



## Linda Frances Marks

October 8, 1945 - September 21, 2020

Linda Marks passed away at her home in Memphis, Tennessee on September 21, 2020. She was 74.

At an age when most of us start cutting back and planning retirement, Linda found an answer to her calling. About twenty years ago, after twelve years in Portland, Maine—and even more years in various jobs from halfway-house attendant to bookstore staff and college teaching along with some piano playing (and seasoned with some wanderlust)—she became a part-time Patient Rights Liaison at Portland’s Spring Harbor Hospital. While she never practiced law, her legal training and her long-time commitment to community service served her well. Soon, her position converted to full time, reflecting both her skills and an underserved need.

She loved her job and loved Portland. What took her from Memphis to Maine—and back?

Linda’s life growing up was all about education and faith after a great loss early on. Her father Louis died when she was 5. Her mother Frances recovered over time and became a “career woman”, returning to teaching and school administration. She had a prewar graduate degree in English; did guidance counseling; and taught Latin at the Hutchison School, English at the University of Tennessee Extension, and Sunday School. The house was full of books.

Louis’s death affected Linda deeply; she understood that better years later.

She won a high school scholarship to Hutchison, joining some of the region’s brightest girls who regularly went on to prestigious schools “up North”. She read incessantly, loved piano, and won local math and Latin tournaments. She earned numerous honors—including nominee for a “Miss Teen” contest—and graduated as a top student in 1963.

When applying to college, Linda looked up North. Against her achievements, however, weighed high tuitions and maternal concerns about safety and culture shock of this first-

born female moving from a modest Southern home to an elite Northern campus. Her mother, teacher/administrator Frances, had dated a Yale student and celebrated Hutchison students matriculating to top colleges up North—but also knew how many either never came back or came back broken. She and Linda agreed that Linda would apply only to top Southern liberal arts colleges. Linda was admitted everywhere she applied and chose Agnes Scott College (ASC) in Decatur, Georgia, and its generous financial aid.

Linda thrived at ASC, graduating with honors in 1967 with an English major, seemingly more practical than her first love—music. Moved by dedication to an academic career, she applied to doctoral programs in English. Among several acceptances, she chose the University of Wisconsin-Madison. After her first year, she had a Masters degree (1968) and was on her way to a doctorate.

One of her Madison classmates—from Massachusetts—became her husband, a top student from one of Maine's small men's colleges and heir to a small family cottage on the Maine coast. Ah, New England! While neither the marriage nor the couple's doctoral pursuits lasted, Linda's longings for New England did. When faculty positions in English dried up in the '70s, Linda tried various jobs and projects in various places—including a JD from the University of Memphis (1986)—but eventually found her niche in that hospital in Portland.

However, in 2003, Frances was 87, still living at home and facing serious health problems. Neither long-term care nor full-time home care were attractive or affordable. Linda's younger brother Denton (Louis Jr.) and wife Tessa had good careers in Milwaukee, which they were unable to transfer to Memphis. Since Frances would not have enjoyed Wisconsin's climate or leaving Memphis, Linda saw the need, and Frances welcomed her home in July, 2004.

Initially, Linda worked part time—paralegal, piano playing, and part-time pianist at the progressive First Baptist Church (FBC) which had been a powerful and consciousness-raising spiritual influence during her teens. She loved the South, Southern culture (especially music), and the varieties of religious culture. Chronic local issues such as poverty and race—her formative years were during the '60s in the South—also tugged at her. FBC's current pastor was among several clergy working with the city's Metropolitan Inter-Faith Association (MIFA) which Memphis clergy helped organize in 1968—a difficult year there that saw the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. Work at MIFA looked appealing.

Linda started at MIFA part-time in late 2005 in its nursing home ombudsman program. After fits and starts during those first couple of years home, Linda was back in her niche. As MIFA reports, Linda soon “found her ideal role at the heart of MIFA's interfaith efforts, building MIFA's relationships with congregations and faith groups through grassroots involvement and authentic engagement”:

She pushed us to expand our interfaith work, cleverly referring to her role as the IF in MIFA. Linda helped churches find new ways to participate at MIFA and sought a deep understanding of their motivations to serve as well as their beliefs and traditions. She thoughtfully organized...interfaith panels that explored the depth and urgency of interfaith work and helped those around her understand the importance of genuine acceptance, rather than mere tolerance, of others. She sought threads of commonality among people and belief systems, and her care and compassion for others shone through in everything she did. We are all better for, in the words of Rev. Dr. Dorothy Wells, “all of the human-made boundaries that she tore down and all of the people that she brought together.”

