



Mary Lou Wingerter Couch

December 14, 1933 - May 25, 2025

Mary Lou Wingerter, passed away peacefully at home on May 25, 2025, surrounded by her loving family. Born on December 14, 1933, in Montclair NJ, Mary Lou lived a full life, leaving an indelible mark on her family, friends, and community.

Mary Lou is survived by her daughters, Sali Wingerter-Petri and husband, Jan: Julie Wingerter-Miller and husband Gerard Calamari; Granddaughters, Roxanne Miller-Pandey, Libby Miller, Sammi Miller, and grandson, Stephen Petri. Mary Lou also had a beautiful new great granddaughter, Aria Pandey. Mary Lou was preceded in death by her husband, David Couch in 2021.

After graduating from college and starting her career in New York City, Mary Lou contracted polio only months before the vaccine became widely available. Afflicted, but not defeated, Mary Lou forged ahead in life, never allowing her condition to slow her down.

In 1963, Mary Lou courageously moved to Sarasota with her two young daughters, Sali and Julie, where she knew no one. Undeterred, she built a vibrant new life for her family. Spontaneous, fun-loving, and determined, Mary Lou's warmth and genuine interest in people helped her forge lasting friendships and to become a beloved figure in the community.

A natural networker, before the term existed, she leveraged her likable disposition to launch a successful 46-year career with the Foundation/development office of New College eventually rising to become new College Foundation's Vice President for Donor Relations. She is the longest-tenured and most beloved employee of New College. At her retirement in 2011, she made an honorary alumna of New College.

At New College, Mary Lou shaped Sarasota's social scene by creating and running "must-attend" events. She launched the popular Foundation's annual Clambake (45 years running. She ran the Much-loved Mistletoe ball, Big Band Bash and the foundation's annual Action Auction, to name just a few.

A devoted mother, Mary Lou was known for her adventurous spirit. She would round up neighborhood children, pile them in her station wagon with seining nets and the family dog, Duke, and head to Siesta Beach and the Bay. There she led expeditions to collect shells, fiddler crabs, and other treasures. The ride home, filled with the smell of wet dog and sea creatures, was a joyful cacophony of children shouting stories of their discoveries.

Mary Lou was an accomplished pianist, golfer and bridge player. She loved her garden and shared that passion through her long-time membership with The Founders Garden Club of Sarasota. She and her husband, David Couch, would often be seen playing golf together with their many friends at The Oaks club. With her discerning eye for style and design, Mary Lou was the driving force behind the always much-anticipated themes for her New College Foundation events. When decorated for Christmas, her friends coined her lovely home in the Red Rock neighborhood as the "Christmas Cottage".

Mary Lou's legacy is one of love, resilience, and connections. Her family and friends will forever cherish her infectious enthusiasm and the countless memories she created. She will surely be missed by so many.

Toale Brothers Funeral Home have made her arrangements, and she will rest within the St. Francis Garden at the Church of the Redeemer.

Charitable contributions in her name can be made to:

Church of the Redeemer, 222 South Palm Ave, Sarasota 34231, 941-955-4263

Resurrection House of Sarasota, PO Box 398 Sarasota, 34236, 941-365-3759

Episcopal Thrift House, 1503 2nd St, Sarasota, 3426, 941-365-1519