



Mary Clark Howland

April 21, 1933 - July 25, 2024

Long-time Santa Barbaran Mary Howland died on July 25 with family at her side. She was 91, and very much her alert and loving self to the end.

Mary Clark Howland was born in Changsha, China, in 1933 to Christian missionaries William (Hal) and Antoinette (Tony) Clark. She lived there for much of her childhood with her two younger sisters Anne (Wire) and Jean (Roth). In 1949, Mary and her family returned permanently to California and settled in El Cajon. There, Mary met husband Robert (Bob) Howland at a church-related function in 1950. Bob was a World War II veteran, studying at San Diego State. They married two days after Christmas, 1952, and soon moved east so Bob could prepare for the ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary.

A curious and talented student, Mary graduated from Grossmont High School near San Diego and attended Stanford University for two years, finishing at Rutgers Douglass College in New Jersey. The couple lived in Lebanon, Oregon for three years before moving to Goleta in 1960.

Mary and Bob had four children together. Stephen born in Princeton (1953); Benjamin, in Lebanon (1956); Barbara, in Lebanon (1959); and Jonathan in Goleta (1960). Each remain lifelong admirers of their mother, benefitting from her wisdom and unconditional love throughout their lives.

Mary began graduate studies in the late 60's and graduated with a master's degree in English from UCSB in 1971. From the mid-1970s to the late-1990's Mary taught literature and writing at Golden West Community College in

Huntington Beach. Her courses were varied, from basic composition to Shakespeare, the latter her lifelong literary passion. She was tireless in her teaching practice and vigorously devoted to her students' growth.

Upon retirement, Mary and Bob moved back to Santa Barbara, where they lived on the Mesa. They were active members of the First Presbyterian Church where Mary participated in the Mission Committee's outreach work. Bob died in 2003. Mary later moved to Vista del Monte retirement community, immersing herself in activities and friendships. An avid, lifelong reader, she participated in book and play-reading groups, singing, and pool volleyball, where she discovered she had something of a competitive edge.

Mary cared deeply about ideas and issues, which she loved to discuss with family and friends. While at Vista del Monte, Mary participated in variety of groups, including a weekly dinner discussion based on an article everyone read in advance, often from The New York Review of Books or the LA Times. Even more, she cared about people, including the needs and well-being of the disadvantaged. She had little patience with disparaging or self-serving remarks and would occasionally surprise family or companions with a blunt retort.

Mary's travels were many and varied, often with one of her children and their family. She bounced around the country following her son Ben's basketball coaching career. She camped in Yosemite, snorkeled in Maui, attended plays in London, England and Ashland, Oregon, and returned three times to China to visit the region of her birth. In 2007 she fulfilled a lifelong intention: riding the train from Beijing to St. Petersburg, Russia, over ten days. About the long solo trip she reported no complaints, only a sense of wonder and an appreciation for what she could see from the observation coach.

In April 2023 Mary enjoyed a large gathering on the Santa Barbara Wharf to celebrate her 90th birthday with her four children, six grandchildren and, at that time, all eight of her great-grandchildren. She welcomed her ninth grandchild in May of this year. Also in attendance were her two sisters, their families, and numerous other relatives and friends.

Her friendships were many, and none as steadfast and deeply meaningful to her as those with her sisters Anne Wire and Jean Roth, both of whom visited her during her final weeks.

The family will gather again this fall to celebrate Mary, to mourn her passing, and to share their appreciation of her inimitable wit, her genuine joy, and her remarkable capacity to be present with whomever she encountered.