



## Bertha Connell Garrett

May 10, 1922 - November 25, 2016

Born May 10, 1922, in Providence, RI, she was christened Bertha Connell Cooney. Her loving parents John and Bertha had five children John, Margaret, Frank, Bertha and Anne. Bertha and her beloved older brother, Frank, were fraternal twins. Bertha was the last of her early family to pass away. She passed peacefully with family by her side at the age of 94 on November 25, 2016.

Bertha had a happy youth at the family home located at 57 Sumter Street, which was a short distance from her favorite playground, Roger Williams Park. As Bertha matured, she attended Saint Michaels Elementary School and then transitioned to Classical High School. These early years were spent in Providence when it was a city mired in class and ethnic struggles, and the deprivations of the Great Depression.

Bertha was greatly affected by what she observed of the treatment of people of different origins, religions and economic backgrounds. Her Irish Catholic background was representative of one of the groups trying, under great hardship, to advance their existence and reach equality within the larger community. She grew to abhor the prejudice and distrust that was evident amongst neighbors. This type of human behavior was the sort of thing that she found intolerable. This feeling factored into her intellectual development and became a lifelong orientation of loving thy neighbor as one's self.

Bertha's father was a perfect role model for what a person needs do to overcome prejudice, and achieve excellence in one's life. He believed in his religion, and he believed in himself. He worked his way through Brown University studying Greek and Latin at which he became fluent. Thereafter, he was the first Irish Catholic to be accepted and graduate from Harvard Law School. Hence, the joys of study and reading were emphasized in the children's upbringing. Faith in God was emphasized as the primary foundation of one's life. Bertha's parents wanted their children to know they could have a personal sanctuary through their faith, allowing them to love and believe in themselves; heal when necessary, and become emotionally and intellectually confident. Bertha would often note that her religion was the backbone of her life. The children observed their father's activist role in promoting basic democratic and human rights principles. He was a prosecuting attorney for the City of Providence, and later was appointed a Deputy Solicitor General of the United States. From their father's example, the children learned the lesson that action needs to be taken if one wants to make a difference, and that being prepared and inspired to do so is one of the great gifts of life.

Bertha attended Pembroke College which was located on the grounds of Brown University in Providence. The two institutions merged in 1971. Bertha pursued and received a Bachelor of Arts in English Literature and Grammar in 1943. Her pursuit of this line of study evolved from her life-long love of language, the written word, and a passion for learning through reading. The challenge was by no means an easy one; it was war time. In order for the education to be affordable, she lived at home, commuted for four years and worked throughout the summer months. Bertha's father would say, "When you're poor, you walk." For Bertha, she didn't mind the walk as Pembroke College was the type of place she longed to get to each day so as to share the camaraderie of fellow students and enjoy the sheer natural beauty of the campus. After graduation, she returned many times to the college to share her

memories of the place with family and friends. Her collegiate experience was clearly one of the defining experiences of her life. It is fair to say, Bertha loved the place and the institution, and she let it be known by attending all reunions through her 50th.

About the time of her graduation, she met the love of her life, Wilbur Reyburn Garrett, Jr. He was a U.S. Navy Lieutenant Commander assigned to the Naval Construction Battalion (aka Seabees) Headquarters in Davisville, RI. Wilbur and Bertha met in May 1943 during a USO event at the Biltmore Hotel in Providence. After a brief courtship, they were married at Saint Michael's Church in Providence on October 16, 1943. For those friends that were unable to attend the wedding service, Wilbur sent a beautiful photograph of the newlyweds leaving the church with the notation that he was "walking on air." Bertha was his true love for 72 years of his 102 year life. Near the end of 1943, Wilbur was transferred to Naval Headquarters at the Washington Navy Yard. The couple resided at the Garrett family's Washington, DC, home as the war drew to its conclusion in 1945.

