



## Pamela Carole Brown Ray

May 30, 1938 - January 13, 2023

Pamela Carole Brown Ray of Mount Dora, Florida, died on January 13, 2023. Poet, crusader, artist, mystic, teacher, wife, friend, mother, and grandmother, Pam's deep and abiding faith inspired her to live with gratitude, to find joy in each day, and to love and serve others with heart, mind, and soul.

Pamela arrived in this world in Charleston, South Carolina, on May 30, 1938, the daughter of Maude Elva Felton Brown and William Welch Brown. Intrepid and spirited from the start, she especially loved time outdoors. At six years old, Pam lived at the Ponce de Leon Lighthouse in Daytona Beach, where she would go fishing with her dog Jingles and catch blowfish for breakfast. Her favorite memory was of climbing aboard a huge sea turtle and taking it for a ride in the middle of the night. What fun! Pam had a lifelong love of lighthouses.

In early high school, Pam's family moved to Mount Dora, Florida, where she enjoyed theater, basketball, and debate, among other activities. In 1955 she represented Mount Dora High School at Florida's Girls State and a year later was named Florida's debate champion. When the fight for civil rights divided her high school's all-white student body, prompting those against civil rights to draw lines down the middle of the school's pathways, Pam was one of few students who walked on the side of justice. Ever intrepid, she joined a Spanish class trip to Cuba while the Cuban revolution was brewing, and it is said she enjoyed drag racing her future father-in-law down Lakeshore Drive between Mount Dora and Tavares.

Graduating from high school in 1956, Pamela entered college at Florida State University, later transferring to the University of Florida in Gainesville. In August of 1959, Pamela married her high school sweetheart, Jefferson Grover Ray, III. Jeff later enjoyed describing how he would lie down with his head in her lap as Pam read him poetry. Pam and Jeff were the first couple married at St. Edward's Episcopal Church in Mount Dora — the pews for the new church having barely arrived in time. Pam and Jeff began their married life in Washington, D.C., where he served with the Army in the Pentagon and she worked for the United States Chamber of Commerce. A favorite pastime was attending Washington Senators baseball games.

In 1960, Pam and Jeff returned to Gainesville, where they finished and graduated from college. Jeff went immediately into law school, and Pam began working on a master's degree in political science. In January of 1962, Pamela's graduate school endeavor was interrupted by the birth of their first child, Wendy Allison Ray, followed two years later by a second daughter, Darby Kathleen. When Jeff graduated from law school, the pair moved back to Mount Dora, where Pam began work at the Chamber of Commerce and eventually welcomed a third daughter, Amy Elizabeth, and then a son, Jefferson Grover Ray, IV.

Pam, Jeff, and their four children lived for thirty years at 321 West Ninth Avenue in Mount Dora – the home of innumerable plays, Easter egg hunts, birthday parties, side-yard football games, backyard volleyball games, gymnastic achievements, forts, swing sets, and dance parties. Pam was widely known for her generous hospitality. To enter her home was to enter a space of true welcome for visitors both large and small. Pam always brought a creativity to her gatherings and an authenticity of welcome that yielded deeper connecting experiences for all present.

In 1971, after Wendy and Darby's preschool teacher retired, Pamela stepped into the void and discovered her professional calling as founder and teacher at St. Edward's Preschool in Mount Dora. For the next 20+ years, "Mrs. Ray" engaged her three- and four-year-old "friends" with unparalleled affection and

energy. Singing was a constant at the Montessori-inspired school – in a circle sitting on “sit-upons,” during daily chapel time, and while gathering for snack. Whether parading through the downtown with shillelagh sticks on St. Patrick’s Day, taking a train trip to the Sanford Zoo, or baking bread at the school, Pam brought joy, creativity, order, and mutual respect to her students’ experience. Many remember those experiences still, as former “friends” stayed in touch year after year, into their own marriages and children’s lives.

After Pam retired from the preschool, she discerned a call to prison ministry, and for the next two decades volunteered at the Lake County jail, conducting weekly classes for female inmates and being recognized as Lake County Jail Volunteer of the Year. She maintained correspondences with many of these friends long after their release.

Pam was also an artist and poet. Especially in the years after her children had grown, she often wrote short poems, describing her experiences as mother, friend, woman, child of God, citizen of the world, and often through the lens of God’s creation. Her poems, like her wardrobe, were full of whimsy and color. In 1996, Pam and Jeff moved from Mount Dora to a home on the shore of Lake Dorr near Altoona, Florida. Always attuned to the spirit of a place, Pam named their new home “Sweet Potato” after a community in France founded by the Buddhist monk and author, Thich Nhat Hanh. She envisioned and created a home where children and grandchildren could gather through the years and celebrate the beloved Ray community of family as it grew and changed. It was at Sweet Potato, between 1998 and 2014, that “Lala” welcomed nine grandchildren to her community of beloveds. Through Camp Lala, Thanksgivings, Christmases, and other family gatherings, the Ray cousins grew up together, led and nourished by Lala’s love, food, humor, and good spirit. And like clockwork, on every holiday or seasonal event when they were not together, each of Lala’s grandchildren of biology and spirit received cards and poems in envelopes adorned in rainbow lettering and drawings and instantly recognizable as coming from Lala. Her grandchildren were Lala’s joy

and solace when she received her final cancer diagnosis because, as she said, she had lived long enough to know “her grands.”

