



## Sherrill Johns

August 23, 1941 - June 19, 2019

Sherrill Colette Johns (née Sherrill Colette Jacotel) was born in Grand Forks, ND, on Aug. 23, 1941, to Arthur Charles Thaddeus Jacotel and Vera M. (Childs) Jacotel and died in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, on June 19th, 2019. As a child, she lived in East Grand Forks, MN, later moving to Moorhead, MN, in a house about a block from Moorhead State College, and near to Concordia College, which provided many cultural and educational opportunities (concerts, art exhibits) to her and her parents. She was graduated from Moorhead High School in 1959. As a student at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis, Sherrill organized programs at the Student Union, featuring a wide variety of presenters active in athletics, the arts, and politics. She said that she sometimes felt discouraged when attendance was skimpy, but her advisor pointed out that many of those in small audiences may not have attended any of the more popular events, and the purpose was to try to serve the entire student body. (My apologies to readers who agree with Strunk & White that “student body” sounds a bit morbid.) Sherrill taught Spanish at Macalester College in Saint Paul, Minnesota, and later at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John's University, near St. Cloud, MN. One of her favorite stories of that period was of a student who, visiting her office, caught her using a slide rule to calculate grades on a Spanish test. He was an engineering student who thought that learning Spanish was an unnecessary burden... but if a Spanish teacher could find an engineering tool such as a slide rule (yes, this was a long time ago) useful, maybe he could find the Spanish useful to him. She heard later that, on the job, he was able to get a supervisory job and promotion because he could communicate with the Spanish-speaking workers better than the other engineers could. She went on to get her master's degree, and she worked on a PhD in Spanish language and linguistics at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. At UW Madison, she met her future husband, Vince, at the Presbyterian church on campus, they were married on August 30, 1969. They shared many activities there, including linguistics classes (both natural languages and computer languages). Vince sometimes helped her organize her Spanish class notes, picking up a bit of Spanish along the way, and she helped him debug his computer programs. In the Graduate Club of the U.W. Student Union they went on outings such as ski trips and (when Vince served as president of the club) organized recreational events at the Student Union such as square dances. As a

newlywed couple, they developed an interest in square dancing, joining the Cross Trails Square Dance Club and making life-long friends as they went through the classes and, upon graduating, traveled around the Madison area to dance with regular (non-beginner) square-dance clubs. She went on to follow her husband as Vince served in the US Air Force; his first duty station was Langley Air Force Base in Hampton, VA. Sherrill served as the photo editor of the Officers' Wives' Club's magazine. One of Vince's co-workers raised Scottish terriers, and one of those pure-bred terrier puppies wound up in her home. Sherrill had had indoor pets before, but her husband hadn't, though he learned to adjust. When the Scottie, "Attaway Artful Dodger", was ready for dog shows, Sherrill and Vince would sometimes accompany the handler, and Dodger, to the shows, and Dodger won several ribbons, and his family got to visit some beautiful areas of Virginia and the Carolinas. Having bought a house only a couple of blocks from a canal near the Chesapeake Bay, Sherrill & family often went canoeing (the canoe was her birthday gift to Vince, kind of a hint as to what she'd like to do) around the canal system and on out to Chesapeake Bay. Dodger apparently didn't understand the properties of liquids and tried to run toward a muskrat or some such animal on the nearby bank. He learned that he was not a great swimmer, and after he was fished out of the water, he was quite docile (and soggy) for the rest of the trip. Some of the trips with friends were on bicycles (a mode of transportation more suitable than canoes in cooler weather) around Hampton and Newport News. Sherrill and Vince rode a tandem bike that made it much easier to talk than when they rode separately. They joined the square dance association in Virginia and continued to enjoy dancing both around home and on excursions by bus to more distant locations such as the Blue Ridge mountains. Sherrill welcomed neighboring children to her home, and noticing that they were attracted to her piano, offered to give them lessons if they could convince their parents to buy the books (a different edition for each child, to avoid head-to-head conflicts that they were afraid might result – the kids were kind of competitive). After a couple of months, Sherrill organized a recital, inviting the parents and visiting grandparents to attend. One of the kids had been practicing on her toy piano, and the grandparents saw that they needed to get her a real piano, even though they found that that would cost a bit more than they expected. (She later went on to become a talented pianist.) Before moving away from Virginia, Sherrill made arrangements for the kids to continue their lessons with real piano teachers. A neighbor who ran a local restaurant hosted a club dedicated to Mexican culture, and Sherrill's knowledge of Spanish fitted right in. (Her husband experienced a bit much of the spicy food at one party, but couldn't complain to the nice lady who'd brought it, and drank a lot of root beer that night.) Sherrill and Vince became part of the visiting dance group that demonstrated traditional Mexican dances such as La Bamba. In one such dance, they demonstrated tying a bow in a long sash, using only their feet, in time with the music. Great fun! Shortly before moving to Oklahoma, Sherrill gave birth to her only child, Colette, whom she

