



Donna Comstock Maythem

September 16, 1929 - July 26, 2025

On a stormy Monday in Buffalo, New York - September 16, 1929 - thunder and lightning cracked the skies as Donna Lee Comstock arrived: a force of nature in her own right. The tempest was fitting: for nearly a century, Donna met the world with precision, elegance, and unshakable resolve to do better every day. She passed away unexpectedly but peacefully on July 26, 2025, leaving a legacy shaped by curiosity, cultural stewardship, and quiet but unmistakable impact.

Born into a family steeped in the performing arts, Donna inherited not only her mother Mary Comstock Campbell's artistic passion (Mary was a teacher and co-founder of Chicago's leading ballet school in the 1950s) but also her discipline. Trained in ballet through her teens, Donna redirected her creative energy into academics at Randolph-Macon Woman's College, embracing a broader liberal arts education that would set the stage for her expansive professional life.

In 1954, Donna crossed the Atlantic to teach language and art history at the American School of Paris, an adventure that marked the first chapter in a career defined by intellect, innovation, and global awareness. Returning to the U.S. in 1961 aboard the SS United States - the first of many cruises - Donna found her calling in educational publishing. Her editorial eye and strategic mind led to leadership roles at Holt, Rinehart & Winston, where she developed

a groundbreaking reading program that not only reshaped literacy education but significantly boosted the company's prominence in elementary school education. Her insistence on inclusive, multicultural content was visionary at the time, and deeply characteristic of Donna's lifelong belief in broad representation.

Her rise continued at CBS Publishing Group (HRW's corporate parent), where she was promoted to Vice President in 1978. Shortly thereafter, McGraw-Hill offered her the reins of their own reading division. As Editor-in-Chief and later VP of Institutional Development, she shaped content that reached classrooms across the country, always advocating for equity and excellence in education.

In 1980, Donna married fellow publishing executive Walter Maytham (deceased 2015). The two shared a life in Manhattan before retiring to Sharon, Connecticut, in 1989. But retirement, in Donna's case, was merely a pivot.

When the couple settled full-time in Sarasota in 2002, Donna's second act began, this time as a cultural catalyst. Her leadership of the Friends of the Sarasota Ballet beginning in 2008 transformed the organization: membership tripled, and a dancer wellness endowment surpassed half a million dollars. She brought the same mix of insight and inspiration to the Fine Art Society of Sarasota (now Arts Advocates), joining the board in 2011 and eventually becoming president in 2019. She championed grants for emerging artists, notably securing funding for the Artists & Climate Change exhibition at Ringling College, and during her tenure, Arts Advocates opened its first permanent exhibition gallery including paintings by The Florida Highwaymen.

Her reach didn't stop there. As an Advisory Board member of the Sarasota Cuban Ballet School from 2013 onward, she championed scholarships, teacher development, and facility expansion, quietly altering the trajectory of

many young dancers' lives. She also gave time and wisdom to The Ringling Museum and Hermitage Artist Retreat, where her influence helped shape programming and community engagement.

Donna's leadership was never loud, but it was always lasting. She had a gift for elevating others, for seeing potential and helping it flourish, whether in the arts, in education, or in charitable works.

She leaves behind no children, but hundreds of students, dancers, and artists who felt the warmth and gravity of her belief in them. Donna Comstock Maytham lived with style, vision, and extraordinary generosity. Her imprint on Sarasota, and on those lucky enough to know her, is indelible.

Per her wishes, memorial contributions may be made to the Sarasota Cuban Ballet School, to Arts Advocates, or to the Sarasota Ballet's "Dance - The Next Generation" program.