



# **Ms. Mary D. Hightower**

APR 11, 1941 - OCT 17, 2024



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# **Ms. Mary D. Hightower**

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**M**ary Dester Hightower, formerly of Utica, New York, died on Thursday, October 17, 2024, in Tallahassee, Florida. She was 83.

Mary was born on April 11, 1941, at the Columbia Hospital for Women in Washington, D.C. She was the first child of William Franklin Hightower and Leah “Pat” Frances Hightower. Mary remained fond of Washington, D.C. her entire life.

Mary grew up in American University Park in the District and she attended public schools, including Woodrow Wilson High School. Mary was active in Girl Scouts, earning numerous merit badges, and she was active in her church, Eldbrooke United Methodist Church.

During high school at Wilson, Mary was an active member of the Girls Glee Club and the Player’s Club (Theater). Mary graduated with honors from Wilson in 1959.

An excellent student, Mary was admitted to Duke University in 1959. At Duke, Mary was a member of the Chapel Choir and Chancel Singers. She also was a member of the Nereidan Club, a group of girls who developed skills in the creative artistic expression of synchronized swimming. Mary majored in religion and received her B.A. from Duke in 1963. She later earned an M.A. in Guidance and Counseling from Syracuse University.

During the summers of 1962 and 1963, Mary served as an Arts & Crafts Director/Waterfront Director at the Anita-Bliss-Coler in Fishkill, NY, a camp run by the Fresh Air Fund for children from impoverished areas of New York City. These summers of 1962 and 1963 were crucial in furthering Mary’s career goals – directing energies toward services to youth in the inner city or economically depressed situations, with an overall interest in recreation and youth-centered activities and work.

After graduating from Duke, Mary accepted a position as a social worker at the Neighborhood Center in Utica, New York. In that role Mary wrote many grants to fund social services for the



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Center, and she worked with inner city youth of a variety of cultural and ethnic groups. Mary enjoyed working with “her kids” so much that she spent her entire working life at the Neighborhood Center.

In her spare time Mary enjoyed singing in the Utica Opera Guild and the Clinton Community Chorus, and performing as the Spirit of Christmas Past in the Player’s of Utica annual productions of “Scrooge”, which ran for thirty-five (35) years straight until its last performance in 2016.

Mary also enjoyed scuba diving, skiing, canoeing, swimming and teaching kids how to swim. Mary is survived by her brother, Robert Stephen Hightower (Bob), his wife, Shara Stroud Hightower, and Mary’s nephews, Bob’s sons William David Hightower and John Douglas Hightower, and by a grandniece, Chloe Suzanne Hightower, John Hightower’s daughter, all of Tallahassee, Florida.

Mary loved New Market, Virginia, and that is why she requested that she be interred in the Saint Matthew Cemetery in New Market adjacent to her Mother, Leah “Pat” Frances Hightower, and her favorite cousins, Grace Brubaker and Nina Arehart.

The family requests that, instead of flowers, contributions be made to The Neighborhood Center, 624 Elizabeth Street, Utica, NY 13501.



## **Memories only last if you share them**

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