



# Plugs & Dottles

Official Newsletter of the Nashville Scholars  
of the Three Pipe Problem  
1st Quarter JAN-FEB-MAR 2022  
Jim Hawkins & Dean Richardson, Co-Editors

- Established 1979
- Meetings on 3rd  
Saturday of the month
- [Website](#)
- [Facebook page](#)

## New Website

The New Nashville Scholars  
website rolled out in February

No longer .net

We are now

[Nashvillescholars.com](http://Nashvillescholars.com)

A Special Report

## KAY BLOCKER

(1952 – 2022)

Kay kept our scion from  
drifting into oblivion by  
continuing to publish the  
newsletter after our founder  
left for graduate school.

**Rest in Peace**

See the article on page 8

## BSI Weekend 2022

(January 12–15)

Marino C. Alvarez, Ed.D., BSI

The BSI Weekend consisted of an official program of events and an unofficial one. These events provided opportunities for interested participants to engage in a variety of social and dinner gatherings.

The first was an ASH gathering on Wednesday evening. On Thursday was Glen Miranker's "Sherlock Holmes in 221 Objects," a collection shown at The Grolier Club. On display were manuscripts, books, correspondence, and artwork relating to the Sherlock Holmes stories. *The Hound of the Baskervilles* edition was one of the more prominent books among the unique and rare artifacts that were shown. Glen is an ardent and significant book and art collector, and his collection includes first-class Sherlockian artifacts.

This year's BSI Distinguished Speaker's Lecture speaker was Mary Bendel-Simso, professor of English at McDaniel College. Thursday evening, she presented a thorough analysis of Sherlock Holmes and his place in detective fiction.

Friday morning Otto Penzler's Mysterious Bookshop hosted the ACD Society's "Doylean Honors" Ceremony. Several awards were given for literary achievement. Following was the usual perusal of books by attendees anxious to find a rare gem.

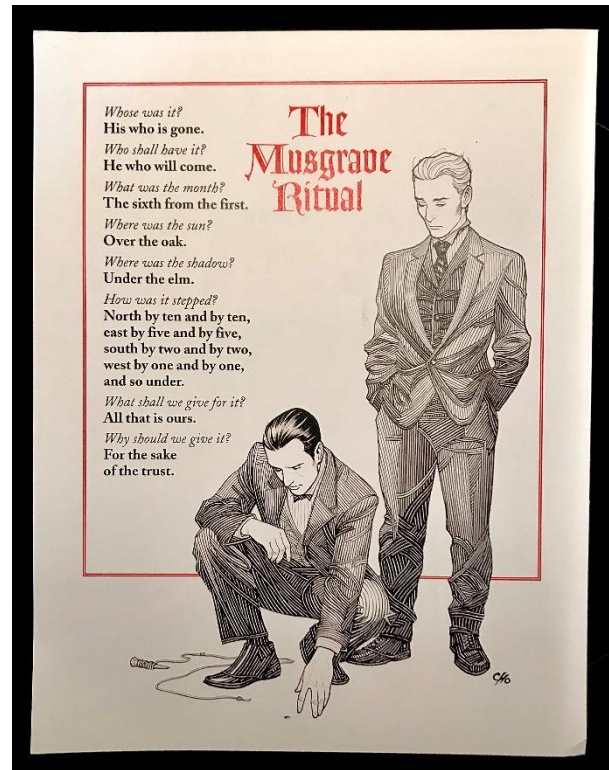
Perhaps the most meaningful event for the Nashville Scholars was the BSI Dinner. Jim Hawkins was seated next to me when Michael Kean, "Wiggins," announced the investitures. There were fourteen, but when the description of one was being read, I had the same feeling as when Shannon Carlisle was next to me when she was invested. I heard Michael Kean say, "... a member of the Nashville Scholars," and I knew he was referring to Jim just as I did when Michael Whelan had introduced her. Jim received the same investiture name, the Hans Sloane of My Age, as did John Bennett Shaw. A very exciting evening.

