



Billie Sue Williams

December 15, 1926 - January 5, 2023

Billie Sue Williams (nee Arthaud), a longtime resident of Williamsburg, Virginia, died on January 5, 2023, at the age of 96.

Billie was born on December 15, 1926, on her family's farm outside of Hannibal, Missouri, delivered by Mrs. Trantum, the family's housekeeper, in the middle of a snowstorm. Her father, James Delbert Arthaud, loved farming and was especially proud of his efforts as a breeder of prize-winning Hereford cattle; he also served as a county judge. Delbert met Billie's mother, Margaret Lowry, when she was the first female bank officer in the state of Missouri. Margaret then took on the role of farm wife and mother; she was also a lifelong Democratic Party activist.

Billie loved her childhood on the farm, which she described as idyllic, even during the Great Depression, and it provided a lifetime of stories and memories. The youngest of five children, she was precociously smart. At the age of 3, she was delivering dramatic recitations at church and on local radio. Beginning school in a one-room schoolhouse in Saverton, Missouri, a village on the Mississippi River, Billie was an ardent student and a voracious reader. She advanced quickly, graduating from the regional high school at 15.

While attending the University of Missouri in Columbia, Billie met Virgil (Bill) Hughes Williams, a handsome student training to be a U.S. Army officer. Not wanting to stand out as a much-younger University student, Billie developed the habit of telling people, including Bill, she was older. After what Billie would describe as Bill's "determined" courtship, they married in Camp Bowie, Texas, on December 10, 1944, just before her 18th birthday. Shortly after, Bill shipped off to serve as an artillery forward observer and tank commander for the final months of battle in WWII's European Theater.

After his return for a brief stateside stay, Bill was assigned to work in the Tokyo headquarters of Gen. Douglas MacArthur. Billie joined Bill in Tokyo, traveling alone on a transport ship, a memorable voyage delayed by a dockworker's strike and marked by an encounter with a Pacific typhoon. The couple later moved to Nara, Japan, where their first

child, Stephan, was born after a bumpy jeep ride to the hospital.

Returning to the States in 1949, Billie assumed the responsibilities of a dutiful military officer's wife, moving her family every few years: to Texas; to Oklahoma; to Columbia, Missouri; to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas; to Hampton, Virginia; to Darmstadt and then Stuttgart, Germany; to Colorado Springs; and finally, to the Washington, DC area. Billie had two more children, Kristin and Julia, and much of her early adult life was devoted to child rearing. But she still found time for hobbies--including gardening, flower arranging, bridge, and bowling--as well hosting great parties.

Billie sought out new experiences even as she moved into middle age: riding a bicycle for the first time, learning how to play tennis, flying in glider planes, taking college psychology courses, and working on projects with the League of Women Voters.

Billie and Bill moved to Williamsburg, Virginia in 1979, and enjoyed a decade together there, developing a coterie of friends and engaging in various community activities. After Bill's death in 1989, Billie remained in their home, filled with her collection of antiques, and hosted family holiday gatherings.

Despite being compelled to travel as a military wife, travel continued to be a big part of her life: "girls' trips" with her daughters to London, Quebec, and Portugal, and granddaughter to Paris, family adventures in Italy, Christmases in Mexico, yearly beach vacations at Outer Banks of North Carolina, trips to Alaska, and visits to Ireland and England with friends.

Billie was an extraordinary woman. The strong consensus among friends and family is she was, among other things, very smart, curious, engaged, clever, and funny (often in an irreverent way). She was a stubborn, independent person - a "force of nature" as more than one person put it. Another family friend aptly described her fondly "as a smart, sassy, tough, and charming woman."

Billie will be missed by all who knew her. Her memory is deeply held in the hearts of her children and their spouses, Stephan Williams (Nancy Gordon), Kristin Williams (Howard Weissman), and Julia Lee (Alan), her grandchildren Tessa Lee and Colin Lee (Megan Harris), and her adorable great-granddaughter Kya Lee. She was also the beloved "Aunt Billie" to her nieces (Arla Rodenbaugh, Cathy Hagan, Cheryl Hagan, Linda Page, Lisa Horner, Peggy Welch) and nephews (Larry Arthaud, Rich Hagan, Joe Rodenbaugh, Steve Page, Wally Welch).

If a reader wishes to offer something in memory of Billie, her family suggests a donation to Habitat for Humanity or another non-profit organization committed to furthering the humanity of the world's peoples and the health of our embattled planet. Billie would also remind you to always vote and to vote for Democrats.

Tribute Wall

LD

“ Steve and Nancy are our very dear friends. We were sad to learn of Billie’s passing. Our brief time with her was a real treat. As everyone knows she was larger than life. We had the pleasure of cooking dinner for her one summer evening. Her comments, throughout the dinner, could have put me in line for a James Beard award.

We all shared a love for tennis. We knew she had a crush on Rafa Nadal but she kept it to herself. I’m sure he would have reciprocated, if only he had known.

We are sorry for the loss of this smart and wonderful woman. We will treasure our memories of her always.

With deepest sympathy. Brian Shortell and Linda Duck, Anchorage, Alaska

linda duck - February 20, 2023 at 10:39 PM

BH

“ What an amazing life story, and what a remarkable human being. Sending deepest sympathy for your loss. Love you Steve and Nancy.

Barbara Hood - January 20, 2023 at 03:04 PM