



Dr. Melva Jo Bennett

June 18, 1938 - February 16, 2024

Dr. Melva Jo Bennett

Dr. Melva Jo Bennett passed away at her home overlooking Greenwood Lake on February 16th, 2024. She was 85 years old.

Bennett was born in Harrison, Arkansas on June 18th, 1938. Her parents, Wallace, and Lucille Payne were Okmulgeans, and Melva Jo spent most of her life in Okmulgee, where she distinguished herself as an important figure in the area's educational and mental health communities.

Dr. Bennett graduated from Okmulgee High School in 1956; a month later she married her husband, J.B. Bennett, who had graduated from college and was enlisted in the Marine Corps Officers Program. They remained married for 60 years until her husband, former Mayor, and State Representative, passed in 2016.

The couple had three children: Dana, J.B. III (AKA "Bo"), and Bon. In 1959, the Bennetts purchased Greenwood Lake- a popular summer swimming resort in Okmulgee- a business they operated every year until it closed in 1994.

Known as "Jo" to her friends in the community, Dr. Bennett began taking college courses in the mid-sixties as her children transitioned to school age. Receiving her Bachelor's Degree in Special Education, she began a teaching career in local elementary schools. Concurrently, she started taking graduate level courses, eventually attaining her Masters Degree in Education and School Psychology in 1975. This led to positions in Psychometry, testing

children for learning disabilities.

Jo Bennett was known for her inquisitive mind, her thirst for learning and a tenacity to meet challenging goals. With a successful career already as a practitioner and administrator for the Regional Education Center, she continued to pursue a Doctorate Degree as she entered the middle stage of her career.

Notably, Jo cherished being a parent and grandparent, and being involved with children – whether in schools, at the lake business or in her own neighborhood. She cherished living in Okmulgee, and was active in supporting youth, sports activities, community events and service organizations.

After earning her Doctorate from Oklahoma State University in School Administration in 1992, she began her stint as Chairman of the Board for CREOKS, a non-profit mental health agency that is now one of Oklahoma's largest providers. Her leadership and guidance helped spur the growth and success of the agency in a time of crisis. She was personally honored in July 2023 when CREOKS dedicated their newest facility "Bennett House" acknowledging her contributions.

Dr. Bennett continued to work as a contract psychometrist for area schools well into her seventies. She provided nearly a decade of intensive in-home care for her husband after he suffered a stroke, while also pursuing interests in research with the Okmulgee County Genealogy Society and serving on the Okmulgee County Homeless Shelter Advisory Team. In 2022, she researched and co-authored a book; "Greenwood Lake: Okmulgee's Original Resort," which proved to be a local sensation.

Jo was a member of the First Baptist Church of Okmulgee. She is preceded in death by her husband, J.B. Bennett Jr., and her sisters, Peggy Seay, and Patsy Spriggs. She is survived by her children and their spouses: Dana and Louis Sigalos (Houston, Texas), Bo and Melanie Bennett (La Mesa, California) and Bon and Jamie Bennett (Bartlesville, Oklahoma); as well as her grandchildren Rowdy Rudd and wife Allison, Byron Bennett, Meilani Bennett,

Archer Bennett and wife Jenny, and Avery Bennett. She has two great grandchildren: Olivia and Ella Rudd.

Internment is with McClendon- Winters Funeral Home in Okmulgee.

Celebration of Life event is pending.

Arrangements have been entrusted to McClendon-Winters Funeral Home of Okmulgee. Memories, condolences, photos and videos may be shared with the family on Melva's Tribute Page of our website. www.mcclendon-winters.com

Tribute Wall

ET

“ *Jo was such a wonderful friend. I will always remember her wonderful stories. Many prayers for her family. Emily Terrell*

Emily Terrell - March 14, 2024 at 01:44 PM

KA

“ *Kim Angle lit a candle in memory of Dr. Melva Jo Bennett*



Kim Angle - February 27, 2024 at 11:26 AM

JA

“ *So sorry for your loss. Prayers.*



Jill Pinneo Alcala - February 24, 2024 at 04:41 PM

JM

“ I was very sorry to receive the news of Jo Bennett’s passing. She was the mother of my best friend, Bo, and a model of kindhearted strength and good humor.

As a teen, I had the unexpected fortune of spending countless hours at the Bennett house and had a front row seat as J.B. and Jo parented, in addition to Bo, two more remarkable children in Dana and Bon. It didn’t take long to realize theirs was a family brimming with possibility and geared toward accomplishment. Together, they formed a renaissance household crackling with a rare blend of creativity, athleticism, discipline and organized play. It was sometimes hard to keep up.