(Continued on p. 2)

Saturday morning, we visited the BSI Merchants Room, where the usual variety of Sherlockiana was for sale. The BSI Press released two books. One was *Referring to My Notes: Music and the Sherlockian Canon*, edited by Alexander Katz and Karen Wilson. Jim Hawkins has a chapter, “A Gift from the Gods: Sherlock Holmes’s Stradivarius.” The other book was in the BSI Manuscript Series, *A Masterpiece of Villainy*, edited by Ross E. Davies.

The BSI Luncheon Reception was sold out, and the attendees were treated to a buffet and an auction conducted by Peter Blau. A significant amount of money was raised from the proceeds derived from the sale of a variety of interesting pieces.

It was enjoyable to see many individuals who have been missed by not meeting last year due to the COVID-19 virus. A thorough review of the BSI Weekend will appear in the forthcoming issue of *The Baker Street Journal*.



## Book Reviews by Shinwell Johnson (a.k.a. Dean Richardson)

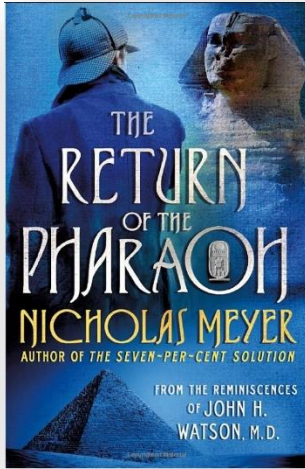
### The Return of the Pharaoh by Nicholas Meyer

Once again Nicholas Meyer has captured the spirit not only of ACD’s Great Detective and his Boswell, but also of the nature of the stories implicit in so many of the titles: “The Adventure.” Four of his five novels have entailed a journey far from Baker Street (to Vienna, to Paris, to Russia, and now to Egypt).

In *The Return of the Pharaoh*, set in 1910, Watson and his wife Juliet travel to Cairo to treat her tuberculosis, where she and those around her in the sanatorium are required to wear masks (inspired by the pandemic during which Meyer wrote the novel?). There Watson encounters Holmes in disguise. The latter has been hired by the Duchess of Uxbridge to find her missing husband, who disappeared while searching for a hidden pharaoh’s tomb that he hoped would contain valuable treasures. Holmes enlists the aid of Howard Carter (later known for finding the tomb of Tutankhamon). Soon the three are dealing with suspicious characters, government

conspiracies, and more, while Watson also tries to tend to his wife and conceal from her the dangers he's facing.

*Return* has the same mix of intrigue, action, mystery, and atmosphere (here Egyptian culture



and archaeology) we have come to expect from Nicholas Meyer. And there are the in-jokes and references to the canon. For example, one of Watson's medical colleagues is named Stark-Munro. The person they deal with in the British Foreign Office is named Le Carre. Another character is a missionary named Vautrin (referencing Balzac's master criminal?). A murder victim leaves a dying message in the dirt (reminiscent of *Study in Scarlet*'s "Rache") as well as an enigmatic spoken word (ala "The Speckled Band"). And one character, modelled on Mata Hari, has a Nashville connection.

Any Sherlockian pastiche is of necessity as much historical fiction as it is mystery, and Meyer spices the telling with many rich period details and some actual historical persons, as well as much about Egyptian antiquity. His narrative style evokes the Master's, enhanced by the use of British spellings

to lend a further feeling of authenticity. Also like the Master, he is first and foremost a great storyteller. The results are truly satisfying.



## The Sherlock Holmes Review: 2021 Sherlockian Annual

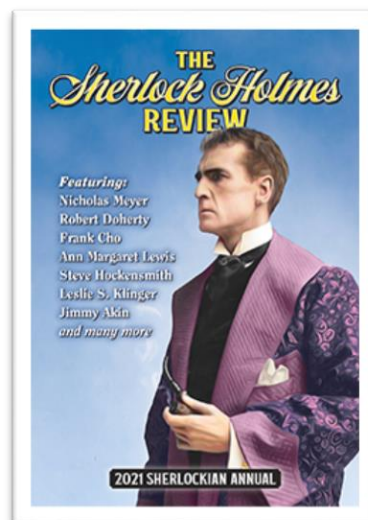
In 1986 two young Sherlockians, Steven Doyle and Charlie Largent, created a journal devoted to all aspects of Sherlockian studies (the canon, the literary agent, films, television, radio, pastiches, interviews, etc.). *The Sherlock Holmes Review* received great acclaim and ran for ten years. (Gasogene Books has begun reprinting the full run in facsimile volumes, but that is another story.)

