



CELEBRATING THE LIFE AND LOVE OF  
*Dr. Theresa Franko-Holstein*

May 8, 1955 - December 10, 2024



Loving, supportive, intelligent, and tireless, Dr. Therese “Theresa” Franko-Holstein led a life rich in family, friendships, and purpose. Theresa embodied her beliefs, greeting each day as a gift, choosing hope over fear, and treating everyone she encountered with care and respect. A generous soul, she gave abundantly—whether through handmade creations or delivering the gift of life to thousands of babies. She will be deeply missed by all who knew her.

Theresa was born on May 8, 1955, to Andrew and Isabel Franko in Youngstown, Ohio. Her parents, immigrants from Germany and Slovakia, instilled in their children the values of hard work, frugality, and perseverance. Andrew, a skilled shop teacher and craftsman, built their family home in Hubbard, Ohio, with the help of his father. Isabel, a dedicated nurse, nurtured their growing family, which soon included five children: Theresa, Cecilia, Andrew, Mary Beth, and Marty. The sisters shared a single bedroom and a modest half bath, but despite the home’s small size and crowded household, it was

filled with love, laughter, and a constant sense of togetherness.

Theresa embraced her role as the eldest child by looking out for her siblings and ensuring they completed their chores before taking time for herself to escape into a good book. Often, she would lie in her room with a pillow over her head to block out the commotion of a bustling household of seven. Education was a cornerstone of the Franko household, and Theresa stood out as a top student, excelling in math and the sciences. Outside of school, she treasured time spent with her grandmother, Nanny, a gifted seamstress who created stunning wedding dresses and tiny, intricate Barbie clothes. Nanny shared her talents with an eager Theresa, giving her skills and sparking a passion that would serve her well for years to come.

One of the family’s most memorable adventures was a trip to Disney World in Florida, which included their extended family and cousins. Theresa fondly recalled how she and Cecilia, both tall and mature-looking for their age, managed to order beer at Busch Gardens without the servers realizing they were underage!



These experiences of adventure, discovery, and family togetherness not only shaped Theresa's early years, they molded her character and built the foundation for her remarkable life.

Theresa's academic prowess earned her a Rotary Scholarship to spend her senior year of high school in the Philippines—a life-changing experience that broadened her perspective and introduced her to new friendships and cultural experiences. As the tallest student in her class, she was quickly chosen to play center on the basketball team. Despite her lack of skill or enthusiasm for the sport, she embraced the role with great humor.

Graduating from high school in 1973, Theresa pursued her college education at John Carroll University before transferring to The Ohio State University, where she majored in Engineering and also pursued studies in Psychology. She completed her undergraduate degree in just three years and achieved a strong MCAT score, earning her admission to The Ohio State College of Medicine. As an avid feminist driven by her dedication to women's health and equality, Theresa chose obstetrics and gynecology as her specialty, knowing it would allow her to advocate for women, make a difference in their lives, and provide care that truly mattered.

After graduating as one of the youngest in her class, Theresa began her residency at the University of Rochester in Rochester, New York. Long hours and hard work defined this period, but visits from her sister Mary Beth, a student at Syracuse University, lifted her spirits. During one particularly amusing visit, Mary Beth, who bore a striking resemblance to Theresa, took her place in a staff basketball game without announcing the switch. Thanks to Mary Beth's impressive athletic ability on the court, the players remained none the wiser.






In 1980, Theresa joined the Public Health Medical Corps, serving underserved populations in rural South Carolina. A passionate advocate for underserved populations, her dedication to women's health and prenatal education left a lasting impact on the community.

While in South Carolina, Theresa was overjoyed to welcome a son, Robin, born on June 14, 1985. Her next assignment in Whitesburg, Kentucky, brought new challenges as she managed the demands of her medical career and raising a young child. But her heart could take on more. On July 19, 1989, she celebrated the birth of her daughter, Helene, fully completing her family.

In 1990, Theresa relocated to Fort Mitchell, Kentucky, seeking a supportive environment for her young family and an opportunity to build her own practice. Settling off of Longmeadow Drive, she founded Tristate Women's Health Associates with Dr. Pamela Hodges. Theresa inspired those around her as she skillfully balanced the responsibilities of motherhood with her vision of building a thriving practice. Renowned in the community as a trusted physician, Theresa was celebrated for her practicality, efficiency, and compassion. She earned the admiration of her patients and empowered them to take charge of their health.






