



Janet Marie Fortner

December 28, 2025

In Memoriam: Janet Marie Fortner (b. 12-25-1945; d. 12-28-2025)

Offered by her husband, John

Janet Marie (Millson) Fortner passed away on Sunday December 28th, 2025 in

Foley, AL from a heart attack at the age of 80 years. She is survived by John D.

Fortner, her husband, lover, and best friend of 54 years.

Janet was born on Christmas Day, 1945 in the San Diego Naval Hospital. She was

the daughter of Earnest Wayne Williams and Bessie Mae (Baker) Millson.

Janet's

earliest memories were of Pensacola and communities along Hwy 29 North (Bogia, Mystic Springs, McDavid, and Bluff Springs)—all located in Escambia County FL.

During her school-age years, she lived in Atmore, Fairhope, and Mobile, AL.

Janet

graduated 10th in a class of 400 from the newly constructed Davidson High School, Mobile in 1964.

Janet and I met and married while we were students at Harding. At 5'2",

Janet's

strawberry blonde hair, blue eyes, gorgeous smile, and prodigious intellect rendered me helplessly and hopelessly in love with her from the start (April,

1971). We were married the following December 20, 1971 at her mother's home in Cullman, AL

Although we began our college teaching careers elsewhere, we both retired from many years of teaching at Harding University, Searcy, AR on May 10, 2010.

Janet

taught ancient Greek and Roman History, Medieval History, and the History of the Early Modern

Era (the Renaissance). During her years at Harding (1994-2010), Janet also taught

Ministry for Women. Janet and I also taught in Harding's Overseas Program: in

1999 at Florence, Italy) and in 2002 at Porto Rafti, Greece, outside Athens.

Our entire married life was intertwined and interleaved with academe and church

ministry. Janet graduated in 1978 from Memphis State University (University of

Memphis), with a degree in Psychology. Janet's many talents and work experience, including managing a variety of medical practices, made it possible for

me to finish three degrees (MTh. / MPhil / and PhD.), while we lived and ministered in Memphis, TN, Lubbock, TX, and Cincinnati, OH, respectively.

During these years, Janet completed an MA degree in Early Modern History with a

minor in Italian language and literature from Texas Tech University in Lubbock TX (1987). Along the way, Janet also became proficient in reading French, Latin,

Greek, and Hebrew. She was a remarkable person of whom I was very proud and

whom I greatly admired.

Janet was a superb teacher both in the academic classroom and in the church. Her

abilities as a communicator brought her numerous invitations to speak not only at

Harding, but also in ministry and lectureship venues ranging from Pennsylvania to

California, including engagements in OH, TN, MO, AR, and TX.

Janet's research, speaking, and writing interests included the interpretation of Luke-Acts against the backdrop of ancient and modern hubris and power; the contemporary relevance of Paul's theology; a critique of the power and greed of

ancient and modern "emperor worship" understood as idolatry; and an understanding of Jesus as God's Grace to Humankind and of Jesus as Humankind's Gratitude to God. This latter long-standing interest of Janet's is in

the form of a completed manuscript which I am privileged to revise and to deliver

to the light of day as a published work, God being my helper.

Janet's analytical mind strove to "see the big picture" and the connections among

religion, society, culture, and politics. Her mind was on fire with cultural critique

and an imagination for how society and the world should be and could be in the

light of the demands of the Kingdom of God.

At the same time, Janet loved the small and quiet things: sewing, knitting, crocheting, quilting, collecting shells from the Gulf of Mexico, working on jigsaw

puzzles, and planting gardens and herb and spice beds, Not the least of these quiet

joys was watching a Bogey and Bacall movie with me in the evenings.

In our journey of life, Janet and I were able to experience together some remarkable times in our travels; just to name a few—both near:

Manhattan, Chicago, St. Louis, New Orleans, Carlsbad Caverns, the Four Corners Region of the Southwest, Santa Fe, Durango and Silverton, CO, Los Angeles, Disneyland; —and far:

London, Oxford, Loch Ness, Vienna, Berlin, Venice, Paris, Florence, Rome, Vatican City, Ravenna, Naples, Capri, Pompei, the tombs of the Macedonian Kings, Thessalonica, Philippi, Corinth, Delphi, Mycenae, Crete, Athens, Rhodes, Santorini, Istanbul, the sites of ancient Troy, Ephesus, Smyrna, Sardis, Pergamum, and Laodicea as well as Cairo, Giza, Luxor, Karnak, and the Valley of the Kings.

For all of that, Janet loved nothing better than haunting an old used bookshop or

an evening out dining and dancing in some quiet corner. In her final years, sometimes she would “disappear” into one of the rooms of our home library (which also doubled as her “workroom”), to hone her new-found skills as a “junk₁journalist”—some of her last “journals” are among my greatest treasures.

In every way Janet exemplified the “woman of valor / strength / capability” of Prov. 31:10-31. She literally evaluated and purchased a piece of hill-top land east

of Murfreesboro, TN as the site for our new house. She designed that house, and

by means of that exquisite sense of design, proportion, and financial acuity, the

house of her imagination became a reality during the Fall-Winter-Spring of 2009-

10.

The internal décor of our house as well as Janet’s personal wardrobe bore

additional testimony to her wonderful eye for color and design. Janet set to work

landscaping the site as well as planting garden vegetables with her green thumb.

We had great fun harvesting tomatoes, peppers, onions and other herbs in order to

cook and can many pints of Italian sugo (red sauce). As I and our neighbors and

friends can attest, Janet was a wonderful cook.

Many years ago, Janet and I took ballroom dancing lessons. We became quite good dancing partners. We even won \$50 in a dance contest broadcast live over

the radio in downtown Cincinnati one Sunday night! We danced a swing to “The

Power of Love” by Huey Lewis and the News! What fun!

Janet was beautiful, elegant, intelligent, and funny! Her eyes and heart knew no

distinctions between class, rank or color. She was a splendid and gracious hostess

to friends and neighbors from all walks of life.

Janet was and remains my dearest love and best friend. My heart “truly (yet) confides in her.” Living side-by-side with her all these years has made me a better

person, and a better Christian. The greatest miracle of my life is that she unreservedly loved one such as I. We loved, we laughed, we cried, we prayed, we

hoped, we dreamed together—and we took turns saving and forgiving each other

all along the way. No man could have wished for nor received a more extraordinary life-mate than I have been graced with all my adult life.

Ultimately,

Janet died suddenly in my arms as I grasped for her. Only now do I begin to understand how much of her life she planned around me and sacrificed for me. I

know that God took note of it all.

While I miss her physical presence profoundly, my greatest desire is that she “save

the last dance for me”—and that we may eternally “trip the light fantastic” before

the Throne of God and of the Lamb.

Send a message to John At fortnerjohnd@gmail.com

Tribute Wall



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John Fortner - March 06 at 05:43 PM