



Mary Helen Schaafsma

February 3, 1951 - March 11, 2018

Mary Helen Schaafsma, beloved child of God, daughter, sister, aunt, niece, cousin, and friend, died on Sunday, March 11, 2018 from cancer related complications.

Mary was born February 3, 1951 in Detroit, Michigan to Miriam Cooke and Sybrant Schaafsma. She grew up in Grosse Pointe, Michigan, and was a graduate of Calvin College (B.A. History) and Western Michigan University (Masters in Public Administration). For most of her adult life she lived in Chicago. Mary was an avid reader and was particularly interested in history and the arts. Some of her favorite historical and artistic figures included Eleanor Roosevelt, Abigail Adams, Mary Cassatt, and J.S. Bach.

Her infectious laugh broadcast her love for others and her good humor. Her quiet and gracious manner belied a fierce passion and determined advocacy for justice and equality, and for a political system that was truly representative and accountable to all of its members.

Her working life, spent primarily in the nonprofit and government realms, and always in the public interest, reflected these values. Until shortly before her death, she was the Executive Director of the Illinois League of Women Voters, a position she assumed in 2013. Other organizations she worked for include Illinois Citizen Action (Administrative and Associate Program Director) and Protestants for the Common Good (Deputy Director for Policy and Program). Mary was an active member of Fourth Presbyterian Church of Chicago, and served it in many roles, including elder, deacon, committee chair and member,

youth mission trip leader and long-time usher. Other volunteer activities included her service as Secretary-Treasurer of the USAction Education Fund and board member of Central City Housing Ventures.

In glory, Mary Helen joins her father, who died in 1999. She is survived by her mother; three younger siblings, Timothy (Krista), Jane, and James (Nancy Vander Kuyl); 4 nieces, Allison Thompson (Chris), Rebecca Dozeman (Jason) and Elizabeth Ryder (Justin), and Lydia Schaafsma; 1 nephew, Josiah Schaafsma; 4 great-nieces and 3 great-nephews as well as an uncle, cousins and many friends. Her nieces and nephews were one of the greatest joys of her life. She cherished spending time with family and friends. One of Mary's favorite spots was Lake Michigan near Montague, Michigan. We pray that the beautiful memories we made with Mary will sustain us all through the days ahead.

We thank God for Mary's life and for the assurance of life everlasting in Christ Jesus. We are grateful for the impact she had on the world and for the blessing and gift she was to countless people. A celebration of Mary's life will take place on Friday, April 6, 2018 at 3 pm at Fourth Presbyterian Church, N. Michigan Ave and Delaware Place, Chicago, IL. In lieu of flowers, please make a gift in Mary's memory to Planned Parenthood of Illinois, or Fourth Presbyterian Church (designate gift for 4th Church Mission Programs). To share a memory, please use the Share a Memory tab on this web page.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

APR 6. 3:00 PM (CT)

Fourth Presbyterian Church
126 E Chestnut St
Chicago, IL 60611-2014
(312) 787-4570

Tribute Wall



“ *Mary Helen Schaafsma*

December 07, 2023 at 05:11 AM



“ *Mary Helen you were a loving, smart, inspiring friend to me ever since our college years. You were so supportive during some very rough times. Thank you so much!*

*Love,
"Doesburg"*

janna - March 26, 2018 at 09:20 AM



“ *Love, the groterboats: Janna, Donna, Martha, Mary purchased the Florist Choice Bouquet for the family of Mary Helen Schaafsma.*



Love, the groterboats: Janna, Donna, Martha, Mary - March 26, 2018 at 08:59 AM



“ *I am so sorry for the grief you are all experiencing with Mary's death. I met Mary through the League of Women Voters. Any time I needed advice/information, she obtained it for me - and quickly. She did her job so professionally and help the Illinois League to excellence. I will miss her.*

Kathy Pearson - March 23, 2018 at 09:54 AM

NB

“ When I served as a Deacon at Fourth Presbyterian under Mary as Moderator she advised me to sign up for everything! Take it all on for a full involvement. That is would be most rewarding. I will always treasure that advice. She was a special light in our midst. I will miss her deeply. Deepest sympathy to sister Janie and all. I will be there for the memorial.
Nancy Baird

Nancy Baird - March 20, 2018 at 08:04 PM



“ Mary, you were my only “big” sister and for that I cherish you. But probably even more important, you were a wonderful and loving role model and mentor to our three daughters. Although you were a little older than I, the fact that you weren’t a “parent” made you much cooler than me as they grew up. Thank you for your positive influence in their lives. You will live on through them.

Special memories include Disney World to celebrate your 40th (& Allison’s 13th) birthday and then an Alaska Cruise for your 65th (& Janie’s 60th). Such fun together! I also fondly recall how you prepared food for our clan, especially apple crisp with peppermint stick ice cream and Sanders hot fudge for the holidays. You have left a hole in our hearts but that hole is full of lovely “More Memories”...a name given by our little girls to their beloved aunt. I love you Mary Helen!

Krista Schaafsma - March 15, 2018 at 10:52 AM

DT

You were one of my favorite people, we could continue a conversation like years hadn’t passed. A genuinely pleasant person and I enjoyed working with you. I still laugh at your tale of your niece asking if you had anything in your purse for “widdle” girls. Rest Mary.

Delores Travis - March 18, 2018 at 05:13 PM



I had the pleasure of working with you and can still remember your smile and laughter(along with that beautiful red coat you had) Rest in Peace!!!

Janet Black - March 19, 2018 at 07:45 PM