



Mary Catherine Hentrich

May 27, 1943 - July 6, 2025

Mary Catherine Hentrich, 82, died peacefully at 7:10 p.m. on Sunday, July 6, 2025 with her family at her side. A loving wife, mother, grandmother, educator, musician, and loyal friend, Mary brought joy, happiness, and laughter into so many lives—and leaves behind a legacy of deep love, quiet strength, and enduring devotion.

She was born May 27, 1943, in Alton, Illinois, the daughter of Irvin and Dorothy (Ethridge) Fischer. A proud graduate of Marquette Catholic High School, Mary cherished her classmates and remained active in planning reunions throughout the years.

She married James Hentrich on June 27, 1963, and together they raised three children just over 12 months apart—surviving the teenage years with humor, compassion, and an uncanny ability to keep everything running smoothly. No matter what the day held, dinner was always on the table by 5:15 when Jim walked through the door.

While raising a full house and working, Mary earned a double degree in music from Lewis and Clark Community College. She taught piano, sang in the choir at St. Mary's Church and SS Peter & Paul Catholic Church, and made sure each child practiced their instrument—be it clarinet, oboe, drums, French horn, or piano. She read bedtime stories, baked chocolate chip cookies, and

helped with math homework and essays. She played piano for her daughter's choir competitions and offered vocal coaching.

Andy wrote; "My mom was dealt a real handful when I came along. I used to bite my toast into a gun and pretend to shoot her when she tried to make me eat my vegetables. I got smart and hid my peas and corn under my plate. I knew she would never figure that out. When I was a teen, she knew I was up to no good but she never gave up on me and rarely did she spill the beans about me to my dad. I could usually hide stuff from my dad except for being late for work on Saturday morning or skipping school with Mark Edwards. When I lived away from home, we would often have long phone conversations...we liked the same TV shows and shared the same humor. I was given the gift of wit, empathy, mental strength, complete forgiveness, and unconditional love. For all of this and more—I thank my mother. "We laughed a lot. She was my friend.

From Tracy; "She seemed to have homemade ice cream sandwiches in the freezer, when waiting for a perm to set—because, yes, she permed my hair, no matter how long it was.

We wallpapered and decorated a handmade Victorian dollhouse, spending many afternoons choosing the perfect furniture and arranging each room with care and creatively. I thank her and my dad for adopting me, giving me a beautiful life. The way she raised me is the way I raised my children—and now grandchildren. Mom will forever have a special place in my heart and in the hearts of so many lives she touched."

From Cathy;

My mom wrote a letter to me every single day while I was away at Illinois State University. She was also funny as could be—later sending hilarious emails to my office at KSHE Radio that caused spontaneous laughter and got shared around the building. She had one-liners for everything.

She and I shared a deep friendship and a love of music, humor, and travel. Together we laughed our way through Great Britain—from London and Bath to the Scottish Highlands— finishing the trip with dinner at Harrods and The Lion King at the Lyceum Theatre. We also shared the joy of attending Andrea Bocelli concerts, The Muny Opera and the Fox Theatre.

Mary loved to craft with her dear friend Susan Hiller—miniature Christmas trees, wreaths, and many other beautiful keepsakes, not your average projects—and hosted unforgettable Halloween parties with haunted house theatrics, spaghetti “brains,” and neighborhood kids galore. She planned family camping trips to Circle B, where one memorable canoe trip ended in a stuck finger and a life lesson: don’t play with the oar holes. She organized camp-side masses and unforgettable campfire dinners.

She canned vegetables from the garden, made multiple varieties of pickles, ketchup and apple butter, hosted card club and family Christmas parties, sang at Midnight Mass and loved Christmas caroling at nursing homes and hospitals.

She earned her bachelor’s and master’s degrees in education while continuing to work, parent, and sing. She later completed doctoral coursework in Educational Administration with a focus on Infant Intervention at the University of Illinois in Champaign-Urbana and UMSL. She retired in 2007 as principal of the Early Childhood Program for the Alton School District, having touched the lives of hundreds of children and families who she loved as her own, with her gentle guidance and steadfast belief in education.

