



Earlene E. Gillan-Smith

May 31, 1931 - June 24, 2020

Earlene (Dick) Gillan-Smith, age 89 of Lewes, DE, passed away peacefully on Wednesday, June 24, 2020. She was born on May 31, 1931 in Northeast Philadelphia, PA, daughter of the late Earl and Maude (Lacey) Dick.

Earlene excelled in secondary school, graduating early from high school. She attended Methodist Hospital School of Nursing and began her nursing career at Shriners Hospital for Children in Philadelphia. She also worked in the Medical, Surgical, and Obstetric nursing fields at hospitals in Washington D.C., Virginia, and West Chester, PA.

She settled in Newark, DE, where she was the first school nurse and health coordinator at the Sterck School for the Hearing Impaired (later renamed Delaware School for the Deaf). In addition to establishing procedures for dormitory medical care and student health education, she became very active in a lobbying campaign that increased the professional salary scale of school nurses in Delaware to be equal to that of teachers.

With five school age children at home and a full-time job, she returned to school and earned her B.S.N. followed by her M.A. in Education from West Chester University.

She was very active in the Christina School District Education Association, where she served as the first president from 1981 to 1983, Delaware State Education Association, where she served as vice president from 1984 to 1992 and president from 1992 to 1996, and the National Education Association, where she served as an elected official for five terms. She spent many years advocating for educators and students often saying, "Excellent teachers make excellent students". Earlene made it a point to understand everyone's concerns: teachers, support staff, nurses, parents, and students. She was often consulted by legislators, governors, and school district superintendents for her input on important committees.

She was awarded the Delaware School Nurse of the Year in 1984 and the Helen Wise Award for Excellence in Education in 1997.

Her passion for education followed her into retirement, where she became involved with the University of Delaware Academy of Lifelong Learning and served as a docent for the Lewes Historical Society. In her spare time, Earlene enjoyed traveling, visiting more than 30 countries. She was an avid reader and enjoyed jigsaw puzzles, walking, and the beach. She also loved holiday celebrations and spending time with her large family.

In addition to her parents, Earlene was preceded in death by her beloved husband, Christopher K. Smith; her sister, Jeanne Rice; and her granddaughter, Caitlin Gillan. She is survived by her five children: Debbie Healy (T.J.), Cindy Higdon (Carroll), Kathy Cannatelli (Tom Capozzoli), David Gillan (Christine B.), and Andy Gillan (Christine L.); her nine grandchildren: Jennifer Celano (Jamie), Steven Higdon (Elizabeth), Melissa Nagy (Joe), Kristen Coveleski (Josh), Troy Cannatelli, Colleen Cavataio (Brandon), and Taylor, Grant, and Ross Gillan; her ten great grandchildren: James Celano, Jr. and Luke Celano, Olivia and Sarah Higdon, Camden and Ella Nagy, Carter and Caroline Coveleski, and Greyson and Blair Cavataio.

Earlene expanded her family to include five stepdaughters after marrying Chris in 1983, Margarete Smith (d. 2017), Carla Kinsella (Kevin), Christa Bailey (Roger), Paula Troise (Nick), and Amy Yeatman (Ed), and ten grandchildren: Jamie Taylor, Emily, Olivia, and Vanessa Yeatman, Kylie, Kevin, and Katie Kinsella, Alexia and Isabelle Troise, and Gabrielle Foster. Six great-grandchildren and one great-great-grandchild.

She is also survived by her longtime devoted friends Ann and John Persinger.

Her family looks forward to celebrating Earlene's life in the fall.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests contributions in Earlene's memory to the Children's Beach House, 1800 Bay Ave, Lewes, DE 19958.

Please sign the online guestbook located on the tribute page.

Comments



“ My deepest sympathy to Earlene's family. Remember her well from her time in the Christiana School District. Her wonderful marriage to Chris and her children. Remember her as a parent when Andy went to the Etta J. Wilson School in Newark. The world is missing a great lady.

Patricia Kohl Koria-Dooley

Patricia Koria - July 13 at 10:15 AM



“ So sorry for your loss to the Gillan-Smith family. She was my first nurse at Sterck School during my younger days. She was an excellent nurse who cared for her students very much.

The most memorable of her that she guided us the close up group to Washington DC and we met Tom Carper. It was a memorable trip with her and meeting other students from another states.

May she rest in peace and May God comfort you all with his great blessings.

Christine Zenorini

christine Zenorini - July 10 at 08:21 PM



“ We're so sorry your Mom passing can imagine she a wonderful woman. With Love & Hugs Sheree & Dave Barker

Sheree Barker - July 09 at 05:42 AM



“ Sorry for your loss. I can always remember her from my childhood as my school nurse. She always had a pleasant demeanor throughout the years. My thoughts are with you and your family.

Brian and Jamie Connor

Brian Connor - July 08 at 06:45 PM



“ My deepest sympathy to Earlene's family. She was one of the most dedicated people that I know, whether while she was a school nurse, DSEA member and President, and as a member of DSEA Retired. We will miss you very much. God bless!

Richard A Phillips - July 08 at 10:47 AM



“ I specifically recall that Earlene was always in my classroom in moments at Sterck School when needed. She was a n encourager even when she needed to be encouraged! Peace and comfort to Cindy and the larger family. .. Sandy Collins

Sandy Collins - July 07 at 07:27 PM



“ Earlene was a great teacher advocate and spent huge amounts of time in that role. It was a pleasure working with her on DSEA and OLLI events. RIP friend Nick Foery

Nick Foery - July 07 at 05:17 PM



“ My deep condolences to all members of Earlene's family. She was an amazing, energetic, fun-loving and talented person who changed the lives of so many at the Sterck School, which is where I knew her from. Not only was she a caring and dedicated nurse, but her work with the DSEA union led to improved salary and opportunities for many of us, including the interpreters and the dorm parents. Rest in peace lovely lady!

Lynn Mankin

Lynn Mankin - July 07 at 12:13 AM



“ Dear Kathy and family,
I am so very sorry for your loss but please know your mom made a huge impact on my life during her stay in our care at The Moorings. I enjoyed having conversations with her about nursing care “back in the day” when we had time to sit on a patients bed and give them a good back rub. We often shared stories about working as OB nurses and spending time caring for our patients when we had wards instead of private rooms and new moms stayed in the hospital for at least a week! I often looked at her year book from nursing school with her when she was a student nurse at Methodist Hospital in Philadelphia and we spent great times reminiscing about how we survived being both a student nurse living in a dorm and waiting for a call to

help out in our hospitals when staff was short. She always made me feel like I was the best nurse that ever walked into her apartment whenever I worked and for that I will always be forever great full because she was a true wonderful, caring person. I am so glad I had the privilege to be with her at end because it made me feel complete. She was amazing! Fondly, Sarah McIlvaine Sampson

sarah mcilvaine sampson - July 06 at 08:49 PM