

**Charlotte Zoë Walker** (July 13, 1935 - January 1, 2021) died in Portland, OR with her husband Roland and her eldest daughter Rebecca at her side, succumbing to a recent leukemia diagnosis.

She is survived by her husband Roland Greefkes, her two daughters Rebecca Mendez (Mark Evans) and Rachel Mendez; five grandchildren Ariel Mendez (Suzanne), Eli Mendez, Sam Mendez (Yelena Bagdasarova), Zoe Mendez (Noah Haynes-Brooks), and Cassius Oldenburg; three great-grandchildren Leif, Enakai, and Cora Mendez; her beloved brother and sister-in-law Stan and Sue Walker; nieces Libby Walker Davidson, Amity Stauffer, Courtney Voskuhl (Jared), Ellie Davidson, and Shayna Walker; nephews Adam Walker (Rachel Jolly), Eli Walker, Winston Stauffer, and Charlie Davidson, plus cousins and adoring friends from across the world. She was preceded in death by her sister Marion Walker Stauffer and her son David Mendez.

There will be a celebration of Charlotte's life and we will all gather at some point when it is safe. Her cremains will be interred at Karne Ling Retreat Center at a future date as well. Plans will be shared on her website [www.charlottezoewalker.com](http://www.charlottezoewalker.com)

Donations in Charlotte's memory can be made to the John Burroughs Association in support of the Literary Awards or the Nature Sanctuary <http://www.johnburroughsassociation.org> or to your favorite Feminist or Political Action non-profit organization.

We miss her beautiful smile, her sunny mood and cheery happiness, her intellectual brilliance, her enthusiastic support of all creative endeavors and mostly her warmth and love for everyone.

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Her parents, Helen (Jackie) and Charles Walker (a young naval officer and a restaurant receptionist/cashier) met in San Diego and married in 1933, eloping so as to save their parents the cost of a wedding. Charlotte, their firstborn daughter, made them very happy parents as she was a very beautiful and happy baby. She was followed 2-1/2 years later by her dear brother Stan, and then 9 years later by her dear sister Marion, who preceded her in death in 2012. As a naval family, they moved across the country numerous times and during her school years Charlotte attended 16 schools. She lamented the "new girl" status she so often had to endure, but with her mother's loving guidance and support she found comfort in books and reading. Both became her life-long passions, and inspired her at an early age to become a writer. (The book "A Dog of Flanders" had such a sad, tearful ending for

her that when her mother explained that the author could change it to a happy ending, she knew that becoming an author would be her calling.)

As a naval family moving all over the US they eventually settled in San Diego again, near her mother's extended family and also where Charlotte finished high school. The years living in the cul-de-sac on Covington Road gave her and her brother an idyllic childhood. Her father was transferred to Colorado but Charlotte had already decided to attend San Diego State University so she stayed, receiving a BA with Honors in Psychology in 1957. She started graduate work at the University of Chicago and University of California Berkeley, but her studies were interrupted by her first marriage to J. I. Mendez and by starting her family. Over the next 6 years she had three children: David (dec. 2004), and daughters Rebecca and Rachel. After 9 years the marriage ended in divorce, yet she felt blessed to resume her graduate studies at Syracuse University, receiving her MA in Creative Writing and Literature in 1966 and PhD in English Literature in 1972.

Attending graduate school to obtain advanced degrees, start her teaching career, and raising three small children on her own are a testament to her strength and fortitude. She was the head of her young family and did not ever waver from what was needed to care for and raise them properly. In fact, she had to fight the university administration for acceptance to married graduate student housing, refuting their argument that a divorced woman (with children) could not be eligible to live there. She won the first of many life battles for women's equal rights.

She began her 35-year teaching career in 1970 at NY State University College of Oneonta (SUCO) as a professor of English and Women's Studies. She describes the early days of camaraderie and meeting with her (female) colleagues to elevate both Feminist and Women's Studies as tremendously empowering intellectually. She was not only thrilled to be doing work alongside the growth of the country's Women's Movement in the 1970s, but absolutely exhilarated in achieving the ultimate goal of "Department" status for Women's Studies and the right to grant a minor. She described the importance of this time of a growing sisterhood, becoming both a band of explorers and comrades-in-arms, joining against the sexism of the times, and finding strength for not only themselves but also empowering their students to fight for their own lives and to change society.

She taught thousands of students, many of whom became lifelong friends. She mentored many students as well as fellow writers and her encouragement to all was never-ending. She was awarded the SUNY Chancellor's award for Excellence in Teaching. She received many awards and grants over the years, including Walter B. Ford grants, faculty awards, National Endowment for the Arts and National Endowment for the Humanities grants and fellowships.

