

Constance Joie Steik was born in Passaic, New Jersey, on Friday, August 07, 1931.

Her father was Karl Theodor Steik, a native Latvian ... known to the family as "Pop" ... he was 49 years old when my mother was born. My mother's mother was Beatrice May Thomson, whose parents were both English ... she was known to friends as "Tommie" and known to the family as "Gaga" ... she was 39 years old when my mother was born.

My mother, was the fourth and last daughter born to Karl and Beatrice. Her eldest sister Elizabeth ... known to the family as "Betty" ... was born in 1920. Her next oldest sister was Kathryn ... known to the family as "Bobbie" ... was born in 1922. And her next oldest sister was Caroline ... known in her earlier years as "Bunny" because of a Halloween costume she once wore ... was born in 1929. And then there was my mother ... known to the family as "Bubbles" ... because she apparently blew lots of bubbles as an infant.

Much of my mother's younger years were spent living at 42 Aubrey Road in Montclair, New Jersey ... many of those years with her maternal grandmother. Because her parents were both worked, my mother spent much of her free time caring for her grandmother.

A bit of a digression here ... after graduating from college, her sister Kathryn married a fellow named Warren Smith, known to our family as "Smitty." Smitty was one of this country's first jet airplane test pilots following World War II. After Smitty and Bobbie were married, they moved to Corpus Christi, TX. After some time, they welcomed a baby girl into the world and named her Bonnie Lee. When Bonnie was one-and-a-half years old, Smitty was killed when his plane crashed during a landing. Bobbie and Bonnie moved back to New Jersey to live at the Aubrey Road house. Bobbie found work, leaving my mother to do a lot of babysitting during her high school years. It was during those years that my mother and Bonnie became very close. More on that later.

My mother followed in the footsteps of her three older sisters and attended Montclair High School. In an autobiography my mother wrote the teachers would often say to her, "What? Another Steik daughter? How many of you are there?"

Another brief digression ... her sister Caroline, a member of the Class of 1947, had a very famous classmate. His name was Buzz Aldrin ... the second man to walk on the Moon. Buzz's sister was a friend of my mother.

My mother graduated from Montclair High School in 1949. For reason I don't understand, she headed north and spent her freshman year at the University of Vermont. Apparently, she thought the winter to be too cold so she transferred to the Maryland College for Women located in Annapolis, MD ... not far from the US Naval Academy. Unfortunately, the school closed its doors at the end of her junior year

forcing her to once again transfer to another college. But she did not opt to follow her three sisters to the University of Colorado.

And what school did she choose? The University of Wyoming. Why you might ask? She undoubtedly chose this school because it is where her father had taught chemistry way back in the 1910's ... and her mother had taught home economics at the same time. The school is where her parents met.

My mother pledged the Delta Delta Delta sorority during the fall semester of her senior year. One weekend the sorority joined the Sigma Nu fraternity for a party in the mountains outside Laramie and this where she met my father. By Thanksgiving of their senior year things were apparently going well and my father invited my mother to meet his parents in his hometown of Powell, Wyoming. At some point during the spring semester my parents became engaged. After graduation, they headed east and were married at the Presbyterian Church of Upper Montclair on August 22, 1953.

Soon after their honeymoon in the Pocono Mountains, they moved to Philadelphia and my father began his four-year study of dentistry at the University of Pennsylvania. My mother started work as a telephone operator which she did until I was born in February 1956. Upon graduation from dental school in 1957, my father signed up for a four-year stint in the United States Navy. His first assignment was out in California at Moffett Field. My folks rented a little house just across the street from railroad tracks. After a time, my father was reassigned to serve aboard the USS General AE Anderson, a troop transport supporting the fleet off of Korea ... which is where he was on my parents' fifth wedding anniversary ... the day my brother was born.

After four years in the Navy, my father wanted to get out and head back to Wyoming and open a private practice in his hometown of Powell. Unfortunately, Powell already had a dentist so he headed two towns to the East to the little town of Lovell.

The folks in Lovell apparently did not have a lot of money so they would often pay my father with chickens, corn, and even some amazing paintings that still hang in my mother's places at Ingleside and Bethany Beach, DE. My father soon realized if he was going to raise his family properly, he was going need some money. So in 1962 he rejoined the Navy and was assigned to serve at Camp Pendleton, California for a short nine-month stay.

After receiving new orders, he headed off to Okinawa to find a place for us to live. This left my mother with the chore of packing things up and traveling from California to Okinawa with two young children ... I imagine this was not an easy chore. It was on Okinawa that my folks purchased their first home, a concrete bunker of a house overlooking the East China Sea. It was during those two years that my mother started teaching kindergarten at the school in Camp Boone, less than a mile from our home. And it was during those two years that my mother traveled to many

destinations in the Orient with my father and once with her mother. We also acquired our first pet while there, a boxer dog named Teko.

In the summer of 1964 the family was on the move again, this time headed for Maryland where my father had various assignments around the Washington area until being accepted into the Navy's post-graduate dental school at the Bethesda Navy Hospital.

It was during our three years in Bethesda that my mother continued her teaching. This time teaching nursery school at Bradley Hills Presbyterian Church. She also volunteered as a Gray Lady at the Bethesda Navy Hospital where she provided non-medical services to sick, injured, and disabled patients.