devoted the rest of her life to raising and teaching. For example, Sherrill entered Colette in numerous beauty and talent pageants, and Colette became a professional model for children's clothing stores, often being paid in clothing from the stores. When she was about two and a half years old, having seen Pinchas Zukerman perform on television, Colette began to pester Sherrill about playing the violin. Since "Maybe someday you'll play" wasn't a good enough answer forever, Sherrill arranged for Colette to take Suzuki lessons – which required Sherrill (and her husband) to learn enough to be able to model what the child needed to do. Many concerts and recitals followed, including at an international modeling and talent competition in Philadelphia where Sherrill accompanied on the piano five-years-old Colette's playing her violin. The trophy that Colette won was about the same height as Colette. Similarly, Sherrill attended many swim-club meets, school band competitions (flute and oboe) and Oklahoma State University football games (piccolo). Sherrill was not always an idle spectator at these events; she and her husband often served as volunteers in Band Parent organizations as hot-dog or popcorn vendors. Sherrill loved animals (not counting unpleasant ones like mosquitoes), and one cold winter a homeless kitty found its way into the house. Sherrill was allergic to cats, but by restricting the new cat to a small part of the house, she found that over time she wasn't sneezing as much as before... and eventually the new cat (whom the family called "D. C.", or "Darn Cat") fully moved in. D. C. was not always nice to the Scottie, Dodger; she'd grab his beard as he tried to go to his food dish in the kitchen. They weren't enemies, though; often as he would lie on his side taking a nap, D. C. would lie with her back against his stomach, keeping him warm. After a nasty tornado in May, 1999, many pets were rendered homeless. Sherrill and Colette took to capturing stray cats, posting their pictures at veterinarians' offices, sometimes reuniting them with their owners, sometimes sending them to animal sanctuaries. Sherrill was active in political organizations. For a time, she was president of the Mid-Del Republican Women's Club and edited and published the club's newsletter. She and her family attended conventions as delegates, worked on parade floats, and distributed election-related materials. Sherrill loved the Lord Jesus and was active in church throughout her life. At the Tinker Air Force Base Chapel, she played in the Bell Choir and organized a Puppet Ministry. She felt that puppets can sometimes reach shy children who might have trouble relating to unfamiliar adults, and she experienced more than one instance in which an adult viewing the puppets received a special blessing from the experience. Sherrill played the flute in several local church orchestras, and played in the Bell Choir at St. Matthew United Methodist Church and at Sunny Lane UMC. She and her husband taught Sunday school at St. Matthew United Methodist Church, including a puppet ministry there. She found the ladies in the United Methodist Women's organization at Sunny Lane UMC to be a great source of support and comfort in later life. At Science Museum Oklahoma, where her husband now works part time, she was a volunteer, helping at the gift shop and running exhibits such as the

Harmonograph. Her daughter spent much time at the museum as a child and gained a deep love and understanding of science. Because Sherrill's daughter had limited vision, Sherrill and her family became active in Advocates and Parents of Oklahoma's Sight Impaired, an organization that sought to get support for families of children with visual difficulties who are striving to succeed in school. She helped organize conferences and other activities, such as Easter egg hunts and parties for the kids. Sherrill eventually lost most of her own vision and became active in the Oklahoma Council of the Blind, receiving assistance that she had once helped to provide. She has been especially grateful for the audio recordings of books that the Oklahoma Library for the Blind and Physically Handicapped provides to Oklahomans who need them. Because one of her grandmothers was born in the Varmland of Sweden, Sherrill was interested in Scandinavian history and culture, and she and her husband were active in local Scandinavian clubs. At International Day, sometimes observed at Rose State College, she helped run the Scandinavian tent, displaying dolls in Swedish costumes and recounting Scandinavian folklore for the visitors. Sherrill and her husband were active for a while in Toastmasters International, developing speaking skills, practicing organizing activities, and making friends – and hearing some terrific speeches at the speech contests. Sherrill Johns is survived by her husband, Vincent Johns, her daughter, Colette Van Bodegom, and her two grandchildren, Gabriel and Nikolai. Services will be held at Sunny Lane United Methodist Church, 2020 South Sunnyslane Road, Del City, OK, 73115, on Tuesday, June 25, 2019, at 2:00 pm.

# Events

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**JUN**   **Funeral**                      02:00PM

**25**

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Sunny Lane United Methodist Church  
2020 S. Sunnyslane, Del City, OK, US, 73115