



Jo Ann Gatton Heck

March 25, 1930 - June 6, 2025

Jo Ann Gatton Heck

Jo Ann Gatton Heck of Temple Terrace, Florida left this life peacefully at home on June 6, 2025. She was 95. She was born on March 25, 1930, in Marion, Ohio, and is survived by her husband of 74 years, James B. Heck whom she married November 18, 1950. Jo Ann and Jim met while attending North High School in Columbus, Ohio, playing husband and wife together in the senior class play and their first date was to the play's cast party.

Once they married, Jo Ann left her journalism studies at The Ohio State University to go back to work, first in a bank and later with TWA Airlines, while Jim completed his education. After 3 kids and 12 moves, she went back to complete her college degree in English at Ohio State, 20 years after first starting it. A gifted writer and dedicated student, she set the grading curve in every class. They raised their family through Air Force postings and Jim's subsequent university administrative positions in Ohio, Illinois, Delaware and Florida, making numerous wonderful friends along the way. They eventually settled in the Tampa Bay area in the late 1970s.

Professionally, Jo Ann worked as a banker for many years prior to beginning an 18 year career as a Realtor, earning her GRE status and helping scores of families buy and sell homes throughout the Tampa Bay area. She was a writer

by avocation, writing articles and short stories throughout her life and always planning in the back of her mind to someday write the “Great American Novel.”

Jo Ann and Jim shared a love of singing, first meeting in chorus at North High School in Columbus, then in various church choirs through the years and passing that love along to their kids. Car trips for the “J Hecks” were a rolling chorus in 5-part harmony. Jo Ann was a long-time member of PEO International, the American Association of University Women (AAUW), the Downtown Tampa Rotary Club, a Life Member of both the Ohio State and University of South Florida Alumni Associations, again, always making friends and touching lives. Just recently, she was honored with her 75-year pin from her college sorority, Alpha Chi Omega. She loved traveling, especially to England where she gloried in wandering around London visiting the homes of many great writers she had studied. Their trips included Austria, France, Alaska, the Caribbean, and every state in the U.S.

She was the exemplar of a loving mother, providing her children an unshakeable foundation of unconditional love that enabled them to grow into adults who could share that love and caring with their own families, extended families, friends, neighbors and colleagues. She was supportive, understanding, and interested in everything they did – teaching them to be independent, successful adults, yet always there to provide love, wisdom, support and guidance.

Jo Ann’s ready smile, kind words, and positive attitude were ever-present. Despite significant physical challenges and disabilities in the last 28 years of her life, she never lost her remarkable positive outlook on life, just one of the many life lessons she ingrained in and passed on to her family. Despite losing the use of her right side, including the use of her right arm and hand, she never complained. She always focused on what she could do, not what she

couldn't. She continued to work as a realtor and taught herself to do everything with her left hand: writing, driving, cooking and continuing daily water aerobics, for six years following the onset. She was a devoted caregiver to her mother for more than six years during that time, mastering intricate medical devices with her left hand in order to care for her mother in her home.

For her grandchildren, she was a fun grandma, always bringing her suitcase of treasures for the grandkids to every visit and planning fun activities for them when they visited her. She was an adventurer and explorer at heart, always ready to investigate new places and try new activities, visiting Open Houses, running for years in Tampa's annual Gasparilla Day race, and, later, driving her Jazzy chair in her neighborhood and beyond to discover what was there. She was a daily, familiar fixture around her neighborhood – the unofficial “mayor” of the village – cruising the area on the morning Jazzy chair rides she loved, waving to passersby, greeting and making connections with neighbors.

She is also survived by her brother, David (Judith) Gatton of Huntsville, Alabama, her children, Janice (Ross) Taylor of Austin, Texas, Judith (Stephen) Lowry of Temple Terrace, Florida, and Jeffrey (Donna) Heck of Lexington, Ohio, as well as grandchildren, Pamela (Brad Bingham) Taylor of Austin, Texas, Emily Taylor of Austin, Texas, Joshua (Kimberly) Leedy of Ontario, Ohio, Sara (Rusty) Bennett of Grove City, Ohio, Amanda (Sean) Brickner of Charlotte, North Carolina, Dennette (Erik) Santamaria of Columbus, Ohio, Alexandra (Rudy Alexeeff) Leedy of Redondo Beach, California, granddaughter-in-law Deidra Sibila of Austin, Texas, 10 great-grandchildren, many beloved nieces, nephews, in-laws, cousins, cherished friends and, especially, her amazing caregivers who assisted her so much in the last several years of her life. She was preceded in death by her parents, Harry and Norene Gatton, granddaughter Danielle Leedy and grandson Benjamin Taylor. Jo Ann's family is her ultimate lasting legacy.

A Celebration of Life will be held at Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church in Tampa, Florida, on Saturday, July 12, 2025, at 2:00 pm, with a reception to follow in the church's Fellowship Hall. Jo Ann will then be returned to Columbus, Ohio, for her final rest. Arrangements in Columbus are with the assistance of Rutherford-Corbin Funeral Home in Worthington, Ohio, where a service will also be held for her on Saturday, July 19, 2025, at 2:00 pm, with interment at Walnut Grove Cemetery, in Worthington.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that donations be made to: her granddaughter, Sara Bennett to help defray expenses related to her battle with ALS (Venmo @Sara-Bennett-10) or to 33 Forever, Inc. (<https://33forever.life/donate/>).

Previous Events

Memorial Service

JUL 12. 2:00 PM (ET)

Palma Ceia Presbyterian Church
3501 west san jose st
tampa, FL 33629

Memorial Service

JUL 19. 2:00 PM (ET)

Rutherford Corbin Funeral Home
515 High Street
Worthington, OH 43085

Tribute Wall



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Jo Ann Gatton Heck.

July 17, 2025 at 09:32 PM



“ Your Light Shines was purchased for the family of Jo Ann Gatton Heck.



July 17, 2025 at 09:32 PM



“ Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Jo Ann Gatton Heck.



July 11, 2025 at 11:30 AM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Jo Ann Gatton Heck.

July 11, 2025 at 11:30 AM



“ *Dreams From the Heart Bouquet was purchased for the family of Jo Ann Gatton Heck.*



June 30, 2025 at 02:06 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Jo Ann Gatton Heck.

June 30, 2025 at 02:06 PM



“ *So very grateful that our paths crossed. She was a very gracious lady and had a wonderful smile. I've missed seeing her at all the things she once attended that intersected with USF. She and Jim added so much to any event. My thoughts and prayers remain with Jim and the entire family. Marion T. Yongue
USF c/o 1991*

Marion T. Yongue - June 26, 2025 at 08:19 AM



“ *OSPF Board of Directors purchased the Beautiful in Blue for the family of Jo Ann Gatton Heck.*



OSPF Board of Directors - June 16, 2025 at 01:58 PM

JL

“ 21 files added to the tribute wall



Judy Lowry - June 15, 2025 at 08:29 PM

JK

Beautiful photos of Jo, Jim, family ❤️

Jane Kerns - June 23, 2025 at 11:57 PM



“ 3 files added to the album Memories Album



Rutherford Funeral Homes - June 13, 2025 at 04:40 PM