

## Ellen K. Bisson



She thought of herself as a child of Kansas, who embraced her mother's Irish heritage and her father's Welsh ancestry. Ellen Blanche Knowles was born on November 3, 1938, in Poughkeepsie, NY, to Edwin Chandler Knowles and his wife, Allen Blevins Gafney. She died on October 31, 2022. Their only child, Ellen was devoted to her parents, and to their Kansas homesteads which she visited often as a child. Her first elementary schooling, in fact, was in Winfield, her mother's hometown. Ellen attended schools in Dutchess County, NY, graduating from Oakwood Friends School in Poughkeepsie. She received a B.A. from Scripps College, in Claremont, CA. Following college, she worked in Washington, DC, where she met and married Gary B. Bisson, son of Antonio N. Bisson and his wife, Alice (Philippon), of Gorham, NH. Gary and Ellen's first son, Mark, was born in 1961, followed in 1964 by son Todd. After several years of living in northern Virginia, the family embarked on a series of international moves, first with the CIA proprietary, Air America, to Taipei and Bangkok, and then with USAID to Nairobi, Mbabane (eSwatini, formerly Swaziland), and Jakarta.

Ellen savored each international experience: she studied Chinese for three years and was an enthusiastic participant in art history projects through the Thai national museum; and enjoyed an archaeology study group in Kenya. Throughout their overseas tours, she held several jobs within the local communities. Ellen always tried to find time to continue her interest in foreign languages. In addition to Chinese, she took Italian and tried to maintain her fluency in French. During stateside years, she was involved with a variety of volunteer activities, frequently while working full-time.

Ellen was a loving wife for Gary, mother and cheerleader for sons Mark and Todd, and doting grandmother for her beloved grandson Dante. She was passionate about her home, steadfastly loyal to her friends. She was a gourmet cook, played a capable game of bridge, and was a tenacious and enterprising genealogy sleuth. She truly enjoyed and appreciated her memberships in the DAR, all of the New England First Families lineage groups, and the Winthrop Society of Massachusetts. Through the family's world travels, she treasured their visits to the Buddhist temples of Thailand and Burma, the terraced rice paddies of the Balinese countryside, and the African veldt, but her heart was always in

Paris. From her first visit in the summer of 1958, she fell in love with the city's sights, fragrances, and sounds. If the itinerary permitted, it was always her destination of choice. Over the years, Ellen also did a lot of writing: community newsletters for embassy families, school newsletters for parents. As a volunteer, for many years she wrote letters for residents in an assisted living center with a portable laptop and printer. If they gave prizes for writing Christmas letters, her carefully crafted annual greetings would be near the top.

She and Gary moved to Shenandoah Valley Westminster Canterbury, a lifecare community, in 2010. She was active in numerous committees and projects through the years, among them hosting a popular book group and organizing the annual Nativity display project. She was preceded by the death by her beloved husband, Gary, in May 2017. Memorial gifts can be directed to Scripps College, Claremont, CA 91711.