

Mary Christopian Gander

July 2, 1924 - October 30, 2025

Mary Gander (née Chistopian) was born on July 2, 1924, in the family home at 393 Ruth Street in St. Paul, Minnesota. She was the first child of Sophie (Sergeychik) and Philip Chistopian to be born in the United States.

Mary's father had come to America shortly before World War I, leaving behind his wife and two children, Anna and Gregory, in Belarus, with hopes of finding opportunity and prosperity. The family remained separated for more than a decade, unable to communicate during the war. Then, one day, Sophie unexpectedly received tickets and instructions to pack up all their belongings and bring the children to America to reunite the family.

Mary's sister Anna, who was 14 years older, lived to the age of 100 and passed away in 2011. Her brother Gregory, 12 years her senior, died of lung cancer at age 39 in 1951. Mary was especially close to her younger sister, Olga, who was born three years after her. Olga passed away at age 94 in 2021 from COVID-19, while Mary herself was recovering from the illness.

Mary graduated from Harding High School in St. Paul and went on to study typing, shorthand, and other secretarial skills. After a few early jobs, she began a 40-year career at the Ramsey County Treasurer's Office, where she advanced from clerk to a highly respected superintendent. Even after her retirement, Mary remained close to her former coworkers and continued to

stay in touch with them well in her later years.

In September 1947, at age 23, Mary married the love of her life, Leon Wayne Gander, a farm boy from Wisconsin. Shortly after their wedding, they purchased a beautiful home at 1281 North St. Albans in St. Paul, where they lived together until Leon's passing in 1994. Leon worked primarily as an upholsterer throughout their marriage.

Although Mary and Leon had no children of their own, they cherished their role as doting aunt and uncle to Mary's nephew, Mark David Johnson, who passed away in 1990 at age 30. Mary continued to live in her St. Albans home after Leon's death, tending to her lush flower beds filled with roses and cultivating a bountiful garden of fruits and vegetables. Her home was always warm, welcoming, and impeccably maintained.

In 2015, Mary moved into a series of independent and assisted living communities in the St. Paul area.

Faith played a central role throughout Mary's life. Raised in the Russian Orthodox Church, she later became a devoted member of Immanuel Church-now known as Grace Church of Roseville-where she sang in the choir and volunteered one day a week for 20 years following her retirement.

Mary is survived by her nephew John Stepowoy Jr. and his wife Helen of Asheville, North Carolina. She was beloved "Great Aunt Mary" to Debbie Vasel, Mary Lynn Collingwood, and Mark Stepowoy of Ohio, the grandchildren of her eldest sister Anna through Anna's son, Val, who passed away in 1995. Mary and Val shared a special bond-more like siblings than aunt and nephew-as they once lived together and were only ten years apart in age.

"Great-Great Aunt Mary" will also be dearly missed by John (and his young

son Jacob who visited frequently) and his sisters Tori, Mandy, Nicole and Rachel as well as his cousins Tommy, Chris, and Ryan, all of whom were blessed to share in her love and warmth.

Mary maintained close ties with Leon's family in Minnesota, Wisconsin and Oregon and is survived by nieces and nephews Cythia Gander, Curtis and Joan Gander, Keith and Mariel (Gander) Woods, Don and Barbara Hess, Art and Caroline Hess, Bill Gander, Dorothy Gander, George and Louise (Gander) Eusterman, Bob and Carol Gander, Don and Mary Gander, Lee and Melinda Gander, Jesse and Lisa Gander and many Grand nieces and nephews.

Mary's life was one of devotion-to her family, her friends, her faith, and the beauty she cultivated around her. She will be remembered for her kindness, strength, and grace.

Cemetery Details

Union Cemetery, Maplewood

2505 Minnehaha Avenue East
Maplewood, MN

Previous Events

Visitation

NOV 4. 11:00 AM - 12:00 PM (CT)

Shoreview Chapel
515 Highway 96 West
Shoreview, MN 55126

Funeral Service

NOV 4. 12:00 PM - 12:30 PM (CT)

