



Mary Lee Partington

April 21, 2024

It is with deep sadness, yet profound gratitude for a life lived with purpose and joy, that we share the news of the passing of Mary Lee Partington on April 21, 2024. A resident of North Scituate, formerly of Providence and Cumberland, Mary Lee was a nationally recognized secondary education teacher, a gifted American singer-songwriter and performer, and a champion of the arts and humanities. Mary Lee was a steadfast preservationist of the culture and heritage of the people who settled in the Blackstone River Valley. Always the teacher and consummate storyteller, Mary Lee's music catalogue, steeped in Celtic tradition, serves as a lasting legacy that will influence generations to come. Though she held many titles in her life, the two that brought her the most pride were that of mother and grandmother, affectionately known as "Birdy" by her loving daughter and granddaughters.

Tremendously proud of her heritage, Mary Lee unselfishly was the keeper of own family's traditions and history, always quick to note that she is "kin" to a family of singers dating back to the 19th century. Born on the Summer Solstice of 1954, her earliest recollection of singing was with her mother at the tender age of three. Together, through the years, their vocal talent delighted all who stilled to listen, treasured fondly as the highlight of family gatherings and holidays. The daughter of a distinguished Rhode Island State Trooper (RISP), and part of a storied law enforcement and public service family, she was inspired by a calling to share her many gifts in the fields teaching, arts and

humanities.

Preceded in death by her parents Captain Willard F. Partington (RISP) and Elizabeth (Whitehead) Partington, and most recently, her beloved sister-in law Lynne (Frawley) Partington. She is survived by her daughter Sarah Kate Drouin Vitale and her husband Adam of Rehoboth, MA, her talented granddaughters, Caroline Mae and Katherine Rose also of Rehoboth, her devoted fiancé Glenn Siner of North Scituate, RI and his mother Mabel Coyne of Chepachet, RI, her sister Kathleen Partington of Cumberland, RI and her brother Gary Partington (Lynne) of Bourne, MA, her nieces, Samantha Partington and her fiancé Cory Kramer of East Boston, MA, and Tess Partington Lambros and her husband Michael, and their children Henry and Natalie of Marstons Mills, MA. Mary Lee had a special place in her heart for her “beloveds” as she called her cousins Scott Partington, his wife Rebecca and their daughter Emily Mae, and Sean Brennan and his wife Lynne, all of Cumberland, RI. She leaves behind the cousins of the Whitehead and Major families and was preceded by her cousins, Brian Brennan and Jonathan Partington.

A graduate of Cumberland High School and Rhode Island College, Mary Lee took her love of teaching and literature to Burrillville High School where she captured the imagination of scores of young people through her arts-based teaching methods blending literature, poetry, theater and writing. Students not only learned about Shakespeare - Mary Lee brought the Elizabethan era to life. Her unique teaching practices were a cover story in Teacher Magazine and Education Week and the focus of a television episode of School Stories, a program of the National Education Association and The Learning Channel. She was lauded in a book by G. Wayne Miller entitled, *Coming of Age: The True Adventure of Two American Teens* where the author devoted an entire chapter to her charismatic gift for touching the hearts and minds of others, and her perfection of the art of teaching. In 1993, Mary Lee added another

accolade to her resume, 21st Century Rhode Island Teacher of the Year, based on a student essay by Scott Dumouchelle praising her “love and lively spirit that make the learning atmosphere inside the classroom the happiest and most joyful of all the classrooms that I have ever been in...she taught me that life was hard and one must always work their hardest in order to get by.”

Work hard, Mary Lee Partington did, inside and outside of the classroom. Her love of all things Irish, especially music, would lead to the creation of the lauded New England-based folk music band Pendragon of which she was a founding member and lead vocalist for 34 years. Pendragon celebrated the rich traditions of Celtic music and brought to life the legacy of generations of immigrants. Her song book includes numerous songs and ballads that she wrote depicting the lives those who settled along the Blackstone River. Mary Lee and Pendragon were both nominated and won numerous awards for best vocals, best folk and music categories for more than a decade in New England.