Recently, Steve Doyle revived the journal in collaboration with Mark Gagen as an annual with this volume. (I'm guessing that the second volume should be out shortly.) The contents are eclectic, as you would expect. Leslie Klinger conducts a fascinating interview with Robert Doherty, creator and executive producer of *Elementary*. Rachel Gosch argues convincingly for the influence of "A Scandal in Bohemia" on the first Batman comic book story (whose Catwoman is much like Irene Adler). Damon Danes discusses the evolution of detectives in life and fiction during the Victorian era. Steve Doyle pays tribute to the late Michael Cox, who produced arguably the best Sherlock Holmes dramatic series (yes, the one with Jeremy Brett). Nicholas Meyer amusingly recounts his book tour for *The Adventure of the Peculiar Protocols*

and refers to his follow-up pastiche as *A Study in Gold* (perhaps a more appropriate title than *The Return of the Pharaoh*; I wonder who decided on the change?).

There are also essays on the illustrators of the canon during ACD's lifetime, the impracticality of storing tobacco in a Persian slipper, the impact of cricket on Sherlock's changing interest in sports, Moriarty and mathematics, the different ways Watson has been portrayed in films and on TV, the shifting placement of "The Cardboard Box" in the canon, and book and movie reviews, among other items (including a few too many typos)—in short, a potpourri, a miscellany, a great grab bag of Sherlockian stuff. Our own Jim Hawkins has a short piece about his most treasured book, the 1960 revised edition of *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* by Vincent Starrett, autographed twice by the author. (Gee, Jim, could I borrow that before Marino gets hold of it?)

*The Sherlock Holmes Review: 2021 Sherlockian Annual* is available directly from Gasogene Press here ([Gasogene Books - The Sherlock Holmes Review - 2021 Sherlockian Annual \(wessexpress.com\)](http://Gasogene Books - The Sherlock Holmes Review - 2021 Sherlockian Annual (wessexpress.com))).



More book reviews by Dean Richardson are [on the website](#).

## A Word from Your Webmaster

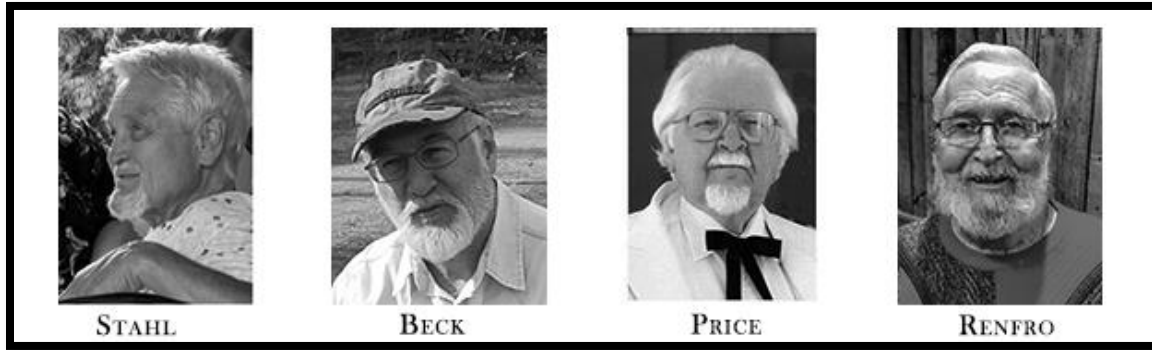
One of the goals I've set for our new website is to draw people who visit our Facebook page and Zoom meetings to our website. To do that I have created a couple of pages I want our members to know about: **Story Schedule** and **REPLAY**. Story Schedule is about the next story in the queue to be discussed, be it a Zoom meeting or in-person when we are once again back at Corky's BBQ in Brentwood. Here is the [Story Page for 3GAB](#), our story for February led by Jeff Steward. It, hopefully, could be our last Zoom meeting in 2022.

