



Howard County Bird Club

A Chapter of the Maryland Ornithological Society

In Memoriam

Janet Randle (1925—2022)

Following is the eulogy given by Eileen Clegg at Jan's memorial service August 7, 2022.

We gather today in a celebration of life for our dearest friend, Janet Eileen Marks Long Randle, better known to us as Jan. She was born 97 years ago on April 16, in Johnstown, PA. As her parents' only child, that singular position projected her to a life-long propensity to be a collector, a magnet for a gathering of acquaintances and friendships. Her layered, extended family had seemingly endless growth. Jan had explored her roots and traced some relatives in PA back to Revolutionary War Times. Her hometown had experienced devastating flooding. She possessed a sideboard with mirror that had survived a major flood. Jan feared floods more than fire, yet fire played a decisive part in her life.

Jan was a Renaissance woman, reinventing herself through the decades as the continuing demands of adult life required adding new interests and opening doors to opportunities she could not have imagined as a child. Exciting adventures brought her joy, a stream of new friends and a second husband, Don Randle.

Those reincarnations began with dance lessons from the one and only Gene Kelly, whose dance studio was located in Johnstown, PA. Thus began her love of moving to the beat.

World War II loomed large over Americans in the 1940s and Jan was not to be left out of contributing to the war effort. She completed her nursing degree, just like thousands of other young women, and worked for a short time before starting a family. She particularly enjoyed her psychiatric rotation. During her free time she was meeting and dancing with young enlisted men, who were ready to be shipped out at any moment. Jan told me she had been engaged several times. Robert Long, a young naval officer, married Jan, and they began their life together with a deployment to Alaska. The young family was a long way from home. From there, they moved to a small farm in semi-rural Virginia where one son accidentally set the barn on fire. Jan was fairly isolated but really loved the peaceful natural setting and the free-range child rearing. It was there that she developed her love of nature and also saw it as a guiding spiritual experience.

When Jan first arrived in Howard County, as a Columbia Pioneer, with her young family in tow, she felt an immediate kinship and sense of belonging. She had found a sympathetic home. A fresh beginning, a place to grow intellectually with others who were establishing the foundational organizations in Columbia from churches to theatrical groups. Everything had to be created from scratch. Bob Kramer, a local artist, had painted a serene boating composition that hung above her bed. Jan knew many of the movers and shakers in the New Town that James Rouse had envisioned: a place on the map, welcoming to all, a visionary city.

After Jan and her first husband divorced, she met Don Randle, also divorced. Shortly afterward, they married and blended together their two families of four sons. A new house was built in Braeburn. Her beloved home was her palette for planting trees, shrubs and flowers to attract wildlife. Jan was happiest when she was digging in the earth.

Jan and Don volunteered with the newly-formed local, amateur theatrical group in Columbia. They joined a ballroom dance club that held formal dances on Saturday evenings in Ellicott City. They spent New Year's Eve at Toby's Dinner theatre enjoying dinner, a show, and dancing at midnight.

Like a moth drawn to a flame people, were drawn to Jan. She attracted people from all walks of life: local and internationally known birders, a Secret Service officer, a faculty member of Gallaudet College in DC, published authors, poets, lecturers, educators, a geologist, actors, scientists, engineers, musicians, ministers, congregants, accomplished nature photographers, Native Americans, her plumber and handyman. They were all considered her friends. The list goes on and on. Jan derived great delight in knowing all these folks. A source of unending pleasure, she always had an open door policy in her home, both literally and metaphorically. The front door was never locked. There were no secrets in her conversations. She welcomed everyone. Jan delighted in the life stories of others, offering comfort and advice, sharing in their joy and dividing their sorrow. Jan provided generous hospitality and fun with summer pool parties, crab feasts, and after a long day of counting birds for the May Count, the Randles would open their home for the Howard County Bird Club tally rally supper. Once, Jan hosted a party to celebrate a friend's completion of his MBA by hiring a belly dancer as the entertainment. While dancing on a shag rug and balancing a bowl of fire her veils were ignited! She extinguished the flames with her fingertips and kept on performing. It was an exciting, memorable evening.

