

Reta Ann Gowlland (née Morton)

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of Reta Ann Gowlland (née Morton), who died peacefully on August 8, 2026, just one week after celebrating her 90th birthday. Reta was predeceased by her husband, George Gowlland, Jr.

Reta was born on August 1, 1936, on the family farm in the Crystal Lake District, northeast of Lethbridge, Alberta. The youngest of three children, she grew up in a time when their three-room farmhouse had no electricity or running water and had a wood-burning cook stove and an outhouse. From those early years, Reta developed the qualities that would define her throughout her life: independence, determination, organization, curiosity, a fierce devotion to family and friends, and an innate ability to cultivate abundant vegetable gardens and beautifully colourful flower gardens.

She attended Crystal Lake School, a two-room schoolhouse serving students from Grades 1 through 12. She walked nearly 3 kms to school every day, even in the Alberta prairie winters, sometimes arriving with her dress and stockings soaked from the snow.

Reta wrote a memoir in which she remembered family card games, checkers, baseball games with her father, and summer “Penny Circuses” that she and her siblings organized for the family. At about ten years old, she discovered the magic of the public library and developed a love of books and reading. That passion remained with her throughout her life.

As a teenager, Reta travelled to England with her sister Dorothy, crossing the Atlantic by ship in 1952. At 16, after getting her driver’s licence, Reta and her friend Elinor became members of Southminster United Church in Lethbridge,

where Reta remained connected to the church community.

Reta's decision to attend Lethbridge Collegiate Institute for Grade 12 changed the course of her life. It was there that she met George Gowlland, and they married on May 24, 1958. They would share 67 years of marriage, building a life filled with family, interesting work, and friendships.

Reta began her working life in 1955 as the confidential secretary to the Chief of Police in Lethbridge, where she was the only woman in the entire police station at that time. She later worked as a court reporter, secretary, university administrator, bookkeeper and, most importantly to her family, a devoted mother. Reta and George lived in Montana and Florida during the early years of their marriage while George pursued graduate studies before returning to Alberta. In Florida, Reta worked at the University of Florida. She experienced firsthand that the world was changing and believed strongly in treating everyone and the environment with dignity and respect.

Reta and George moved back to Calgary, and their family grew with the arrival of their daughters, Charmaine and Tanya. Reta built deep and lasting friendships.

Throughout their lives, Reta and George travelled by train, plane and automobile, taking many unforgettable trips. Road trips were taken in their memorable cars, including many convertibles and Corvettes, while much of their international travel adventures were with their lifelong friends, Ken and Lavonne.

Reta was a woman who kept meticulous records. She wrote lists, never missed balancing her chequebook, and her medical records and notes remained complete and chronological right until the end of her life.

Reta was known for a few "famous" dishes. Her signature dishes included porcupines (meatballs with rice in them that, when cooked, make them look like porcupines), teriyaki chicken,

cheddar cornmeal biscuits, angel food cake, and “Aunty Mary’s” shortbread. She always (and I mean always!) used a recipe, even when she knew the recipe by heart. She also ensured that every meal included plenty of colourful vegetables, both raw and cooked.

Reta loved card games, especially Phase 10 and cribbage. She was competitive, and winning against Reta was no easy accomplishment.

Reta was kind, strong-willed, protective and deeply loyal. She worked hard to keep her family close and remained interested in the lives of the people she loved.

Reta will be lovingly remembered by her daughters, Charmaine (Tom) and Tanya (Luigi), and her beloved granddaughters, Hannah and Sena. She will also be deeply missed by her six nieces and two nephews and their families, her cousins in Scotland and England and their families, her sister-in-law, the many friends she loved dearly, and all those whose lives she touched.

Reta gave us a lifetime filled with stories, friendships, traditions, incredible style and decorating, and treasured memories. She leaves behind recipe pages carefully followed, lists meticulously written, card games fiercely contested, gardens lovingly tended, a silly snowman built every winter, animals that were always given attention, travels remembered, and a family who knew, without question, that she loved them.

Reta will be deeply missed and forever remembered.

In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Reta’s memory to the [Canadian Cancer Society](#).

A Memorial Service will be held on Friday, September 18, 2026, at 1 p.m. in the Sequoia Centre at McCall’s Gardens, 4665 Falaise Drive, Victoria, BC.

Condolences may be offered to the family below.

McCall Gardens

www.mccallgardens.com

This obituary is the property of the "Gowlland" family and may not be reproduced, distributed, or altered in any way without prior written consent.