



Eileen Sylvester

December 27, 2023

Eileen Mildred Sylvester
1924-2023

Eileen M. Sylvester, 99, of Gulf Shores, Alabama, passed away peacefully surrounded by loved ones on December 27, 2023, after a century enriched with family, friends, sports, spirituality, community, and a boundless love of learning and travel that took her to every state in the U.S. and every province in Canada. Hers was a life that was very well lived.

Eileen was born on June 25, 1924 in Detroit, Michigan. Owing to the Great Depression, she bounced around to different homes during childhood and held a number of odd jobs. Whip-smart and a hard worker, at only 18 years old Eileen was hired by Cadillac to work on top-secret tank technology projects as the war effort ramped up. Feeling that was not enough to support her country, Eileen enlisted in the U.S. Navy and served as a hospital apprentice. She was a proud veteran of WWII.

In 1944, she met and married another Navy sailor who was the love of her life, James E. Sylvester. Eileen served stateside while her husband served in the Pacific theater, and when WWII was over, they returned to Detroit and put down roots. Together they raised two children, Jim and Jamie, all the while Eileen worked in administration at Wayne State University and her husband

rose up the ranks of the Detroit Police Department. Theirs was a close-knit family, and life was filled with many community events and outdoor adventures, and at times, being witness to the front row of history as with the Detroit Riots in the late 1960s.

They decided to relocate to Traverse City in northern Michigan in December 1972, and four months later, Eileen lost the love of her life, James, in an auto accident. She moved to Maple Grove, Minnesota a few years later and built community anew around her.

Eileen loved to drive, and famously, this Detroit-born girl never owned a car with anything less than a V6 engine. With Michigan and then Minnesota as her home base, she traveled extensively by car, crisscrossing the U.S. and Canada dozens of times, feeding her ceaseless curiosity about people and places by visiting hundreds of cities and national parks, participating in study tours, and doing myriad service projects.

Her extensive travel led her to Gulf Shores, Alabama, where she fell deeply in love with the coast, the people, and the South so much so that she relocated permanently there in 2003. She was proud to call herself an Alabamian.

Service, sports, and spirituality were three constants in Eileen's life, and in Alabama, she found that she could dive fully into all of them. In service, she was passionate about getting out the vote, delivering Meals on Wheels, and serving as a proud member of South Baldwin Republican Women. The State Senate of Alabama honored her legacy of service with a proclamation issued on her 99th birthday. In sports, Eileen was quite an athlete—an avid golfer, a dynamic tennis player, a keen bridge player, and the winner of a silver medal in the mixed 200M freestyle relay at the National Swimming Masters in 1979.

And in faith, a strong sense of spirituality was a through line in Eileen's life—

she held an unwavering belief in God and trust in His love and resolve. In Gulf Shores, Eileen found her spiritual home at St. Andrew by the Sea, where she was very active in the church community. She was always glad to lend a hand, and to talk about life, God, and finding the beauty in any and every place.

Eileen was preceded in death by her parents, three siblings, and her husband, James, and son, Jim. She is survived by many loving family members and friends, including her daughter Jamie Davidson (Bob); six grandchildren including Stephanie Malia Hom (Paul), Jim Davidson (Haiyan), Laura Davidson, Kelli Rogl (Nic), Jodi Sylvester, Nikki Sylvester-Gapko (Nathan); and three great grandchildren.

A celebration of life will be held on February 10, 2024 at St. Andrew by the Sea in Gulf Shores, Alabama. Donations in Eileen's honor can be made to The Salvation Army, Meals on Wheels Gulf Shores, or your local Meals on Wheels organization.

Tribute Wall

JC

“ *Jaime, was going through photos & family keepsakes today as we plan our hopefully last move. My Mom is Joan Pattee, who passed from cancer in 1985, very young. Eileen was on the top of her address book (remember those?) Your number was listed with your Mom's. I remember your Mom as such a wonderful friend to her. Had the honor of "driving and chaperoning" those bridge playing friends on many outings. What a great group of ladies, and your Mom was one of a kind. I was always thankful for the friendship she and my Mom had. I am so happy she had such a good long life and I hope she and Mom are setting up the bridge masters in heaven.*
Best, Jane Pattee Callewaert

Jane Callewaert - February 11, 2024 at 07:39 PM