

MARILYN SPRINGER HARRISON



Passed away peacefully on September 18, 2023. She was born January 12, 1932, in Syracuse, NY, before moving at age of 7 to Mt. Lebanon. Preceded in death by Bruce Harrison, Jr., her beloved husband of 35 years, her brothers-in-law Chet Edmunds and Jim Harrison, her sister-in-law Kay Harrison, her niece Lindsay Edmunds, and her nephews Rick and Don Harrison.

Marilyn is survived by her devoted sister Marion Edmunds; sons, RB (Susan) Harrison & John (Sherri) Harrison; her daughter Pamela Gordon (Geoff); grandchildren Lexi & Nate Gordon and Brian, Gregory, Lauren, and Will Harrison; nephews, David Edmunds and Jim (Jan) Harrison; great-nieces, Claire and Brynn (Daniel Bird) Edmunds, Jill Harrison, Molly (Marc) Valli, Kate (Jeff) Vermilyea; and their children, Jack and Logan Valli and Ryan and Megan Vermilyea. Family was of the utmost importance to Marilyn & she delighted in spending time with them.

Marilyn grew up in Mt. Lebanon and attended college at Mt. Holyoke, one of the seven sisters to the Ivies. Not only that, but she did it at 16—the youngest girl in her class. There she found a love of psychology and writing, two strengths that would stand her well later in life. Enjoying her independence, she also discovered her “going out” cocktail of a good Manhattan while spending school vacations with her Thomsen cousins, a tradition she continued throughout her time at Mt. Holyoke.

Following her graduation, Marilyn, a skilled writer, started as a copywriter at Hornes, then Kaufmann’s, and finally Ketchum Advertising. While at Hornes, Marilyn’s creative side shone not just in her writing, but in the way she attacked problems. Tired of working on Saturdays, she convinced the other writers to wear prison grey dresses as a protest; unable to fire the entire copy writing department, she got her way and they no longer worked on Saturdays.

Working at Kaufmann’s and Ketchum brought Marilyn two of the things she loved best: her beloved Sunbeam Alpine Sports car, which she drove blissfully, participating in sports car rallies and honking at fellow members of the sports car club, and her future husband, whom she shared the bus stop with. At first she was not sure about Mr. Bruce Harrison, who carried a briefcase on the bus and seemed a bit stuffy to the fun loving copywriter. But after he opened his car trunk on the first date and there reposed a picnic basket and a bottle of champagne, she decided to give him a chance and the rest became an over 30 year happily married history.

Marilyn’s son, RB, began his highly successful career at Kaufmann’s, following in her footsteps and pleasing her greatly. Her second son, John, became an awarded engineer, and her daughter, Pam, a writer, like her mother. Marilyn always fully supported her children, and later her grandchildren. She was very proud of all their accomplishments, and would say with a shy smile that she couldn’t always talk to her friends about their children, because she didn’t want it to seem like she was boasting about her own.

Marilyn loved to learn and she loved to help people. School beckoned anew after her children started school, and she graduated first in her class with a degree in psychiatric nursing. She then began a second career at St. Clair Hospital. But even when so busy working, she always thought of her children and surprised them with little treats like clown cupcakes, and she was never too busy to sit and talk — her psychiatric background and caring nature giving her good instinct on just the right words to say. As her children and grandchildren grew, she took great pride in their accomplishments, and graciously supplied funds to cover their educations.

Marilyn loved life and being with her children. Christmas in particular gave her a chance to shine. She would spend hours, if not days, shopping for just the right presents. Then after her children went to bed on Christmas Eve, she and Bruce would work late into the night to deliver a magical Christmas morning from Santa. To be honest, it was mostly her, as her husband would yawn and suggest they finish in the morning, but Marilyn would not stop — believing that it was not Christmas if you could see still see the floor under the presents.

Marilyn treasured adventures both near and far, weekends at their cabin in Turkey Foot, cuddled up by the fire drinking Irish coffees, and of course the annual family “shootout” where she would work for days making sure everything was just right for the Harrison gathering.

She loved the ocean and adored her trips to North Carolina, where she jumped waves with the kids and ate She-Crab soup. In the winters, she and Bruce would go further south, exploring Caribbean islands — ideally ones that fit their motto, “the more remote the better.”

Her favorite place to be was her beloved Otisco Lake. Marilyn had spent summers and weekends at the Lake growing up. Friendships, romances, softball in the field, dances in Schneids’s barn, boating on the fastest boat of the Lake (her father would have it no other way) and of course swimming and water skiing in the clear blue waters. It was an idyllic way to spend her summers, and she gave that gift to her children, spending six weeks every summer at the Lake. Maybe not as much water skiing later on, but always swimming, always reading, always propping her long legs up on the porch with a cup of coffee and chatting with everyone who walked by.

While Marilyn loved the water, her beloved dogs did not. First was Tuffy, a handsome English bulldog, whom she had to rescue from Otisco Lake often because bulldogs are a bit top heavy. Then her beloved Eeyore, a glorious Newfie, carefully chosen for the breed’s love of water — only Eeyore, the sweetest mountain of Newfoundland, was also the only Newf who didn’t like to swim.

Marilyn didn’t care if her dogs didn’t swim. She loved and accepted them for who they were just as she accepted and loved everybody. She was a genuine, caring, brilliant woman. The world was brighter while she was in it. It is dimmer now that she is gone.

We would like to take this moment to say how grateful we are to Marilyn’s caregivers from Comfort Keepers Amedisys Hospice for their loving and compassionate care which enabled her to remain in her condo where she could watch her birds and the lake.

Friends will be received at **LAUGHLIN CREMATION AND FUNERAL TRIBUTES**, 222 Washington Road, Mount Lebanon, on Saturday, September 23rd, from 11:00 am – 1:00 pm where a service will be held at 1:00 pm. Interment to follow in Mount Lebanon Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, her family requests memorial donations to Mt. Holyoke College (mtholyoke.edu) or to the Children’s Tumor Foundation (CTF.org).

Send condolences post-gazette.com/gb