Upon finishing his post-graduate schooling, my father was assigned to serve as one of three dental officers aboard the USS Enterprise, the nation's first nuclear-powered aircraft carrier. He found a lovely home for us in Walnut Creek, California. During the falls of 1967 and 1968, the ship would often leave its home port of Alameda for training missions before heading off to the Tonkin Gulf to support the nation's war effort in Vietnam. Seven-month deployments are a long time ... so my mother had to serve both as mother and father during those times.

For those of you old enough, you may remember that the USS Enterprise experienced a tragic fire in January 1969 while on its final training mission before heading off to Vietnam. My father was working on a patient early one morning when bombs started going off on the fleet deck. General Quarters were immediately sounded and my father reported to his GQ Station where he served as a medic. It just so happened that his station was the one closest to where all of the bombs were exploding. During that event he had to perform life-saving emergency procedures. Thirty-five men were killed that day ... most so badly burned they could not be identified except via dental records. I don't think I ever saw my mother so scared as I did when I came from school that day ... we had yet to receive word about my father's situation.

If there was anything good that resulted from that incident, it was that the ship had to return to Honolulu for temporary repairs which meant that most of the crew had some unexpected time off. My mother left my brother and I with friends and flew over to Hawai'i. So ... my folks got to do some more traveling in the Orient during that time.

When the ship returned from its time in the Tonkin Gulf in July 1969, it required additional repairs at the only dry dock large enough to hold the ship ... and that was in Bremerton, WA. So the Navy loaded up the hanger deck with the family cars and and the families and headed up north for a three-day cruise. We spent an idyllic month in a rented house on Puget Sound before making the cross-country drive back to Rockville, MD.

My folks purchased a wonderful home in New Mark Commons overlooking the small lake there and we became the Wilkies at Watchwater Way. This time around, my father served as a teacher in the same post-graduate dental school at Bethesda Navy Hospital while also working on some pretty famous patients.

In 1976 my father accepted an assignment in downtown Washington at the Navy's Bureau of Personnel ... his work was to make assignments for all of the commanders in the Navy's Dental Corps. Much to my mother's delight, this new position did not involve any move! It was also during this assignment that my father was promoted to the rank of captain. In the Spring of 1978, my father's last piece of business was to assign himself to the position of head of all Navy dentists in the Pacific arena ... including all bases and ships. And this meant that my mother had to once again pack up a household and move to Honolulu, HI.

I think it was during the four years my folks lived in Hawai'i that my mother was the happiest. They had taken our beloved dog, Mittens, with them ... there was plenty of opportunity to travel, and she was the wife of someone pretty important.

In the summer of 1982 my parents returned to their home in Rockville and my father served in a variety of different positions in Washington and at the Bethesda Navy Hospital before retiring in the summer of 1984. He followed many of his peers to the Georgetown University Dental School and spent five years doing what he loved most ... teaching. Then at the end of the spring semester of 1989, the school closed and he continued his teaching for five more years at New York University, teaching post-graduate prosthodontics. During those years, he would often travel down to Maryland for the weekend ... and my mother even made a few trips up to New York.

My father retired for a final time at the end of the spring 1994 semester. It was then my parents purchased their first place in Bethany Beach, DE. Three years later they sold their place in Sea Colony West and purchased the town home in Bethany Proper that we still have today. My parents loved spending time at the beach, making many friends both in their neighborhood and on the beach.

My father passed away in October 2005 after a two-year battle with Hodgkins Lymphoma. My mother opted to stay in the marital home. Then in late November 2011 she took a tumble down the stairs and wound up with a compression fracture of her L1 lumbar vertebrae. After a brief stay in the hospital, she began her stay here at Ingleside at King Farm up on the seventh floor while she recovered. A short time later she moved down to her independent living unit on the third floor. During the next seven years she experienced a series of other tumbles and broken bones, all requiring brief stays recovering on the seventh floor. Then in late November 2019 another fall and another broken bone, this time her collar bone. And while she was fortunate to keep her apartment on the third floor, the seventh floor became her base of operations until she passed away on Saturday, March 28, 2026.

Reflection on the Life of Constance Joie Wilkie

So that is my mother's life history. Now I'd like to take just another two minutes to tell you about who she was.

She was a devoted daughter—always the sister serving as the care giver

She was a sister who wanted to be “grown up” like her older sisters

She was an attentive aunt to her niece Bonnie

[A side note here ... Bonnie passed away at the age of 63 in July 2012. My mother never got over this. I know that they are now happily reunited in Heaven.]

She was a caregiving granddaughter

She was a devoted wife for 52 years

She was a proud mother to my brother and me

She was a grandmother to four granddaughters

She was a daughter-in-law

She was a sister-in-law

She was a niece

She was a cousin

She was a great aunt

She was a home economics student

She was a Delta Delta Delta sorority sister

She was a military wife who moved her family across the country several times and even to Hawai'i and to the Orient

She was an active member of the Navy Dental Wives organization

She was a world traveler

She was a teacher

She was a volunteer ... she spent countless hours working at the Bargain Box in Rockville before it closed several years ago

She was a Christian

She was a life-long friend

She was a good neighbor

She was an active member in the Potomac Womens' Club

She took great pride in her homes

She loved her clothes

She was an excellent cook

She loved to entertain

She was a player of Rummy-O and “do-er” of puzzles

She was a proud native of the State of New Jersey

She was a lover of the Great State of Wyoming

She was a lover of the beaches in New Jersey and Delaware

And she even wrote a short story about her summers in Bethany Beach

And she was the last of her generation.