

Elizabeth Stephens, 95, Choir Director at Methodist Church, Led Community Concert Association

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Date : January 9, 2020

Mrs. Elizabeth Blount Stephens (Betty), 95, died Wednesday, Jan. 8, 2020 at her home in Atlanta.

Betty was born in Andrews Chapel, Georgia, eight miles east of Thomaston, on June 19, 1924. She was the daughter of Samuel Artis Blount and Arthur Velma Barner of Andrews Chapel.

When Betty was in the first grade the family moved to Thomaston. Betty loved to share that the very fondest of her childhood memories was of walking from her Thomaston home to school with her older sister, Jackie: "I thought that half-mile journey was at least five miles!"

Betty graduated from R. E. Lee High School in 1941. Piano was her passion and talent, and she could type like no other person. She went to work at the Citizens & Southern Bank later that year as secretary to the bank president.

On Aug. 23, 1946, in Clayton, Georgia, Betty married Charles Preston Stephens from The Rock, Georgia, who had returned home from naval action in the Pacific less than a year earlier.

The job that would change their lives forever had been offered to Press only a few months before the wedding; he joined the Coca-Cola Export Corporation as a quality control chemist and the young couple packed their bags and moved to Panama.

As Press worked to establish a Coca-Cola office, Betty worked in the lock control room of the Panama Canal. Over the next 16 years Betty and Press moved from Panama to Brazil, to Chile, to Peru, and finally to Caracas, Venezuela.

They raised three children along the way, each time moving into a home Betty would later describe as "the house that Coke built," no matter which country they were in.

With patience and elegance, in each of those places, she worked hard to host Coca-Cola businessmen from all over the world while Press helped facilitate production and distribution of the famed soft drink across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Betty was the organist and choir director for every American church in each of those Latin American places. She brought a level of excellence and sophistication to the music programming in those sanctuaries the likes of which congregants had never heard or seen before.

All three children, as a result of Betty's passion for high quality music, sang in every choir at every age.

Returning to the United States in 1961, the Stephens family lived first in Dobbs Ferry, New York, then in Darien. Press commuted each day to New York City when he wasn't traveling overseas.

Betty loved her home in Tokeneke near the Connecticut shore, and as she had done in Latin America, she hosted Coca-Cola visitors from all over the world. The guest room was indeed a "guest room," and was in use more than just a few days and nights every month.

Betty was just as proud, though, of her work as organist and choir director at the Darien Methodist Church. She spent hours each day practicing preludes and postludes for Sunday services.

Then, in 1974, two years before Press's retirement from Coke, after all three children had left "the nest" in Darien and the Coca-Cola Company had consolidated all offices in Atlanta, Betty and Press moved to Buckhead, Georgia where Betty resided until her death.

In addition to being a committed member of American and Methodist churches across the hemisphere, Betty was a Cub Scout and Boy Scout volunteer in Caracas; she led the Community Concert Association in Darien; she joined the Board of Directors of the fledgling Center of Puppetry Arts in Atlanta, becoming one of the longest serving board members in their history.

Her philanthropy benefitted the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra, the High Museum of Art, Peachtree Road United Methodist Church, The Upson Historical Society, and the Georgia Land Trust, just to name a few.

After Press's death in 1993, Betty took over supervision of the Stephens family real estate in The Rock, Georgia, traveling to Upson County from Atlanta each week to meet with foresters, visit family cemeteries, and care for her beloved pond and blueberry bushes.

She renovated the 1861 Stephens "homeplace" on The Rock Road and maintained the Stephens house in Thomaston.

In 2011, at the age of 87, along with her three children, she formed The Stephens Family Investment Company, LP, to structure the timber-growing business at The Rock. It was always her intent, as it was Press's, to preserve their ancestral family land and nurture its agricultural and environmental values into perpetuity.

Betty was greatly loved for her cosmopolitan flair and her kindness and generosity which she combined with Georgia-red-clay strength and endurance. Her love of traveling, theatre, music, art and literature was matched only by her devotion to her husband, to her children and to her grandchildren.

Betty reveled in taking family members, especially grandchildren, on trips to either New York City, or abroad. On more than one occasion during her later years she treated her entire family to extraordinary excursions in Africa and in Europe.

She was the quintessential traveler, declaring she would carry her own bag, thank you, until the time came when she simply couldn't take any more trips at all.

Betty was preceded in death by her husband, Charles Preston Stephens, her sisters Dove, Jackie and Doris, her brother Billy, and her parents. She is survived by her brother, Sam; her children, William Powell Stephens (Connie), Charles Preston Stephens, Jr. (Shirley), and Sally Elizabeth Stephens Westmoreland (Melvin); and her grandchildren, Matthews Stephens Westmoreland, Preston Powell Westmoreland, Elizabeth Marie Westmoreland, and Mariah Louise Stephens.

A visitation will take place from 5 to 7 p.m., Friday, Jan. 10 at Spring Hill Chapel, 1020 Spring Street NW, Atlanta. Funeral services will be held at 11 a.m., on Saturday, Jan. 11, at Peachtree Road United Methodist Church, 3180 Peachtree Road, Atlanta, with Rev. Bill Britt officiating.

Saturday afternoon, following the funeral service, Betty will be buried in The Rock United Methodist Church

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Cemetery, The Rock, GA, with Rev. Bill Britt officiating.

— [This obituary](#) originally was published Jan. 9 on Legacy.com by the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. The photograph is from the H.M. Paterson & Son.-Spring Hill Chapel funeral home [website](#).