

MEMORIAL SERVICE & CELEBRATION OF LIFE
FOR

Erika Gates



OCTOBER 23, 1942 › DECEMBER 14, 2021

*Gone too soon,
but forever in our hearts*

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Erika Gates

SERVICE HELD ON
THURSDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 2022
AT 3:00 P.M.

AT
THE GARDEN OF THE GROVES
FREEPORT, GRAND BAHAMA
OFFICIATING:
PASTOR CLIFFORD LEWIS

EULOGY
FOR
Erika Gates

We are told that the formative years of a child's life are from 0-8 years. To truly understand and celebrate Erika's life, we need to look at that time in her life. Erika came into the world in the middle of a war. A few months before she was born, her father was taken captive and sent to a POW camp in Canada. The war had been over for two years before he was able to return home and Erika met her father for the first time when she was five.

Many considered the aftermath of the war to be worse than the war itself. Although the bombings had ended, starvation, disease and atrocities continued. Erika considered herself lucky to have survived because the mortality rate for children was very high. Her older brother (who took her birding when she was eight) died at an early age of an incurable disease. These were chaotic times. Erika's mother recalled a bitterly cold night when soldiers ransacked the family home, stole their meager food rations, took their blankets and left them to freeze. Even the baby Erika had her blankets taken.

Some time after the war ended, a team of British officers, known as the British Control Commission, made their headquarters on the ground floor of the family home. This proved to be a Godsend: these officers were kind, decent men who treated them like their own family. Food and medicine became available and the children were protected from the violence around them. Erika always realized that without the British officers, her life could have had a different ending. Perhaps it was those early childhood struggles in a country suffering the aftermath of a war that inspired Erika to embrace life to the fullest, and gave her the drive we all saw in her.

The friendship between the family and the British officers was to last many years after the war. The officers, their wives and children often visited and Erika spent time in Bournemouth as their guest.

Erika came to Grand Bahama in the seventies to teach tennis. Eight courts were built at Arawak Hotel for her to use and this is where she ran her programs and tournaments. Pictures and details of that period are too voluminous to describe adequately. Later on, she leased the Holiday Inn courts and the two facilities at the Princess Hotel. Tennis was in its heyday and Erika's courts were always busy. There was always something exciting happening.

For the next twenty years, she was involved with tennis but she was also involved in other business enterprises. More than an average player, she won at least one Bahamas National Ladies Championship. But because of her other pursuits she could not commit to the training regimen required for that level of play. During this time she was also a co-owner of two high-end shops in Miami - Burberry's of Scotland - located in both the Omni and Bal Harbor shopping centers. This required her attendance in Florida a few days each week. At some time in this period she was also co-owner of The London Pacesetters in Freeport which many remember as "the place." Both tennis shops at the Princess were always well-stocked with the best merchandise and tennis gear.

Erika visited Winbleton many times in the seventies. First as a spectator and then in an official capacity and was reportedly the first non-British person to be accepted as an umpire

for the All-England Lawn Tennis Club. The AELTC was the association that administered the Wimbledon tournaments. Her elevation to umpire was considered a milestone for English tennis and she was invited to appear on the Larry King show. Early in her role as a chair umpire, she chaired a few matches on the back-courts but functioned as a line judge for some of the more important matches.

As a result of her Wimbledon connections, she was able to bring top-ranked players such as Jimmy Connors and Illi Nastase to Freeport to play exhibition matches. She was also invited by the prestigious ITF Futures Tournament organization to host tournaments for young women players from all over the world. These events meant important international exposure for Freeport. She hosted the tournaments for two consecutive years with over 150 entrants each year. The tournament was eventually moved to Nassau after intense lobbying from there.

During these years, Erika became enthusiastic about flying and gained her pilot's license with the help of a number of Freeport's established pilots. Before long, she moved up to a much more powerful twin-engine plane and gained her instrument-rated license. This meant that she was permitted to fly at night or in bad weather conditions. Over a period of ten years, she made many trips flying supplies for the IAT Clinic and other business enterprises.

In 1991, she and her husband Ed took a week-long kayak trip off the coast of Maine and despite the freezing temperatures, loved the experience. They came home and started Kayak Nature Tours.

The company was one of the first to recognize the importance of Ecotourism. The Executive Director of the BNT has suggested that Erika put Grand Bahama on the ecological map.

Despite the hurricanes and downturn in business due to the pandemic, Kayak Nature Tours has been continuously in operation with a number of employees for more than 30 years. The company has also been providing tours for Disney at Castaway Cay since its inception.

In 2008, Erika resurrected and reopened The Garden of the Groves which had been seriously damaged by Hurricanes Francis and Jeane in 2004. The process had to be repeated following Hurricane Matthew in 2016 and Dorian in 2019. Most people would have given up at some point, but because of Erika's tenacity and love for the Garden it is still in business today.

In 2011, through Erika's connections in Germany, Kayak Nature Tours leased the world-famous tall ship, the Alexander Von Humboldt. The Green Lady, as she was known because of her famous green sails, provided a refreshing new slant on tour offerings for Freeport. While the venture was moderately successful, mechanical issues could not be overcome and the ship was returned to Germany.

Over the years, Kayak Nature Tours has received numerous awards and accolades including the Cacique Award, Carnival's award for the Number One Caribbean Operator and Carnival's award for Sustainable Tourism.

Erika would have been happy to know that someone referred to her as part of the "fabric of Freeport." She loved Freeport and her adopted country. Within the scope of her expertise and abilities, she was often at the forefront of any worthwhile effort or project that would

benefit the community and the greater Bahamas. Erika loved what she was doing and would only seek media attention if necessary to move a project forward. Otherwise, she would quietly stay in the background and let others take the credit.

