

Beyond The *Red* Door



ANN DUFRANE: A LIFE OF SERVICE FROM A NAUGHTY ALTO

By E. Ray Walker

NOTE: Some biographical information in this article came from Ann duFrane's family-written obituary. The world was blessed to have Ann duFrane. From her unconventional birth to her death 80 years later, Ann left her indelible mark on all who knew her, especially her friends at St. Stephen's.

On her death, Ann left a significant monetary gift to the church, a part of which paid for the recent acquisition of a mint-condition baby grand Steinway piano (5 feet, 1 inch wide) for the music ministry, a fitting tribute to a woman who was devoted to her church and loved music.

At St. Stephen's, she was a fixture for decades, serving faithfully as a Vestry member and Senior Warden, singing in the choir, teaching Sunday School, volunteering in the Culpeper Food Closet, and serving on the Altar Guild. A lady of many interests and boundless energy, Ann was an avid gardener, tennis player, golfer, and bridge enthusiast. She also found joy in reading, travel, Bible study and raising Jack Russell Terriers.



Born in Winston-Salem, N.C., Elizabeth Ann Wilsey was the youngest of three children of Dr. John D. Wilsey and Lorraine E. Wilsey. She was delivered by her father, just as the emergency crew arrived.

Ann was a graduate of the Shipley School in Bryn Mawr, Pa., and Hollins College (now University) in Roanoke. She earned degrees in English literature and Russian at Hollins, and later a nursing degree from Germanna Community College. She devoted many years to caring for others as a dedicated nurse at Family Practice in Culpeper.

In 1968, she married Duke Meriwether duFrane and moved to Gordonsville, where they raised their two daughters (Elizabeth duFrane O'Reilly and Jane Meriwether duFrane). They settled in Culpeper in 1977.

Ann passed away June 2, 2025, just three days after the death of her second husband, Thomas A. Houston Jr.

And finally, a little-known fun fact about Ann: She made her high society debut at the 1962 Winston-Salem Debutante Ball and was an active member of the Winston-Salem Junior Spinsters Club and Junior League.



Ann's fellow Chancel Choir member Lina Marengo Frank wrote this loving tribute to her longtime friend:

When I received the call asking me to say a few words about Ann, I had to pause. I found myself wondering, what can you possibly say about a lady like Ann duFrane that will capture even a glimpse of who she truly was? The truth is, no words will ever be enough. But I'll try, because Ann deserves that, and so much more.

I met Ann in 2006 when I joined the choir. I was the new voice trying to find my place, and Ann was one of the first people to make me feel like I belonged. She was a beautiful Alto, and she loved being called the naughty Alto. She wore that title with pride and a mischievous grin. That was Ann. She brought fun, laughter, and light into every rehearsal with her outgoing personality. She was the one who could make you laugh in the middle of practice, the one whose energy was

contagious, the one who reminded us all that singing together was not just about the music, it was about the joy of being together.

Ann and I discovered over the years just how much we had in common, and those shared passions deepened our friendship beyond the choir loft.

Ann was an avid gardener. She had a true gift for nurturing things, whether it was a garden bed, a friendship, or a soul in need of encouragement. She could talk about her flowers and plants with the same enthusiasm she brought to everything else in her life, and you couldn't help but be drawn in by her excitement.

She introduced me to her Monday Bible study, opening yet another door in my life with her generous spirit. That was so like Ann, always inviting others in, always making room at the table, always wanting to share the things that brought her joy and peace.

We used to talk about our sponsorships with World Vision. We both had a child that we sponsored, and it was something that bonded us in a special way. Whenever Ann received an update about the progress of her sponsor child, her whole face would light up. Her eyes would sparkle as she shared every detail, every milestone, every photo, every letter. You could see in those moments just how big



her heart truly was. It reached far beyond our choir, far beyond our community, it reached across the world to a child she had never met but loved just the same.

Ann was selfless. She was a beautiful person, inside and out. She was faithful to her friends, the kind of friend who showed up, who remembered, who cared deeply and consistently. She was faithful to her faith, and she was faithful to this choir.

Her absence is still deeply felt among us. An empty space remains in the Alto section that no one can fill. But more than that, there is a place in our hearts, that Ann carved out with her love, her laughter, and her spirit. That place will never be forgotten.

We love you, Ann. We miss our naughty Alto.

ANN DUFRANE PIANO DEDICATION

By Wonhee Kang, SSEC music director

Dear Friends of St. Stephen's:

With joy and gratitude, I warmly invite you to our Piano Dedication Worship Concert on Saturday, October 17, at 3 p.m. in the Sanctuary. Through the generous gift of Ann duFrane, a longtime and dedicated member of the SSEC Choir, our parish has been blessed with a beautiful Steinway grand piano. With deep gratitude for Ann's love of music and her faithful presence among us, we will gather to offer this piano to God's service.

The afternoon begins with a Dedication Liturgy led by Father Trent Moore, as we dedicate this instrument to serve the ministries of St. Stephen's, now and in the years to come. Then our church family will welcome the piano in the best way we know how: by sharing our love of music, our service, and our presence. You will hear cherished piano works, sacred songs, offered by our choir, soloists and some of our young instrumentalists. Professional musicians, passionate amateurs, and students will all be sharing their gifts side by side.

It is, at heart, a family gathering, and it would not be complete without you. I am especially delighted that our special guest, Ms. Grace Kim, will join us at the piano. Ms. Kim is a lifelong pianist and a beloved aunt of mine. She has served as an elementary school teacher, a church pianist and a concert pianist. In all my years in music, I have never known anyone more devoted to the piano, and it is a gift to share her music with our St. Stephen's family.

A reception will follow the concert, and there is no admission fee. Please come, and bring your family and friends.

