



## Barbara Allen Bell

May 7, 1972 - January 13, 2025

Barbara Allen Bell, lovingly called "Turtle Barb" because of her vast love for and knowledge of turtles and animals of all kinds, has died. She was a scientist, an artist, a singer, a gardener, an advocate for the disabled and unheard, intensely feeling and engaged with the world, and I know losing her in this world will ripple across many communities. A kind woman who loved all living things.

Barbara was born May 7, 1972 in Alexandria, VA.

She graduated from William and Mary University with a bachelor's degree, and Drexel University with both master's and PhD.

Sea turtle research in Costa Rica was one of her favorite experiences and led to her master's thesis titled "The fertility of female leatherback turtles at Playa Grande, Costa Rica." She also studied the effects of the Deepwater Horizon oil spill on sea turtles' populations in the Gulf of Mexico.

Barbara, whose soprano voice was so lovely, sang in the College of William and Mary Choir with many friends. Favorite memories of the 1993 European choir tour included performing for Queen Elizabeth at Drapers Hall in London, singing at Westminster Abbey and Canterbury Cathedral, and in the gardens at Sissinghurst Castle designed by Vita Sackville-West and Harold Nicolson.

She was also a member of Reveille and Double-Take, two beloved campus singing groups, and later sang with Anna Crusis Feminist Choir, the oldest feminist choir in the US, and SpiralSong Feminist Spirituality Vocal Ensemble in the Philadelphia area.

Barbara loved animals, and had several herpetological pets, including a boa named Karma, geckos Paris, Hector, Helen, Briseis, Willow and Rory, and turtles she raised from eggs named Siddhartha and Boddhisatva. As her health challenges increased, she carefully calibrated how much effort she could provide and re-homed her darlings when she felt they would be better with a less-disabled caregiver. She knew how much pets and plants added to her quality of life but refused to sacrifice their quality of living.

As an artist, Barbara explored many mediums, including beading, chainmaille, and watercolor painting. Her meticulous ink drawings of turtles were published in a textbook. She loved the fine detail and precision of bead weaving, and designed works that reflected her science and animal interests, including several turtle-themed necklaces and phoenix earrings.

Barbara cared about how we interact with the world and each other. She wrote thoughtfully and well. Here's an example of her style:  
I'm not a fan of "shoulds" or similar pushy judgements.  
If I can replace "should" with "could," that typically means there's judgment involved. And I've done a lot of work letting go of judgment. It has made me a softer person and a better friend. I value those things.  
But there are some "shoulds" I'm okay with. I don't think people should try to hurt other people intentionally. I think we should be taking better care of the planet than we are.

Barbara is a remembered and beloved friend to many in the chronic illness community. She surfaced and called out ableism in many media, writing

passionately and honestly about ways our society seems to ignore and look away from the needs of people with energy, mobility, and cognitive limitations as if those overcoming those facts and challenges were somehow a matter of will or choice. She had compassion and kind words for fellow sufferers and worked to notice and center gratitude for small moments. Her exploration of Buddhism gave her comfort.

Most recently, she was exploring definitions of neurodiversity, and the links among autism, ADHD, and human behavior, focus and distraction and creativity and meaning. She reached beyond the limits of "either/or" binaries to the improvisational inclusion of "Yes! And..." embracing multiple layers and facets of art and fine craft.

Barbara is survived by her brother Adam and his wife Christy, her father James, and her mother Sally, and many who love her across the globe.

A Memorial Gathering will be held from 12:00-3:00 PM on Saturday, January 25 at Pierce Funeral Home.

In lieu of flowers, please consider making a donation in Barbara's honor to SeaTurtles.org at: <https://tinyurl.com/TurtleBarb>

Please include the "I'd like to notify someone of this contribution" check, and notify James Bell at [fotojames@aol.com](mailto:fotojames@aol.com)

# Previous Events

## Memorial Gathering

JAN **25**. 12:00 PM - 3:00 PM (ET)

Pierce Funeral Home  
9609 Center St.  
Manassas, VA 20110  
(703) 257-6028  
pfh@piercefh.com  
<https://www.piercefh.com>

# Tribute Wall

JM

“ *Rest in power and in peace, beautiful warrior.*

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**Jolene M** - February 03, 2025 at 09:24 PM

AS

“ *Barb was a senior doctoral student when I started at Drexel, and she always had time to talk about turtle research. She was kind and witty and she had deep expertise in her field. In more recent years I've been a Facebook friend and continued to be a real friend and thoughtful person who I've continued to learn a lot from. She will be deeply missed.*

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**Annette Sieg** - January 28, 2025 at 07:53 AM

RE

“ *A truly beautiful person, inside and out; I was honoured to consider her a friend, even though we never met physically. xx*

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**Ron Eddy** - January 27, 2025 at 08:01 AM

KK

“ *Barb was a beautiful person inside and out. I accompanied her in the field when she was working on her Doctorate at Drexel University--what she taught me about turtles was immeasurable and invaluable. My deepest condolences to her family and friends. <3*

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**Karen M. Klein** - January 25, 2025 at 06:18 PM

BS

“ I met Barb during my first years at Drexel, when she was one of the senior students in Jim's lab. I found she was kind, profesional, consistent and loyal. A good person to have in a team. We shared a love for Playa Grande and the turtles and her commitment to the work was inspiring.

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**Bibi Santidrián** - January 25, 2025 at 12:33 PM

JZ

“ Barb was a very very special person. She had a strong sense of justice and decency. Her love and appreciation of nature and all living beings was evident in her beautiful and diverse art. She had a kind and generous spirit. May her bright light shine on through all who had the privilege to know her.

*Judy M. Zabriskie*

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**Judy Mehn Zabriskie** - January 25, 2025 at 09:47 AM



“ Pink Potpourri Bouquet was purchased for the family of Barbara Allen Bell.



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January 24, 2025 at 08:39 AM

JS

“ Barb was my student at Drexel University. She was a wonderful student and long time friend. We shared many adventures in Costa Rica and Philadelphia and was a joy in my life. Barb discovered many of the mysteries about the development of leatherback turtle eggs at Playa Grande in Costa Rica and then studied the effects of oil pollution on snapping turtle legs. She was a major organizer of the International Sea Turtle symposium in Philadelphia and designed the logo for that meeting. She made the world a better place and shared her love of people and animals with all she came into contact with. There is no better legacy for anyone. I will miss her always.

*Jim Spotila*

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**Jim Spotila** - January 23, 2025 at 05:58 PM

JT

“ Jim Spotila and The leatherback Trust purchased the Sentiments of Serenity Spray for the family of Barbara Allen Bell.



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**Jim Spotila and The leatherback Trust** - January 23, 2025 at 05:53 PM

JT

“ Jim Spotila and The leatherback Trust planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Barbara Allen Bell.

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**Jim Spotila and The leatherback Trust** - January 23, 2025 at 05:53 PM