



Laura Brooks Staehle Johnson

April 4, 1951 - February 19, 2019



Graceful to the Last

Greetings!

Having read Laura's biographical sketch in her obituary, my first thought was what a wonderful job her children did in composing this memorial to their mother. Clearly her children have always known Laura the best.

Some forty-three years ago when I met Laura and her family they had just moved in across from my parents. In her eagerness to find good friends for her daughter my mother told me, "You have to meet the great gal that moved in across the street!" And I thought, "Hey okay, whatever," and also, "Sure, what the heck."

I had just finished college; Laura was only a couple of years my senior and she was already raising a family. WOW. And she was superb at it. She was young and playful and filled with common sense. I was impressed. At twenty-two I was immature and irresponsible and she was stately, a great hostess, lighthearted and yet still "in charge." So much responsibility: three girls and in short course a son. At my young age I was astounded and today I still marvel at her masterful juggling of family and all her many interests.

My first impression of Laura never really changed. What did change was the great many things that she added to her plate and the way her juggling talents only seemed to improve. Many of these endeavors are mentioned in her family's biographical sketch below.

Laura interacted with me personally, and with CU Maurice River in many contexts as well. We did so much over the years that some of it is almost a blur now, or maybe that is just tears I'm struggling with, trying to compose what she rightly deserves: my best.

She clearly fit the cliché "the hostess with the mostest." She threw wonderful parties with guests of all ages. Everyone felt welcome. She didn't walk about; she floated and she always made what she did look effortless. She had polished social graces along with a gift for dry wit with a sprinkle of sarcasm for those who knew her best. She hosted our first new member's orientations, and her home offered what may be the best view of the river for inductees to appreciate: her favorite view, over what the previous owners, the Moores, dubbed *Sweetmeadows*. Laura, being a history buff and clearly recognizing an apt name, kept it. Over the years she made many different contributions to CU and in 2007 she was an *Ah Why Knot* awardee.

When Laura was in good health she used to take her rowing shell on the river to stay fit and connected to the river. Seeing her row was a kind of poetry.

Laura was very disciplined in her physical pursuits. In fact it was sadly ironic that a person who cared so much about her health would ultimately be betrayed by cancer. Even in the worst of times she was gracious. In recent months my husband, Peter, visited her on numerous Sundays and she kept a chin-up presence: "I'm fine, how are things with you?"

Laura's property had one of the first osprey nests that we erected on the river. And for many years those chicks were the first to hatch. We used it as the gauge for when to begin banding, which is critical because we don't want young to fly or jump ship prematurely. This led to many phone calls and osprey conversations over a period of I would guess almost 20 years: "Do you think they have hatched?" and "Yes, I see her feeding them." From her porch you can spot about eight different nesting platforms and we call this river reach the *osprey ghetto*. Each year when we banded we called Laura to give her a chick status report. At times we would see her on her deck, phone in hand, as we checked in via cell. In all matters of family, even the osprey kind, Laura was curious, concerned, and heartfelt.

At the Bayshore Center in Bivalve she was a familiar face as a devoted volunteer and later as Director of Development and Marketing. Many of our members and theirs will mourn her loss. At the Center she filled one additional role with our family, acting as a listening ear for our two daughters who each spent a period working there. And likely many people from among Laura's family, friends, and acquaintances have similar stories to tell, of Laura making a difference to their families. For when someone is a good role model they touch lots of people's lives, and in that way Laura was exemplary.

Below you will read that Laura's family speaks of her superbly written thank-you notes. And now I write my last one to her, "Thank you Laura, you have no idea how many things you have taught me. And my parents were right: you are one great gal."

Our condolences to all of Laura's children and grandchildren, who were the light of her life. And to her larger family to which she was so clearly connected.

Sincerely,

Jane Morton Galetto

As Board President I have the formal responsibility also to thank the family for selecting CU Maurice River to receive memorial [donations](#). It is fitting, for Laura loved the river, its nature, and its history.



View of Sweetmeadow

Obituary

Laura Brooks Staehle Johnson, beloved mother, grandmother, sister, aunt, and friend, died on February 19th, following a prolonged illness. Well-known for her generosity, humor, beauty, intelligence, and tenacity, Laura excelled at everything she did. She will be greatly missed by all who knew and loved her.

Born in Newark, NJ to Dr. George and Alma Staehle, Laura graduated from Kent Place School and attended Connecticut College. She was a lifelong learner and avid reader, with a particular interest in genealogy and history. She loved books of every kind, and while her children attended The Ellison School she founded the library there (in addition to serving on the school's board of trustees). She was also an excellent writer, demonstrated by her time at the helm of the newsletter for the New Jersey Society of the Colonial Dames of America, for which she served as president and also as a Regent for Gunston Hall, home of Founding Father George Mason. Even on a small scale, her beautifully written and heartfelt thank you notes were a joy to read.

Laura was extremely active and seemingly tireless, whether on her daily walks around Laurel Lake with Harvey the dog or climbing over stiles on the moors of Scotland, making beds and breakfast for visitors, digging in the garden, tending to the chickens, birds, cats and whatever other hungry creatures came by, and visiting her children and friends all over the country and the world.

She was a great connector of people, whether as a hostess at her famous biannual Buckshutem Bash, or in her duties for over fifty years as class secretary for Kent Place

School. Her empathy for others and warm demeanor put everyone instantly at ease, a characteristic that made her welcome while visiting and comforting homebound employees during her time at Wheaton Industries. She also served on the board of trustees at WheatonArts, to which she had a special connection as a direct descendent of T.C. Wheaton, founder of Wheaton Industries.

Although she loved to travel, Laura's favorite place was her home on the Maurice River, and her passion for New Jersey's Bayshore region led her to her most recent position as the Director of Development and Marketing at the Bayshore Center at Bivalve. When not at work, Laura could be found monitoring the osprey nest with her telescope, navigating her rowing shell through the marsh, or ferrying her guests to the "shack" for cocktails, followed by an elaborate homemade meal overlooking the river.

Laura is survived by her daughters Alexa Kontes, Zoe Kontes, Laura Kontes Ames (Kevin), and by her son William C. Kontes (Kim) and five grandchildren: Constantine and Sophia Kontes, Kevin and William Ames, and Kalliope Brooks Kontes.

Laura is also survived by her brother Stuart Staehle (Alice), her sister Pamela Staehle Eilenberg (Tom), and by her niece, nephews, aunts, cousins, and friends. She was predeceased by her brother Richard and her parents.

A service in Laura's memory will be held on Saturday, March 2nd at 11:00 AM at the First Presbyterian Church, 119 N. 2nd St. Millville, NJ, 08332. Because Laura loved flowers, arrangements may be sent to the church. [Donations](#) in memory of Laura may be sent to Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and Its Tributaries, Inc. 17 E. Main St. PO Box 474, Millville, NJ, 08332.



Laura with grandson Kevin, one of Laura's archival Facebook photos

CU ON THE RIVER!
www.CUMauriceRiver.org

CONTACT US

CU MAURICE RIVER OFFICE
PO Box 474
Millville, NJ 08332

CitizensUnited@CUMauriceRiver.org
(856) 300-5331

Memorial Donations

Jane Morton Galetto
President
ForRivers@comcast.net

Karla Rossini
Program Manager
Karla.Rossini@CUMauriceRiver.org

Doreen Homan
Membership, Events and Office Manager
Doreen.Homan@CUMauriceRiver.org

Meghan Thompson
Assistant Office Manager
Meghan.Thompson@CUMauriceRiver.org

STAY CONNECTED

