



## Mrs. Leigh Irene Ross Merlini

November 2, 1944 - May 18, 2025

Our beloved Leigh Irene Ross Merlini passed away peacefully, surrounded by her closest family, on Sunday, May 18, 2025.

Born in New Rochelle N.Y., to Richard and Maurine Ross, her family soon moved to Palm Beach, Florida where she and her sister, Laurie, spent their childhood on the water. Leigh attended Palm Beach High School.

After high school, Leigh moved to New York City where she attended Mills College for Women. It was there she met the love of her life, Chuck Merlini, when he substituted last minute for a blind date with a friend. The two fell in love, got married and moved into family housing at Princeton University, where Chuck was an undergraduate and their first child, Richard, was born.

After having their second child, Katy, Chuck completed his MBA at Harvard and they moved to White Plains, New York. Leigh attended Manhattanville College in Purchase N.Y. and received her undergraduate degree in Theatre. She was a 'triple threat' (actor, singer and dancer) in community theater, then professionally in off-Broadway productions on the New York dinner theatre circuit.

Leigh had a soft spot in her heart for children and adults with special needs. She worked and volunteered for several human services organizations in her

lifetime, including Blythedale Children's Hospital, NY, and CATA in the Berkshires, among others. Caring for special needs individuals was something she would continue to do throughout her life.

In the 80's, Leigh and Chuck moved to Richmond in Berkshire County Massachusetts, where they lived surrounded by nature. Leigh had a love of nature and took the trip of a lifetime, solo, to Zimbabwe to help with elephant research and preservation. In the Berkshires, Leigh had a longstanding career as a counselor for what was then Family Planning. She was dedicated to women's rights and activism and was an avid protester and activist.

Leigh is survived by her sister, Laurie O'Leary, Daughter, Katy Lynn Merlini, Son, Richard Angelo Merlini, and grandchildren, Anna and Charles Merlini. She was predeceased by her true love, husband, Charles Merlini.

A remembrance of her life will be held at a later date. Donations may be made in her name to either

CATA (Community Access to the Arts)- CATA (<https://fundraise.givesmart.com/form/5TuggA?vid=1jppjaa>)

Lenox Cat Hospital, 450 Pittsfield Road, Lenox, MA 01240 or to Reproductive Freedom for All Reproductive Freedom for All — Donate via ActBlue ([https://secure.actblue.com/donate/naral-search-ck?refcode=CK\\_FY25\\_RFFA\\_Br\\_EXT\\_1x&gad\\_source=1&gad\\_campaignid=21508469940&gbraid=0AAAAADkidIsTYXskpfBkpiYM0M-FYP6ll](https://secure.actblue.com/donate/naral-search-ck?refcode=CK_FY25_RFFA_Br_EXT_1x&gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=21508469940&gbraid=0AAAAADkidIsTYXskpfBkpiYM0M-FYP6ll))

# Tribute Wall

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“ Laurie, Katy, Richard, Anna and Charles- I am so very sorry for your loss. I was fortunate to know Leigh through her work as a volunteer at Community Access to the Arts (CATA). She brought such energy, warmth, and dedication to her work supporting our artists with disabilities. She knew everyone by name and took time to show her care and support in every interaction. I am holding you all in my heart now.

*With sympathy,  
Margaret Keller (Exec Director of CATA)*

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**Margaret Keller** - May 24, 2025 at 01:42 PM