As MIFA's Inter-Faith and Community Outreach Officer, Linda wrote regularly (that English major came in handy!) about MIFA's work and commitment, and spoke often, especially in Memphis-area places of worship.

She also recruited Frances, then in her nineties, for volunteer work and Denton and Tessa—often in town for Christmas holidays—to volunteer with MIFA delivering Christmas “meals on wheels”.

In 2013, Linda received the Daniel Pearl Legacy Award for her humanitarian work with diverse faith groups and congregations in the community.

After moving home, Linda also became a more active ASC alumna. In addition to receiving the college's Outstanding Alumnae Award for the Service to the College in 2019, Linda also served on the Alumnae Board from 2017-2020 representing her beloved Memphis. She was honored with a special "Scottie Spirit Award" at Alumnae Convocation in 2017, her 50th Reunion year, in part because of her spirited leading of traditional group sings during student and alumni events and penning new Scottie songs (sample lyric: “Agnes [Scott] will make you Intelligentsia/no matter how dense you ah”).

She also assembled a remarkable collection of socks.

In response to pandemic workplace restrictions, Linda was working for MIFA at home in late July when she became ill. After several weeks of hospitalization and rehabilitation,

she was discharged to join her two cats Agnes and Fog but continued outpatient rehabilitation. She was recuperating at home when she was found unresponsive early on September 21, 2020.

It took time, but Linda was blessed to find a place for her passionate and faithful commitment to serving those in need—and those who want to sing!—and, when she did, the world was better for it. Just ask those who knew and loved her.

Linda is survived by her brother Denton and his wife Tessa. Because of the pandemic, they will organize a small private service. First Baptist Church of Memphis will hold a public memorial service at a later time when we can gather in safety (<https://fbcmemphis.org/> ).

In lieu of flowers, we believe that Linda would have gifts in her memory go to any of the following (in no particular order):

- The Linda Marks Memorial Fund at MIFA to support interfaith work throughout the community

- The Memphis Interfaith Coalition for Action and Hope (MICAHA)

Linda chaired MICAHA's Immigration and Intercultural Equity Task Force ( <https://www.micahmemphis.org/leadership> ). MICAHA's September newsletter wrote: "Our hearts are heavy this week with the death of justice giant Linda Marks...One of the many values Linda held was the power of 1:1 relationships to create systemic change. She modeled that passion in every MICAHA meeting by intentionally connecting with someone she did not know. Our hope is to live in to our future as an organization with that same passion of connection to continue her legacy.

- First Baptist Church of Memphis

- Agnes Scott College (Decatur GA)

# Cemetery

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## **Forest Hill Cemetery Midtown**

1661 S. Elvis Presley Blvd

Memphis, TN, 38106

# Comments

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“ Linda was my dear friend while she was living and working in Maine. She was one of the most extraordinary souls I've ever known. I loved her dearly - her spunk, her spirit, her wisdom, her kindness. I wish to extend love to all who knew and loved her - and there are many!

Patricia Keene

Patricia Keene - October 06, 2020 at 05:35 PM

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“ 1 file added to the album Graveside Zoom recording



Canale Funeral Directors - October 05, 2020 at 05:02 PM



“ Beautiful!

Judy Brown - October 08, 2020 at 12:27 PM



“ Beautiful service befitting such a lovely and dedicated lady we all loved and cherished as a friend! We should all in tribute to Linda try to be of service to others while understanding and valuing our diversity.

David Edwards - October 11, 2020 at 02:43 PM



“ Linda was a dear friend and I will miss her dearly. She cared deeply for other people and loved her work at MIFA. I know how special it is to have a job that one loves. She is going to so, so missed.

Trudy Hatton - October 13, 2020 at 11:36 PM