



## Marilyn Joan White

October 27, 1931 - July 18, 2025

Marilyn Joan White was born on October 27, 1931, in Norwalk, Huron County, Ohio, to Esther Birdsall Sutton and Frederick Wilford White. She attended East Cleveland Schools from kindergarten through 12th grade (1936–1949).

Marilyn's father, Fred White, passed away when she was seven years old. She found comfort in drawing and later in painting with watercolors. After graduating from high school, she attended the Cleveland School of Art (now the Cleveland Institute of Art) for two years (1949–1951) and continued part-time classes through 1957.

Following six years as a switchboard operator with Ohio Bell Telephone Company (1951–1957), Marilyn began her teaching career at the Cleveland Day Nursery Association, where she taught for three years (1958–1961). There she developed a lifelong fondness for inner-city children and later wrote a memoir of those formative years titled *Hug Around the Knees*. During this time, she enrolled at Cleveland College (now Case Western Reserve University), earning a Bachelor's Degree in Education (1964), a Master's Degree in Library Science (1970), and a Master's Degree in Art Education (1979).

It was at Ohio Bell that Marilyn met her partner, Margaret Jean Bowen, with whom she shared more than fifty years of love and companionship. Together they traveled widely - from Europe to Hawaii and across the continental U.S.,

from California to New England, Michigan to Texas. Both excelled in their careers: Jean in early computer advances in telecommunications, and Marilyn in education, helping East Cleveland's Caledonia School win a Rockefeller Award in Arts (1983). That same year, Marilyn was nominated for Ohio Teacher of the Year, a success she attributed to the support of her mother and her partner, Jean.

When Marilyn taught primary grades in Cleveland Public Schools (1964–1970), she and her colleagues at Rosedale School (1967–1968) advocated for more relevant books for inner-city students - a year she later chronicled in her book. During her years in the East Cleveland City Schools (1970–1991), she and a group of teachers developed a Black Studies Guide through a Martha Holden Jennings Foundation grant.

Marilyn's first twenty years of teaching were in primary classrooms, and her final ten years were as an art teacher across all elementary grades. She also taught preschoolers at the Cleveland Museum of Art during summers and offered art classes to seniors after school at her mother's residence, the nearby A.M. McGregor Home. Her mother passed away there in 1997, with Marilyn by her side. Jean died ten years later, in 2007, at Breckenridge Village - with Marilyn again lovingly at her bedside.

After retiring from teaching in 1991, Marilyn pursued another passion: genealogy. From her great-grandmother Charlotte Garland's diaries, she wrote *Lottie's Story* (1999) and traced her lineage back to Peter Garland the Mariner of the 1620s. She later explored her father's ancestry with her half-niece, tracing their line to William White, a passenger on the Mayflower. Their research earned them both a membership in the Society of Mayflower Descendants in 2003. In 2010, Marilyn wrote *From Frederick to William White*, chronicling her father's story and their ancestral search. Altogether, she wrote five biographies, including Jean's, all of which are housed at the Western Reserve Historical Society Library.

Retirement also brought Marilyn the joy of her golden retriever companions, who joined her for walks at Holden Arboretum. She continued to paint and exhibit her artwork and calligraphy in numerous local shows; one of her paintings was displayed at the State Teachers Retirement System headquarters in Columbus, Ohio.

Marilyn generously supported many organizations, including the Holden Arboretum, Cleveland Museum of Art, Cleveland Institute of Art, Musical Arts Association (Cleveland Orchestra), Western Reserve Historical Society, Geauga Humane Society (Rescue Village), and Canine Companions.

Marilyn passed away peacefully on July 18, 2025. Her family and friends extend heartfelt thanks to the staff at Vista Springs Quail Highlands and Hospice of the Western Reserve for their compassionate care. She will be remembered for her creativity, generosity, and lifelong dedication to education and the arts.

A celebration of life service will be held on Sunday, October 26, 2025, from 3-3:15 p.m. at Brunner Sanden Deitrick Funeral Home & Cremation Center, 8466 Mentor Ave., Mentor, OH 44060; following the service, the family will receive friends until 5 p.m. at the funeral home.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made in honor of Marilyn to Canine Companions; online at [canine.org/donate-now/](https://canine.org/donate-now/) or Hospice of the Western Reserve; online at [www.hospicewr.org/](https://www.hospicewr.org/)

Offer condolences at [www.brunners.com](https://www.brunners.com).

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

OCT **26**. 3:00 PM - 3:15 PM (ET)

Brunner Sanden Deitrick Funeral Home & Cremation Center  
8466 Mentor Avenue  
Mentor, OH 44060  
(440) 255-3401  
ajs@brunners.com  
<https://www.brunners.com/>

## Visitation

OCT **26**. 3:15 PM - 5:00 PM (ET)

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# Tribute Wall

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“ *MARILYN WHITE.*

*Just hearing her name brings smiles and many memories of times when she was my neighbor and friend. She loved people and dogs. So glad I knew her and those memories will always remain.*  
*Sharon Waddington*

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**Sharon Waddington** - October 18, 2025 at 07:49 AM