Jan's most accomplished moment was when she and Don opened The Nature Nook, a natural history/Native American bookstore and gift shop in Historic Ellicott City. Jan was 60. They had no previous retail experience other than managing the portable bookstore at the monthly meetings of the Howard County Bird Club for several years.

It was a match made in heaven: perfect location, perfect timing, and perfect subject matter. They had found their retail niche. The business allowed them to travel widely to gift and book shows to order merchandise for the shop. Beanie Babies were a craze. They met authors, went sightseeing across the West. Those were happy times and happy trails. It was an immediate success! The staff, consisting of Marcia, Michele, Eric, Maggie and myself became a close family. The customers were like a family to us, too.

Eva Sunell met Jan at the Bird Club and at the shop. Eva had a booth at the Columbia Flea Market selling Beanie Babies. A customer from Montgomery County wanted an eagle Beanie Baby, and Eva knew just how to procure one: from Jan. So Eva picked up the eagle beanie baby and met her customer on the shoulder of Rt 29. Eva said it felt like a drug deal going down.

Other Randle adventures included an appearance on the Antiques Road Show. Don had inherited a Baltimore Album Quilt, circa 1840's, made by a Baltimore quilt maker. These period quilts are unique to Baltimore. The quilt made the show, was appraised, and was later sold by the Randles. The proceeds were used to purchase a van to accommodate their buying and sightseeing trips.

Jan was widowed in 2005, but thanks to her many caring friends she was never alone or lonely. She joined new groups, formed new friends while keeping the old ones, and changed her church to one closer to home. She kept adjusting to life.

Her thoughts on the afterlife and Native American beliefs allowed her to identify with a spirit guide she named Violet. Violet sat on Jan's shoulder and comforted her in times of stress or decision making. When Violet was absent, Jan would say "she is helping someone else. Violet will return."

You could take Jan out of Pennsylvania, but not Pennsylvania out of Jan. She retained much of her speech patterns and phrases from Western Pennsylvania. Jan was the queen of the malapropism: the unintentional use of a wrong word that sounds similar. She might say, "That desert mirage we just saw

was an obstacle illusion." Instead of saying an optical illusion. There were times when it was quite amusing and other times bordering on being X rated or politically incorrect.

Jan had an independent, stubborn streak that sometimes clashed with the medical field. She had her own definite ideas about how her ailments ought to be treated, sometimes going against medical advice. She would listen to the doctor, go home, and make her own adjustments. One time, when hospitalized, she insisted upon signing herself out because she felt her needs were not being met quickly enough. So, against the doctor's sound medical advice (I witnessed this in real time), Jan signed herself out and was readmitted 24 hours later. Medicare does not approve!

People who came into contact with Jan were considered friends, and late in life she developed a special, supportive relationship with Fred Butt from the Low Vision Group. He is unable to be with us today, but I wanted you to know that he cherished Jan and their friendship.

I would like to thank everyone who attended this evening's memorial service to share in Jan's celebration of life. Her worldly experiences carried her far and wide from her PA childhood home. She relied upon the kindness of others throughout her life, but especially in her last few months and weeks.

Jan was one of my best friends for more than 40 years and on behalf of that dear arrangement I want to thank the members of the Howard County Bird Club; the Village in Howard; the Low Vision Group; the Rosie's, Wine, Women and Words group; the ministers of St Paul's and Abiding Savior Lutheran Church; the congregants of both churches; and her beloved staff/friends from the Nature Nook and all the friends who brought her meals, supplies, cleaned her home, transported her to the store, doctor's appointments, grocery shopping, church, concerts, took her out to dinner, or simply sat with her and held her hand.

Thank you for being her faithful friend. Thank you for being a messenger of kindness. Thank you for comforting a dying woman.

I'll close with Jan's own parting words each time we said good bye, "I've got my medicines all straightened out, my ducks in a row, and we're OK."

-- Eileen Clegg

Jan and Don joined the Howard County Bird Club in 1981. She had been an active member for more than 40 years. Jan served as the bookstore manager 1982-85, and her home was the May Count tally potluck site 1982-2006. One of her favorite stories was of Chan Robbins knocking on her door at 6:00 a.m. on May Count days to drop off ice cream for the evening meal. It was an illustration of Chan's generosity since he was always considered a guest.