



Deborah Neel Maya

Dec. 8, 1952 - Jan. 21, 2026

Deborah Neel Maya passed away unexpectedly on January 21, 2026. She was born in El Paso, Texas in 1952 to Jack Fagg Neel and Catherine Hale Neel, both originally from western Virginia. Most of her childhood was spent in Roxboro, North Carolina before relocating for her high school years to Albemarle, North Carolina where her father served as City Manager for the remainder of his career.

She went on to the University of North Carolina at Greensboro where she obtained a bachelors degree in Early Childhood Education, then to North Carolina State University where she obtained a bachelors degree in Food Science Technology and met her future husband of 48 years.

Her early work life was as a Cytogenetics Technologist at Bowman Gray School of Medicine in Winston-Salem and subsequently at the University of Texas Medical Center in Dallas, Texas. When her husband's career took the family to Morganton, North Carolina in 1990 she committed to spending her days raising her two children, maintaining the household, and pursuing her creative and entrepreneurial interests. She created dried floral arrangements for a few years until she discovered a hidden passion for decorating gourds with intricate wood burned patterns, leather dyes and an assortment of weaving and beads. Many of them still decorate homes and businesses from Asheville to Raleigh.

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When the ravages of time took the nimbleness from her fingers and she could no longer wood burn, she began helping her daughter propagate and grow carnivorous plants. Over the course of several years they developed a picnic table covered with plant trays into an extensive inventory of hybridized Pitcher Plants, and founded

Quaker Meadows Carnivores. She had become a well known authority on the cultivation of North American species along the way.

She is survived by her husband, Victor Maya of Morganton, North Carolina; two daughters, Sky Maya of Morganton, North Carolina, and Sara-Maya Hans (Griffin) of Athens, Georgia; and four younger sisters.

A celebration of Deborah's life will be held at a later date.

The family requests that in lieu of flowers, donations be sent to the Burke County Friends for Animals.

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

Tribute Wall

Vic , I'm so sorry to learn of Deborah's passing. I only met her a couple of times but I could see that she was an attractive, friendly, sharp lady. I know you must be lost without her. Time heals but it's a slow process. I can't imagine the weight of your loss. Thankfully you have your girls to be there for you. Stay strong, Greg P

–Greg Pleasants



I was so sorry to learn of Debbie's passing, and offer my deepest condolences to Vic and all the family. Debbie and I went to high school together in Albemarle, and roomed together our first year at UNCG. We reconnected later in life when Debbie came up to Burnsville for a visit, and one of her beautiful gourds is my prized possession. I was also fortunate enough to taste some of the wine from the viognier grapes she grew in Morganton (delicious). Debbie's laugh was infectious, and I admired her passion, energy, and creativity. A truly bright star has winked out.

–Janis Holder

So sorry to hear of Debbie's passing. I went to high school with her - class of 71. A group of us from that class started getting together again and was so glad to reconnect!!! I was so impressed with her talent and I do have one of her painted gourds!!! RIP Debbie.

–Beckv Callahan



While I only met you once.. after reading this beautiful story about your life i see how much we had in common! You clearly made a huge impact in the people around you, but one that was clearly impactful and bountiful! I wish I had known you better but maybe one day I will see you again and we can do art prodjects together in Heaven! love -
Karly Hale

–Karly Hale

I am so very sorry to read about Debbie's loss. She was such a good, funny, and interesting person. I have many of her gourds and a couple of her pitcher plants, and I have loved talking to her about our families, pitcher plants, and biology and life in general. We live just down the road a little way...off of Pea Ridge...and I realized a number of years ago that we have mutual friends in the Hesters. Vic, we will be holding you in our hearts. Much love to you and your family.

–Jessica Howells



Vic, Sorry for your loss. Praying for you and the girls during this difficult time. May Gid wrap his arms around you and give you Comfort that only God can give during this time.
Terry Baker Moses

–Terry Baker Moses