Mary Lee together with Pendragon band members were the driving force behind the creation of the Blackstone River Theater (BRT) and efforts to preserve the Masonic Temple in Cumberland. Today, the BRT is a non-profit cultural arts center where the music, dance and folk arts traditions of the Blackstone River Valley come to life. It is only fitting that as a summer solstice baby, her influence and inspiration can be seen in the annual Summer Solstice Festival. She left her role as Chairman of the BRT's Board of Directors and Artistic Director in 2007 after 25 years of volunteer service. Today, she holds the esteemed and distinct honor of being the Theatre's Artistic Director Emeritus.

The energy and dedication that Mary Lee devoted to promoting and expanding the state's arts and humanities sector is unparalleled. She served

two terms as a Board Director for the Rhode Island Council for the Humanities primarily focused on developing grants and programs. She served as a Board Secretary, Grants Committee Chair, and as Chairman of the Board of Directors and member of the Executive Committee. Mary Lee has been developing programming at Slater Mill in the City of Pawtucket for decades to celebrate its unique place in history as the birthplace of the industrial revolution and the labor movement. She was the Artistic Director for the Rhode Island Labor and Ethnic Heritage Festival and helped in the creation of the Pawtucket Arts Festival, serving many years as its Artistic Director. She understood the important role that young people play in the long-term preservation of the arts and cultural traditions. She served as Chairman of the Board of New Urban Arts, a nationally heralded youth through the arts organization.

In recognition of Mary Lee's lifetime contributions to education, performance, community engagement and to preserving the rich heritage of the Blackstone River Valley, she was nominated by United States Senator Jack Reed for The Blackstone Valley Heritage Corridor's John H. Chafee Heritage Award which honors "heroes" who have demonstrated the Valley's long tradition of leadership and inspiration. She humbly and graciously accepted this honor among family and lifelong friends in December, 2023.

Mary Lee continued to blend her love of music and storytelling both on stage and in the music studio. She performed as part of a music duo, Partington & Sweeney, in collaboration with guitarist Ed Sweeney. The 2020 CD compilation, *Commonplaces with Partington & Sweeney*, features beautiful American and British songs and ballads as well as some of Mary Lee's folk-roots originals.

Mary Lee took great pride in her collaboration with Kevin Doyle's Roscommon Soles to create innovative stage shows and performances that capture the

Irish love of family and friends through dance, music, and songs with heartfelt stories and local Irish history woven throughout the performance based on scripts developed and narrated by Mary Lee. She delighted in the creative crossroads of writing and singing the stories that shine a spotlight on ordinary folk who embrace extraordinary experiences as an everyday expectation. She also expressed joy in working with All-Ireland award winners, fiddler Sheila Falls and uilleann piper Torrin Ryan.

Mary Lee's final performance was truly a labor of love and endurance. Determined that the show must go on despite daunting health challenges, she was driven to complete her work on Roscommon Soles, "The Pipes Are Calling", a show to celebrate the season of St. Patrick. On February 28th, 2024, Mary Lee Partington took the professional stage for the last time at Providence Performing Arts Center. The performance was epic - so special for many reasons, the theater location, the inclusion of the PPAC Wurlitzer organ in the show, but most touching was that she shared the stage. "Birdy" and her granddaughter, Caroline, who inherited the family gift of music, poignantly performed together. Mary Lee was beaming as Caroline turned to look at her as she closed the show singing "Danny Boy" and "When Irish Eyes are Smiling" before a packed PPAC audience who joined them in song. Caroline can now claim that she, too, is part of a family of singers that dates back to the 19th century.

Mary Lee, never one to sit still, loved to travel for both work and pleasure. Together, she and her favorite travel companion and dear friend, Laura Travis, regularly journeyed to destinations in Ireland, England and Scotland to explore locations tied to their ancestral roots and to rekindle friendships developed over the years. Just this past February, Mary Lee traveled to Glasgow to attend the Celtic Connection Music Festival.