She freely gave of her time and resources. Many messages of condolence mentioned "thanks for mentoring." Some said "You made me what I am today." Twice yearly, for several weekends each time, spanning almost two decades, she provided free birding classes for new birders. As a result, the number of people enjoying this activity in Freeport has grown considerably. During the same period of time, she also organized major annual birding events both locally and internationally.

Erika would spend any amount of time to rescue an injured bird, or dog or cat and over the years they numbered in the hundreds. She was an ardent supporter of The Humane Society of Grand Bahama and if she were here, she would ask you to please lend your support.

The Ministry of Tourism often called on her to assist with introducing new activities to areas badly in need of tourism revenue. She never turned them down and although she may have been paid a per diem, she seldom sought to recover expenses.

On one occasion, to attract visiting birders, she was asked to create a birding environment near Congo Town, South Andros. It was hot and the mosquitoes were biting, but she made three multi-day trips and created boardwalks, blue-hole viewing platforms and signage to identify the various bird species.

On another occasion, she was asked to identify and design tours in South Eleuthera for Princess Cruise Line passengers. Guests were coming off the ship, but there were few tours available. She spent two weeks on the ground under very trying conditions evaluating the potential of various tour ideas and then a month afterwards writing tour descriptions.

More recently, she was tasked with doing the same in Bimini for guests who were not interested in gambling. She made three separate trips to Bimini for that purpose and developed the S. Bimini birding trail.

Over the last five years, Erika made self-funded trips to the annual British Bird Faire in England to promote birding in The Bahamas. This is a huge event that takes place over three days in August of each year and almost every country is represented by its birding experts. When Erika discovered that The Bahamas was only represented by a desk handing out brochures, it became her mission to correct that.

Erika was a true multi-tasker. Her secret was that she always loved what she was doing and was always meticulously prepared. Few people can claim that they ever heard her say "I'm sorry I'm late" or "I forgot to bring that."

She may be gone from our lives, but the memory of her will always be with us.

Although Erika proudly became a citizen of The Bahamas in 1982, she always carried a part of her homeland with her. Like her parents before her, she was born in a quaint, 600-year-old town named Lennep. It was in a region of Germany known as the Bergisches Land, an area of low mountains, rivers, deep forests, magnificent castles and fairy-tale princesses. It's where she developed a love for the beauty in nature and her passion for birds. For those of us who loved and adored her, we saw the beauty reflected in her life, and she will always be our Bergisches Princess.

MEMORIAL SERVICES AND CELEBRATION OF LIFE

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Erika Gates

Opening Hymn Ludwig von Beethoven's "Ode to Joy"

Joyful, joyful, we adore Thee, God of glory, Lord of love;

Hearts unfold like flow'rs before Thee, praising Thee, their sun above.

Melt the clouds of sin and sadness, drive the gloom of doubt away;

Giver of immortal gladness, fill us with the light of day!

All Thy works with joy surround Thee, Earth and heav'n reflect Thy rays,

Stars and angels sing around Thee, center of unbroken praise.

Field and forest, vale and mountain, flow'ry meadow, flashing sea,

Chanting bird and flowing fountain call us to rejoice in Thee.

Thou art giving and forgiving, ever blessing, ever blest,

Wellspring of the joy of living, ocean depth of happy rest!

Thou our Father, Christ our Brother, all who live in love are Thine;

Teach us how to love each other, lift us to the joy divine!

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

Pastor: The Lord be with you.

All: And also with you.

Pastor: Let us pray:

O God of grace and glory, we remember before You today our wife, aunt and friend, Erika. We thank You for giving her to us to know and to love as a companion in our pilgrimage on earth. In Your boundless compassion, console us who mourn. Give us Your aid, so we may see in death the gate to eternal life, that we may continue our path on earth in confidence until, by Your call, we are reunited with those who have gone before us, through Your Son, Jesus Christ.

Message Ms. Sarah St. George
Chairperson of Grand Bahama Group of Companies

Message Lisa Sorenson, Ph. D.
Executive Director of Birds Caribbean

The Lord's Prayer Sung by Congregation

"You Raise Me Up" sung by Javan Hunt

Message Mrs. Christina Stoecker
Sister-in-law of Erika Gates

Message Pastor Andreas Reichert
Cousin of Erika Gates

"Bergisches Heimatlied" performed by Angel Russel, *Grand Bahama Choir*
Piano by Kevin Tomlinson, *Director*

Message Ms. Elizabeth Tip Burrows
Executive Director of The Humane Society of Grand Bahama

Message Mrs. Yvonne Smith
Pilot

Message Pastor Clifford Lewis

Selection "Time to Say Goodbye" Johannes Reichert
cousin of Erika Gates

Closing Blessings Pastor Clifford Lewis

Gatherings for Cocktail Reception at the Café Deck

Thank You.

The family sends heartfelt thanks to all who have sent loving thoughts & prayers, cards of condolences, letters and phone calls. Your support is deeply appreciated.



Wimbledon 1974



Tennis with Bud Collins



Chair Umpire 1976



Garden of the Groves Opening 2008



Not my duck!



Italian Musical



Florida Panthers Chair Leaders



Castaway Cay



Our Abaco Staff on Castaway Cay



Arrival of Alex



German sailors are pleased to see their new commanding officer



Castaway Cay Staff



I never got my cake!



ATV Tour

Kayaking

Andros Bird Park

Birding Group with Certificates

Red Tail Hawk

Protecting Birds

British Bird Fair

Flying to Florida

Trip to Abaco

First Plane

GONE TOO SOON,



BUT FOREVER IN OUR HEARTS