



Mary Anne Olsen

January 26, 1943 - February 21, 2026

Mary Anne Olsen, daughter of the late Maria Esteve and David W. Sheehan, was born on January 26, 1943, in New York City. She was one of six children—four boys and two girls—and grew up surrounded by a large and loving family.

A woman ahead of her time, Mary Anne was one of the original feminists—strong, independent, educated, and well-traveled. As a single mother during the transformative “Supermom” era, she balanced family and career with determination and grace.

Mary Anne devoted much of her professional life to service. She worked with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), contributing to international development efforts that reflected her passion for helping others. Her work and adventurous spirit led her to live abroad in Barbados and the Dominican Republic, experiences she cherished deeply.

In addition to her international work, Mary Anne was a dedicated educator and served as an elementary school principal, shaping the lives of countless students with her leadership and compassion.

She was married for over 25 years to Jim Olsen. Together they raised two daughters, Kate whom preceded her in death.

Mary Anne is survived by her loving daughter Jackie and granddaughter “Charlie”, three siblings, uncles, several nieces and nephews, great-nieces and great-nephews, cousins and a host of extended family members and dear friends who will miss her strength, wisdom, and unwavering love.

Her life was a testament to independence, service, and devotion to family. She leaves behind a legacy of courage, compassion, and resilience that will live on in all who knew her.

Tribute Wall

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“ I met Anne and Jim when I went to work at InterAmerica Research Associates (in Washington, D.C.) in 1983. I had been hired (I thought) to be part of a project team that would travel to the Dominican Republic. It turned out I had been intentionally misled. Jim and Anne barely knew me, but motivated by a sense of justice that (I was to learn) was entirely characteristic of them, they lobbied for me to join the expatriate team. I was allowed to do so. The expatriate team consisted of two people: Jim (Chief of Party) and Anne (Deputy Chief of Party). In the nearly two years we spent together in the Dominican Republic, I learned a tremendous amount. The experience literally changed my life – without it I would not be where I am today. But the most important benefit was becoming close to Anne and Jim. That closeness lasted the rest of their lives. And I will miss them for the rest of my life.

Andy Hanssen - March 03 at 10:01 AM

“Loss. Absence. Passing. Words that hardly convey the complexity of emotions and memories that overwhelm me as I grieve the death of my dear friend and mentor Anne Olsen. Last Saturday, Anne’s sister Cathy and I sat by Anne’s side as she died. Cathy was Anne’s rock and caregiver, subordinating her life to the support of her beloved older sister over an extended period. Anne passed quietly and peacefully at home. She had been discharged from the hospital to enter hospice just the day before. Cathy met with the hospice nurse and had everything organized. We thought we had more time.

I met Anne and her husband Jim in Camden, South Carolina in 1984. I was teaching at a local private school and was introduced to Anne and Jim by mutual friends. They were larger than life. Gregarious, intellectual, opinionated, they created a safe space over the table in their home’s bar for the free exchange of ideas and a forum for debate that I had rarely experienced, even after recently finishing four years at Yale. They had moved to Camden after directing a USAID educational project in the Dominican Republic when Anne contracted a tropical illness that prevented her from continuing there. Before that, they had run an educational publishing house in New York, written a book on U.S. youth who had “turned on, tuned in, and dropped out” to escape to Afghanistan, and lived itinerantly in the U.S. Virgin Islands. I would house sit for them while they travelled to Barbados to consult on development projects.

Anne was sharp-witted with a wicked sense of humor, almost perfect memory recall, and commitment to forward momentum. She and Jim were primary influences in my decision to depart for China in 1986 to volunteer for two years. Their encouragement to take this huge step changed the course of my life. They were by my side when I applied to Columbia University and refused to allow my insecurities and self-doubt to impede my dream to serve internationally. In 1993, they hosted a dinner to introduce John and me. They were preparing to move to San Miguel de Allende in Mexico. Anne felt that ours would be a match as strong as hers and

Jim's. At the end of dinner that evening, Anne turned to me and said, "Just marry him." John and I have been together ever since. Anne was there when I composed the letter to my mother to let her know I am gay and about my relationship with John. She offered endless compassion and support. I visited them in San Miguel de Allende over the next twenty years almost annually or every two years at most. We celebrated in a bar together there on the evening that President Obama was elected to his first term.

Jim died in 2015. At the time, Anne told me that she was angry at him for leaving her. Theirs was a love for the ages. She could hardly imagine her life without him. While Jim was a confirmed atheist, Anne had been raised a devout Catholic. At her core, she told me she believed that something in our relationships lasts beyond this life. I like to think in this respect that Anne was right and that somehow, somewhere, Anne and Jim are reunited around the table in what she termed "the perfect room" in Camden. Mikel

Mikel Herrington - February 26 at 02:33 PM