



Sheila Gail Atwater

January 5, 1948 - February 9, 2026

Sheila passed away peacefully in her sleep Monday morning, Feb 9th, 2026.

Born on January 5th, 1948, to Bruce & Arliss Naylor in Bertha MN, she was later joined by sister Kristen "Aviah" in 1951. Raised a dairy farmer's daughter, she had a deep sense of work ethic, and a strong family bond.

She graduated from high school in Bertha and moved to New York to attend Alexandria Technical College for their Medical Lab Assistant program. She started her career at the New York State Dept of Mental Hygiene, and over time moved on (and back to Minnesota). Soon she met a very handsome and charming man by the name of James Atwater.

Sheila wed Jim in a small ceremony, in the middle of the deepest of winter cold & snow in her hometown, on December 11th, 1971, before promptly packing up and moving out west to Blaine WA. Jim was in the Air Force, and Sheila was in love with both the man and the adventure! They welcomed a daughter, Cheryl, in 1976. Shortly after, Jim was assigned to Glendale AZ, and off on another adventure they went! After a few years, it was time to retire from the military life and settle the family down, and they chose Custer WA as their landing place.

Sheila went back to work at Whatcom Pathology Laboratory and occasionally

taught phlebotomy at the Tech College for their Medical program. After a full career, Sheila decided to go back to school for a Medical Assistant program, where she graduated from Whatcom Community College in 2005 – the same year she became a grandmother to Sylvia! She started her second career and enjoyed being the professional that she truly was for many more years.

Throughout her time in Washington, she was very involved in her church's altar guild and served as the head of the guild for many years. Her faith was deeply meaningful to her, and she truly led by example, with grace and humility and gentle support.

After retirement, she further explored her love of the fiber arts, and joined the Weaver's Guild, where she remained an active member until 2026. She entered the NWWA fair competitions with silver hair, just as she had in her childhood showing her cows (and took 1st place every year!). She had shows at the Jansen Art Center in Lynden, she ran the 'Little Looms' classes at the local libraries and would happily spend time with anyone that needed a teaching moment.

After Jim's death in 2015, she also joined the volunteers that support Whatcom Hospice House and spent the last 11 years doing everything from making keepsake pillows to putting together packets for grieving families after their lasting impact following her own loss of a partner.

Sheila loved traveling and experiencing new places – learning about the history and the culture and the people (usually with her daughter as her adventure partner). They traveled to Scotland

and England in 2001, and they fulfilled Sheila's lifelong dream of going to Hawaii in 2023 along with many, many other adventures.

She is preceded in death by her parents, husband Jim, sister Aviah Cole, stepdaughter Jeanette "Charlie" Aiken, and grandson Zachary Aiken. She leaves behind her daughter Cheryl (and favorite son-in-law Henry) Atwater-Miller & granddaughter Sylvia, as well as granddaughter Kailynn Aiken (with great-granddaughters Charlie and Madisyn Cordova), and grandson Aarren Aiken. She also leaves behind a vast community of friends and family.

We will be celebrating Sheila on March 4th, 2026, at St Paul's Episcopal Church in Bellingham WA at 2pm. Immediately following their will be a memorial reception at Moles Greenacres in Ferndale WA. In lieu of flowers, we ask that you make donations to Whatcom Hospice House, Planned Parenthood, or any other worthy cause.

Sheila was a wildly intelligent, witty, and welcoming person. She touched so many lives, and she did everything with honor and integrity. We will miss her deeply, and the world is a bit darker without her light in it.

Previous Events

Ceremony

MAR 4. 2:00 PM (PT)

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
2117 Walnut St.
Bellingham, WA 98225

Tribute Wall



“ *Moles Farewell Tributes created a Tribute Video in memory of Sheila Gail Atwater*



Moles Farewell Tributes - March 03 at 12:11 PM



“ *Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of Sheila Gail Atwater.*



March 03 at 01:52 PM



“ *Sheila was a dear friend. We will miss looking for her weavings at the fair. I will miss her humor and her kindness. Sheila will be deeply missed. Cathe and Rob Donnelly*

Cathe Donnelly - March 03 at 01:42 PM



“ *Robin & East Jordan Plastics purchased the Simply Elegant Spathiphyllum for the family of Sheila Gail Atwater.*



Robin & East Jordan Plastics - March 03 at 10:32 AM