



## Mary Lou Wills

May 9, 1931 - November 30, 2021

Mary Lou Wills, 90, of Silver Spring, passed away on Tuesday, November 30, after a long illness.

She came from humble roots, growing up in a small town in Michigan, called Centreville.

Her parents were John (called Jake) and Elenore Marion Brown (Schrader.) Jake was a carpenter and farmer and Elenore was a homemaker. You don't have to look far to see their influences in her life—love of gardening, love of baking, love of sewing.

She had a sister, Joanne, who was four years older. Mom missed Joanne dearly when she married George Sadewasser, and they moved into their own home. Mary Lou's niece and nephew, Dianne and Steve Sadewasser soon came along. Later in life Mary Lou and Joanne became dear friends when they both ended up living in Indian Head.

Mary Lou grew up during the depression so times were very, very tough. But the one thing that she seemed very proud of was the fact that she always had spending money because her dad helped her to raise rabbits and, they never went hungry during the Depression because they farmed.

When she was 10 years old, the U.S. entered WWII making life doubly hard on a child. She heard about the bombing of Pearl Harbor on the radio while she was eating dinner at a friend's house.

At some point after graduating high school, Mary Lou, set off for Albuquerque, New Mexico, to work for Sandia Corporation—a contractor to the then Atomic Energy Commission. While there, Mary Lou bussed in daily from Albuquerque to Camp Mercury, Yucca Flats, New Mexico. While working there, she participated in a series of nuclear weapons' test series, called Operation Plumbob, including the Smoky test. We were fortunate to have Mary Lou bless us for 90 years, as a recent article in the Journal of Radiological Protection found that there was an 81% mortality rate amongst participants in the Smoky test. In fact, Mary Lou often reflected on how she had lost so many past friends from her years in Yucca Flats to leukemia.

Her short seven months of working in New Mexico was plenty long enough to provide massive doses of radiation which led to her acquiring an environmentally induced DNA mutation that would eventually lead to her polycythemia Vera disease.

Mary Lou met her husband, Harry Wills, while living in Albuquerque. He was stationed there as an Army military police officer. They soon married on November 4, 1957, and after he was honorably discharged from the army, returned back to the small town of Indian Head, Maryland, where Harry was raised.

Their daughter, Debbie, was born on September 6, 1958. Soon after, they relocated from the Indian Head Naval Ordnance Station (NOS) civilian housing to off-base housing, about a mile away, to Strauss Avenue.

During the late 1960s, Mary Lou returned to work as a bookkeeper for

McWilliams Ford in Indian Head. While working there, her niece from Michigan, Dianne Sadewasser, met and married John McWilliams. John and Dianne had four children, John C McWilliams, Megan Pierce (Henry), Erin Klaas (Brian), and Shannon Oliver (Daniel), and eight grandchildren who represent many of Mary Lou's great nieces and nephews living throughout various areas of Charles County.

While working full-time, Mary Lou took a few college courses. Eventually she landed a secretarial position on the NOS base where she worked very hard and quickly rose up the ladder.

By the end of her career, she had been promoted multiple times, transferred to Crystal City, traveled the U.S. for work, and worked daily with admirals and generals. Her final career title was "Assistant to the Executive Manager, Department of Defense Explosive Ordnance Disposal Technology and Training.'

She likely endured much sexism professionally, among other things, but held strong and kept her eyes focused on her work—she was very ahead of her time.

Mary Lou and Harry loved going down to "the country" to visit on Sundays with friends and relatives. They both truly loved St. Mary's County and never saw a game of Pitch they didn't want to enter.

There were always many occasions to celebrate with crabs too. Mary Lou took to eating Maryland Blue Crabs better than any non-native Marylander ever.

Shortly after retiring from the Federal Government, Harry and Mary Lou

moved to Silver Linden Drive, in La Plata, Maryland. They truly loved their first brand new, customized home in such an ideal setting.

After retiring, Mary Lou embraced her retirement with gusto, learning to quilt at the Charles Senior Center and volunteering as an aide at Civista Hospital (now Charles Regional Medical Center) for many years. To say she could quilt was an understatement. Quilting brought her so much joy and she blessed so many people with her beautiful quilts.

Not long after retiring, Mary Lou and Harry went through the devastating La Plata tornado. She recalled my father seeing the twister in the distance heading towards him and them barely making it into the bathtub with a mattress over their head. While their home was spared, the town of La Plata was completely destroyed. Mary Lou often speculated that it was that traumatic experience that may have triggered Harry's death shortly thereafter.