During the 1970s she was not only exploring and enjoying the growth of feminism, she also began a life-long study and immersion in Eastern Philosophy, Spirituality, and Religion when she started visiting (with her three children) the Ananda Ashram in Monroe, NY, becoming a dedicated student of Dr. Ramamurti S. Mishra. She studied yoga, meditation, the yoga sutras and the sanskrit language for many years. In the 2000s, her focus turned to Buddhism, studying under Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche at the Karme Ling Retreat Center in Delhi, NY, and devoting herself to learning and practicing her Buddhist meditations daily.

In 1994 she combined her two loves: the natural environment and nature writing, and launched the first Sharp Eyes Conference on John Burroughs. Her enthusiasm and appreciation for nature, for nature writing and for the wisdom of John Burroughs was infectious, and she led the conference two more times and in 2008 was the keynote speaker at Sharp Eyes V. For Syracuse Press she edited two books on John Burroughs: Sharp Eyes in 2000 and The Art of Seeing Things in 2001.

Charlotte wrote her entire life (probably everyday) and her work garnered many accolades and awards. Both her fiction writing and her essays were published in numerous journals, story collections and magazines. Her short story “The Very Pineapple” received an O. Henry Award in 1991, her story “Goat’s Milk” received an Honorable Mention in Best American Short Stories, 1993, and “The Virgin of the Rocks” received 4th place in New Century Writers Awards, 1999.

In 1986 her first novel Condor & Hummingbird was published by Alice Walker’s imprint Wild Trees Press and then a British edition in 1987 by The Women’s Press. This was also when she magically reconnected with her (soon-to-be) second husband Roland Greefkes. In 1988 they built their precious Hummingbird House on a hillside, with the help of her son David. Hummingbird House was the site of many family reunions, porch dinners, hikes, pond excursions, lively dinners, and conversations.

She continued to write and teach at SUCO until her retirement in 2005 and she was awarded Professor Emerita status. She returned to teaching for one final semester in 2008 at Colgate University.

Post-retirement she continued to write, publish and travel. She devoted her time to her family and friends, happiest when all were gathered together. Charlotte lost both her parents and her son in 2004. While her parents had lived into their 90s and celebrated their 70th wedding anniversary in 2003, her son David’s death at age 46 was unexpected and heartbreaking to her and the entire family.

After her son David’s death she inherited a violin that he had found and planned to play someday. Restoring it, buying a new bow and learning to play gave her an

outlet for her grief and loss. In 2008 at Hummingbird House she performed on David's violin for the assembled family, celebrating what would have been his 50th birthday, and also interring some of his ashes on the upper hillside of their property at what would now be known as David's Meadow.

In October 2012 her dear younger sister Marion died unexpectedly and it was a great shock to her. The loss and grief literally broke her heart and without warning she had to undergo quintuple bypass surgery, leaving the hospital on Christmas Eve and grateful to still be on this planet. Surprisingly this heart surgery led her to another of her great life passions: the cello. After surgery she found sadly that she could no longer physically play the violin. Upon meeting her future cello teacher he advised that playing the cello is like giving someone a big hug and she would find it much easier. She loved playing her beloved cello and it gave her an excuse to get the biggest available iPad so she could display a full sheet of music onscreen.

In 2016 to celebrate the 30th anniversary of Condor & Hummingbird and in honor of her beloved nature writer John Burroughs, she began a new imprint: *Leaf & Tendril Books*. This became the home for her past and future writing. She re-published an anniversary edition of Condor & Hummingbird and three new books, including her collection of short stories The Girl Who Talked in Accents, published just this past November. There were more novels and stories in her and she had hoped to continue to publish.

In 2017 she published her father's autobiography Roots & Consequences (on Amazon) rekeying his typed manuscript. Her father's connection to and study of his own roots spurred on some of her own genealogical research, leading her to new cousins across the US, the UK, and even to Australia. She (and her sister) loved the family's Irish and English roots and was so happy to meet and connect with these distant relations.

Charlotte loved her family deeply and tenderly. She cherished her many, many friendships, gathered and kept from times throughout her entire life. She loved books, poetry and *more* poetry, literature, nature, travel and exploration, the ocean and sea air, art, languages, music, food and wine, adventures, new experiences, beautiful clothes and shoes, learning, teaching, meeting people and most of all, writing. She loved caring for and cooking for her family and made many lovely meals. She loved picnics and always made customized sandwiches for everyone, each carefully wrapped and labeled. She learned to make wonderful pies from her own mother and passed on those pie-making skills to her children, her grandchildren and her great-grandchildren. Her favorite breakfast was the last leftover slice of apple pie and her mother always indulged her.

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