Theodora Foster Rendlen, 85, Class President of DHS Class of '55, Preservationist, Loved History, Led Spiritual Retreats

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Theodora "Toto" Foster Rendlen of Hannibal, Missouri, passed away at 1:03 a.m., Monday, Feb. 5, 2024 at Wexford Place in Kansas City, Missouri. She was 85.

Toto was born March 18, 1938, in New York City to Linton Haight Foster and Theodora Sohst Foster.

She was married from 1961 to 1977 to The Hon. D. Brook Bartlett with whom she shared four children. She later married Charles E. Rendlen, Jr., on June 16, 1983, in Hannibal, Missouri. He preceded her in death in 2006.

Born into a time of great change, Toto's early life was distinguished by leadership and academic excellence. As governor of Girls State in Connecticut and later president of Girls Nation in Washington, D.C., in the mid-1950s, she demonstrated a propensity for leadership and a commitment to civic engagement. These roles not only honed her leadership skills but also ignited a lifelong passion for history and the workings of government.

Toto was a 1955 graduate of Darien High School, where she served as president of the student body. She was a 1959 graduate of Smith College in Northampton, Massachusetts, where she served as the student government president. She went on to earn a master's degree in education at Stanford University in 1961, and later in life earned a master's in spiritual direction from Loyola University in Chicago.

Toto's professional journey was a reflection of her inner world — vibrant, colorful, and full of life. As an artist, she found solace and expression in the dance of her brush across canvas. Working in a variety of mediums, including acrylics, pastels, oils, and watercolors, Toto's art was a window into her soul. Her work graced the walls of the Hannibal Arts Council, Alliance Art Gallery, and the communities she lived in, bringing joy and contemplation to all who beheld her creations.

Previously, Toto served as Director of Admissions at The Barstow School in Kansas City, Missouri, and executive director of the Missouri Heritage Trust. She also was co-owner of Art Alley, an art gallery and frame shop in Jefferson City. While in Jefferson City, she was an active member of the Missouri Mansion Preservation organization and served as a docent at the Missouri Governor's Mansion. In Hannibal, Toto was active in many community organizations and served on the board of Douglass Community Center.

Reading enriched Toto's life, her mind constantly exploring the vast realms of religious texts and historical accounts. Her love for history was not confined to books; she often visited Civil War battle sites, walking the hallowed grounds to better understand the past that shaped the present.

Toto's creative flair extended beyond the canvas; she found joy in transforming everyday objects into works of art. Painting furniture and candlesticks, she turned the mundane into the extraordinary, infusing her surroundings with her unique spirit.

Her adventurous soul led her to spiritual retreats in the serene landscapes of New Mexico and Scotland, where she found peace and deepened her faith amidst the tranquil beauty of these sacred places.

The ocean was a source of endless fascination and comfort for Toto. Growing up on Long Island Sound, Toto was a junior champion sailor, guiding many boats to victory and teaching aspiring young sailors.

Her time spent sailing led to a lifetime love of being on or near water — whether an ocean, a river, or Mark Twain Lake where Toto and Charles built a house with a lake view. The flow of the tides resonated with her innate sense of life's cycles, and she found solace in the vast expanse of water and the horizon beyond. Toto drew deep inspiration from nature, especially trees and clouds which were a constant source of wonder.

Toto was a member of Trinity Episcopal Church in Hannibal, where she was a lay Eucharistic minister. Previously, she was a member of Grace Episcopal Church in Jefferson City, where she served as director of Christian education. Toto also led many spiritual retreats to help people move closer to God and gain a better understanding of life.

Survivors include her four children: Julia Bartlett of Kansas City, Missouri, Linton Bartlett (Linda) of Jefferson City, Missouri, Amanda Mook (Benjamin) of Excelsior Springs, Missouri, and Polly Bartlett of Johns Island, South Carolina; four stepchildren: Charles E."Sketch" Rendlen, III (Susan) of St. Louis, Branham Rendlen (John) of Monterey, California, Jeffrey Rendlen of Stoutsville, Missouri, and Cindy Rendlen (Jack) of Chicago; one sister, Nan Kilbourn-Tara of West Bath, Maine; four grandchildren: Emily Bartlett (Blake Rickard) of Kansas City, Missouri, Kelsey Bartlett of Gainesville, Georgia, Mikey Mook of Excelsior Springs, Missouri, and Luella Mook of Excelsior Springs; two step-grandchildren, Lindsey Latzke (Tom) of St. Louis and Chelsea Rendlen of Burlington, Vermont; and two step great-grandchildren, Vivian and Elaina Latzke.

Toto was preceded in death by her parents and one step grandchild, Ethan Rendlen.

A celebration of life will be held at 10 a.m., Saturday, March 16, 2024, at Trinity Episcopal Church in Hannibal. The Rev. Michael Kyle will officiate. Burial will be at Mt. Olivet Cemetery in Hannibal.

Friends and family are invited to Toto's visitation from 4 to 7 p.m., Friday, March 15, 2024, at James O'Donnell Funeral Home in Hannibal.

Memorial contributions may be made to the Hannibal Arts Council , The Nature Conservancy, the Alzheimer’s Association, or Ascend Hospice in Kansas City, Missouri, or a charity of the donor’s choice.

The greatest memorial to Toto, though, would be to plant a tree in her honor.

— an obituary *from James O'Donnell Funeral Home, where online condolences may be left*