David Hayes had the honor of being first to lead the discussion in 2022: "The Yellow Face," published in *The Memoirs* in 1883. Once each meeting is over, on Zoom or in-person, those notes will be placed on an archive-like page called "REPLAY." [You can see that here](#).

It is my hope that you will feel ownership of this new website and use it often.

<https://www.nashvillescholars.com>

As we looked back across 43 years of the Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem, we thought it might be interesting to repost Ken Beck's story he wrote for *The Wilson Post* in 2017. The immediate story was about our summer picnic at Gael and SuSan Stahl's place on Old Hickory Lake, but Beck took his readers all the way back to the beginning of our scion society's faltering start. Again, Gael and Kay kept us together with Kay's determination to keep the newsletter alive and Gael's enthusiasm about how wonderful Sherlock Holmes is and how excellent Conan Doyle's stories are.



*The Charter Member Gang*

Here is Ken Beck's article reprinted with permission from *The Wilson Post*:

A native of Plainville, Kansas, and a former Catholic priest who served as a chaplain at Fisk University, Meharry Medical College, and Tennessee State University, Stahl discovered Holmes at a B. Dalton Bookstore in Knoxville one day in 1977.

"They had come out with a book with all the Sidney Paget artwork, who did the artwork for most of the Holmes stories and two of the novels," said Stahl of the artist, whose illustrations in "The Strand Magazine," beginning in the early 1890s, helped make icons of Holmes and his sidekick Dr. Watson. "I bought that book and took it home and read one of the stories. I told my wife, 'You know, this detective story is kind of good,' and the next time it started raining, I said, 'Sit down, I'm gonna read to you,' and we began reading the stories to one another."



Two years later, Stahl spotted an announcement in "The Tennessean" inviting people to a meeting of those with a common interest in Holmes.

Stahl took his wife and two friends and met about 30 others who were to become the charter members of the **Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem**.

Not long afterward, Gael and Susan left to spend two years in Europe and California. When they returned to Tennessee, they learned the club had about fallen apart as the organizer had moved. Gale tracked down Vickie Overstreet and Patricia Blocker, two charter members

who had continued to publish a newsletter. (The club's quarterly newsletter, "**Plugs & Dottles**," today is produced online by Jim Hawkins and Dean Richardson.)

"I got a hold of them and said, 'Let's get the group going again.' We met at the Donelson Library and got it going again. Then we met at different libraries and in people's homes, and now we mostly go to nice restaurants and have our meetings," said Stahl, retired after 30 years as editor of the Tennessee Municipal League's newspaper, "*Tennessee Town and City*."

**The Nashville Scholars** have convened every month since Stahl returned to the Music City area in April 1982. Typically, they gather the third Saturday of the month at Corky's BBQ in Brentwood and at McNamara's Pub in Nashville for a Christmas dinner. They met for many years at the former **Sherlock Holmes Pub** in Music City.

As for what drew Stahl into the casebooks of the master detective, he said, “The foggy Victorian atmosphere, for one thing. Doyle’s a masterful storyteller. He knows how to get all your attention. He was born a good storyteller. I’ve read a lot of his books but none as good as his Sherlock Holmes books.”

“I think a part of it is because he started something new. He had a medical professor at Edinburgh, Joseph Bell, who was a medical detective. People would come to him, and he would pretty well diagnose them before they opened their mouth. Doyle was quite impressed by that and a few years later thought about writing a detective story. He brought Joe Bell as Sherlock Holmes, and he was the only one doing that type of thing. He figured it out by detecting it from the beginning, and that proved to be popular with readers.”

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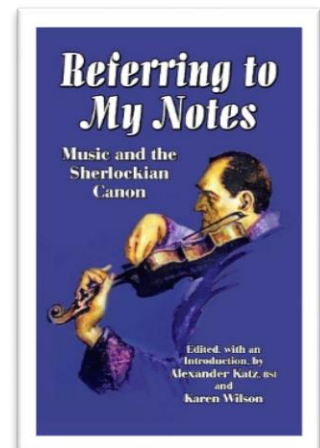
## Editors’ Extras

Essays / Book Reviews / News / Trends / Opinions  
from your *Plugs & Dottles* editors

One of the sections of the new website that Dean and I are excited about is what we call Editors’ Extras. This is where we hope to keep you in the know on Sherlockian events, trends, and “breaking news.” Here is that [website section](#).



