



Marian Catherine Birkhead

September 18, 1937 - August 24, 2016

Marian Catherine Birkhead, long-time host of WESM-FM's immensely popular gospel radio program 'Stairway to Heaven', passed peacefully with her daughter-in-law, Fareeba Birkhead, at her side on Wednesday, August 24. She was seventy-eight (78) years old.

A native of Salisbury, Maryland, Birkhead was the daughter of the late John and Allie Birkhead. Marian received her gift of music from her father and took her first piano lesson in the third-grade. She pursued her passion and majored in Music and English at Bennett College in North Carolina, setting the stage for her future involvement as a radio personality and staple figure at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore.

"Birkhead Beat", which aired on WJDY-FM was Marian's first radio show. The show was an instant sensation and Birkhead became widely acclaimed as Delmarva's "first lady of gospel music." She worked with gospel greats such as Reverend James Cleveland, Reverend Al Green, Pastor Shirley Caesar and the Mighty Clouds of Joy in her travels. Marian hosted shows on WOLC-FM and Channel 47, but her most renowned role was host of "Stairway to Heaven," a syndicated gospel program that ran from 1990 through 2000. Marian retired from radio in 2013, citing health concerns.

Marian began her career at the University of Maryland Eastern Shore in 1970,

as Administrative Assistant to Dr. Howard Wright, UMES' 7th President. Over the next 39 years, she served in a variety of other positions before coming to work for the School of Business and Technology. Marian's most beloved titles during her tenure were "Mom" or "Ms. B" given to her by beloved students. Birkhead loved her students and would refer to them as her "babies."

For her extraordinary public service to the greater community, Marian has been the recipient of numerous awards and recognitions including: Outstanding Woman of the Year, Citation from Governor Robert Ehrlich, Jr., Letter of Recognition from President William J. Clinton and she won the coveted USM Regent University System Staff Award.

Active in the Somerset County Arts Council, Birkhead founded Friends of the Arts, a non-profit organization that uses artistry to enrich the lives of children and families throughout Somerset County, whereby, children will have opportunities to have positive live art experiences through public performances and exhibitions. Through Friends of the Arts, Marian secured a grant to bring the African Children's Choir to the area twice.

Marian Birkhead was a member of Metropolitan United Methodist Church, Mill's Memorial Baptist Church, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Toastmistresses of America, and the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP).

The legacy Marian leaves behind are her family, friends and the multitude of fans who were touched by her--and loved her right back.

Lovingly Submitted ~ The Family

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Birkhead, please visit our
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