

Elizabeth “Liza” Maxwell Lee

Elizabeth "Liza" Maxwell Lee died peacefully on September 12, 2026, at William P. Clements Jr. University Hospital in Dallas, Texas. She was 83.

Liza was born Elizabeth Lyon Maxwell on August 8, 1943, in New York City. Her father, Charles R. Maxwell Jr., was a corporate and financial lawyer, and her mother, Elizabeth Scheuer Maxwell, was active in civic and cultural organizations. Liza attended The Brearley School, an independent girls' school in Manhattan, graduating in 1961.



Liza arrived as a freshman at Mount Holyoke College (MHC) from New York City. Classmates found that her wit and intelligence made her a natural leader and always good company. Senior year, she served as Torrey House President. Following graduation, she served both as a Class Agent and as a Reunion Gift Caller. In 2010, she received the Elizabeth Topham Kennan Award given to an alum for outstanding achievement in and contributions to the field of education. She was always a loyal supporter of the College.

In 1965, she earned her Bachelor of Arts from Mount Holyoke College, where she was a Mary Lyon Fellow, and in 1967, her Master of Arts from Columbia University, where she was a Woodrow Wilson Fellow. She received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters from Southern Methodist University. She also received SMU's Maura Award for her support of women's lives, the Excellence in Education Award from the Dallas Historical Society, and the Girls' Champion Award from Girls Inc.

Martha Dolkart Bernstein '65 shares, “Although Liza and I were casual friends in college, our lives intersected more closely when she was living in NYC and then came together again in more recent years when we visited mutual friends in Dallas. Over these more than 60 years it was always a joy to spend time with Liza. Her insight on a wide variety of topics and her wonderful sense of humor were truly special.”

Karen “KK” Kelly Becker ’65: “Although I knew Liza Maxwell Lee at MHC—we were both English majors who became teachers—not until more than 20 years later did we become close friends. As the years passed, Liza Lee’s achievements as a school head and an educational leader became ever more distinguished—until she was ultimately recognized as perhaps the most outstanding leader in the independent-school world. Liza Lee was certainly one of the most intelligent, articulate, compassionate people I’ve ever known. Her words, her influence, and her imprint will remain everywhere around us.

Liza and William Martens Lee, MD, married in 1966. In 1980, their family moved to Charleston, South Carolina, and in 1990 to Dallas, Texas.

Liza’s professional career began at The Brearley School in Manhattan, New York, where she spent 12 years in a variety of teaching and administrative roles, including Head of the Middle School. That experience provided the foundation for a career that would take her to leadership positions at independent schools across the nation.

In 1990, Liza was selected to lead The Hockaday School, one of the nation’s foremost independent schools for girls. During her 14-year tenure as Eugene McDermott Headmistress, she guided the school through substantial growth and curriculum reform while earning a reputation for combining high expectations with a personal interest in the lives of students and colleagues. She also led a successful campaign to fund investments in technology, resulting in the construction of the academic research center that now bears her name, the Liza Lee Academic Research Center (LLARC).

Dr. Laura Leathers, Eugene McDermott Head of School at The Hockaday School wrote: “She was truly one of a kind, whose voice, wit, and leadership will long be remembered. Hockaday would not be the incredible school it is today without her influence.”

More than a decade after her retirement, Liza returned to Hockaday as interim headmistress from 2015 to 2017. During that period, she helped guide completion of the school’s Centennial Campaign and launched a service-learning initiative that connected classroom learning with community engagement.

Liza's influence extended well beyond Dallas. She served as the head of the Columbus School for Girls in Ohio, and as the interim head of Trinity Episcopal School in Austin; Porter-Gaud School in Charleston, South Carolina; and The College Preparatory School in Charleston. She also served on the boards of The Lawrenceville School; The Brooks School; The Brearley School; St. Philip's School; The Winston School; and The Oldfields School; as well as on the boards of the Dallas Holocaust Museum/Center for Education and Tolerance; the Eugene McDermott Foundation; and KERA North Texas Public Broadcasting. She was Past President of both the National Association of Principals of Schools for Girls and the Country Day School Headmasters Association.

Liza's NY Times obituary states: "Liza believed deeply in the power and potential of girls and women—and had a remarkable ability to help others see that potential in themselves. And while she had a profound impact on generations of students, faculty and staff in educational institutions, to her family her greatest talent was as a vivacious, loving, and hilarious sister, wife, mother, and grandmother!"

In addition to her husband, she is survived by her children, Matthew (Gia), Ted (E.V. Day), and Caroline (Mike Nees); five grandchildren, Arthur, Lorenzo, George, Ellie, and Henry; and her brother John W. Maxwell (Dora Keogh).

Earlier in 2026, UT Southwestern established the "Will and Liza Lee Center for Liver Disease and Transplant Research in recognition of Dr. Lee's pioneering contributions to hepatology and liver research and Mrs. Lee's lifelong commitment to education, leadership, and public service."

In lieu of flowers, the family has requested that memorial gifts be made to the Will and Liza Lee Center for Liver Disease and Transplant Research at UT Southwestern, The Hockaday School (for the benefit of the Liza and Will Lee Financial Aid Endowment Fund at Hockaday), or a charity of your choice.

A memorial service is scheduled for Saturday, October 3, at 2 p.m. in The Hockaday School's Nancy A. Nasher and David J. Haemisegger Family Theater; reception to follow in the Liza Lee Academic Research Center.

Photo: The Hockaday School.

Sources: The Hockaday School, September 15, 2026 death announcement by Dr. Laura Leathers, Eugene McDermott Head of School; UT Medical Center/Internal Medicine/Announcements, September 16, 2026; *The New York Times Obituaries*, September 20, 2026; the Alum Association of Mount Holyoke College/In Memoriam Notification, September 25, 2026; and the Mount Holyoke College Archives and Special Collections.

Special thanks to **Karen “KK” Kelly Becker** for reviewing this obituary and for forwarding The Hockaday School announcement, to **Caroline Fuller Sloat** for forwarding the UT Medical Center obituary, and to **Judith Ciani Smith** for sharing memories.

Posted: September 2026.