After honorably discharged, Wilbur then returned to his family's construction business, Skinker and Garrett, Inc., which he managed for several decades until his retirement in 1985. In 1945, Bertha and Wilbur moved to the lovely countryside of Potomac, MD, wherein Bertha undertook the completely new roles of wife, mother, and homemaker, all of which she loved. Wilbur and Bertha raised their six children at the family home in Potomac. A lot of love and fun was had by all at the country home called 'Wickford.' It was named for a small, picturesque Rhode Island town on the Narragansett Bay where they resided briefly during the war.

At this stage in her life, Bertha made a significant transition from being a New England city girl to living in the South just outside of the nation's capital. She

partnered with Wilbur, raising a family on a farm and becoming a part of a community completely alien to her. She always took great pride in her appearance and the manner in which she presented herself, which naturally helped to attract many friends and acquaintances of a similar persuasion. She made the best of her evolving life by getting involved and making friends. The basic components of her upbringing provided the guidance needed to undertake this life change – love of God, family, and community involvement. She knew her Catholic faith offered her a refuge wherever she might reside. Throughout the remainder of her life, she would volunteer much of her time to church activities and charities, and was cherished by many in the congregations. Initially she attended St Mary's (Rockville, Md), then Our Lady of Mercy (Potomac, Md) and lastly St Christopher's (Stevensville, Md). Early on, Bertha joined the Washington, DC, Junior League, a women's organization committed to promoting voluntarism and improving communities.

As if raising a family wasn't enough, Bertha found time to immerse herself in numerous community activities, some for the benefit of the children, or Wilbur, or herself. She became very interested in two new sports, which would have seemed out of character with the sports of her youth such as ice skating and tennis. She developed a passion and proficiency for horsemanship and golf. Bertha loved her riding as it opened up a world of adventure and freedom that she shared and cherished with her daughters Lynn and Mary and the many friends made over the years. Bertha loved fox hunting on a crisp fall day, jumping coops and hedge rows as the horses and hounds crossed the beautiful countryside while mounted on her favorite horse, Tilly. She was a member of the Potomac Hunt Club, and a longtime supporter of The Potomac Pony Club. As for golf, she was a member of Columbia Country Club (Chevy Chase, MD) and Cove Creek Club (Romance, MD). She played at numerous courses in the States and Great Britain. Even after her playing days ended, she would watch and read just about everything relating to golf.

When all the children were on their own, Wilbur and Bertha moved in 1978 from Potomac to their home on the Chesapeake Bay's Kent Island looking west towards Annapolis, the Naval Academy, and spectacular sunsets. Wilbur designed and built the house, and Bertha decorated the house and gardened the grounds. For both, the home was a lovely retreat and a place to entertain family and friends during their long retired life. They traveled extensively and repeatedly to various European destinations, North and Central America, the Caribbean and Hawaii. Their mutual love of travel was often based on common interests such as history, architecture, and golf. A highlight of the spring travels was regular attendance for many years at the Masters golf tournament in Augusta, GA.

At home, in what is referred to as "the land of pleasant living," they enjoyed a universe of many friends with similar social interests. They were devoted parents who willingly sought to assist their children with various activities in which they were involved. Bertha kept a lovely and inviting home, was a chef equivalent, and loved to dote on her gardens and her six wonderful grandchildren. She remained an avid and passionate reader which filled free time. She had most of her reading treasures in her home's large library. She practiced daily personal quiet time devoted to prayer, and she so enjoyed her family and friends. Bertha survived cancer at the age of 80 and was otherwise remarkably free of chronic illness throughout her life of 94 years. Her memory was always crystal clear, and she freely shared it with others.

Bertha lived a long life, had a mutually adoring marriage of 72 years, enjoyed the love of her children - all of whom love each other. These things made her happy. Bertha knew she had lived a relevant and rewarding life. Her memory will be cherished by family and friends for a long time to come.

Bertha is survived by her children, Lynn (Collins), Michael, Peter, Mark, and John Garrett and Mary (Wilson); grandchildren, Stephen, Brian, Michael and

Sean Garrett, Molly (Wilson) and Jeff (Wilson); daughters-in-law, P.B., Theresa, and Linda Garrett; and son-in-law, James Wilson.

