



Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove

October 15, 1946 - April 27, 2024

Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove (Sand), 77, passed away peacefully with her family by her side in her home on Saturday, April 27, 2024. Mary was born to Harold William Sand and Elizabeth Sand (Knop) on October 15, 1946 in Detroit, MI and graduated from East Detroit High School in 1964.

Mary is survived by her beloved husband of 58 years, Frederick VanDeKerkhove; children: Michele (Darrell Laughlin) VanDeKerkhove and Darlene (Brian) Jenkins and grandchildren: Austin, Samuel, Elizabeth, Abigail, Darrell Jr. (Nikki), and Bret; six great grandchildren: Nathan, Noelen, Carly, Seline, Emily and Shelby; brothers and sisters: Janice (Jim) Carpenter Paul (Rhonda), Philip (Judith), Anne (Jim) Packett, Therese (Dennis) Sosin, Joan (Randy) Coplen and Eugene (Lori) Sand and many nieces, nephews, and friends. Mary was preceded in death by her parents, her oldest brother, William Sand, her brothers-in-law, Jim Carpenter, Jim Packett, Dennis Sosin, and sister-in-law, Judith Sand.

Family was the cornerstone of Mary's life and she was considered the "matriarch" and "nurturer" to all of those she loved and who loved her. Losing her father at the age of 16 and being the second oldest of nine, Mary assisted her mother in raising her four youngest siblings. This included taking her youngest sibling on her dates with her "one and only true love" Fred, as she reminded him during her last couple of days. With him along side of her, Mary continued this tradition by raising two daughters, assisting in childcare of her

neighbor's children, her nephews and her grandson. When all of them were grown, she extended that passion with the children at Dresden Elementary School, where she was a lunch supervisor to the little ones and a paraprofessional to students that were hard of hearing. Besides being her daughters advocate, her greatest prides were being the wife to Fred and being "Nana" to her grandchildren and great grandchildren whom she loved with all her heart and they knew it.

Mary was also considered a quiet giant (not referring to size but protectiveness towards the ones she loved). Not wanting to be in the spotlight, Mary would quietly leave the room and worked diligently to take care of the needs of everyone around her. She always put the needs of others before herself. Even with the discomfort of her illness when hospitalized, she never complained but instead would always ask others how they were doing and forget about herself. Her optimism was contagious and often made others feel that they could tackle anything. However, when she felt that one of her loved ones or some that she knew was being hurt, Mary's protective nature (the giant) would come out but not in the way of words but by the nonverbal facial expression or the "look" as many would call it.

Mary was motivated by anything that would make others feel good or smile. Whether it was making them laugh by dressing up as a clown or a Dalmatian for Halloween or simply by completing a household task. She cooked meals or appetizers for others regardless if she was hosting gatherings or was a guest at another activity. She took pride in finding interesting recipes that would satisfy the needs of the guests. Even when she was unable to eat over this past year, Mary would often be found watching the Food Network and other shows to absorb more information to be able to share with others. This love for cooking and sharing it with others resulted in many requesting the recipes and starting new traditions themselves. Mary had the uncanny ability to make such a small task, like cooking, seem like a work of art extended into

everything she did. She took pride in learning how to sew clothing for her younger siblings and daughters. This talent included making clothes for herself that matched what she made for her daughters, making Halloween costumes for the family, or even creating cushions for outdoor furniture for her husband, showing everyone that she clearly loved her family.

Mary was a wonderful role model to her family and friends. She was not pretentious but instead thoughtful and thrived on making others feel special while instilling confidence to be themselves. She never uttered an unkind word to anyone, never judged, was a great listener and accepted and loved everyone for who they were! She had a unique ability with her amazing heart to make every person she met feel as if they were the only person that mattered in the world. Just ask others about their birthday and holiday cards each year.

Mary will forever be missed but her legacy will continue to shine through all of those that she loved for she has made an impact on so many people in her lifetime. We love you, Mary!

The visitation will be held on Wednesday, May 1, 2024 3:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. at Mandziuk & Son Funeral Directors, Inc. 3801 18 Mile Road, Sterling Heights, MI 48314. Funeral service will be held at St. Blasé Catholic Church, 12151 E. Fifteen Mile Rd., Sterling Heights, MI 48312 on Thursday, May 2, 2024. In-state at 9:00 a.m. with service following at 9:30 p.m. Private memorial service at Great Lakes National Cemetery will be on Friday, May 3, 2024 at 2:00 p.m.