In 2021, Pam and Jeff yielded to the reality that both had been diagnosed with serious illness and needed to be in a more supportive living environment. Pam spent her last 18 months at the Osprey Lodge in Tavares, where she offered poems and stories at holidays and made it her mission to know everyone — residents and staff — and shower them with love. Pam’s family is deeply grateful for the care she received during her time at Osprey Lodge, and especially by the outpouring of affection from staff during her final days. Many relatives and friends survive Pamela and will grieve her absence. These include her husband of 63 years, Jeff; her children and their spouses, Wendy, Darby (Raymond), Amy (Leslie), and Jefferson (Brooke); her nine “grands,” Chandler, Langston, Benjamin, Morgan, Elena, Hayden, Elizabeth, Vivian, and Carter; her brother, William; her sister, Debbie (Bob); and her nephews, Matthew (Yvonne) and Adam (Shelly), and their children, Avery, Blake, and Morgan. She is also survived by many family of the heart, including Victoria Krebs; Henry, George, Elinor, and Caroline Colella; and Debbie Morgan. Pam was preceded in death by her younger brother, “Buzzy”; her parents; her dear friends Frances and Joady; a number of beloved dogs, including Jingles, Jingle Bell, and Popcorn; and Muff the cat.

On the occasion of her oldest daughter’s birthday in 2020, Pamela wrote that she hoped she had been (1) a “shepherdess on the green” of many lambs, (2) a matriarch of family and friends in a house that mercy builds, and (3) a singer of songs. Dearest Pamela, you were indeed all of these and so much more. Well done, good and faithful servant.

Those who wish to make a gift in Pam’s honor may consider a donation to one of the following: St. Thomas Thrift Shop, which supports low-income residents of downtown Eustis and makes grants to local organizations (Mail to St. Thomas Thrift Shop, 317 South Mary Street, Eustis, FL 32726 or contribute online at [stthomaseustis.org/support/](http://stthomaseustis.org/support/) – choose “Other Donations” and then

enter "Thrift Shop - Pam Ray" in Memo field), or Early Learning Coalition of Lake County, which provides school readiness programs and financial assistance to low-income families for early child education and care (Mail to Early Learning Coalition of Lake County, 1300 Citizens Boulevard, Suite 206, Leesburg, FL 34748 with Memo "In honor of Pamela Ray").

A memorial service to celebrate Pam's life is planned for Saturday, March 11, at St. Edward's Episcopal Church in Mount Dora at 10:30, Florida.

# Previous Events

## Memorial Service

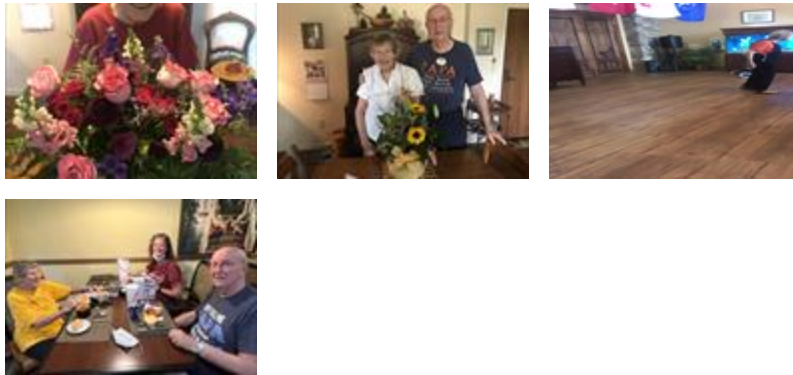
MAR 11. 10:30 AM.

St. Edward's Episcopal Church

# Tribute Wall

SB

“ Pam brought so much joy to everyone’s life. These are memories I was able to capture of Birthday flowers, video from 2022 Halloween program and Anniversary photo at Osprey Lodge with Pam.



Susan Buss - January 29, 2023 at 08:46 PM

LS

“ Pam, your beauty and love always shined so brightly. The loving and positive impact you had on my son, Bill, when he attended St. Edward’s preschool with you will never be forgotten and will always be so appreciated. You were a special person in everyone’s lives and will be greatly missed. Rest in peace and love. Linda Stewart

linda Stewart - January 18, 2023 at 10:26 PM

JY

Dearest Ray Family,  
Your mom was a wonderful, treasured lady who always made me smile and feel uplifted in her presence. You were truly blessed having her as your mother and she will be missed. May God send you His loving comfort at this time.  
Jeanmarie Hennis York

Jeanmarie York - January 19, 2023 at 10:12 AM

RD

*I have never known a more beautiful, caring, and compassionate person as Pam Ray. I have known Pam for over 50 years and will miss her bright and shining smile and exuberant personality. Pam was a flower child and will indeed be missed. Fly with the angels!*

**Richard Dufour** - January 21, 2023 at 01:47 PM

AM

*What a beautiful tribute to a life so very well lived. May God bless the immortal soul of this extraordinary woman with eternal joy.*

**Abby Martin** - January 24, 2023 at 09:36 PM

DM

*What a sweet lady who was such an asset to her community, family and friends. She will be truly missed. Diane Mullen*

**Diane Mullen** - March 12, 2023 at 06:20 PM