



Mary Alice Pollard Brooks

January 16, 1921 - February 8, 2017

Mary Alice Pollard Brooks, of Jackson, school teacher to thousands, world traveler, humanitarian, and advocate for every man, died Feb. 8 at the age of 96. A daughter of the Delta, she was born in Thornton, Miss., in 1921, to Burdette and Dr. Marquis de Lafayette Pollard, and grew up in Yazoo City where she spent almost every day in the public library developing a voracious thirst for knowledge and deep love of books.

Mrs. Brooks was a person of rare gifts who used her boundless intellect, energy, courage and generosity to improve life for all those fortunate enough to know her. She and her husband of 65 years, Dr. Thomas J. Brooks, Jr., believed passionately that education was the key to a full and meaningful life and should be put to work to solve society's problems.

After attending Belhaven College in Jackson, Mrs. Brooks earned a bachelor's degree from the University of North Carolina in 1942 in political science. In 1964, she was awarded an R. J. Reynolds Fellowship in Economics from UNC, and in 1965 was one of only two Mississippi teachers awarded a Congressional fellowship in Asian studies at the University of Hawaii's East-West Center in Honolulu. In 1967, she earned a master's degree in history from Mississippi College and was inducted into Phi Alpha Theta honorary history society.

Mrs. Brooks was a leader in education in Jackson. From 1963 to 1982, she taught economics, American history, world history, government and sociology to 12th-graders at Canton, Wingfield, Lanier and Callaway high schools and taught at Mississippi College and Millsaps College. She was well known for high standards and the care she showed her students. They would bring their families years later to meet the teacher they credited with changing their lives by helping them secure national scholarships that transformed their opportunities. If Mrs. Brooks saw a need, she took it on. She organized the first P.T.A. at Chastain Junior High School, was president and founder of the P.T.A. at McLeod Elementary School, and was a member and organizer of the first Head Start Board in Jackson. She also taught Sunday school for more than 25 years.

During the 1960s, Mrs. Brooks supported Mississippians for Public Education and other organizations designed to improve access to education. In 1971, Jacksonians for Public Education recognized her efforts with the “Special Teacher Award in Human Relations.”

She also was a member of the Hinds County Mental Health Board, the University of Mississippi Medical Center Women’s Auxiliary, the Human Relations Council and Common Cause.

Fascinated by other cultures, Mrs. Brooks traveled the globe with Dr. Brooks and their family, and lived in Kyoto, Japan, and San Jose, Costa Rica, through his research grants in public health.

Leading a life of creativity and varied interests, she was an accomplished classical pianist, master gardener, seamstress, artist, designer, and serious student of foreign languages, teaching herself to read and write hundreds of Chinese and Japanese characters in her spare time. Tall and elegant, she was happiest working in her yard, chopping flower beds, building streams and creating beauty where there was none.

She leaves a legacy of moral integrity, tolerance, adventure, lifelong learning, respect for nature and a commitment to make the world a better place. She is missed beyond measure.

Mrs. Brooks is survived by two sons, Tom Brooks (Robin) of Harrisville, Miss., and Dr. Michael Brooks (Margaret) of Laurel; two daughters, Browning Edmonds (Bill) of Tallahassee, Fla., and Anne Kent (Ronnie) of Hattiesburg; seven grandchildren: Tiffany Stoner (Michael) of Enola, Pa; Thomas Brooks (Mihaela) of Marietta, Ga.; Wes Brooks (Shane) of Hattiesburg; Josh Brooks (Eliza) of Savannah, Ga.; Emily Gardner (Troy), James Kent (Jessica), and Grace Johnson (Casey) all of Hattiesburg; 15 great-grandchildren; and Janice Brooks of Hendersonville, N.C.

A memorial service will be held at 11 a.m. on Saturday, Feb. 18, at Fondren Presbyterian Church in Jackson.

Memory Chapel Funeral Home in Laurel is in charge of arrangements. In lieu of flowers, the family gratefully will accept donations to the fund established in Dr. Brooks' name that sends medical students abroad to provide vital public health services to areas most in need. Checks should be made payable to the UMMC Office of Development and should reference the Dr. Thomas Brooks Endowment Fund # 00063 on the check. Mail to:

University of Mississippi Medical Center
Office of Development
2500 North State Street
Jackson, MS 39216

Previous Events

Service

FEB 18. 11:00 AM (CT)

Fondren Presbyterian Church
3220 Old Canton Road
Jackson, MS 39216