In lieu of flowers, memorial donations in honor of Mary VanDeKerkhove may be given to either:

St. Jude's Hospital Make A Wish Foundation of America

P.O. Box 1000 Dept. 142 1702 E. Highland Ave. #400

Memphis, TN 38148-0142 Phoenix, AZ 85016

Email: stjude.org/donate Federal Tax ID number 86-0481941

Cemetery Details

Great Lakes National Cemetery

4200 Belford Rd
Holly, MI 48442

Previous Events

Visitation

MAY 1. 3:00 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Mandziuk & Son Funeral Directors, Inc. - Sterling Heights
3801 18 Mile Road
Sterling Heights, MI 48314
(586) 997-3838

Instate

MAY 2. 9:00 AM (ET)

St Blase Catholic Church
12151 15 mile Road
Sterling Heights, MI 48310

Mass of the Christian Burial

MAY 2. 9:30 AM (ET)

St Blase Catholic Church
12151 15 mile Road
Sterling Heights, MI 48310

Tribute Wall

DM

“ My memories of the warmest, most kind hearted & loving woman I've ever known are as clear today as they were more than 40 years ago. Mary wasn't someone you ever forgot because of the love she shared with those important to her. I'm unaware of her final journey but I do pray she's in warm & comfortable hands now. My heart goes out to her equally as wonderful husband & family. May God Bless you all & keep you & yours healthy. Respectfully, Darr Moore

Darr Moore - February 08, 2025 at 01:17 AM

RA

“ I am so sorry to hear of Mary's passing. I worked with Mary for a number of year's at Dresden Elementary as a lunchroom supervisor. She was always so loving of the children and willing to be part of some of the lunch mom's crazy antics. We would dress up with hair bows or holiday headbands just to help brighten the days of the kids. She will be missed.

Rachelle - May 09, 2024 at 01:15 PM

BL

“ Mary has always been the type to lighten up the mood anytime she walked into the room. She was the pillar of stability of many family functions, and many of the dynamics just will not be the same. Your memory will live on, and you will not be forgotten.

- With much love, Bret.

Bret Laughlin - May 05, 2024 at 07:22 AM

SB

“ Happy Memories when she visited you all in Gerrards Cross, her lovely cards & wishes to us have continued ever since. May God Bless you and your family Mary! With love always Ulli & Susan

Susan Braun - May 01, 2024 at 02:13 PM



“ Beautiful in Blue was purchased for the family of Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove.



May 01, 2024 at 10:25 AM



“ Small Garden Dish was purchased for the family of Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove.



May 01, 2024 at 09:12 AM

TR

“ Tony and Gladys Rosales planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove.

Tony and Gladys Rosales - May 01, 2024 at 08:01 AM



“ *Heavenly Heights Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove.*



May 01, 2024 at 08:01 AM



“ *Love, Brian and Denise Grothe purchased the Blue Caribbean Bouquet for the family of Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove.*



Love, Brian and Denise Grothe - April 30, 2024 at 04:05 PM



“ *Sweet Tenderness was purchased for the family of Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove.*



April 30, 2024 at 03:32 PM



“ *I will miss you so much Aunt Mary. <3 I will never forget our conversations, the laughs, and the love you shown and shared with me. It will hurt greatly to not have you here, but I am glad you are no longer in any pain. I love you.*



Alexis Gipson - April 30, 2024 at 03:24 PM

DG

“ Knowing Mary for 15 plus years, words cannot express how much she impacted our lives. Her warm smile and giving heart always made you feel welcomed and loved. Every Christmas our family would receive a beautiful card from her and Fred, she never forgot. Our times together as a family we will always treasure. She will be missed, but Mary enjoy being in the arms of your Savior. Love,
Brian and Denise Grothe

Denise Grothe - April 30, 2024 at 03:17 PM

YF

“ Your Clarity Family purchased the Sweet Tenderness for the family of Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove.



Your Clarity Family - April 30, 2024 at 02:45 PM



“ Arrive in Style was purchased for the family of Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove.



April 30, 2024 at 12:47 PM



“ Dreams From the Heart Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove.



April 30, 2024 at 12:24 PM

LG

“ *Our deepest sympathy.*



Lynn & Mike Gazo - April 30, 2024 at 11:40 AM

RB

“ *Ron & Diane Bonin. planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove.*

Ron & Diane Bonin. - April 30, 2024 at 11:09 AM



“ *Serene Retreat was purchased for the family of Mary Elizabeth VanDeKerkhove.*



April 30, 2024 at 11:09 AM