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Mary Jayne Sifford Peeler

None - Jan. 17, 2026

Mary Jayne Sifford Peeler of Morganton passed away peacefully on Saturday, January 17, 2026, at the age of 70.

At the time of her death she was a resident of The Berkeley Assisted Living Memory Care in Morganton.

Jayne was born in Roxboro, NC to Mabel and W.J. (Dub) Sifford, Jr. Later her family moved to Hickory and Jayne was in the first graduating class at Hickory High School.

A talented artist from a young age, Jayne studied art and painting under several local and nationally known artists. In high school the Hickory Museum of Art employed her to guide visitors through the museum's exhibits and collections.

Jayne had a beautiful singing voice. In high school her vocal talents won her a position in a student choir that toured Europe, Russia, and Scandinavia. The thrill of that trip kindled a love for travel and adventure that stayed with her throughout her life.

As a teen she collaborated with her mother at the Hickory Costume Company and became an accomplished seamstress and clothing designer. After high school she also worked in the furniture industry as a decorator and designer for several local and

international furniture manufacturers.

A desire to teach took Jayne back to school. While working full-time she graduated with honors from Western Piedmont Community College in 1988. Later, while still working full time, she graduated with honors from Lenoir Rhyne College (now University) in the centennial class of 1991.

After graduation she was employed as a teacher by Western Piedmont and later the Burke County Public Schools. Her first assignment was at a pilot program for at-risk students at the College Street School. Later she moved to Freedom High School where she taught English and Theater Arts. While at Freedom she also coached the Forensics and Debate Team and directed yearly student productions. During her summer breaks she took many of her students on tours of Europe where they walked in the footsteps of Shakespeare, Moliere, Burns, Aeschylus, Ovid and other famous playwrights and poets.

She cared deeply for each of her students and spent countless hours of her own time tutoring them and writing college recommendations on their behalf. To her students she was always JP or Mrs. P or Mama P. Many of them reached out to her during her illness to say how much they loved her and appreciated that her classroom was always their "safe place." Another former student reached out to say: "She was the most incredible person. Jayne was the first person I felt who saw me, the real me and loved me for it and I wouldn't be anywhere near the man I am today without the influence she had on me." Most days before and after school you could find groups of students congregated in her classroom. So strong was her dedication to her students that in 2012 she was named Freedom High School's Teacher of the Year.

Jayne was active in the community throughout her life. She served as a Scout leader. She was also a member, president, and district director for the Morganton Jaycettes. She served on the board of the Historic Morganton Festival and was a member of Calvary Lutheran Church.

Jayne applied her artistic talents to all that she did. Her collection of flamboyant necklaces and colorful tops were a trademark. Ask anyone lucky enough to have had one of her one-of-a-kind birthday cakes or any of the scores of friends and family members who were recruited annually to help make hundreds upon hundreds of her famous homemade Christmas chocolate candies and they will tell you how she

famous homemade Christmas chocolate candies and they will tell you how she brought art and love to all she did. Family and many close friends always looked forward to her yearly handmade Christmas ornaments. Although she never admitted it, she usually started work on the next year's version the day after Christmas.

Jayne was devoted to her family. especially to her three grandchildren. She often said that her greatest treasures called her "Granna." Their memories of their Granna will be highlighted by the fabulous birthday cakes she designed and created and the themed birthday parties she staged. It was said that more planning went into those events than into the moon landings.

Jayne is survived by her husband, Tom, their children Laurie (Lee Traxler), Jason (Wendy), grandchildren Luke George, Nora Peeler, and ZellaJayne Peeler; her sister Ann Anderson (Doug) and several nieces and nephews.

Jayne's family would like to express their appreciation to the many friends, co-workers and former students who reached out to her during her illness. They also thank the caregivers at The Berkeley Memory Care Assisted Living, Adult Day Center at Blue Ridge Community Action, and Memory Care of Asheville as well as the many friends and relatives who helped with her care while she was at home.

The family will greet friends from 1 to 2 p.m., Saturday, February 7, 2026 in the fellowship hall of Calvary Lutheran Church. A celebration of Jayne’s life will follow at 2 p.m. in the church with Rev. Paul Carlson officiating.

Although Jayne loved beautiful flowers the family asks that you refrain from sending any. Instead, they have asked that donations in her memory be given to Scholarship Fund of the Community Foundation of Burke County, PO Box 1156, Morganton, NC 28680 or to Calvary Lutheran Church, 119 N. King Street, Morganton, NC 28655.

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

Tribute Wall

Tom, I am so sorry to have just learned of Jane's passing. I will continue to keep you and the family in my thoughts and prayers. Many hugs.

—Linda Lou

I went to high school with Tom and my brother Ebbie went to high school with Jayne. When Jayne found out that I collected eggs, and that in fact we had chickens at our house in Atlanta, she made me a beautiful Christmas ornament from a goose egg. I hang it on the tree every year and remember her incredible talent. My condolences to Tom and the family, and to all her friends and former students who loved her. She was indeed a uniquely gifted person.

—Rev. Jeanne Swink Simpson



Jayne, you were the reason I was able to survive high school. I was so desperate to be in theatre every year that I took the intro class twice. Thank you for helping me get through those years. Thank you for everything. I pray for your journey to the Field Of Reeds. I will always miss you yelling at me to get off the desks.