Mary adored her grandchildren—Leah, Andrea, Alexander, Adreanna, Audrey, and Eddie—and her great-grandchildren, Lucian and Saylor. She spent treasured time with them when they were young, and passed on the values,

traditions, and laughter that shaped generations.

She is survived by her husband of 62 years, James Hentrich; a son Andy Hentrich (Bene) of Godfrey; two daughters; Tracy Giller of Jefferson City, MO; Catherine O'Neill (Mike) of University City, MO, and six grandchildren, Leah & Dylan Burian, Andrea Hentrich, Alexander Jackson, Adreanna & Andy Fields, Audrey O'Neill, and Eddie O'Neill; and two great-grandchildren, Lucian Jackson and Saylor Fields. She was preceded in death by her parents, two brothers, Charles and Jack Fischer, and one sister, Jean Rizzoli.

Visitation will be held from 4:00 to 8:00 p.m. on Thursday, July 10, 2025, at Gent Funeral Home in Alton. A Mass of Christian Burial will be celebrated at 12:00 noon Friday, July 11, 2025, at SS Peter & Paul Catholic Church. Burial will follow at St. Joseph's Cemetery. Guestbook and information at www.gentfuneralhome.com. Memorials may be made to <https://www.alz.org/greatermissouri>.

Mary was, and always will be, extraordinary. Her song may have ended, but her melody lingers in every heart she touched.

Cemetery Details

St. Joseph's Cemetery

525 East 4th Street
Alton, IL 62002

Previous Events

Visitation

JUL **10**. 4:00 PM - 8:00 PM (CT)

Gent Funeral Home
2409 State Street
Alton, IL

Funeral Mass

JUL **11**. 12:00 PM (CT)

SS Peter & Paul Catholic Church
Alton, IL

Tribute Wall

LB

“ Grandma Mary, I'll never forget the good times having our tea parties, decorating Christmas cookies, playing in the yard with Maddie dog, the rope swing, playing music together, visiting grandma Fischer on hair day, playing at the school, your amazing coconut caramel cookies, musicals at the Muny and so so many more. I already miss you more than you could ever know. Thank you for all the wonderful memories and for making sure my childhood was the best a kid could ever have. I love you a bushel and a peck ❤️

Leah Burian - July 15, 2025 at 05:22 AM

CK

“ May she rested in peace!! Prayers for her family 🙏🙏🙏

Cindy Korte - July 11, 2025 at 01:17 PM

TO

“ Tracey Oulson-Blasa lit a candle in memory of Mary Catherine Hentrich



Tracey Oulson-Blasa - July 10, 2025 at 08:20 AM

BW

“ Mary was a true gem and I felt so honored to work with her in the PK program in the district! She shared her extensive knowledge and encouraged us all to stretch our skills and abilities as we helped young children reach for their true potential. She was a great cook and I still make her famous white chicken chili and have shared it with friends and family! May her joy in living be a comfort to her family and her many friends as we celebrate her life! We know she is singing in heaven with the choir of angels! Sing on...

Bonnie Westcott - July 09, 2025 at 08:07 PM



“ Peaceful White Lilies Basket was purchased for the family of Mary Catherine Hentrich.



July 09, 2025 at 03:52 PM



“ A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Mary Catherine Hentrich.

July 09, 2025 at 03:52 PM



“ Sweet Sincerity was purchased for the family of Mary Catherine Hentrich.



July 09, 2025 at 10:27 AM



“ *Full Of Love Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mary Catherine Hentrich.*



July 08, 2025 at 05:21 PM



“ *Grandmother Mary was such a sweet and kind woman. My love and prayers to the entire family.*

LaTrina Rogers-Stepney - July 08, 2025 at 05:13 PM