She was saddened at the passing of her beloved husband, Harry, in 2002. Shortly after, she moved to Leisure World in Silver Spring to be closer to her daughter, Debra Knorr (Jim); children Laura Sutzko (Nick) and James Wilson (Katie); and grandchildren, Caleb Wilson and Nelle Sutzko. While at Leisure World, she made friends and got more involved with family. She loved traveling, gardening, and going to the Dollar Store with friends, Betty, Laura, and Carole. She was also extremely close to her neighbor, Ed, who she considered to be her adopted son. She also became a mother figure to Debbie's friend, Rosie Serpas and her family, spending every celebration and holiday together.

Mary Lou also remained close to her step-grandchildren, Hillary Kroboth (Kevin) and Eric Knorr (Callie) and their children, Dylan and Caroline Kroboth and Brookes Knorr. She also had a special place in her heart for Hillary and

Eric's mom, Debbie.

Mary Lou was a kind, humble, and generous person. One could cite thousands of examples of her kindnesses to others, but just a few examples:

In 2005 she made six quilted items for the family of her daughter's colleague who had lost everything in Hurricane Katrina. She wasn't asked, that's just the kind of human being she was.

She would literally give the shirt off her back to a stranger. Just as recently as last year, she received a rebate check that she felt she did not deserve. So rather than spend it on herself, she donated the whole amount to the Manna Food Center. She also donated to other worthy causes like Honduras refugee assistance sponsored by Danny and Santa Fedock—relatives of Debbie's in-laws.

When my father's brother, Bob Wills, was diagnosed with ALS, my mother took him into her home and cared for him before he later transferred to Riderwood.

Mary Lou loved going to Ocean City.... It was her favorite place in the world to go and she use to take yearly trips to stay at Marigot Beach with whoever could go—Tina, Mollie, and Peggy.

These years that Mary Lou has been able to spend with her daughter, grandchildren, great-grandkids, and step-grandkids and step-grandchildren were cherished by her. She was able to experience every event, outing, and celebration, because they had her close.

Mary Lou was a beautiful soul who truly lived out the Golden Rule of "Love your neighbor as yourself." Her family is humbled and blessed that God chose

her and are forever grateful for the length of time they had her here with them on earth.

A private interment will be held at a later date.

Memorial contributions may be made to The Salute Military Golf Association (SMGA), 14600 Argyle Club Road, Silver Spring, Maryland 20906 or to Manna Food Center, 12301 Old Columbia Pike, Suite 200, Silver Spring, Maryland 20904.

# Previous Events

## Gathering

DEC 6. 10:30 AM - 11:00 AM (ET)

Raymond Funeral Chapel  
5635 Washington Ave.  
La Plata, MD  
business.office@raymondfuneral.com  
<http://www.raymondfuneralservice.com>

## Memorial Service

DEC 6. 11:00 AM (ET)

Raymond Funeral Chapel  
5635 Washington Ave.  
La Plata, MD  
business.office@raymondfuneral.com  
<http://www.raymondfuneralservice.com>

# Tribute Wall



“ *Mary Lou Wills*

October 08, 2023 at 10:45 PM



“ *Mary Lou Wills*

October 04, 2023 at 03:12 PM



“ *Its been said, "Where ever a good soul has walked, there is a trail of beautiful memories". The certainly applies to Mary Lou.*

*So sorry for your loss, Debbie. I know you have many great memories of your Mom.*

**Dianne & Chuck Goodrich** - December 08, 2021 at 04:46 PM



“ *Debbie,  
I can't tell you how sorry I am to hear of Mary Lou's passing. May God provide you and your family comfort and peace. Mary Lou was a beautiful, intelligent, humble, gracious, kind, thoughtful, giving and loving woman. My life was blessed to have her as my friend for many years and she will be surely missed. Heaps of love.  
Sallie Wright*

**Sallie Wright** - December 08, 2021 at 10:22 AM

DM

“ I met Mary Lou at the Clark Senior Center in the Sewing Room. She loved quilting and hand stitching. I learned a lot from her and she made such beautiful quilts. She was a lot of fun and had a wonderful personality. Whenever I would become frustrated working on my quilt she would always perk me up. Once when someone made a remark about my quilt she asked me "Who's quilt is this?" I responded "mine." She would say "Are you happy with your quilt?" I said "Yes!" And she would say "All right now. That's all that matters!" Mary Lou did not want me to give up and lose interest in quilting.