Mary Lee did everything with purpose and determination from projects she

chose to work on to her choice of travel destinations. But, the beautiful 18th century home and property she shared with her fiancé, Glenn Siner, was where she knew her heart belonged. They shared a love of history and all things “old”, and authentically restored a home which reflects that love and is a tribute to its origins. It was here, in their beloved homestead, that Mary Lee was able to spend her final weeks and days in Glenn’s loving and devoted care. She came home to “The Farm” – to the place that she loved – to be surrounded by the company of cherished friends and family. She wanted everyone to know that she was grateful for the life she was given, felt she lived it to the fullest, and mostly, that she was happy. Although she felt she still had much to do and hated to leave, she accepted her prognosis with grace, courage and good humor. She continued to direct the show, in essence writing the script for her “beloveds” to follow at the time of her passing. At the moment of her passing, we are comforted to share that she was encircled by loving family, listening and soothed by her favorite Irish songs - a perfect Irish goodbye.

Mary Lee was grateful and fortunate to be cared for by Dr. Cara Matthews, MD and her entire team at The Research Program in Women’s Oncology at Women and Infants Hospital. A brilliant teacher and researcher at heart, Mary Lee approached her cancer diagnosis as she did any of her complicated projects. She was dogged in her research, went to appointments armed with information, wanting to know every detail, and determined to have a strong voice in her care plan. Dr. Matthews was the “North Star” Mary Lee trusted to guide her through this arduous journey. Like others before her, she fought her cancer with tenacious purpose, bravery and grace. In true Mary Lee style, she was proud to contribute through her courageous participation in clinical trials designed to promote advancements and improve outcomes in cancer treatment for women in the future.

In keeping with Mary Lee's expressed wishes and also to honor this year which would have been her 70th Summer Solstice birthday - plans for a celebration of her life are underway to take place at a future date this summer at the Blackstone River Theater, featuring many of her favorite artists and friends – as she might say a “Hoolie.”

Those who shared in her storied life, and wish to honor Mary Lee's memory are invited to consider a donation to the Blackstone River Theatre, 549 Broad Street, Cumberland, RI 02864, or to Women and Infants Hospital Program in Women's Oncology, 101 Dudley Street, Providence, RI 02905.

Tribute Wall

KD

“ She was Ms. Drouin when I knew her, and she saved me. I met her when I was a student at Burrillville High School. I was new to the school, quiet by nature, and had a hard time making friends. She saw me when I felt invisible, taking the time to sit down and talk with me about literature and poetry before I was even her student. Her compassion pulled me out of an unfathomably dark place.

Later, as her student, she opened my eyes to romantic and transcendentalist thought, helping me realize that there were countless others like me, and that I could see my soul reflected in Emerson, Thoreau, and Hesse. She encouraged my writing when I saw no value in my skills, and today, I am an author with a global audience because of her. I am also an educator, emulating her teaching style, fostering the students who feel unseen, and inspiring the next generation.

I would not be the man I am if not for her. She was like a mother to me, and news of her passing was devastating. But I will do everything in my power to keep her spirit alive, and honor her in everything that I do.

Thank you for everything.

Kieran M. Doyle - January 15, 2025 at 08:25 AM

BF

“ Mary Lee was the reason I chose to pursue acting. She helped me work on my audition for a scholarship to Rhode Island College. She was her own FORCE OF NATURE .. We were all blessed to have known her and to have had her in our lives.

Bill Forbes - September 04, 2024 at 03:51 PM

GM

“ I met Mary Lee on the first day of reporting for my book "Coming of Age" and spent many days in her classroom during the year that followed. From that first day, her brilliance, joy, warmth, humor, compassion and genius as a teacher and musician/singer were on display, and we became good friends -- a friendship that lasted long after she left teaching. Those of us who knew her were lucky and blessed, as the saying goes. My condolences to Glenn, Sarah and the rest of her family and extended circle of friends. Mary Lee was metaphorically a total eclipse of the sun: rarely seen but always cherished.

G. Wayne Miller - May 11, 2024 at 07:41 AM

SS

“ Deep condolences to Mary Lee’s family. I am just hearing of Mary Lee going home. I met Mary Lee in the 80s when she was a co-founder and singing with Pendragon. Since then, I had the joy of hearing her throughout the years. What a dear special sweet ever cheerful soul who engaged her additional skills to helping others. I am deeply saddened, but this brilliant soul has added her light to Heaven, that feeds us all. Love to you, Mary Lee, on your journey forward. Ever in my heart.



