



*Nancy Thornwell  
Bernhardt Collett*

**April 26, 1934 - April 3, 2021**

Nancy Thornwell Bernhardt Collett, daughter of Jean and John Christian Bernhardt of Lenoir North Carolina, died peacefully at Heartsease, her Morganton home on Saturday afternoon. She was 86 years old.

She was a graduate of St. Mary's School and of Hollins College. As recipient of the prestigious Woodrow Wilson Award she pursued graduate work at Harvard.

She married Dr. James Rountree Collett of Morganton in 1956. She was a member of the First Presbyterian Church where she served as an Elder and longtime Sunday school teacher; a founding member of the Morganton Service League and its Vista Daycare Program; an ardent supporter of the NAACP; and a trustee of the Morganton Public Library Board and of North State Academy in Hickory. She was a fierce advocate of social justice and a believer that God loves all His people equally. She was a longtime volunteer in the Burke County school system and the creator of The Grandmother Club at Hillcrest Elementary School. A founder of the Discussion Club and a prodigious intellect, she never stopped pursuing knowledge and the life of the mind.

She loved books, flowers, great conversation, and local history. She was a dedicated letter-writer and accomplished poet. In the arms of her beloved husband, an

exceptional dancer. She loved all babies and teenagers unconditionally, especially the troublesome ones, to whom she was a confidante and champion. Above all else, she loved family.

Her love and care for her community was exceeded only by the kindness, compassion and generosity of those who cared for her during her declining health.

Her family has been humbled by the devotion of her faithful caregivers, including Dr. Debra Davis, Sonya Akbar, Daphne Ervin, Shanda Whisnant, Bridget Blackburn, Christina Gray, Lolita Jenkins, Valerie Carswell, Joyce Gray, Magalene Cash, Sonja Hall, Lisa Sharpaleszos, Chloe Pittman, Kendra Denny and Mackenzie Willis. She was also blessed with the attentions of nurses at College Pines, Baptist Hospital of Winston-Salem and the men and women of Grace Hospital in Morganton. Her family is deeply grateful for the devoted care of Burke Hospice.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Dr. James Rountree Collett, and she is survived by their five children: Jean VanNoppen and husband, Allen; Ellen Collett and Alexander Gruszynski; James Rountree Collett Jr and wife Ellen; Alexander Collett and husband, Derek Long; and William Collett and wife Georgia, and the son of her heart, Kevin Dixon and his wife Tomica. She is also survived by her grandchildren: Nancy Thornwell VanNoppen, Ellen Harper VanNoppen, Allen VanNoppen Jr, Jean Bernhardt VanNoppen, Alexander Collett Gruszynski, Adaline Rountree Collett Gruszynski, James Rountree Collett III, John Calhoun Collett, Ruth Ellen Hay Collett, Edgar Rand Collett, Mary Margaret Collett and Mathias Alexander Collett.

She is also survived by her brothers and sisters-in-law, John Christian Bernhardt Jr and Mary Jane Winfrey, Alex Bernhardt and wife Anne, and nephew and nieces Alex Bernhardt Jr., Lillian Sutcliffe and Mary Busko.

In addition, she is survived by beloved nieces and nephews Mary Ruffin Collett, Dimples Collett, Martha Mellon, Becky Collett, Del Apperson, John Collett Jr., Sallie Prouty, Robert Collett, Vicky Mitchener, Tod Collett, Joe Patton Jr., Betts Drennen, Chuck Patton, Paul Hopkins Jr., Clay Doxey and John Hopkins.

A graveside service will be held at 2:00pm, Tuesday, April 6, 2021 at Forest Hill Cemetery.

In lieu of flowers, contributions can be made to First Presbyterian Church of

IN LIEU OF FLOWERS, CONTRIBUTIONS CAN BE MADE TO FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF MORGANTON, THE LIBRARY FOUNDATION OF BURKE COUNTY OR DULATOWN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF LENOIR.

Sossoman Funeral Home and Crematory Center is assisting the family with the arrangements.

# Tribute Wall



–Nancy VanNoppen