

Judith Penn Clayton

Judith "Judy" Penn Clayton, 88, of Trussville, Alabama, passed away peacefully on July 31, 2026, surrounded by her loving family.

Judy was born on May 22, 1938, at Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to Col. William Scott Penn, Jr. and Helen Marshall Penn. As the oldest child in a military family, she spent her childhood moving from place to place, embracing each new adventure with curiosity and grace. In the summer of 1946, at the age of eight, her family moved to Germany during the post-World War II rebuilding effort. While there, Judy became fluent in German and developed a lifelong appreciation for people, cultures, and the wider world.

After returning to the United States, she graduated from high school in Fort Monroe, Virginia, and attended the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. During her sophomore year, she married the love of her life, George E. Clayton, Jr. and transferred to Wake Forest University, where she earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in 1960.

Judy and George made their home in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, where they began raising their family. They were devoted members of St. Paul's Episcopal Church, where Judy faithfully served in youth ministry and taught confirmation classes. Sharing God's love with young people became one of the defining callings of her life.

Throughout her career, Judy served as a high school English teacher and later as a medical social worker at Nash General Hospital in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. She also served on the board of Crisis Control Ministries in Winston-Salem, NC. Whether through her professional work, volunteer service, or personal relationships, Judy was a fierce advocate for those in need and a steadfast friend to the underdog.

More than anything, Judy devoted her life to loving, nurturing, and encouraging children and young people. As a teacher, church leader, mother, aunt, grandmother, and great-grandmother, she invested her time, wisdom, and compassion in countless lives. She had a remarkable gift for seeing people exactly where they were and loving them without judgment. Over the years, she "adopted" many extra teenagers and young adults, offering guidance, encouragement, and unconditional support. Her nieces and nephews held a particularly special place in her heart, and she loved them as if they were her own children.

Judy was known for her warm smile, engaging stories, and wise counsel. Friends and family alike knew they could always find a listening ear, a thoughtful perspective, and a gracious spirit in her presence.

She was also deeply creative and found joy in writing, reading, basket weaving, cross-stitch, and many other artistic pursuits. Her creativity reflected the beauty, thoughtfulness, and attention she brought to every aspect of life.

Judy was a devoted follower of Jesus Christ and throughout her life, she remained a faithful and active member of the Episcopal Church. She worshiped and served in several congregations over the years, including St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Winston-Salem, St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Morehead City, Church of the Good Shepherd in Rocky Mount, North Carolina, and most recently, Church of the Holy Cross in Trussville, Alabama. In every church community she joined, Judy found ways to serve others, nurture young people, and share God's love through faithful ministry and friendship.

In January 1997, Judy lost George, her beloved husband and partner in life, after faithfully caring for him through a long illness. Widowed at the age of 58, she continued to live a life marked by service, generosity, faith, and devotion to others. She especially cherished time spent with family and loved to travel, creating treasured memories wherever she went.

Judy was preceded in death by her parents, William Scott Penn and Helen Marshall Penn; her husband, George E. Clayton, Jr.; her infant son, Penn Clayton; and her infant brother, Henry Penn.

She is survived by her siblings, Susan Penn Mickey (Bill) and William Scott Penn, III (Nancy), her children, Anne Clayton Vines (Rick), George E. Clayton III (Trina), and Paige Clayton Keeton (Randy); her grandchildren, Meredith Paradise (Blake), Sarah Vines, Caroline Clayton, and Claire Vines; and her great-grandchildren, Marshall Paradise and Clayton Paradise. She is also survived by many nieces, nephews, extended family members, and dear friends whose lives were enriched by her love and friendship.

A memorial service to celebrate Judy's life will be held on Saturday, September 12, 2026 at 11:00 a.m. at the Good Shepherd Episcopal Church in Rocky Mount, NC .

In lieu of flowers, and in loving memory of Judy, the family invites gifts to a ministry close to her heart. There can be no greater tribute to her life than continuing the work she cared about so deeply: loving and supporting children in need.

Donations may be made at:

<https://justiceandmercy.org/judy-clayton/>

Judy's legacy lives on in the countless lives she touched through her faith, compassion, generosity, and unwavering love. Her family takes comfort in knowing that the kindness she shared so freely will continue to ripple through generations to come.