Shoreview Chapel
515 Highway 96 West
Shoreview, MN 55126

Tribute Wall

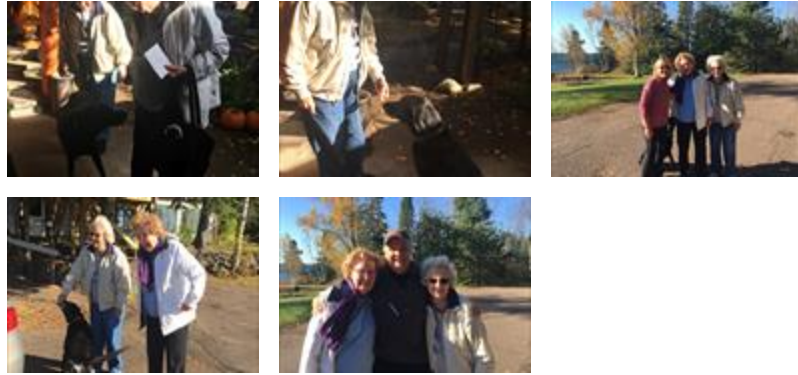
CS

“ Mary was one of my best friends, even though she was 30 years older than I am. We met when I started working in the Grace Church Roseville office and she came on Tuesdays to proof the contribution entries I made. Soon we were alternating our lunch choices (Wendy's or Arby's) every week, when she wasn't on vacation. Once a week together was getting to not be enough time, so we started going out to dinners (she always wanted to pay) and then more and more visiting after. She was so generous, extra supportive to me and my kids, especially when we were going through a very difficult time, never judging, just providing prayers, comfort, encouragement, and sometimes financial help. When she decided to gift me her Christmas Department 56 village it was one of the best memories and special gifts I could ever receive. It makes the holidays so blessed and cherished. I have such a warm feeling of gratitude for the friendship we had. It was an honor and to celebrate her extra big milestone birthdays. On September 10, 2025 some of us "Grace Girls' were able to visit her after she moved into her Memory Care apartment. It will be a visit I will never forget. She was one of a kind, blessing so many others and loved by all.

Carol Shimanski - November 10, 2025 at 12:22 PM

LB

“ 9 files added to the tribute wall



Lee Bergstrom - November 04, 2025 at 06:06 PM

MA

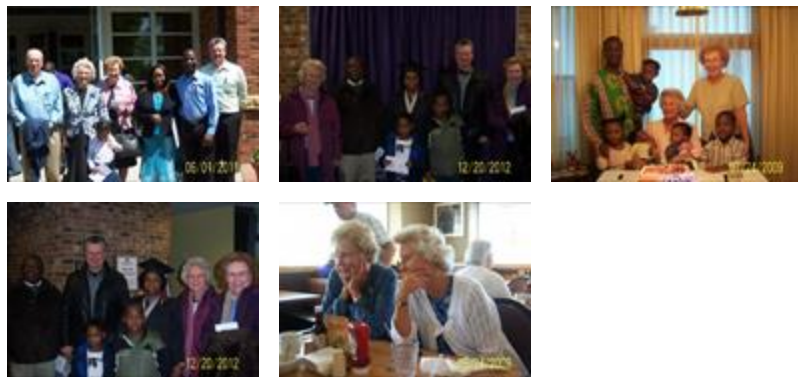
“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Mosun and Tola Agboola - November 04, 2025 at 12:24 AM

MA

“ 6 files added to the tribute wall



Mosun and Tola Agboola - November 04, 2025 at 12:14 AM

BT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Bonni Thompson - November 03, 2025 at 11:00 PM

BT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Bonni Thompson - November 03, 2025 at 10:58 PM

BT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Bonni Thompson - November 03, 2025 at 10:53 PM

BT

“ 1 file added to the tribute wall



Bonni Thompson - November 03, 2025 at 10:34 PM

MA

“ 3 files added to the tribute wall



Mosun and Tola Agboola - November 03, 2025 at 08:41 PM



“ Sweetest Sunrise Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mary Christopian Gander.



November 03, 2025 at 02:36 PM



“ Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mary Christopian Gander.



November 03, 2025 at 02:16 PM

OO

“ You were kind, gracious, loving and generous. You were always there with your precious Sister whenever we needed you. As I sort through life's memories, all I see and remember is your loving face. You made kindness looks easy but I know it was through the grace of the Savior. The circle surely will be unbroken. There's a better home awaiting at the right hand of the Master. REST ON BELOVED. REST ON.

Olusegun Oyewole - November 03, 2025 at 09:09 AM

MA

“ Sister Mary as you were fondly called. You were always supporting whenever you can. You were always present at any gatherings that I invited you to particularly with your beloved younger sister - Olga who passed on almost 4 years ago. I hope you are resting in the blossoms of Abraham.

We were privileged to see and spent some moment with you before you passed on. We love you, but it is time to go back to your Maker. It is well!! Rest in peace!!

Mosun and Tola Agboola

Mosun and Tola Agboola - November 01, 2025 at 11:04 PM

FA

I got to know sister Mary through her close sister Olga. You have gone to meet your Maker and your other family members, especially your close sister Olga - what a journey, you lived a good life and will be deeply missed by those who knew her. Good night and keep on resting until resurrection day. 🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹🌹

Florence Akinsipe - November 03, 2025 at 01:35 AM

JS

Mary and Olga were dear friends of ours for many years. We traveled to Florida and the North Shore many times and when my wife died over three years ago we agreed to call each other every evening at 8:00. This we have done for over three years and it was so enjoyable for both of us. What a privilege to have been a part of her life.

