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A Final Farewell to Our “Matilda Briggs”

KAY BLOCKER

1952 – 2022

by Billy Fields

When Kay Blocker crossed the Reichenbach, the Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe problem lost one of our greatest champions and dearest friends. Known to the group as Matilda Briggs, her passion and energy held together a very young association of Sherlock Holmes aficionados during its early years of existence. Without her sheer determination, Nashville earliest Sherlockian society would today be just a memory.

Kay passed away recently following several years of declining health. In reality, her entire life was a struggle against the odds with respect to health issues and physical infirmities. Despite the challenges, she faced the world with determination that few ever have but most desire. She looked straight at what many individuals would see as crippling only to push through it and conquer.

Donna and I were fortunate enough to be present at her memorial service in Manchester, Tennessee. At this gathering of family and friends, we were warmly welcomed to an afternoon of sweet memories and numerous surprises. When we entered, a table was set (quite appropriately,

from my perspective) with items from her Sherlockian collection, including many newsletters which she edited for the Scholars for a number of years. Her portrait was prominent as were her remains, which were placed atop a stack of books related to Sherlock Holmes. Her investiture to our scion society was adjacent, and Donna and I agreed she would have approved of this remarkable table setting.



Of course, her beloved Pembroke Welch Corgis, Murphy and Zoe, were also beside her that day as they were in life. The black-and-white dogs brought her great pleasure. Her corgis won many championships, ribbons, and honors before she allowed them to retire as the pets who loved her so. Their photo brought a smile to our face as we reflected on our friend.

As we passed the table, Kay’s sisters embraced Donna and me with a warmth I would have expected to be reserved for family. Each of them smiled from ear to ear. Her sister Mary then grabbed my hand and said, “You must be Billy Fields; here is your picture,” as she grabbed a newsletter from years before in an article Kay edited. Their appreciation for our presence was

overwhelming and very appreciated. One sister took Donna and the other me as we began sharing our memories of the past and they shared Kay's memories with us. It was evident that the Nashville Scholars were a major part of Kay's life, and it brought tears to our eyes as we heard story after story of the role Sherlock Holmes played in her life.

Being in the South meant a round of delicious food was to be served. A magnificent banquet of barbecue, beans, and slaw awaited us, followed by desserts and beverages. The tables soon filled as did our stomachs with each table abuzz with stories and memories.

Then, following a prayer, the family began their tributes.

First, we heard of Kay's life. From birth to death, she was remembered and loved. She was described as stubborn but kind, forceful yet gentle, smart but not condescending. She was a photographer specializing in black-and-white photos. She admired Ansel Adams and filled her walls with his work. She established her own dark room so she could practice her skills as she created her art. She relished music of all genres from country to jazz to classical. Her collection ranged from Bach and Beethoven to Brooks and Dunn to Kiss and the Eagles. She was a member of the Nashville Symphony Association as well as the Nashville Opera. She attended performances as often as she could, and she loved every minute.



I was able to bring your official greeting to the gathered assembly. I spoke of Kay as I believe you would have shared. I recalled her generosity and tenacity. I spoke of her love for Holmes and Watson and her continual battle to keep green the memory of the master. I explained that I believe there would likely not be a Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem had Kay not stepped in more than 40 years ago to breathe life into a struggling body of Sherlockians. I offered the following quote from "His Last Bow":

"Stand with me here upon the terrace, for it may be the last quiet talk that we shall ever have."

I now invite you join me with a final thought: I do wish I could have had one more quiet talk with Kay.



We end this first quarter *Plugs and Dottles* with a testament about Kay Blocker from her immediate family. We, the Nashville Scholars, were her *adopted* family. She loved everything about Sherlock Holmes and his world, and she continually enriched our scion society. For this final "quiet talk," let us listen in as her family remembers her.

Words written by Kay's sister, Mary Henley, for her memorial service.

Kay. Do we really know Kay? Nothing about Kay was elementary . . .

