

ALDEN CALMER READ

November 2, 1930 - November 18, 2024



Alden Calmer Read passed away peacefully on November 18, 2024, in her residence at Longwood at Oakmont, where she and her loving husband of 73 years, Robert O. Read, Jr. have lived since 2011.

Alden was born in Paris, France to Edgar and Priscilla (Alden Hatch) Calmer on November 2, 1930. She was baptized in Eglise St. Suplice in St. Germain des Pres at the insistence of her godfather,

Ernest Hemingway, a friend of her father's. Her parents nurtured Alden's early interest in literature and the visual arts, both life-long passions of hers. She first came to the United States at age 6, where some of her earliest memories included her beloved Aunt May, who taught her to knit, igniting another life-long passion. The family settled in New York City, surrounded by Hatch family aunts and cousins. Alden and her mother eventually returned to Charlottesville, Virginia, where she became keenly interested in gardening, yet another of her life-long passions. Her primary education was at St. Anne's School in Charlottesville, followed by boarding school at Ethel Walkers in Simsbury, CT; in 1947 she matriculated at Vassar College in Poughkeepsie, NY, where she met many of her closest life-long friends. Those who knew her there - and indeed, throughout her life - experienced directly the depth of her passion for the friendships she cultivated, cherished, and shared so generously.

She spent the Summer of 1949 in France with The Experiment in International Living, and on the boat ride back, met her future husband, Bob Read, who had traveled to the Royal Henley Regatta with the Princeton Lightweight Crew, winners of the Thames Challenge Cup that year. They married in 1951 in Charlottesville, whereupon she transferred to Barnard College in New York City and completed her degree while simultaneously raising a family in Stuyvesant Town on the Lower East Side of Manhattan. Three children were born in quick succession (Charles, Otis, and Priscilla) and, bursting at the seams, the family moved to the New Jersey suburbs: Upper Montclair, and then, New Vernon, where a fourth child (John) was born. She handled all the chaos of these years with grace and great good humor, sustained by the support of friends (and constantly keeping track of everything and everyone with hundreds of index cards, kept in a small metal box on her desk).

The New Jersey years were filled with family, fun, and friends - always more friends, wherever Alden went or worked. Highlights during these years included jobs with the National Park Service, in Morristown, NJ, and at Drew University, in Madison, NJ, where she led groups of art students on weekly visits to artists' studios in Manhattan and Brooklyn.

In 1978 the family moved to Pittsburgh for Bob's new job at Matthews International, ultimately settling in Shadyside. Alden volunteered at Phipps Conservancy, re-kindling and honing her gardening skills. At Phipps, she helped re-design the outdoor gardens, using her own garden on Pitcairn Place as a laboratory for the medieval herb garden at Phipps. At Calvary Episcopal Church, she experienced the energy and dynamism of a diverse, urban congregation with a palpable sense of wonder, and she contributed countless hours creating exquisite needlepoint cushions for the sanctuary.

As Alden and Bob moved from place to place, a constant thread was their summers spent in Little Compton, RI, where they retired in 1991 soon after Alden and Bob built their dream house. During the years there, Alden had the time of her life designing and planting magnificent gardens surrounding the house, working tirelessly on ever-more complex needlepoint creations (always in great demand from appreciative recipients). Here, by the sea, she spent endless hours with family and friends - again, always so many friends, old and new, each recorded on an index card in that box on her desk.

In their later years, at Longwood, she continued to garden, helping to design and bring to life the Longwood Memorial Gardens while also planting on every square inch around their residence on Winding Way. As we reflect on her life's passions, we wonder whether the many friendships that blossomed here - just as those that she nurtured and nourished throughout her life - weren't really one and the same as her impulses and great talent in tending her garden.

Charming, caring, funny, smart, artistic, eternally positive; she was loved deeply and will be missed by all who knew her.

Alden is survived by her husband, Robert O. Read, Jr.; her four children, Charles (Princeton, NJ), Otis (Warren, RI), Priscilla (Providence and Little Compton, RI), and John (Pittsburgh); her brother, Regan Calmer (Little Neck, NY); her three grandchildren, Max, Miles, and Eliza (who knew her as Mimi, which Alden also called her own grandmother); and two great-grandchildren, Gus and Ronan.

A memorial service will be held in the Ballroom at Longwood on Monday, December 16, 2024, at 2:00 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests making a donation in Alden's honor to the Longwood at Oakmont Memorial Garden Fund (via check to the Presbyterian SeniorCare Foundation, 1215 Hulton Road, Oakmont, PA 15139 with a designation to the Longwood at Oakmont Garden Fund) or to Phipps Conservancy.

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