



Lucia Porcher Johnson Rather

September 12, 1934 - November 8, 2023

Lucia Porcher Johnson Rather died on November 8, 2023, age 89, at the Heron Point retirement community in Chestertown, Maryland. She was born on September 12, 1934 to Lucia Lockwood (Porcher) and Cecil Slaton Johnson, a professor of history and later Dean of the General College at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Because women could not enroll there until junior year, Lucia began post-secondary studies at Westhampton College in Richmond, Virginia. She received her BA in History with Highest Honors in 1955 and MS in Library Science in 1957, both from UNC-Chapel Hill.

After graduation, Lucia moved to Washington, D.C. for a position at the Library of Congress, where, some years later, she met John Carson Rather, a widower with two young children. They married in 1964 and remained devoted to each other until his death in 2013, at age 93. Son Bruce predeceased them both.

Lucia had a distinguished 34-year career at the Library of Congress, notwithstanding progressive hearing loss that began in her youth. After serving as a cataloguer, reference librarian, bibliographer, and systems analyst, she joined a three-person leadership team that ushered in a world-wide revolution in library automation, the MARC [Machine-Readable Catalogue] II Format (1968). In 1976, Lucia was appointed Director for

Cataloging, managing some 700 employees and operations in the Library's largest division. For a period during the 1980s, Lucia and two close colleagues traded multiple turns as Acting Deputy Librarian of Congress; their handwritten office nameplate, an increasingly cramped list with each name successively crossed out for the next, survives in genial testament to their sense of perspective.

Internationally, Lucia was influentially involved with the International Federation of Libraries Associations, chairing several key committees during a time of huge changes in library cataloguing. Her professional leadership and impact were acknowledged by the Margaret Mann (1985) and Melvil Dewey (1991) awards from the American Library Association, a Distinguished Service Award from the Library of Congress, and a Distinguished Alumnus award from the University of North Carolina School of Library and Information Science. In 1989, Lucia looked back on her career in an interview for the Columbia Center for Oral History, Columbia University Libraries, leavening the technical subject matter with humorous anecdotes, obvious modesty and professional generosity, and the soft southern accent that never left her. <https://dlc.library.columbia.edu/catalog/cul:866t1g1mng>

At her professional peak, Lucia decided to seek a Ph.D. in history – fulfilling a dream set aside in the 1950s, when women faced barriers in academia. She was admitted to George Washington University, which, in consideration of her demanding job, allowed her to take just one class per semester, making the normal two years of doctoral coursework into an uncommonly long haul. Research for her dissertation on the Suez crisis, however, would have been impossible without extended time in British archives. Lucia embraced the enticing prospect of life in London with John by retiring from the Library of Congress in 1991. (For over a decade afterward, she volunteered in its Prints and Photographs Division, cataloging political cartoons.) She received her doctorate in 1994.

In 2004, Lucia and John moved to Heron Point, where she built strong friendships and led an active and fulfilled life. She chaired its Long-Range Planning Committee and served on the Board of Directors during the transition to ACTS management. As head of Heron Point's Library Committee, Lucia firmly advocated for preserving library satellite locations and the main library's integrity as a space for books and reading, making a quiet financial commitment in support of renovations. Locally, she was active in the League of Women Voters and taught thirteen courses for the Washington College Academy of Lifelong Learning, earning her its "George Award" in 2021. Mere days later, Lucia suffered the stroke that began her distressing cognitive decline.

No account of Lucia's life would be complete without acknowledging her deep love for a sequence of Shetland Sheepdog companions stretching back to childhood. Astonishingly, a photo of her first dog, Panda, remained in her wallet until the end. Lucia also relished European and Caribbean travels with John, collecting and working intricate handmade wooden jigsaw puzzles, politics, reading, and gin martinis straight-up.

Lucia is survived by her daughter Susan Rather – for whom she was such a professional role model – and devoted son-in-law Richard Wheelus, of Austin, Texas, and by her adored grandson Robin Wheelus. Nieces Laura and Alexandra McGee, who maintained lifelong relationships with their mother's only sibling, survive her as well, along with their brother Scott. We are deeply grateful to the many caring Heron Point staff members, companion Delores Phillips, and steadfast friend Lindsay Batcheller for the daily attentions that sustained Lucia throughout her difficult final years.

The family welcomes all to a memorial service on Friday, January 19, 2024 at

2 pm at the Presbyterian Church of Chestertown; livestream at <https://www.presbyterianchestertown.org>

Memorial contributions may be made to the non-profit Animal Care Shelter for Kent County: <https://acskc.org/support/general-donation/>

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JAN 19. 2:00 PM (ET)

Presbyterian Church of Chestertown
905 Gateway Drive
Chestertown, MD

Tribute Wall

AR

“ Anna R. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Lucia Porcher Johnson Rather.

Anna R. - January 19, 2024 at 09:50 PM



“ Sweet Tenderness was purchased for the family of Lucia Porcher Johnson Rather.



January 17, 2024 at 03:45 PM

SR

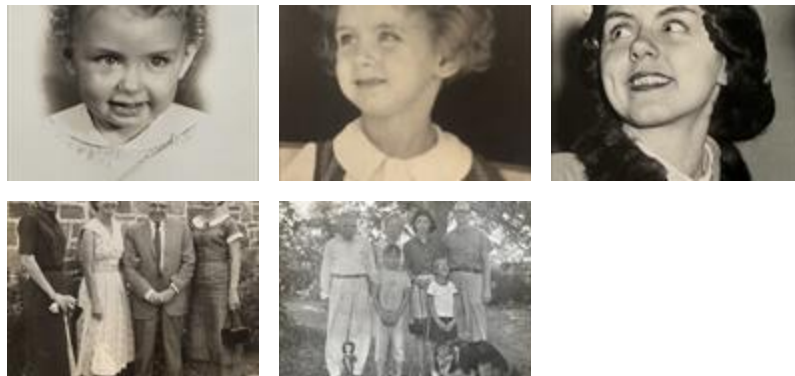
“ 4 files added to the album Lucia throughout life (Susan's submissions)



Susan Rather - November 21, 2023 at 06:40 PM

SR

“ 5 files added to the album Lucia throughout life (Susan's submissions)



Susan Rather - November 19, 2023 at 02:43 PM

SR

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Susan Rather - November 19, 2023 at 02:41 PM

DL

“ My condolences and prayers to the family.
Mrs Rather was one fine Lady.



Dorothy & Richard LaPlaca - November 11, 2023 at 04:14 PM

SJ

“ *Suzanne Jackson lit a candle in memory of Lucia Porcher Johnson Rather*



Suzanne Jackson - November 11, 2023 at 02:37 PM