



## Mary Lisbeth Davidson

September 17, 1939 - June 21, 2022

Mary Lisbeth Davidson

Former Hennepin County Judge Mary Davidson, a long-time advocate of making divorce less painful and expensive, died June 21 in Minneapolis. She was 82.

Mary grew up in Milwaukee and attended Stanford University, graduating in just three years so that she could marry Larry Winter. She taught history and German until she became pregnant with her first child; at the time, pregnant women were not allowed to teach.

She became a stay-at-home mom but after her divorce, she went to law school. Despite having four small children and no partner, she graduated with honors from the U of M in 1975. Her class was only 16 percent female. That decade was the beginning of enormous advances for women in the legal profession. In 1970, there was not a single woman serving on the bench in Minnesota. Mary was part of a trailblazing group of women who would go on to change the face of the judiciary.

She launched a private practice in 1975, then served as a family court referee for seven years before being appointed to the bench by Rudy Perpich. She served as chief judge of family court and ran Divorce with Dignity, encouraging divorcing parties to use mediation and avoid going to trial. Mediation is common now, but at the time, this was a revolutionary idea in family court, where divorces had been expensive battles between lawyers. Divorce with Dignity handed control back to the divorcing parties. Mary's work helped

countless families come through divorce in better financial shape and less emotionally bruised.

Mary was proud to be the granddaughter of one of the founders of Harley-Davidson. Her chambers featured an H-D banner, and she offered continuing legal education seminars to the Street Legal Motorcycle Club with titles such as "A Smoother Ride through the Divorce Process."

She married Chuck Sweetland in 1976. They divorced with dignity in 1992.

She was passionate about the Cubs, Rafa Nadal, travel, reading, bridge, knitting, politics, learning new things, and finding great new restaurants.

She could be a raucous fan at the sports games of her children and grandchildren, letting the umpire know what she thought of the calls.

She volunteered with organizations such as Chrysalis and Open Arms, and fostered that sense of responsibility with her grandchildren, who spent many hours with her giving back to the community.

As her dear friend Wanda Schoeneberger said, "She lived her life in the same manner she merged into traffic on an interstate: 'Ready or not, I'm coming with speed and intent, better clear a path!'"

She loved flowers, Italy, her home on St. John and her children Anne (Mark) Tremel; Catherine (Chris Julin) Winter; Bill (Jennifer Prentice) Winter; Peter (Susan) Winter; and grandchildren Erin and Ben (Marisa) Tremel and Stephanie, Ali, Mitchell and Arthur Winter.

Celebration of life Sunday, July 17 10-1, Interlachen Country Club.

Refreshments will be served.

Memorials to Open Arms or to Tubman (which merged with Chrysalis in 2007).

Washburn-McReavy.com

Strobeck-Johnson 952-938-9020

# Previous Events

## Memorial Gathering

JUL 17. 10:00 AM - 1:00 PM (CT)

Interlachen Country Club  
6200 Interlachen Boulevard  
Edina, MN 55436

# Tribute Wall

JB

“ *I remember my dad speaking very highly of Judge Davidson as a family law colleague and a friend.  
She was a support to him as well in his final years.  
Sending condolences to her family and friends.  
Jenna Zalk Berendzen  
(Bob Zalk's daughter)*

---

**JENNA BERENDZEN** - July 14, 2022 at 06:36 PM