

GRETCHEN CHRISTIAN HANKINS RICE



RICE, GRETCHEN CHRISTIAN HANKINS. January 11, 1917-June 11, 2011. Gretchen Rice loved her life. The youngest of five children of Dr. Frank Lamar Christian and May Therry Christian, she had an idyllic childhood, living on the expansive grounds of the Elmira (New York) Reformatory, riding horses, reveling in adventures with her brother Art and his friends, sharing a special bond with the great and good man who was her father, appointed superintendent the year she was born. She loved her boarding school in Baltimore and the College of Notre Dame of Maryland, where she was shepherded by Sister Mary Frances. She majored in English, graduated cum laude, saw her stories and poems published in the literary magazine *Damozel*, edited the yearbook-- writing a classical poem to accompany every graduate's picture. She rode horseback, played tennis, and

sometimes slept over at the White House, a guest of the Roosevelts, friends of her parents. She loved Jack Hankins, a handsome, blue-eyed Ohioan whom she met when she was twenty-three, living at her parents' winter home on Chase Avenue in Miami Beach. On February 20, 1941, they eloped to Fort Lauderdale with twenty dollars between them, buying a marriage license, a ring, a corsage, and two glasses of champagne. When the war broke out they moved to Ohio, where he found work at Goodyear Aircraft in Akron and she mothered their three little girls. In 1947, the early days of consumer television, he started his own TV repair business, charging \$3.50 for a service call, when his customers could afford to pay him. In the early fifties three more children were born, and through lean times she worked as a legal secretary, as a girl Friday to a newspaper publisher, and then as a teacher. She loved teaching. After too many harsh winters in a big, drafty house, the family moved to Miami, where GRETCHEN HANKINS in 1957 began anew her teaching career-at Southwest Miami High School. She would chair the English Department for twenty-six years, developing a rich humanities curriculum for senior honors students, a model nationwide. She co-authored an anthology of world literature, published articles, earned a master's degree from the University of Miami, taught workshops, chaired panels, served as principal speaker and consultant and judge and coordinator and visiting professor; she was president of the Dade County Council of Teachers of English and was named Dade County teacher of the year. She especially esteemed Southwest principal Hugh Allsworth and assistant principal Del Barrett; and she developed collegial friendships that lasted her lifetime. But mostly, it was the teaching. She loved her students, and they loved her. Twelve years after the death of her husband from lung cancer, at the age of seventy-five Gretchen Hankins fell in love again. She married George Emmett Rice, a consummate professional social worker, retired, a man with a very big heart. They were, as she said so many times, blissfully happy. In the four years after George Rice died, she lived quietly in the company of her two beloved dogs, reading hundreds of large-print books and watching the Marlins, the Hurricanes and the Dolphins, buoyed by visits and letters and phone calls from her children and grandchildren--and from students and colleagues of decades past. For almost seventy years, she was the pole star to her children. She possessed a grace that accepted what life brought her, an equanimity that sprang from knowing what mattered, a delight in the moment, an appreciation for life's ironies, and a sense of humor that sustained her until the day she died. She suffered a massive stroke on Sunday, May 29th and died at home thirteen days later. Although paralyzed on one side and unable to eat or drink or talk, she managed nonetheless over the course of those days to console, in turn, each of her children. Family members are grateful to Vitas Hospice Care, especially to nurse Carol Shields whose presence on the last day was a blessing. They thank caregiver Felicia Smart whose love and good spirits made every morning cheerier, and Rey and Edda and Marilyn and Susana and Lesbia and Rocky and Lana and Alfonso- and Dr. Paul Siegel, all of whom brightened their mother's days. Gretchen Hankins's son Stephen Christian Hankins died suddenly of bulbar polio in 1959 just before his eighth birthday. Five children and six grand- children survive: Suzanne Bognar (Miami), Sally Hankins (Talent, OR), Sherry Agnos (San Francisco), John Hankins (Geneva, FL), and Laura Hankins Taylor (El Dorado Hills, CA); Ellen and Robert Bognar, Christopher and Stephen Agnos, and Theresa and Erin Hankins. Memorial contributions may be made to the Humane Society of Greater Miami. View this Guest Book at [www. MiamiHerald.com/obituaries](http://www.MiamiHerald.com/obituaries).
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