



Martha Hays Cooper

NASHVILLE - Martha Hays Cooper died peacefully at home in Nashville on Thursday, Feb. 4, after years of struggling with Alzheimer's. "Ookie" was married to Rep. Jim Cooper for almost 36 years, mother of their three amazing children, Mary (Scott Gallisdorfer), Jamie, and Hayes, and grandmother of the incomparable Jay.

Martha was born on Sept. 13, 1954, the second child of the late Dr. A.V. Hays and Dr. Martha Hays Taylor of Gulfport, Mississippi. Her siblings, Art Hays (Debbie) of Gaithersburg, MD, and Mary Hays Peller (Steve) of New Orleans, survive her. Martha graduated from Sweet Briar College in 1976 and from Mississippi State in 1980 with an M.S. in ornithology. Her first job was in a cubbyhole in the attic of the Natural History Museum, the Bird Division of the Smithsonian, staffing the first two editions of the million-selling National Geographic Field Guide to the Birds of North America. An adventuresome soul, Martha smoked cigars in swamps to repel mosquitoes, made lifelong friends in Buenos Aires, taught children and studied Puffins for the Quebec-Labrador Foundation, protected Least Terns on Gulf of Mexico beaches, camped in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and worked the Galápagos Islands for World Wildlife Fund, all while keeping an African-Grey parrot named Baroot in her kitchen.

Martha lived in Georgetown and drove a 1971 Robin's-egg-blue Volvo P1800E when she met Jim, the youngest congressman in the U.S., who proposed at a White House Christmas party. Part Audrey Hepburn, Ali MacGraw, and Penelope Cruz, Martha was wary of politics until she lived in Shelbyville with Jim's mother for a few months in 1984 to manage Jim's first re-election campaign. The experiment worked. They married on April 6, 1985, followed by the birth of Mary Argentine in 1990, John James Audubon in 1991, and Hayes Hightower in 1995. Martha loved Mardi Gras, Galatoires ("the big G"), hurricanes and snow, peonies, Little Cayman Island, Ernie Banks, homemade popovers, Radnor Lake, friends in the Query and Centennial Clubs, Aretha Franklin and Paul McCartney, Standard Poodles (Ruby, Sirius Black, and Romeo), Cicadas, golf, City House's belly-ham pizza, families of Crows, Prince Charles, her Cardinal-red 2003 Mini-Cooper, and the Hermitage, serving as Regent of the Ladies' Hermitage Association. Her favorite president was Barack Obama; favorite bird: *Upupa Epops*.

Martha's charm and optimism were heroic, eclipsing her illness. She ALWAYS smiled and said thank you. She loved car travel; on bumpy roads she'd say "this makes me wiggle." In recent years, she drew wobbly hearts on everything... with a Sharpie when she could find one.

The family is grateful to Martha's main caregiver, Sandy Mathers, her friend of 25 years, as well as newer friends, Heather Tavasti and Alyssa Action. The team at Alive Hospice was godsent. Natural burial by Feldhaus Memorial Chapel of Shelbyville and Larkspur Conservation of Nashville. Anatomical gift to the Vanderbilt Brain and Biospecimen Bank. Due to COVID, family ceremony only.