



Thelma Luciana

Jan. 21, 1933 - Aug. 22, 2025

Thelma Lois Brooks Luciana passed away in her home of 67 years in Morganton, NC on August 22, 2025 at the age of 92. She was lovingly tended to by her daughters and great granddaughter. Staying in her home surrounded by her beautiful quilts and treasures was her wish. The support of her family and friends, all of the therapists, nurses, and caregivers has been remarkable.

Thelma was born in Black Mountain, NC on January 21st, 1933, to her parents, Glenn Dewey Brooks and Martha Phoebe Justus Brooks. She was a mountain girl who often spoke of an idyllic childhood. After graduating from Black Mountain High School in 1951, she attended Catawba College for two years where she met the love of her life, James Luciana. They married in 1953 living in New York City for 2 years while Jim was in the army. Thelma finished her college degree at Lenoir Rhyne College in 1965 with her daughters in attendance. She loved her chosen profession of teaching elementary school children. The principal at her retirement celebration noted, "Thelma's love for children was very evident and they returned her love with admiration and hard work." Many of her students continued to visit her and bring their families over the years. She couldn't walk down the street, go the grocery store or bank, without someone calling out- "Mrs. Luciana!"

Her family consists of Lynda Luciana Reilich (Jeffrey Neal Reilich) and Cathy Luciana Johnson (Rick Alan Johnson, deceased); 2 grandchildren, Leland James Reilich (Jasmina Ordenana), and April Johnson Calamaco (Jose Raymond Calamaco); and 6 grandchildren: Valeria, Mireya, Melody, Alejandra and Estella Calamaco; Gael Ordenana and one on the way.

Thelma was an artist of multi medium, however hand quilting was her passion. Her quilts are hand stitched, each unique in design. Thelma was interviewed on her 90th birthday by a former student, who is the executive director of the QSOS- Quilters Save Our Stories. It is the largest oral history collection about quilt makers in the world. <https://youtu.be/sN0p5J8WVml>. She quilted in the tradition of her mother and grandmother, taking the creativity and beauty to a new level.

She was an active member of the First United Methodist Church, at one time serving meals at the soup kitchen, interviewing Habitat for Humanity candidates, and a member of various guilds. She had a group of dear friends who played bridge, hosted marriage and baby showers, and went on trips together. She and Jim loved to entertain at their cabin, and at one time were members of 3 dance clubs.

Thelma's doctor used the term "true grit" when he spoke about her. She was always up for a challenge, generous with her time and her funds. She was the matriarch of a family that is racially diverse and was proud of it. Her face told it all when she held the newly arrived great grand babies. She had high expectations of her family. Firm but forgiving, a true teacher throughout her life. One of her favorite children's books was *The Velveteen Rabbit* which she quoted often. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't happen often to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally, by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out and you get loose in your joints and very shabby. But these things don't matter at all, because once you are Real you can't be ugly, except to people who don't understand." Fare thee well to a wonderful human being who inspired so many.

A celebration of Thelma's life will be held at 1 p.m., Saturday, September 6, 2025 at First United Methodist Church with Rev. Dan Hester officiating. The family will receive friends in the fellowship hall following the service.

In lieu of flowers please donate your love, kindness, time and resources with those who need it most.

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

Tribute Wall

Lynda & Cathy, My admiration began in my childhood as neighbors, very close neighbors! Your mom and dad and their marriage were idyllic to me. Thelma never ceased to amaze me in her ability to do so much so well with ease, grace, & artistic beauty! Our moms endured our trying teenage years. Thelma became my friend, my mentor, and confidante as I entered college and and subsequent marriage. We shared our passion for elementary education, , our love for our children and then our grandchildren through the years. In the last half a century, a visit to Morganton meant a visit with Thelma. Her gift and stories about her quilts were more than entertainment. She was always creating and adding beauty to this world. We shared so much life, love, and laughter. Her light will always shine in our hearts.

—Karen Ball James



I was a fellow quilter from the Senior Center. Her quilts were magnificent and inspiring; her personality so warm and loving! I am sure she is all smiles taking in all of the beautiful colors of Heaven! Rest in peace Beautiful Lady!

—Cindy Grimord

She was my 4th grade teacher back in 1984. A very great teacher that cared for her students. Even after many years out of school, she still could tell you your name and talk to you like it was just the other day

—ionathan bowell

Thelma was a beautiful Southern Lady. She played the piano for Aldersgate Sunday School classes with gusto while the class sang beloved hymns. She was a talented musician. I volunteered for the Soup Kitchen in Morganton with Thelma.