*Delores Moses*

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**Delores Moses** - December 04, 2021 at 04:22 PM

DK

*Thank you*

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**Debra Knott** - December 05, 2021 at 08:21 PM

DK

*Thank you, Delores*

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**Debra Knott** - December 05, 2021 at 08:22 PM

KT

“ I only met Mary Lou briefly after she moved in with Debbie and Jim. If I hadn't known better I wouldn't know she was so sick, she was warm and cordial to a complete stranger coming into her room. Debbie showed me some of the quilts she made and they were beyond beautiful! I am surprised to read that she only took up this craft after she retired. I wish I could have met her under better circumstances and had the chance to hear some of her stories. Debbie you did a great job sharing her life and capturing the things that were important to her. I pray that God will comfort your family as you honor this special lady and navigate the holidays without her.

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**Kellie Taylor** - December 04, 2021 at 01:44 PM

DK

*Thank you, Kellie. 🥹*

**Debra Knott** - December 05, 2021 at 08:23 PM

AS

“ *Andrew S. purchased the Divine Peace Bouquet for the family of Mary Lou Wills.*



**Andrew S.** - December 04, 2021 at 09:00 AM

AS

“ *Julia and I are so sorry for the loss of Marylou, although we only knew her for a short time She was such a sweet and wonderful soul. With Lots of Love, Andy & Julia Sutzko*



*Joshua 1:9*

*Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go.”*

**Andrew Sutzko** - December 04, 2021 at 07:44 AM

DK

*Thank you both for all you have done in so many ways. Without your love and support none of this would have been possible.*

**Debbie Knorr** - December 07, 2021 at 11:49 AM

DK

*Thank you for all of the love and support that you gave to us before during and after grandma's illness. We could not have done any of this without you and are forever grateful. Love that Knorr/Wilson/Sutzko family*

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**Debbie Knorr** - December 07, 2021 at 11:51 AM

DC

*“ we can't begin to tell you how sorry we are about the loss of MaryLou. What an amazing lady she was. The love she had for her family & friends was truly a gift to us all. And yes, could she cook!! The best crab cakes ever!! I haven't had any like hers ever. The time we got to spend with her was a gift for sure. Her stories about her family, you could see how much she loved them & how proud she was. I'm going to miss calling her, I'd always say "Hi MaryLou, it's Debbie.....from Michigan" because you could always hear a pause, then when I said Michigan she would laugh. We're all going to miss her. Hold onto those memories & talk about her often. I loved all the stories she told about her & Laura's adventures. I could tell how much they meant to her. Debbie, thank you for sharing your Mom, someone who I looked up to & very much admired.*

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**deb cupp** - December 03, 2021 at 06:30 PM

DK

*“Hi ...DEBBIE from Michigan.” Your thoughts and love were with us as we honored her memory yesterday. She loved you and your family so very much. Thank you for reaching out and sharing your love for my love. Love, Debbie*

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**Debbie Knorr** - December 07, 2021 at 11:54 AM



“ *Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Mary Lou Wills.*



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December 02, 2021 at 05:11 PM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mary Lou Wills.*



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December 02, 2021 at 12:35 PM



“ *Mary Lou I have alot of great memories with you. All of us camping together going out to eat or just plain ole hanging out.It didn't matter you were open for what ever what fun we had together. Rest In peace Love Patty Rice & Animal Lyon*

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**Patty rice** - December 02, 2021 at 12:05 PM



*Thank you for sharing your wonderful memories about my mom.*

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**Debbie Knorr** - December 07, 2021 at 11:56 AM

DM

“ *David Sadewasser Jenny Meyer purchased the Basket Full of Wishes for the family of Mary Lou Wills.*



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**David Sadewasser Jenny Meyer** - December 02, 2021 at 10:11 AM

JA

“ *Mary Lou will always be a cherished person for me. She befriended me when I first moved to LW. We enjoyed many walks and talks. She loved her family very much and was deeply grateful and appreciative of their love. And so proud of every one of them. May her soul be at rest. May the family continue to draw strength from her in the days and months and years. They never truly leave us.*  
*jay*

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**jay** - December 01, 2021 at 11:39 PM

ER

*For the short time I knew Mary Lou even a decade would be too short to enjoy her company. She was vivacious, energetic, open minded, and never stopped learning. Despite a blood cancer from 1950's nuclear government research work and nearly blind, she never let the disabilities be obstacles. She gave me a vision of aging gracefully with the determination to squeeze the best from each day. I will miss my girlfriend's laugh and cookies. Bravo Zulu.*

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**Erik** - December 02, 2021 at 03:29 PM

MK

*Mary Lou was beautiful both inside and out. I enjoyed every opportunity that I had working with her. She and Harry loved each other dearly and were a joy to be around. You will be missed by everyone you touched. Until we meet again.....*

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**Mary Kay Kassiris** - December 03, 2021 at 08:07 AM