



## Helen L Kafka

April 22, 1950 - August 18, 2022

Helen L. Kafka of Alexandria, Virginia passed away at her home surrounded by her family in the early hours of Thursday, August 18, 2022. She was the loyal wife of Raleigh Romine for 40 years and the proud and loving mother of Jessica Romine. She was heartened and happy to be healthy enough to attend Jessica's wedding to her new son-in-law, Brad Terpstra, just 5 weeks before her passing.

Helen was born on April 22, 1950 to Richard Michael Kafka and Mary Elizabeth Kafka and grew up in Plant City, Florida - the Winter Strawberry Capital of the World. Despite being a self-proclaimed "horrible student," Helen was a quietly observant woman who received a degree in zoology from Stephens College, her mother's alma mater in Missouri, before moving to Washington, DC. In 1972 she began her career with the Smithsonian Institution, first working in the field in the Rhode River estuary before becoming the 2nd female zookeeper hired at the National Zoo. She started in the Small Mammals house before becoming an inaugural keeper in the newly constructed Monkey House. She subsequently transitioned to the National Museum of Natural History in 1977, eventually finding a long-term home in the Mammal Division assisting in the intake and preservation of specimens as well as numerous research projects including a stint of field work in Venezuela in 1986.

Helen was an ardent believer in the importance of community, and of each person's role in looking out for all others, people and animals alike. She was known to many as a quiet but staunch supporter of social justice and most enjoyed working behind-the-scenes to promote a just and loving society. Whether this involved marching on Washington, volunteering as a poll worker, or helping repair a retaining wall at her church, she lived by her favorite verse, Micah 6:8: "Do justice, love mercy and walk humbly with God." In the past few years she had become an active volunteer with the VoteRiders organization, helping people obtain government IDs lost due to homelessness, addiction, loss of birth certificates or other documentation due to emergency situations, misfiling of immigration paperwork, etc. This allowed them to return to society and become employed, obtain housing, vote, and qualify for WIC and other benefits. This work became a passion of hers and she continued helping until just days before her death.

Helen was a 25+-year member of the Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church and served numerous roles throughout her time there, from teaching Sunday School ("Holidays and Holy Days," a curriculum for elementary school children to learn about celebrations in other religions and cultures, was her favorite) to serving on the Board of Trustees. MVUC was an integral part of her life and the community she built there was invaluable.

A Celebration of Life memorial service will be held at Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church on Sunday, August 28th at 2pm for all those who want to honor the legacy of selfless service and stalwart love for others that Helen leaves behind.

Helen was nothing if not humble, with no ego requiring the spotlight or acknowledgement of her tireless contributions. In that light, in lieu of flowers, she has requested that you consider making a donation in Helen's memory to VoteRiders at [click here \(https://secure.everyaction.com/dPfoulsLYEy8uljc3A](https://secure.everyaction.com/dPfoulsLYEy8uljc3A)

WO8w2) or the Fairfax County Park Foundation at click here (<https://fairfaxparkfoundation.org/donate-2/>) .

# Previous Events

## Memorial Service

AUG **28**. 2:00 PM (ET)

Mount Vernon Unitarian Church  
1909 Windmill Lane  
Alexandria , VA 22307

# Tribute Wall



“ *Helen L Kafka*

October 27, 2022 at 09:45 PM



“ *On behalf of VoteRiders, I want to share my sadness at Helen’s passing and express our condolences to the family. Although we only knew Helen for a relatively short time, her kindness, patience and tenacity left its mark. Helen was devoted to our mutual cause of ensuring that all eligible citizens have the ID they need to vote and began assisting us with complex cases even before the Virginia team of which she was a part was officially onboarded.*

*The depth of her knowledge and expertise in all matters relative to helping voters in Virginia was unparalleled. In one instance, she helped unravel a DMV mess that was prohibiting both the father and mother in a family from getting their driver licenses, which in turn was preventing the father from getting a job that required him to drive. Helen was relentless in pursuing various options to remove the barriers facing the family and stuck with them even when they would drop off the radar for a while. Besides helping both parents and their teenage son get ID, they got to see first hand what our commitment means, especially when Helen was involved.*

*Helen’s dedication and spirit made her a joy to work with. We will miss her tremendously and are grateful for the time we worked together.*

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**Pam Pearson** - August 21, 2022 at 02:18 PM

NW

*I am so sorry about Helen's passing. She was a childhood friend. I grew up in Plant City also and our dad's were physicians. I had just reconnected in the last couple of years with Helen and was hoping of meeting up with her in the future. Many prayers for the family. Nancy pope Williams*

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**nancy pope Williams** - August 21, 2022 at 03:44 PM

CA

*My deepest condolences to Helen's family. I knew Helen through her work in the Division of Mammals at the Smithsonian. I remember her as a kind, caring person who was dedicated to her work. Hold on to the fond memories. Carla Dove*

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**Carla** - August 22, 2022 at 08:31 AM

SJ

*I knew Helen from our shared time at the Natural History Museum. She was a quiet dedicated worker and I never got to know her beyond our professional connection but I had great respect for her and I know she was greatly valued by her colleagues in Mammals. I am very saddened to learn of her passing and extend my condolences to her family and friends. Her loss will be deeply felt by the many who knew her and had the pleasure of working with her.*

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**Susan Jewett** - August 22, 2022 at 10:46 AM