A Funeral Mass will be held at Saint Christopher's Catholic Church in Chester, MD, on Saturday February 18, 2017, at 11 a.m., located at 1861 Harbor Drive, with a reception to follow.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made to Compass Regional Hospice, 255 Comet Drive, Centreville, Maryland 21617.

# Previous Events

## Mass

FEB 18. 11:00 AM (ET)

St. Christopher's Catholic Church  
1861 Harbor Drive  
Chester, MD

# Tribute Wall



“ *Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home created a Tribute Video in memory of Bertha Connell Garrett*



Fellows, Helfenbein & Newnam Funeral Home - February 14, 2017 at 06:59 AM



“ *Bertha Connell Garrett*

October 26, 2023 at 06:42 PM



“ *Bertha Connell Garrett*

January 28, 2023 at 12:44 PM



“ *Bertha Connell Garrett*

January 28, 2023 at 08:03 AM



“ *Barbara "Cissel" Stater (now Hayden) lit a candle in memory of Bertha Connell Garrett*



Barbara "Cissel" Stater (now Hayden) - January 05, 2017 at 02:33 PM

BH

*Bertha was the most unique and amazing woman that I have ever known. She was my Godmother and her fierce love of the Roman Catholic Church was the best example I have had of a person with powerful, sustaining faith. Bertha was the one who told my mother, who was Bertha's buddy and confidante through the 40's and 50's, "That church is for YOU - the Lord God does not care how many times you have been married, he loves you and wants you to come to mass!" prior to Bertha, my mother despaired of ever being readmitted to the church because she was in her second marriage. Mom did return to the church because of Bertha's insistence, and although Mom never received the sacraments, she was at mass every week and got so much comfort from being able to talk to God in a holy place. My mom is currently 100 and still kickin' so we will be there at St. Christopher's to see the family and friends who shared Bertha with us."*

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**Barbara "Cissel" Stater (now Hayden)** - January 05, 2017 at 02:43 PM

JC

“ Loved spending the night with Lynn as a teenager in the house in Potomac but if Bertha knew you were Catholic, you had to go to church with her on Sunday. So much for getting a Sunday off when you were not home.

Bertha was our first chaperone in Ocean City for beach week in June of 10th grade. She was tough but fair. Never found out why she didn't sign up for the next year. I always enjoyed my visits with her through out the years. She was a great liberal & progressive Democrat before it was cool. We always had interesting conversations. She was a proud New Englander. I am so glad that I saw her at Wilbur's funeral. I always thought they made a great couple. I loved Wilbur too. He was always so nice. One of the last times I saw him was at Cove Creek. Jane Dawson & I would hit balls there waiting for Lynn to get off work. He gave us some pointers & said I had a good swing. They were both such fine people & I will miss them. What makes it easier for all of us, who are old friends of Lynn, is that her parents led long & good lives. So, at the funeral we will celebrate their lives.

My thoughts are with her family.

Judy Lyman Culhane  
Pasadena, MD

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**Judy Lyman Culhane** - December 31, 2016 at 04:11 PM

SW

“ Our sympathy and condolences to the Garrett family. Praying for you al. Such wonderful memories with Bertha and family. Susie Dunn Webb



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**Susie Dunn Webb** - December 06, 2016 at 08:14 PM

MD

“ *Mary Dunm lit a candle in memory of Bertha Connell Garrett*



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**mary dunm** - December 05, 2016 at 02:32 AM

BC

“ *To all Miss Bertha's family ,  
I have been so privileged to have known such a  
wonderful loving caring extremely witty lady.  
We have shared many days together laughing  
as she tells me the stories of her life  
with her parents to her children to her married  
life she told me so many wonderful stories that I will cherish forever  
. I know that she is resting peacefully .*



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**Bonnie Coleman** - December 03, 2016 at 02:26 PM