Dedicated to professional excellence, Theresa stayed at the forefront of her field through rigorous study and active involvement. She earned recognition as a Fellow of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists and contributed to advancements in women's health through her work with the National Menopause Society. Over her career, Theresa delivered a generation of babies and provided unparalleled care to hundreds of women, finding deep fulfillment and gratitude in the privilege of sharing in their childbirth journeys.

Theresa brought the same dedication and resolve that defined her professional life to her most cherished priority—her children. After long hours at work, she would return home to prepare healthy dinners for Robin and Helene, managing the household with a detailed checklist inspired by her own mother. She was unwavering in supporting their dreams, making sure Robin and Helene felt encouraged in every aspiration, from Helene's band activities to Robin's tennis matches at Beechwood High School. Engaged and hands-on, she even put her sewing skills to use by offering to make the color guard flags.

Family adventures were a central joy in Theresa's life. She nurtured Robin and Helene's artistic interests by enrolling them in summer programs at the Cincinnati Art Academy and planning enriching outings to places like the Natural History Museum or Playhouse in the Park to catch the latest performances. Quick getaways were common, including trips to Disney World, Florida, or Wisconsin for the Experimental Aircraft Association Air Show. The family loved visiting Amish Country to admire the crafts and enjoy the cheese, and these trips often included





a stop for Theresa's favorite pistachio ice cream. As her children grew older and built lives of their own, she found creative and meaningful ways to stay connected, like sending them a care package of their favorite Graeter's ice cream, a sweet reminder of her love and their home.

Theresa's creativity was not only a gift she passed on to her children but also a lifelong passion that brought her immense joy. Her talents in sewing, embroidery, knitting, and crocheting were matched only by her generosity, as she freely shared her handmade works with family, friends, and community organizations in need. With both children out of the Fort Mitchell home, Theresa moved to Cincinnati's Mt. Adams neighborhood.

There, she became an avid cyclist and relished the camaraderie of local cycling clubs, thriving in the city's vibrant energy with its walkable yarn shops and restaurants.

In her later years, Theresa continued to champion women's health, focusing on the complexities of menopause, researching new treatments and staying at the forefront of emerging practices. Her commitment to women and children's advocacy extended beyond medicine, she became an active member of MOMS Demand Action, working to combat gun violence and promote safer communities.

In 2019, Theresa retired and moved to Daniel Island, South Carolina, to be closer to her sisters. She embraced the warm climate and continued to enjoy cycling whenever possible. Theresa found joy in the companionship of her beloved dog, Ellie, a Beagle-Labrador mix who had been by her side for many years. A lifelong dog lover, she cherished their constant comfort and loyalty. After Ellie's passing, Theresa welcomed a Pembroke Welsh Corgi into her life—the charming and aptly named Lady Diana.

Even in retirement, Theresa remained active and generous. During the COVID-19 pandemic, she put her sewing skills to work, creating and contributing hundreds of cloth masks to local hospitals for healthcare workers. Always eager to make a difference, she volunteered tirelessly to support vaccination efforts.



Theresa's commitment to bettering her community was evident in every opportunity she embraced to lend a helping hand.

In late 2022, Theresa's health took a difficult turn when she began experiencing mobility issues and arthritis. A fall prompted an MRI, which revealed early-stage ovarian cancer and led her to begin chemotherapy. The treatment came with its own complications, causing significant damage to her joints and further hindering her mobility. Never one to ignore her health, Theresa continued to advocate for answers, leading to a final, devastating diagnosis of ALS—a progressive and terminal disease of the motor neurons. Theresa faced her prognosis with remarkable grace and resilience, fully aware of its implications as a physician. Her family rallied around her, with her sisters Mary Beth and Cecelia offering steadfast care and support as she adjusted to her new reality.

Theresa's final weeks were spent in the tender care of her children Robin and Helene, who stood by her side with compassion and devotion. She left them with a message of wisdom and love, a reflection of her life's lessons: "Travel more, take care of yourself, and don't work so hard that you don't enjoy life."

On December 10, 2024, Dr. Therese Franko-Holstein passed away peacefully, surrounded by her children, family, and faithful companion, Lady Di. She will always be remembered as a devoted mother, an accomplished physician, and a woman of remarkable character and extraordinary talent. Theresa made a difference with her life, leaving an enduring legacy in the hearts she touched and the lives she transformed.

*She will be profoundly missed.*





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