

Memories



Charliene High Hooker

Parents, Jerald D. High (d. 2000) and Hallie Lucille Stout High (d. 2006) were born and raised “down in the country” near Canton, TX. They were from farming families; completing the sixth and ninth grades respectively, they subsequently married and migrated to the Dallas area where jobs were to be had, soon settling in on Grand Prairie’s Northeast 32nd St. until after his death.

Ultimately, J. D. advanced to lead man for production layout in precast concrete and, subsequently, airplane manufacturing while Lucille learned the seamstress trade, specializing in the difficult components of collars and cuffs for men's custom shirts. She left work each May and returned in September, allowing her to be at home with her children in the summers. Many of Charliene's school clothes were made at home.

Charliene was the middle of those three children, born January 23, 1944, between two brothers, Jarald Eugene High (d. 2012) and Terry Ellsworth High (Kathy), Grand Prairie, experiencing all the closeness, conflicts and peacemaking that such birth order normally entails.

Thanks to Lucille, the children were active with her in the near-by Bowles Memorial Baptist Church where Charliene, following her interest and developing talents, ultimately sang with the Adult Choir.

Family tales of summer vacations often included fishing on East Texas lakes (Charliene quietly reading while the others cast their lines) and sleeping out under the stars, except when sudden rainstorms sent them running for some protected spot in the family station wagon.

The children were educated in the local public schools, where each was actively involved in the music programs.

Charliene graduated Grand Prairie High School in May 1962 and was soon married to John C. Hooker (d. 2019), happily adding Steven Jay to their family and moving north of the Texas border to Stillwater OK, for John to pursue graduate work in Electrical Engineering at Oklahoma State University. The family, including toddler Jay, was introduced to the joys of married student housing.

John met another grad student, Jed Ramsey, and their families connected through a local Baptist church. Jed's family included four children, the eldest of whom had the maturity and experience to care for Jay in his parents' occasional absence. David made a very positive impression on the Hooker family and vice versa.

Graduation with the intended PhD and an appropriate professional opportunity for John enticed them to move to Ft. Worth, where the family was expanded by welcoming Jonna Charliene into the group.

John was not happy nor fully satisfied using his engineering education in the military/industrial complex and wanted to learn more about physiology, possibly combining those fields. They relocated to Houston in 1973, where John began studies at Baylor College of Medicine, and they found Covenant Church. Imagine their delight to be joined by former sitter, now UH graduate student, David Ramsey and wife, Janice, in that small congregation. What an unexpected and blessed reunion!

That expanded Baylor education made John fit for teaching a wide variety of studies at Houston Baptist University and verified the decision to settle in Houston.

Charliene entered the nursing education program at HBU, but soon abandoned that pursuit to augment the family income with full time employment. She sampled a variety of choices,

including construction administration, insurance company back office, outside sales in oil field supply and executive search/placement, ultimately finding her place in administration within the English Department at Rice University. Not satisfied with just one job, she also worked part time in women's clothing at Neiman Marcus, an opportunity that put her at the right place to supplement her wardrobe with first shot at regular sale events, handy for future employment settings.

Following a separation and divorce, Charliene married Bill Hamilton at Thanksgiving, 1982 and moved with him in the fall of the following year to San Antonio; Jonna moved with them. Building on a lead from one of her Rice colleagues, Charliene sought and obtained work in a new endeavor – sales assistant with a regional investment firm, Rotan-Mosle. Company policy prohibited promotion from sales assistant to sales, but she began studying on her own and testing to gain SEC licensing in the variety of fields encompassed by the industry. Quickly proving her worth with added knowledge and skills, she moved, along with her broker, to similar work in the local Kidder-Peabody office; advancement from assistant to sales was also prohibited there.

It was time for another move, this time to Williams College for Jonna and to San Francisco for the parents, where Charliene landed another opportunity in Kidder's downtown office, this time as assistant to the Branch Manager with the additional responsibility as branch compliance officer, beginning to employ the fruits of her earlier self-study. The office occupied one of the upper floors in the towering Bank of America Building, having an ideal view of the Bay location and a spot to feel the occasional tremors.

Upon the couple's return from a visit to Great Britain, where they joined Jonna on break from her "study year abroad," she learned that Bill's construction management responsibilities were calling the two to a site, contrasting in almost every aspect of their life, near the southern end of the Florida peninsula – the carefully planned city of Coral Gables!

Once again, she went straight to Kidder's Miami office, where the Branch Manager was about to lose his assistant. The opening seemed ready made for her and she jumped right in . . . only to be surprised soon with the sale of Kidder's Florida entire retail business to another firm.

Upheaval and a chance for a change of pace in the same field ensued, this time to the investment arm of Community Bank, Homestead. She had found the appropriate occasion to help individual investors plan for their future retirement. And she loved it; she flourished. That is, until the eye of Hurricane Andrew blew across that peninsula, wreaking havoc on the adjacent Homestead Air Force Base and all around.

That upheaval sent Bill to challenges in, of all places, Huntsville, Alabama. Charliene soon joined him, finding similar work with Compass Bank, first in near-by Athens and subsequently in downtown Huntsville.

Bill's mother came to live with the family the last six years of her life, dying shortly after 9/11/01. Charliene found great company with Gladys as Bill served in several assignments, distant from home.

Bill reached compulsory retirement in early 2002. The couple sold their house, bought a Ford F-250 and a 35' fifth wheel, living in it full time for 10 years; they made a temporary move to Las Vegas for a 38-month second career. It was a simple and convenient arrangement.

Sensing a need to settle down, they sold their portable housing and bought a single-family home on the northwest side of Houston, suitable for retirement. However, these carefully chosen plans were just not to be!

Sometime in 2014 they discovered Charliene's emerging tendency to search abnormally for common nouns. Eventually they were lead through extensive examinations, resulting in a determination that she had Mild Cognitive Impairment and should begin some behavioral modifications for her own safety.

Diagnosis of Alzheimer's Disease followed all too soon; the next move was to the increased safety and security of a retirement community in April 2019. An unsupervised venture outside the building in mid-August 2020 was one too many and the couple was required to find residence for Charliene in a memory care home. Bill moved to independent living in a nearby senior apartment. They engaged additional care of a hospice agency. It all seemed to happen too quickly!

Of course, Charliene's behavior regressed dramatically, she ate less and lost weight, but her physical health remained good. On January 11th, she tested positive for the COVID virus and by the weekend of the 16th, she was showing early signs of oxygen deprivation; during the day on the 19th, she couldn't swallow without choking and died peacefully in her sleep early the following morning.