Jerry Shaw

Jerry A. Shaw - November 03, 2025 at 09:58 PM

DT

Memories of being cold from the ride in our folks stationwagon and we'd knock or ring the doorbell and Mary or Leon would invite all 9 of us into the warmth of their home with their authentic smiles for a Christmas evening. Hot chocolate, hot apple cider, coffee, tea, Christmas cookies, chocolates [not the cheap kind] sometimes the complete Christmas dinner too. Games played and puzzles put together late into the night. Mary knew how to entertain fit or royalty but I always knew everyone was going to be happy and have fun. Time seemed to fly until we had to bundle up with all our winter jackets, scarfs and mitten and say "thank you" and get back into the cold stationwagon for the trip back home. Even though it was over; we knew we'd do it again next year.

Nothing compared to those memories with Mary and Leon. They both were special people.

Debbie Thompson - November 04, 2025 at 10:11 PM

JB

“ What a great lady! So many wonderful memories working together in the offices at Grace Church. John Benham

John Benham - November 01, 2025 at 05:32 PM

LL

“*Mary's birthday was July 2, mine July 3. We sent birthday wishes back and forth for over 20 years. She was a very special woman who walked with Jesus Christ as her guide; was a faithful prayer warrior for so many missionaries, especially the women. I was privileged to have known her, to spend brief minutes with her. God bless the memories of a great woman.*”

LEANN LABARRE - November 01, 2025 at 10:30 AM

TC

Heaven is rejoicing that such a lovely lady, Mary, has arrived. Although we'll miss her there's great rejoice in going on in heaven especially with Kathy Nelson thank you Mary for loving us and for letting us share your life Tina Coleman.

Tina Coleman - November 01, 2025 at 04:21 PM

EO

Aunt Mary, as our family fondly called her, was a vital part of our family from the beginning along side her beautiful Sister, G'ma Olga, I remember wonderful memories of pure joy and friendship with the Sisters, her smile and gentle demeanor and kindness will be forever cherished! Best of all, a blessed Daughter of the Most High God! We love and miss you! Until we meet again with the Saints of God, rest on Aunt Mary!

Eunice. Oyewole - November 01, 2025 at 09:01 PM

BG

My aunt Mary outclassed me in never category of life, yet openly engaging. Always, I look up to her as a prime example of a life well lived.

Bob Gander - November 02, 2025 at 10:16 PM

LB

My husband, Scott and I owned Thomsonite Beach Inn on Lake Superior where Mary and her sister Olga were repeat guests. They made the trip north multiple times usually in July, September or October. I loved the sisterhood they shared. We enjoyed spending time with them mostly in their suite after getting the fireplace going for them to enjoy. Olga loved to build the fires too. 2019 was their last visit. We celebrated birthdays and a milestone for us at Thomsonite Beach with a cake to share and we received flowers from them. They loved to invite their dear friends Jerry and Alice to join them for a few days during their stay. We also were able to get to know Mary's niece Mariel, Keith and kids as they frequently stayed at Thomsonite for their north shore getaways around the same time. Once Olga passed and it was impossible to make the trip north, I kept in touch with Mary over the phone. She would love to hear what had been happening in our lives and our children. While Mary wasn't family, both she and Olga were a very special part of our Thomsonite Beach repeat guest family. We developed a connection over the years that created a special bond. I am grateful I had a wonderful visit with her early September where I was able to bring her up to date with family and hear about what was going on with her. Her kind, gentle spirit and genuine nature was always a pleasure to be around. With her strong faith, she is now at peace and with her loved ones that passed before her. I have many memories that I will hold close to my heart. Our condolences to her family as they grieve the passing of a special woman in their lives too.

Lee and Scott Bergstrom

Lee Bergstrom - November 03, 2025 at 06:25 PM

KE

I wish I could say thank you to (cousin) Mary one more time for all that she did for our church and family! "Every" phone call or visit included, "How are you doing?" And, "I'm so glad you called!" She was always interested in our well-being and how the kids were doing in school/college. We thank God for her prayers, encouragement, and support. God is so good!

Kerby - November 03, 2025 at 09:27 PM

BT

Mary, Mary, my sweet Mary. You were a true treasure to all those who knew you. Your love for God and people shone through in all the kind words and deeds you have done. You were an encourager, an inspiration to us all. You will be missed but your "Precious Memories" will live on. Thank you for being YOU!!!

Bonni Thompson - November 03, 2025 at 09:52 PM