Sylvia Ann Soares - May 08, 2024 at 11:57 AM

CD

“ Mary Lee was someone who made you feel like your life was a bit charmed just from knowing her. Hard working. Creative. Talented. Wise. Charming. Generous. Her memory is a blessing to us all.

Cristina DiChiera - May 03, 2024 at 09:42 PM

DS

“ Amid all of her other service commitments, Mary Lee served as the board chair of New Urban Arts for three years from 2017 through 2020. She was a thoughtful and charismatic leader, as well as a remarkable source of personal support to me.

Daniel Schleifer - May 02, 2024 at 12:45 PM

RL

“ To my dearest friend Kathy and the entire Partington family we send our deepest sympathy on the passing of your beloved sister and mother. May she sing with the angels and of course Betty....Rose and Don Lemoine.

rose lemoine - April 29, 2024 at 04:09 PM

BE

“ To the Partinton Family:
My sincere condolences to the entire family and to Kathy. God bless Mary Lee, may she rest in peace.

*Lt. Billy Eckert
Retired
RI State Police*

Billy Eckert - April 29, 2024 at 02:32 PM

MI

“ It is sad to learn of Mary Lee's passing. I recall the days of her singing with Pendragon and always enjoyed her songs of the immigrant experience in New England. She left this world a better place for all her commitments and service. A tribute that Sarah and family can take comfort in at this time.

michael - April 28, 2024 at 08:04 PM

BE

“ My deepest sympathy to Glenn and Mary Lee’s family on her passing. Those who touch our lives, live on in our hearts. May God rest her soul and bring you peace.

Barbara Erickson - April 28, 2024 at 05:46 PM

SD

“ We wish our friend Glenn, and Mary Lee's family and friends, our most sincere condolences. While we have gotten to know Glenn well through our shared hobby over the past 20 years or so, our regret is to have not known Mary Lee as well. Circumstances allowed a few meetings and it was always clearly obvious what Glenn loved about her. Such a life lived! Such an accomplished and interesting woman! I just know she was inspiring to many, many people, myself included. Mary Lee, I know you are missed deeply. I'm thankful for having known you for the time I did. Bless your unstoppable soul.

Scott and Kathryn Donahue - April 28, 2024 at 02:21 PM

SL

Dearest Glenn , Family and Friends of Mary Lee , We were deeply saddened to hear of the passing of Mary Lee . She was such a beautiful and accomplished woman with a gorgeous smile and caring soul . May she Rest in Sweet Peace and may her loved ones, find solace in her generous spirit , in the days ahead . 🙏❤️😊

Sue and Paul LeComte - April 30, 2024 at 04:25 PM

LM

“ My heartfelt sympathy to Kathy and your entire family for your loss of Mary Lee. May she be at peace and may all those beautiful memories of a life well lived sustain you all.

Leslie Macksoud - April 28, 2024 at 10:50 AM

RJ

“ Bewitched of Scituate is saddened to hear of her passing and know she will be singing in the green pastures of her home land in her heaven. May her journey home be filled with love and light like she was here on earth leaving the world brighter. Aho my friend.

roxanne Jasparro - April 28, 2024 at 09:12 AM

PH

“ On behalf of everyone fro the Irish Ceilidhe Club Of RI i would like to express our deepest sympathies to the whole family. Mary Lee was surely a shining star and ray of sunshine to anyone she interacted with. She will be sorely missed but her spirit will always be a part of our organization. Patrick Harrington President

Patrick Harrington - April 27, 2024 at 07:22 PM

GH

“ Dear Kathy and Gary: My deepest sympathy to you at this very difficult time. Your tribute to Mary Lee was a beautiful depiction of a life well lived, of a woman who treasured her family, of a person who through her creative expression honored her heritage and as a teacher, positively impacted her students well beyond the classroom.

