



## Mrs Susan LeRoy Merrill

June 4, 1942 - October 24, 2017

Susan LeRoy Merrill was born June 4, 1942 at Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore, Maryland, daughter of Dr. George Grenville Merrill, Jr., a psychiatrist and Episcopalian minister, and Anne Totten Merrill, an artist and farmer. Susan was the second of five children, and grew up at her mother's family home, Montrose Farm in Baldwin, Maryland. The farm was always full of animals: horses, cows, chickens, and innumerable cats and dogs. Susan's maternal grandfather, Howe Totten, had raised prize-winning Great Danes there, and her mother Anne adored all animals and always opened her door to strays. Susan shared her mother's love for animals, and later in life would come to make farm animals a central focus of her artwork.

At age ten Susan contracted polio – just two years before Dr. Salk's revolutionary cure ended the polio epidemic. It left her with a slight limp and a focus on drawing and reading. After attending Baldwin public schools, she went on to Garrison Forest School, where she skipped sports and spent a lot of time in the art studio. She graduated in 1964 from Bennington College with a B.A. in Literature and Arts.

During college, a short story Susan wrote won her a guest editorship at Mademoiselle Magazine, which took her to Rome for the first time. She fell in love with Italy and returned there in 1965 in the company of her childhood friend Melanie Dugan - happy to be traveling first class on the S.S. United

States.

Susan lived in Rome for two years, studying at L'Accademia di Belle Arti and learning Italian. In Rome she reconnected with fellow artist Jarvis Rockwell, Norman Rockwell's eldest son, . Susan and Jarvis first met in the Berkshires at an art contest where young Jarvis was judge. Susan, about thirteen at the time, had submitted a drawing in lipstick on newspaper. Jarvis gave her first prize. They were married in 1966 in Baldwin, Maryland. After seven years they amicably divorced. Susan and Jarvis are the parents of Daisy Rockwell, who grew up to be a translator of South Asian literature, as well as a writer and artist herself.

Susan worked as the Lower School Art Teacher at Berkshire Country Day School from 1975 to 1983, where she touched the lives of hundreds of children with her inimitable teaching style. Her many students still remember being taught to finger paint with chocolate pudding, building spaceships, and being taught to believe that anyone can be an artist. She earned her Master's Degree in Art Education from the University of Massachusetts in 1987.

In 1986 she married Carl Sprague of Lenox, a film and theatre designer. They adopted their son Ruslan in Yaroslavl, Russia in 1993, and their daughter Elena in Krivoy Rog, Ukraine in 2001.

Susan was first and foremost a painter, but she also worked as an illustrator, doing commercial work and illustrating children's books – including *I Live in Stockbridge*, which she co-wrote with her friend Susan Geller, and her own book *Washday*, an account of her family's weekly laundry day in their house in Maryland.

In 1990 Susan's friend theatre producer Lyn Austin asked her to read "something" for a Berkshire Writers Evening at the Music-Theatre Group.

Susan explained that she was a painter, not a writer, but Lyn would hear none of that, so Susan wrote a story - first in a series of dozens of mostly autobiographical tales to follow. Susan's stories delighted many audiences, notably at Gail Ryan's Williamsville Inn, where she read her stories every year for over a decade. The stories eventually grew into two novels - Warm Morning and Cool Evening - set in the Berkshires and the Maryland farm of her childhood. Last year Susan recorded Warm Morning as an audiobook.

In 2005 Susan pioneered showing contemporary art at the Hancock Shaker Village with an exhibition of paintings of farm animals. For a dozen years her annual show of paintings in association with the Baby Animals event provided a delightful welcome to Spring at the HSV.

Susan's body of artwork encompasses abstraction, portraits, landscapes, woodblock prints, domestic scenes, and fantasies, as well as her many pictures of animals – domesticated and wild. Her final series of paintings, a dozen pictures of bugs beneficial to gardeners, was completed over the summer after she was diagnosed with glioblastoma, an incurable type of brain tumor, and given three months to live by her doctors. The show BUGS is on display at the Berkshire Botanic Garden till December. Some of her pictures can be seen at [etsy.com/shop/SusanMerrillPainting](https://www.etsy.com/shop/SusanMerrillPainting).

Since 1993 Susan made her home at La Chaumière, the Stockbridge house on Yale Hill that her grandparents - Pauline Warren Dresser Merrill and the Rev. George Grenville Merrill of St. Paul's Episcopal Church - bought in 1920. Highlights of her home life were her wonderful children, her cats and dogs, trips to the theatre, Jacob's Pillow, Tanglewood, Ruslan's ballet performances, and watching the Saturday races at the Mahkeenac Boating Club.

She said her best memories were of picnic lunches with Carl on the terrace

beneath her grandfather's grape arbor, smelling the roses.

As much as she loved home, she adored travel, and spent many happy times seeing her friends Molly and Gino Mazzone in Rome, and visiting other family and friends in France, England, Scotland, Portugal, and India. Recently she accompanied her husband Carl on speaking engagements in Argentina, Costa Rica and Spain.

Susan enjoyed many things - her countless pets, her many marvelous friends, singing in choruses and singing after supper, making pies, cooking, gardening, sewing, making valentines, putting on puppet shows, and throwing parties.

Susan is survived by her husband Carl Sprague, her daughter Daisy Rockwell and son-in-law Aaron York, and her grand-daughter Serafina York, her son Ruslan Sprague, her daughter Elena Teal, and her grand-children - Adrian and Natalia Teal and Seth Hagarty; also, her first husband Jarvis Rockwell and his wife Nova, her sisters Pepperell Crofoot and Margery Cuyler, her brother Michael Merrill, and her many beloved cousins, in-laws, nephews and nieces. Susan's dear brother George Merrill died in 2012.

Susan is a direct descendent of Governor Peter Stuyvesant, Nicholas Fish, and Dr. Joseph Warren. She is a great-niece of Edith Stuyvesant Vanderbilt, John Nicholas Brown, the Comte D'Osmoy, and the French symbolist poet Stuart Merrill.

Susan died serenely at home in her husband's arms, at 11:00 P.M. on October 24th, surrounded by her family, devoted friends, and her beloved corgis.

A memorial celebration will be held at St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Stockbridge at 3:00 PM on Saturday, November 11. Those attending are

encouraged to wear bright colors and big hats.

# Cemetery Details

## Stockbridge Town Cemetery

Church Street  
Stockbridge, MA 01262

# Previous Events

## Memorial Service

NOV 11. 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM (ET)

St. Paul's Episcopal Church  
Stockbridge, MA 01262