



Phyllis A. Toy

December 21, 1942 - March 11, 2018

Phyllis Sterneman Toy passed away at the age of 75 at St. Vincent's Medical Center in Evansville on March 11, 2018 after a sudden but heroic struggle with pancreatic cancer.

For 18 years she was a professor of modern literature at the University of Southern Indiana where she also served as Founding Director of the University's Honor Program. A summa cum laude graduate of the University of Evansville, she became one of America's first winners of the prestigious Mellon Fellowship in the Humanities: an honor compounded by a full-tuition fellowship from the University of Chicago, where she received her Ph.D. in modern literature and psychoanalytic criticism.

She is preceded in death by her parents, Mary and Walter Sterneman (a WWII veteran in the battle for Iwo Jima).

She is survived by her husband of 37 years, John Haegert of Newburgh, IN and by her three children, Teran Jackson (Kerry) of Newburgh, William Toy of Henderson County, KY and Jeff Toy (Holly) of Louisville, KY. Also mourning her loss are her four sisters, Mary Noble of Westlake, OH, Adele Moore (Tony Schmitt) of Evansville, Vicki Dobbins (Darryl) of Warren, ME, Jeanne Klein (Terry) of West Lafayette, IN and her brother, Walter Sterneman (Terri) of Bloomington, IN. In addition, she leaves behind four grandchildren, Tara Gillum (Scott) of Dallas, TX, Megan Jackson of Newburgh, Ellianna and Kienan Toy of Louisville; as well as two great grandchildren by Tara and Scott Gillum, Emily and Landon.

Apart from her lifelong interest in feminist literature and films, she developed in later years and ancillary passion for Native America—both its culture and its artifacts and frequently offered evening lectures at Angel Mounds State Park in Evansville. Another surprising facet of her middle and later life was a growing affection for large dogs such as Dobermans, Rottweilers and German Shepherds; breeds often feared for their fabled aggressiveness and power. Under her gentle tutelage, however, she quickly transformed these “monstrous” beasts into affectionate if peripheral members of communal life. In short, she was a truly remarkable woman, brilliant versatile and boundlessly curious. She will be sorely missed by her devoted family, of course, but also by the many students, friends and colleagues who had the great fortune to know and love her.

A private celebration of her life and accomplishments will be held at a later date.

In lieu of flowers, donations in her name may be made to the American Cancer Society or the Humane Society.

Cemetery Details

Evansville Crematory

318 N. Lemcke Ave.
Evansville, IN

Tribute Wall



“ *Phyllis enlightened me as a writer Belated. Sympathies to family. She was indeed an inspiration.* ”

Greg Grotius - March 08, 2025 at 10:53 AM



“ *Phyllis A. Toy* ”

January 16, 2023 at 06:53 PM



“ *When someone like Phyllis passes, I try to be thankful that we got to be with her, hear all her amazing stories of her adventures and the way she made us laugh until we cried. We're so grateful to have known her and to have her friendship. Also to have and to keep these great memories of her we will miss her so much!. I am sorry for your loss and the families loss. Please accept our sincere condolences. Angela & Jerrad Bailey* ”



Jerrad & Angela Bailey - March 13, 2018 at 05:38 AM