A little girl born on Wednesday, December 19, 1951, in Fort Worth, Texas, with congenital polio and a clubfoot. Her parents, John and Gertrude Blocker, loved her as did her sisters, Mary and Martha (whom we know as Marty), and her brother, John, whom we call Bud.

Kay spent some time in a Shriner's Hospital in Dallas to correct her orthopedic conditions. She was fitted with corrective shoes---but she never complained. She loved books and therefore read a lot. She had multiple surgeries through the years to correct her leg alignment with implanted hardware, but she never complained. She just kept reading.

Kay attended Prairie Plains Baptist Church with her family. There is a written statement in our family Bible that says, "Kay was saved on January 21, 1962.

Kay graduated from Coffee County Central High School here in Manchester as a Beta club member. She left home to attend Middle Tennessee State University and eventually earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Science and a Master of Science degree in Biology.

Her profession took her to Nashville with positions in the general lab and blood bank at Vanderbilt Hospital. She also spent some time at Baptist Hospital while continuing to work at Vanderbilt. At Vanderbilt, Kay loved the blood bank. At her 25th anniversary she was gifted with a nice rocking chair that was designed with the familiar Vanderbilt black and gold as well as an inset of the Vanderbilt symbol. It is here today---be sure to read the dedication on the back.

While she was away from home, she lived in a boarding house where she met two young ladies who became lifelong friends. Carol has passed away. Carol's daughter Jaquie is Kay's goddaughter. She also met Brenda, who was her faithful travel buddy for many years.

The Nashville experience was "a foot" for Kay. She enjoyed many interests:

1. Photography—She got her first Nikon camera, and after a few lessons she focused on black-and-white nature shots. She turned her bathroom into a dark room and began to develop her own photos. She was inspired by photographers Ansel Adams, John Netherland, and Charles Frace'. Her home was a reflection of her love for them as she displayed many of their black-and-white photographs. Photographs of the American West and wildlife. She had many rare edition black-and-white photographs by Frace' and Ansel Adams on her walls at home.

2. She also loved music and had an appreciation for many genres, which was evident in her impressive collection of vinyl albums from artist greats such as Alice Cooper, Billy Joel, The Blues Brothers, Bob Dylan, and more. She also collected many country albums such as Emmy Lou Harris and Tom T. Hall, as well as classical compositions by Mozart, Beethoven, Bach, and Chopin. Kay was also a faithful member of the Schermerhorn Symphony where she enjoyed the opera as well as the Nashville Symphony.

3. “No one is ever really gone,” a quote from Luke Skywalker, the Jedi Master in *Star Wars*, is a reminder about the importance of the legacy we leave behind. Kay knew the galaxy well. She also liked *Star Trek*; it was her favorite. For hours, she would watch the series from the beginning of the USS Enterprise, remembering First Officer Spock and his quote, “Live long and prosper.”

4. Kay always continued to read and developed an enthusiastic interest in the fictional detective Sherlock Holmes. Wanting to share stories with other Holmes readers, she was part of the founding group of The Nashville Scholars in 1979. Their society, called the “The Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem,” is still in operation today. At that time, Kay wrote their monthly newsletter, *Plugs and Dottles*. Kay was known as Matilda Briggs in the membership of its society, beginning January 6, 1979. One of Kay’s favorite Holmes quotes was “The game is afoot.”

5. Kay was a devoted and passionate lover of animals, especially her Cardigan Welsh Corgies. She loved her short-legged sheep-herding dogs. She trained and traveled with them, competing in many dog shows. Her dogs have earned several awards and ribbons. Two of them survived at her passing, but Murphy has since passed away just a few days after Kay. Zoey survives. They were her loyal companions.

Kay’s life was full, exciting, and giving, but Kay was not a complainer. Kay’s health began to decline in the past several years. She passed away on Monday, January 24, 2022, at Unity Hospital with family beside her.

No more twisted joints, no more internal hardware to cause her pain. That Monday afternoon at 2:33 p.m., Kay entered Heaven dancing, jumping around, looking at and touching her now perfect feet, kicking up her heels, perhaps even walking on the streets of gold. For Kay the splendor would be amazing! She was something special, for sure.