—Victoria Trout



Jayne was a gift



—Bertha Denton



My sincerest condolences to the family and friends of

Jayne. While I only met Jayne a few times, it sounds as though she poured out her God given talents and love into all that she did and more importantly, to the people that she came in contact with. She exemplified both thru daily devotion to her family, friends and all that she encountered thru the various positions that she held during her lifetime. She made an indelible impact on her students as well. I know that she will be sorely missed this side of heaven. With sincerest sympathy.... Wendy Eller

—Wendy Ellet



RIP my sweet baby sister as we gather on Saturday to say goodbye to u. I miss u so much already. First daddy, then mom and now u. I am left here without any of u and no one to call to talk to. I light this candle in ur memory and my love for u.

—Ann Anderson



My best friend, all the way back to elementary school. Oh...some of the fun we had growing up! I'll cherish those memories. See you later, my precious friend! "Go rest high"

—Marilyn Deal

Tom and family, We send our sincere condolences. Little did we know of the scope of Jane's life and the many lives she touched. She wore so many different

hat's in life as an educator and person of faith. May our Lord comfort you as you go through the grieving process.

–Wayne and Leslie Giese



I was lucky to have met Jayne while being one of her caregivers at The Berkeley. Jayne was the first resident I clicked with and it was a privilege meeting her. May Jayne rest in peace. Praying and sending love to your family.

–Faith Irene

I got to know Jayne while instructing at the Basic Law Enforcement Training program at Western Piedmont Community College. I taught the Rapid Response to Active Shooter for many years. That class consisted of a day of classroom instruction then a day of practical exercises. For many years Jayne provided the role players from her drama classes at Freedom High School for the practical exercise. On Many occasions she would show up with old clothes for the students to wear so they wouldn't ruin their own clothes. We used a lot of stage blood to make the exercise realistic. The class wouldn't have been as realistic without Jayne's help and her students. WPCC 's Basic Law Enforcement Training Program will always be in her debt. Captain Karl Walden Retired Morganton Dept. of Public Safety.

–Karl Walden



Tom, so sorry for your loss. Hang in there old buddy. Jones

–Jones Abernethy



JP.... You touched so many lives and your light and love and laughter carried so many of us through the drama-filled days of being teenagers. Thank you for being you, and for always being a safe person. I knew you from Annie at OCP, high school, England, and beyond. One of the last few times I got to see you was when I was at a library story time with my son. You had your granddaughter with you and loved telling me about your grandchildren. I know you are so missed. Sending love to your family.

–Anna Brown-Walker

Tom, I am sorry for the loss of your wife. Phil Barton

–Phil Barton

Tom and Laurie, our hearts go out to you in this time of sorrow. Jayne was a wonderful, loving person and we loved her in return. Our prayers are with you. Claude and Dolores Huffman

–Claude and Dolores Huffman

Laurie, and family. My heart hurts for you and the loss of your beautiful, amazing mother. My deepest condolences and prayers are extended to you all. I am one of the recipients of her chocolates and let me say they were some of the best I have ever eaten.

–Shirley Dale

Tom & Family, You have been true to the promise you each made to Jayne and that was to take care of her. Know that God's Peace and Comfort will be with you in the days ahead.

–Tom Ditt

—Tom Ditt



I remember Jayne from being school friends with her sister Ann from kindergarten throughout high school and are still friends today. Jayne was a precious little girl and what a legacy she left for her family and others. It shows what a wonderful person she was and how she cared for others. My heart and prayers go out to all the family but she is at peace with our Heavenly Father and her parents. May God give family and friends grace and peace during this difficult time.

—Donna Whitener



I was lucky enough to know Jayne through Laurie. As the mother of my best friend, she provided a safe, loving and FUN place to be an awkward teenager. She and Tom accepted me from the start, taking me under their wings and encouraging me. Their love for their children and their community was obvious even when I was a teenager. Jayne was always smiling, laughing and letting us discover who we were while providing a safe place to land. So many sleepovers, parties, and adventures are entrenched in my memories. I always felt loved, accepted, supported and truly seen in Jayne's presence. My heart goes out to Tom, Laurie, Jason and the many family and friends who cherished her. She will be greatly missed, but left an indelible mark on those around her. Rest in peace, Mama Jayne.

—Amber Garvey



Jayne was amazing. She put her whole self into everything she did. What an amazing example she set for her students.



she did. What an amazing example she set for her students, children, and grandchildren. She will definitely be missed. Prayers for this beautiful family. Judy Lane Davis

–Judy Lane Davis



My sister. I miss u already so much but I know ur in a better place. Love u

–Ann Anderson

Mrs. P. had a profound impact and influence in my life. She gifted me with words of encouragement, wisdom, and always the right lyrics when I couldn't find them. She saw through me and lifted me when I needed it most. I'm so grateful for the gift of education and then later in life, friendship. I am forever grateful I was able to hold her hand one more time and hear one more "hey sweetie "! The gift of JP will transcend this life and pass through to the next. So grateful for every second my life was impacted by hers. Sending love to all of her family. It's been such a long time since I've seen most of you but my thoughts and condolences are with you. I know this hurts so big.

–Kristen Bongibault (De Dominicis)