As many of you “old timers” know, Dean has been our chief proof-reader for all publications coming from the Nashville Scholars for years. He seems to balk at the idea that he is my co-editor for *Plugs and Dottles*, but in my mind he certainly is. I mean, this is what Dean Richardson does for a living! We get the benefit of his excellent work—pro bono. Apart from editing my poor attempt at writing for this newsletter, Dean helped me with an article published in the *Saturday Review of Literature* titled “Coming Full Circle to Honor and Remember John Bennett Shaw.” Jon Lellenberg of Santa Fe, who was the BSI historian for many years, encouraged me to write that bit of history, published in the SRL in 2020. The most important project Dean has helped me with was my article for the recent BSI publication, *Referring to My Notes: Music and the Sherlockian Canon* (Baker Street Irregular Press, 2021). It was the most fun and educational writing assignment I ever volunteered to write.



If it had not been for the encouragement of Dr. Marino Alvarez and Jon Lellenberg, I would never have begun such a journey.

Interestingly, Marino had an article in the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 2019, “Undershaw’s Conversion to Stepping Stones School.” (Both articles published in the *Saturday Review of Literature* are available on our website in the section [Essays, Presentations and Published Papers](#).) You will also find publications by Bill Mason, David Hayes, Tom Feller, and Tom Vickstrom on this page. I look forward to seeing more of our scholars’ articles there. Please dust off your laptops and keyboards and prepare something for us to share with all visitors to our website.



## A Very Nice Christmas Greeting Indeed!

### A Letter from Wiggins

Dear fellow Sherlockian,

It is my pleasure to invite you to attend the 2022 Annual Dinner of the Baker Street Irregulars in New York City on Friday evening, January 14.

For your Official Invitation, Weekend Summary, and Reservation Form, see my letter via the link below. In addition to the Dinner, you are welcome to participate in as many or few of our other activities as you choose.


## A Confession

There was a time when I didn’t care about such things. But working on the John Bennett Shaw website put me in touch with so many caring and generous Sherlockians that I came to the point where being counted in this group was something I desired. More precisely, I wanted very much to attend just one BSI dinner, to be in the midst of those whom Shaw loved so much and to engage in conversation with the men and women who find “the game” something they gladly devote much of their time and resources to. When the invitation came from Michael Kean, “Wiggins,” I felt like I had realized a dream: I had finally reached the goal of getting closer to John Shaw than ever before. I would be sitting in his chair, so to speak.

Little did I know, or even suspect, that I would come away from that evening at the Yale Club, having enjoyed dinner and memories with Marino Alvarez and others, and invested as “The Hans Sloane of My Age,” the same investiture Shaw received in 1965. The moment Michael said, “. . . member of the Nashville Scholars . . .,” Marino jabbed his elbow into my ribs and shouted, “You’re in!” His petitions on my behalf were

certainly a big part of my being recognized officially by The Baker Street Irregulars. The hours I spent gathering information for John Shaw’s website, where older Sherlockians can bring to mind pleasant memories and where more recent followers of Holmes can discover just who John Bennett Shaw was, were not only most enjoyable but gave me a goal in my retirement. That goal was to honor and indelibly portray for others the man who was so very influential in my Sherlockian journey. The more I find out about him, the more I want to know. His dear friends joined me in that task and sent all kinds of notes, letters, and photos as well as their memories of John Shaw. Tim Johnson made available all of Shaw’s materials carefully catalogued in the Sherlock Holmes Collections at the University of Minnesota. Together I think we have succeeded to some degree. Apparently others agreed. Thank you, John Bennett Shaw, for being there with me that night. I felt your presence even in the midst of thunderous applause.

(Jim Hawkins — *The Hans Sloane of My Age*, #2.)



A Reminder about our Reading List for 2022 and our new website. A Zoom link (should we continue to need it) and notes for the stories under discussion [ARE FOUND HERE](#). Past discussion notes will also be on this page.



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. He 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.

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.



***We will see you online.***