Over 60 years ago our families met on Thomas Leighton Blvd, so it was during our childhoods when our fondest memories were made. Coming to mind is a favorite... No doubt, our older siblings would find us annoying especially the times when we rode our bikes around and played "state police". We would call out the kids we decided had done wrong and issue them a ticket. Mary Lee was not excluded from her share.....Mary Lee... a young girl who only wanted her voice to bring joy to anyone who was fortunate enough to hear it. (She didn't deserve a ticket.) Thanks for the memories! Keep singing Mary Lee! We will hear you! Love , Gail

Gail Grundy Hagarty - April 27, 2024 at 01:11 PM

SM

“*Mary Lee Partington, a consummate educator, friend, colleague, vocalist, and valued confident to many, epitomized the attributes embroidered in a delightful tapestry that is compelling and displays those qualities and skills of the best in our education profession. During my tenure as the principal at Burrillville High School, it was my privilege to be her colleague, to seek her counsel, and to witness the vibrant and exciting teaching and learning space she and her students created in all of her classes. She was an effective communicator who created a safe learning environment for all students, layered with mutual respect and a determination to ensure equity for all. Failure was not an option. Her classroom was alive and exciting, and I always enjoyed watching the passionate interchange of ideas between and among her students and her. Often, after the regular school day, I would find students in Mary Lee’s classroom seeking additional help, chatting about a proposed project, or making up work missed due to an absence. In my other life, as a representative of the Committee on International Schools and chair of numerous International School Accreditation Teams worldwide, I would arrange time to meet with students to attain their views of teaching within the school and to describe their most influential teacher in a one-word adjective to which many responded, “joyful, fun, expertise, skillful, master, caring, listener, challenging, encouraging, and non-judgmental.” I witnessed these attributes in Mary Lee each day. Thank you, Mary Lee, for all your unconditional love and skillful teaching to the students at Burrillville, and thank you for being my colleague and dear friend over these many years. God Bless you and Rest in Peace.*

Stephen Mitchell - April 27, 2024 at 12:53 PM

MR

Melinda "Mindy" Ryan

*I was deeply saddened to learn of Mary Lee's passing. She and I worked together in the English Department at Burrillville High School for many years where I witnessed her superb talents as a teacher and performer. Mary Lee had a remarkable ability to blend literature, poetry, writing, drama, and music to create lessons and projects that her students will never forget. Although I lacked her talents, I also love Irish history and Celtic music. I even had the pleasure of watching her perform at my cousin's medieval wedding at Belcourt Castle in Newport. I would like to end this message with a famous Irish blessing:
May the road rise up to meet you,
May the wind be always at your back,
May the sun shine warm upon your face, and the rain fall softly upon your fields, and until we meet again,
May God hold you in the palm of his hand.*

Melinda Ryan - April 29, 2024 at 11:48 AM



“ *To the Vitale family: I am so sorry for your loss. I taught with Mary Lee at BHS in 1995 and did not know she was your mother and grandmother. She was a well respected educator and very talented woman. I wish you peace in this trying time. May her memory be a blessing. Sincerely, Alison King*

Alison King - April 27, 2024 at 11:23 AM

KW

“ *So deeply saddened to hear of her passing. Another page from my youth has closed. She was a school friend to the new kid, a friend of my husband who would be playing guitar at school or a Coffee house at the Monastery many years ago. Then the Renaissance Fair years. Quiet evenings at their home. Oh, so many times over the years, to many to mention. Pray for her and your family. I think of her singing and happy in heaven.*



Kimberley Wyld-Chirico - April 27, 2024 at 09:26 AM

MM

“ *Losing Mary Lee is like losing a ray of sunshine. I served with her on several boards but it is her personal friendship that I will miss. Abrazos, Mary Lee.*

Marta V Martinez - April 27, 2024 at 08:13 AM

DA

“ *I am beyond saddened to read of Mary Lee's passing. I knew her from way back as part of Pendragon, and went to every performance I could. I have cassettes and CD's with her lovely voice singing songs I will never forget. I extend my deepest condolences to all of her family. We shall not look upon her like again. May the Old Ones guide her on her journey to the Summerland, God rest her. with love always, from Damaris*

Damaris - April 26, 2024 at 10:13 PM

MC

“ *A heartfelt goodbye from Hogan's Alley.. It was a pleasure working on the Hogan Family Reunion back in 2010 with Mary Lee and The Captain. Godspeed and Suaimhneas Siorai Air... Mike Connors and the Connors Family 🍀*

Michael Connors - April 26, 2024 at 06:13 PM

SW

“ *My heart is broken hearing this news. Mary Lee was such a force to be reckoned with and I will always remember her that way. I am so lucky to have crossed paths with her and to have been a part of her care. Sending my love to her family and many many friends!*

Sheila E (former RN from WIH) - April 26, 2024 at 02:00 PM

KP

Sheila...I am her sister, Kathy and just loved and respected you and Dr. Matthews. You're both legends in our eyes. Thank you for all you did for MLP 💕💕

kpartington27@gmail.com - April 26, 2024 at 03:55 PM

SH

Kathy - thank you so much, but she was the true legend!! I am sure this summer hoolie will be epic and full of her Irish spirit. <3 sending you love!

