



Barbara Elizabeth Martinson

July 24, 1953 - July 25, 2025

Barbara Elizabeth Martinson (Larson) was born July 24, 1953. She was raised on the East side of Saint Paul by her grandmother, Esther Larson, and Esther's sisters "The Girls" Hilma, Hilda, and Olga Johanson. As a child, Barbara skateboarded down large hills with her long braids waving behind, collected comics and horse figurines, and cherished her visits to the north shore. In 1970, Barb graduated from Johnson Senior High and continued her studies at Bethel University as an English major. She enjoyed singing in the choir and acting in theater productions.

Barbara married Darwin Lee Martinson on December 21, 1972. The couple resided in their Falcon Heights, Minnesota, home for six years before moving to Roseville, Minnesota, shortly after the birth of their first child. Darwin built both homes.

In the 1980s, Barb followed her love of art and design and completed her master's and doctorate degrees through the University of Minnesota. Several years later, she started her career as a professor in the College of Design on the U of M's St. Paul campus. In addition to teaching undergraduate and graduate students, Dr. Martinson curated the Paul Whitney Larson Art Gallery and the Goldstein Museum of Design, published research articles, and had artwork (mostly textiles) exhibited across the country.

As an adult, Barbara loved calligraphy, walking around Como Lake, attending Latin Hip Hop classes at the Shoreview YMCA, sipping iced teas and mochas, expanding her home garden, volunteering at the Como Japanese Garden, as well as singing and dancing with her children and grandchildren. Some of the greatest gifts she shared with her two daughters were her love of art, music, and travel. She traveled on numerous trips with Liz and Melissa.

Barbara was a caregiver for many. While raising her two children, she helped her grandma and her great aunts (as well as Darwin's parents) age gracefully until their last days. When Darwin needed two knee surgeries and endured treatment for skin cancer, she was there every step of the way.

In 2018, near the end of her career as a professor, Barbara was diagnosed with Posterior Cortical Atrophy, a neurological condition that impacts both cognition and vision. Barb started with a mild cognitive impairment that took some of her greatest gifts from her: her ability to see color, do art, write, and read. The one thing it couldn't take from her was her ability to sing. Music was a gift she enjoyed until her last days.

In April 2018, Dr. Martinson received a Distinguished Teaching Award through the University of Minnesota. She retired from teaching in May 2020 during the height of the pandemic.

As her condition progressed, Barbara's world became smaller and smaller each year as she transitioned from her home in Roseville to assisted living in 2021 and to memory care in 2023. Through it all, Barb was calm and optimistic, always thinking that she was healthy and doing well. The activities she could do the longest were going for walks, sipping mochas, and listening to music.

On July 25, 2025, Barbara passed away due to the progression of Posterior

Cortical Atrophy. She was well-cared for by Eagan Pointe Staff and Brighton Hospice. Her family sends their gratitude.

Barb is preceded in death by her father, Robert Larson; her grandmother, Esther Larson; and "The Girls"-great aunts, Hilma, Hilda, and Olga Johanson. She is survived by her daughters, Elizabeth (Will) Hanson and Melissa (Pete Baldwin) Martinson; as well as her four grandchildren, Amelia, Ella, Winter, and Raymond.

Barb's legacy lives on through art, music, poetry, gardens, the care of loved ones, and nature walks. May her memory continue to bring joy to all who knew her for decades to come.

A Celebration of Life open house will take place Sunday, August 10, from 6-8 pm in Como Lakeside Pavilion's waterfall room, 1360 Lexington Pkwy, St. Paul, MN 55103. Wear bright colors or patterns in honor of how much Barbara loved to teach color theory!

The venue cannot accept flowers, so memorials are preferred to Como Zoo & Conservatory, TPT (PBS), or Minnesota Public Radio.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

AUG **10**. 6:00 PM - 8:00 PM (CT)

Como Lakeside Pavilion
1360 Lexington Pkwy.
Saint Paul, MN 55103

Tribute Wall

JW

“ *My deepest condolences. Barbara served on my mentor committee in the department of DHA. I am deeply grateful for her warmth, insight, and gracious support. Juanjuan Wu*

Juanjuan Wu - August 10, 2025 at 04:49 PM

MD

“ *I was a faculty colleague of Barbara and enjoyed her calm, her wit and knowledge both as a guest speaker in my class and as a co-author of a book on color and design. Marilyn DeLong*

Marilyn R DeLong - August 02, 2025 at 02:29 PM

LH

Our mom spoke of you fondly, Marilyn. Thank you for being an incredible colleague and support for our mom!

Liz Hanson - August 09, 2025 at 10:26 PM