There was swimming, fishing and football; basketball, wiffle ball and hockey. There would be sketch-writing and radio announcing and TV, film and music. There were discussions of politics, history and nature, and there was a perceivable respect for education and lifelong learning. Mr. Bennett was a commanding figure and a visionary, while Mrs. Bennett was the complementary force that drew it all together and gave it form and soul.

Dana, Bo and Bon, I am so very sorry for your loss. I have the blessing of my own wonderful family and the additional gift of yours, and I am truly grateful. I love you all. May God grant you comfort and peace.

Joey Magrini - February 24, 2024 at 11:29 AM

BB

We appreciate you, Joey, and we have been so fortunate to have been blessed with your support over the years. Mom thought the world of you and loved your visits. Thanks again- you are an important part of the Bennett family.

Bo Bennett - February 24, 2024 at 12:55 PM

PB

“ *Paulette Barnes lit a candle in memory of Dr. Melva Jo Bennett*



Paulette Barnes - February 22, 2024 at 01:06 PM

PB

Jo was an dear friend. We came to know each other when I moved from Kansas back to Oklahoma. We shared many personal and professional adventures. Jo was an exceptionally talented lady. She was a rare combination of a "thinker" "a planner" and a doer. I will miss our friendship and our good times. Rest in Peace Jo. Love you dear friend. Paulette Whetstone barnes

Paulette Barnes - February 22, 2024 at 01:11 PM

MJ

“ *Prayers for the family. The Bennett touched so many lives in such a positive way. I would take my 3 kids to Greenwood Lake every day at 2:00 pm for 2 hours. That was the highlight of the day. We saved our little coins and packed snacks. Mr Bennett taught my son how to swim. He would run over to Mr. Bennett to get a hand shake from the "Nice Man who let me swim and gives me candy cause I'm smart". Such special people.always made you feel important. Some people come into your life that you never forget how special they made you feel.*

Marilyn Jackson - February 20, 2024 at 11:45 PM

PS

“ *My brother married into the wonderful Bennett family, which allowed me to get to know them. Jo was always so warm and welcoming, and what a wonderful legacy she leaves in her children, grandchildren and great grandchildren. A life well lived!*

Paula Saunders - February 20, 2024 at 08:11 PM

ZC

“ *Zandra Christy lit a candle in memory of Dr. Melva Jo Bennett*



zandra christy - February 20, 2024 at 05:28 PM

JD

“ *Miss Jo, bless your heart and thank you foremost for being a friend to Kim and I, a mentor, a coworker and leader, and a cherished blessing to us all. We'll miss you and you will forever be in our hearts. With deepest respect and admiration, Jay Dearmore VP-Facilities/CREOKS*



Jay Dearmore - February 20, 2024 at 09:04 AM

SK

“ *Dana, after meeting you (through Julie), I remember meeting your mom and coming by your house in Okmulgee. Your mom was so pretty and always so nice to me. I pray that the sweet memories that you have made with her through the years will give you peace in this time of loss. Keeping you in my prayers. Susi Agee Kelch*



Susan Kelch - February 20, 2024 at 01:29 AM

DM

“ *David Miller lit a candle in memory of Dr. Melva Jo Bennett*



David Miller - February 19, 2024 at 05:35 PM

BG

“ *I was in Bo's graduating class at Okmulgee High School in 1977. Sorry to hear of his mother's passing. She and JB did so much for Okmulgee and its young people.*

Bob Gibbins - February 19, 2024 at 12:32 PM

FL

Mrs Bennett was a kind lady me and Bo used to swim there after school and she would watch over us reading a book such good memories so sad to hear she's up in heaven with Mr Bennett JB RIP. 🙏

Francis Longoria - February 19, 2024 at 04:04 PM

RK

“ *Such a wonderful lady. I remember how Melva Jo and her entire family worked together to keep J.B. as comfortable as possible after his stroke. You have our prayers.*

The Kovarik family

Roger Kovarik - February 19, 2024 at 11:04 AM

MC

So sad to hear of Mrs. Bennett's passing. I still treasure the many warm summer nights playing basketball with J.B., Bo, and Bon at the Greenwood home and generally hanging out with all the Bennetts who generously opened their home to me and others. I remember seeing Jo in 1984 when she proctored my Teacher Certification tests. No matter how much time passed, it was always just like a moment ago when you'd renew the friendships with her or any of the Bennetts. Truly one of the great families of Okmulgee ever. My deepest condolences to Dana, Bo, Bon and the entire Bennett family. Jo will be missed but she clearly left this world better because of her life well lived.

Mike Carney - February 19, 2024 at 12:19 PM