Sheila - April 26, 2024 at 05:12 PM

NA

“ *A tribute befitting a remarkable individual. Deepest condolences to KP and all who love Mary Lee*

Nicki (Romeo) and Greg Armstrong - April 25, 2024 at 06:17 PM

KR

“ *Mrs. Drouin, as we knew her from the Class of 93 was one of the true great teachers to grace the halls of BHS. Her classroom was a safe haven for many of her students and you couldn't help but love Shakespeare once she was done with you! I will forever remember her beautiful voice singing Danny Boy and her kind smile when she welcomed you into her classroom. She was remarkable and I know I am forever grateful to have been one of her students.*

*My deepest sympathies,
Kristin (Lamoureux) Raimond
BHS Class of 93*

Kristin Raimond - April 25, 2024 at 05:26 PM

PM

“ I was lucky enough to live across the street from the Partington family on Thomas Leighton Blvd. As kids riding our bikes around the block, you could hear "The Sound of Music" coming from their home. It was the beautiful voices of Mrs. Partington and Mary Lee. My favorite was Edelweiss then and now. When Mary Lee passed into heaven her beautiful voice filled the air. The kids from Thomas Leighton who lived near Mary Lee gathered to hear the familiar music and welcome her to heaven..... John and Donna Grundy, Steve and Dick McGinn, Mike Parfitt, and Matt Valaitis. Until we meet again, May God hold you in the palm of His hand, all of you. Rest in love and peace.

To Kathy and Gary, losing a sibling is immensely painful. I am here for you always. Sending you my love and prayers. Wishing you peace.

Love,

Pat (Grundy) Malachowski

Pat Malachowski - April 25, 2024 at 04:44 PM

MK

“ My deepest sympathies to Glenn and Mary Lee's family. I was devastated to hear this sad news and I just cannot get her off my mind. I had the greatest pleasure working with her for many years at Burrillville HS. We even shared some rides to school. She also tuned me in to a great love of Celtic music and my husband and I frequented the Blackstone Theater, a fabulous contribution of the arts in this area. Rest in Peace, beautiful angel. You will be greatly missed.

Marilyn Kelley - April 25, 2024 at 03:58 PM

DC

“ I was so sad to see of Mary Lee's passing. She sang with us for a short time at St. Joseph's Church. She had the voice of an angel. I followed Pendragon years ago and that promoted my love of Celtic music. She was missed when she didn't come back to the choir. So sorry to see she has passed.

Donna Costa , St. Joseph's Church

Donna M Costa - April 25, 2024 at 02:59 PM

CB

I had the pleasure of working with Mary Lee for 20 plus years. She was an absolute star in the classroom, on stage singing and in life! Her passion for her students was always obvious and her commitment to being there for them made her one of the most popular teachers! My deepest sympathies to Glen and her friends and family. We were blessed with an angel, who will be greatly missed.

Charles Boucher - April 27, 2024 at 12:33 PM

KC

Rhode Island has lost a very special woman. Her contributions to the Arts in RI are immensurable. Her voice will not sing with the Angels. Please accept our sincere condolences. Karolye White Cunha and Fernando Cunha

Karolye Cunha - April 28, 2024 at 02:59 PM

JM

I was fortunate to know Mary Lee when I taught a Special Education class at Burrillville HS. Her bright light was obvious the moment she walked into a room and her enthusiasm for sharing her passion with students was infectious! My sincere condolences to the Siner and Partington families and all of the people who had the pleasure to know and love her. RIP Mary Lee, the heavens became a bit brighter when you arrived.

Jeannie Miranda

Jeannie Miranda - June 09, 2024 at 06:07 PM