

Paula Sigrid Harrell Obituary

1939 - 2024



Devoted wife, mother, grandmother and friend, as well as an accomplished scholar, teacher, and violinist, Paula Sigrid Harrell (née Johnson) passed away peacefully on September 3, 2024, due to medical complications arising from cancer.

Born July 28, 1939 in Hartford, CT, Paula was raised in a family of educators and spent much of her formative years in Mexico and Burma which inspired her lifelong interest and passion for history, language and culture. She received a B.A. in Russian Studies from Smith College ('59) and a Masters ('64) and Doctorate ('70) in East Asian Studies and Chinese history from Columbia University where she met her devoted husband of 58 years, Ed Harrell, in Japanese language class.

Ed lovingly described Paula as "the best student in the class while I was the worst". They had three children together, Erik and twins Matthew and Philip, and in the 1970's spent eight years overseas in Thailand and Jordan, where Ed served as Mission Director of the Agency of International Development (AID) and Paula served as a Project Specialist for USAID.

After returning with her family to Chevy Chase, MD in 1981, Paula served twelve years in the World Bank's China Department, where she took part in the appraisal, negotiation, and supervision of a series of Bank-financed projects that helped jump start China's economic takeoff in the 1980s. An expert in both China and Japan, and fluent in both languages, Paula published two books on China-Japan relations: *Asia for the Asians* (MerwinAsia/WEAI-Columbia University, 2012) and *Sowing the Seeds of Change* (Stanford University, 1992) and later taught Chinese history as an Adjunct Professor at both Georgetown University and the University of Maryland.

An outstanding violinist and passionate believer in the power of music to aid in healing and personal development, Paula was also a dedicated musician, who served fifteen years as a violinist in the Avanti Orchestra in Washington DC. Besides her inspiring career and academic achievements, her three sons will best remember her for being a deeply caring, supportive and loving mother and grandmother. She will be deeply missed.

She is survived by her three sons, and her dear daughters-in-law, Marit, Liz, and Brooke as well as her 10 beautiful grandchildren Emilia, Mattias, Julia, Carson, Anna, Tessa, Andrew, Tommy, Libby and Emma. Services private. Paula's family welcomes any contributions in Paula's name to

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