She was always kind and caring to the people who came for a hot meal. She and I visited while we served the meals, she most often had a story about her grandson, Leland. She was so proud of him and his accomplishments. I met Thelma at a UMW meeting in 1996 at First Methodist Church. The members were asked to bring scraps of material from home. She showed us how to make an angel doll, with long arms sewed together. When our angel was finished, it was ready to hang on a door knob. I still have my angel which hangs on my bedroom door. What a blessing to have. Thelma was so proud of her North Carolina heritage, growing up in the Blue Ridge mountains. I visited her home once when she helped me with a quilt I was making. Jim had made wooden racks hanging on walls all over the house where her beautiful quilts were displayed, just like beautiful, colorful pictures. What a great friend and she will be missed. What a blessing it was to call "friend". Blessings to her family.

—Margaret Tanner Hester

We met Thelma when we moved into the neighborhood 6 years ago. She was very friendly and told us what the neighborhood was like years ago. Paul helped her with groceries a few times. Sorry for your loss.

—Betsy & Paul Abare

Mrs. Luciana was my third grade teacher at Mt. View Elementary. She was so very kind. She was always welcoming at a time when integrated education was new. Over the years I would run into her and she was always my kind, gentle, third grade teacher.

—Coron Brewer Jordan



Deepest condolences to the family. I have fond memories of her from 1973 at Mountain View Elementary and throughout the subsequent years.

—B. Scott Andrews

Thelma was one of my favorite people at Mt.View. I use to call her Mrs. Louisiana. Thelma was not only blessed with not only a talent for needlework and quilting, but she could also sing, play piano, and clog. I will miss seeing the back of her head at Sunday service. My sympathy to her family. Ann Freeman

—Ann Freeman

As a child, I was very fortunate to have had Thelma as a neighbor. She had a big smile for all of the kids. And after being away from Morganton for decades... when I would see her, she would greet me with a big smile. I'm very sorry for your loss

—Frank S Wallis



Thelma was an excellent teacher for our daughters Kelly and Anne Salsbury at Mountain View Elementary School. We send prayers for her family! Jeanie Salsbury

—Jean Salsbury

We loved Miss Thelma at the library and we will miss her!

—Lorie Rehberger

Thelma, I never met you but.. I know your daughter, Cathy. She has the sweetest personana and Love of Christ. So.. you must have been a lovely person to raise

such a kind daughter. I enjoyed reading your remembrance. You would have been someone that I would have loved to pull up a chair in your kitchen.

—Susan Kerr



—The Strickland Family

Didn't get to see her much but when I did she was such a joy. She was very loving and so sweet to us growing up. One if the best parts if living with pop and grandmom we got to spent the time u all came to visit with you guys. We were blessed to get to know you guys. I missed her already but will not always have to miss her. Love her always!

—Lena DelCampo

I put the hvac in her house ! Such a nice and pleasant lady ! Prayers for the family in this difficult time

—Kevin Woolridge

This tribute is for the best grandmother and great grandmother in the world. You are greatly missed by us. We are so thankful for the 92 years of life you had and the last moments we got to spend with you. With tons of love April.

—April Calamaco

So sorry for your loss. Will miss her in Church.

—Jim Belote



So sorry about the passing of this sweet lady I love going to her home and seeing all her many talents we were in herb group together we would joke about her being from black mountain and me being from old fort I love her and shall miss her Thelma did not die she just changed addresses she is now experiencing all the joy of heaven our minds can only imagine what she is experiencing may God hold the family close and comfort you as only He can love and hugs

—Eddy and Brenda Huffman

She was my children's teacher.....they learned under guidance and teaching. She was my friend, loved to play bridge with her and her friends. Her sweet daughter Kathy babysat for me. She will be missed but she is with her sweetheart Jim in heaven now!

—Brenda Hogg



Thelma was a beautiful lady inside and out. Working with her at Mountain View School was a delight and an inspiration. She was so dedicated to her calling. She sat in front of me on Sunday mornings at FUMC. What a delight to receive that beautiful smile and warm welcome. She will truly be missed. Love and prayers to her beautiful family. In sympathy, Judy Lane Davis.

—Judy Lane Davis

Linda & Kathy, I am so sorry about your Mom. She was a very special lady. I'm very grateful that I visited last week. I have wonderful memories of your family & our life in Fox Street.

–Debbie Leonard Segars

Dear Lynda, Cathy, Jeff an extended family. So sorry to read of Thelma's passing. She was definitely a character and always had that smile on her face. I know for a fact, her students loved her. Peace and blessings...

–Bo Cash