



## Ruby "Bela" Herlong

July 29, 1931 - February 15, 2021

Saluda, SC

Ruby "Bela" Herlong

Some people get their own, completely unique name. Bela Herlong was one of those people. Nobody else in the whole world, it seems, was called Bela; and that is exactly as it should be because nobody else in the whole world was like her.

Ruby Euela Padgett Herlong, lovingly known as Bela, Miss Bela, Mrs. Herlong or Mama, depending on one's relationship with her, was born on July 29, 1931, and passed away at home on February 15, 2021. She was surrounded by family and by the love of an entire community and a world of students.

She taught English at Saluda High School for over forty years and is respected, remembered, and deeply loved by her over 5000 students, as the hundreds of Facebook messages show: "How many of us over [her] four decades of teaching benefitted from [her] love of the English language and literature? Country kids from Saluda learned of Shakespeare, Chaucer, Dickens, themes, poetry and term papers." "What we did in her class was hard. She believed we could, so we did." "My love of reading, I got from Bela Herlong. She was one of the best and toughest teachers I ever had." "She was a true teacher because she taught you to think, not just this is the correct answer, but why and how. It takes a 'gift' to be able to do that."

She did not restrict that gift to only those students in her classroom. For over twenty-four years, she was also the advisor for the Prism, Saluda High School's award-winning literary magazine. In that role, she encouraged the writer in every student and with Mrs. Gloria Caldwell as director, co-wrote and put on an annual dramatic performance based on the students' work.

Her great gift was recognized nationally. To recite her teaching awards would require

pages. One of the earliest was being named one of five finalists in Look magazine's National Teacher of the Year contest in 1967. One of the more recent was the 2009 Governor's Award for Lifetime Achievement in the Humanities. Through the years the awards ranged from recognition as an "Ageless Hero for Love of Learning" (2000) given by South Carolina Blue Cross/Blue Shield, to a "Distinguished Service Award" (1985) from the Southern Interscholastic Press Association.

When she retired, she turned her formidable talents to history and was among the original group who worked to save the Saluda Theater and establish the Saluda County Historical Society. Turned historian, she also turned researcher and author and co-wrote books on local history—books that will be invaluable to future students and which include *Mount Willing: Gone But Not Forgotten* (2004) and *Breaking New Ground: A Pictorial History of Saluda County* (1995). Moreover, she and Gloria Caldwell co-wrote and produced numerous historical dramas depicting significant moments in Saluda County history, such as *Ties that Bind: A Gathering in Daly Woods* (2000), *With Valor They Stood: A Drama of Saluda County Veterans* (1991), and *Thomas Green Clemson: A Man Before his Time* (1990). Her most successful historical publication, however, was also her most personal. Every Sunday for ten years, she listened to and recorded her own father, Douglas Davenport Padgett, as he shared the tale of his life. She edited it, gathered the thoughts of others about him, and in 2008 published Padgett's *My Name: One Man's Story of Growing Up and Growing Old Among Family and Friends in Rural South Carolina*. Again, for these community efforts, she received many awards, including recognition by the Greenwood Index-Journal as one of the 100 Most Influential Citizens of the Century in the seven-county area and the "Citizen of the Year" award from the Saluda Civitan Club.

All this illustrates her giving, public life as Miss Bela and Mrs. Herlong, but one of her most treasured names was "Mama." In 1951, she married Jimmie Herlong, who died in 2006. She and Jimmie had four children. The eldest was Jim (Jim Ed), who died in 2014 and was married to Wendie Smith, whom Mama especially treasured after the loss of Jim. Jim had one daughter, Charity Chappelle (Mitch), who gave Bela three great-grandchildren (Jesse, Olivia, and Jake), and one son, Kirk Herlong, who lived with Bela for several of his teenage years and gave her two great-grandchildren (Jonathon and Zachary). The second child was Madaline, who married Don Haycraft, lives in New Orleans, and gave Mama four grandsons—James (Christine), Daniel, Jesse, and Travis. William, the third child, married Joan Egan and lives in Greenville, SC. William gave Mama one grandson, Jack (Caitlin), and three granddaughters—Darcy Slizewski (Adam), Grace Loveless (Ryan), and Blanche Reese (Hunter), who have given her four great-grandchildren (Laney and Birdie Slizewski and Carson and Scott Loveless). The "baby" was Alice, who married Heyward Powe, lives in Charlotte, NC, and gave Mama two grandsons, Padgett and

Harrison. Mama's house is filled with photographs of all this immediate family as well as all the extended family and friends who enriched her life.

There was also a very private "Bela" that she revealed only in her poetry. One of the blessings of her later years was that she had time to collect those poems into a volume titled *A Certain View*, which is available for purchase at the Saluda County Museum.

Mama sometimes said that she wished she could have been a mother-at-home for all of us—but we always knew she didn't mean it. She may have loved us "so much her heart hurt" but her heart was made stronger, wider, and happier by her teaching. As she wrote upon her retirement:

"I will be lonely. I will miss 'life all around me'- noisy, young, exuberant life. I will miss the 'country of the young' where I have lived for forty-three years. I will miss the magic of the classroom where dreams are the fabric of the very day. I look back over the corridor of the years and thank God for letting me be a teacher."

We, her children, thank God for giving her to us to be our "Mama," and we know that thousands of students and the Saluda community thank God for letting her be their "Mrs. Herlong" and "Miss Bela." We know that many people will want to show their love of her, and we know that in lieu of flowers, what she would most appreciate is contributions to the scholarship established in her name at Winthrop University for the benefit of South Carolina students studying to become teachers. She treasured the ability to help others in this way and would be so thankful if others joined her in this effort, because all amounts, no matter how small, combine to make a difference to a worthy, aspiring teacher. Checks can be made out to "The Ruby P. 'Bela' Herlong Annual Restricted Scholarship" and mailed to Winthrop University Foundation, Winthrop University, 302 Tillman Hall, Rock Hill, SC 29733.

A simple graveside service will be held at Emory United Methodist Church at 2 p.m. on Friday, February 19. While we wish that all who loved her could be with us at this time, the pandemic requires us to invite only family and close friends. However, we invite everyone to participate via the broadcast on SALUDANow on Facebook Live. The stream will launch around 1:50 p.m. EST. We hope that when the pandemic restrictions ease, we can hold a celebration of life—possibly at her beloved theater—in true "Bela" style. We hope to see you there and to share with you the joy her life gave to us all.

# Cemetery Details

## Emory United Methodist Church Cemetery

423 Emory Road  
Saluda, SC 29138

# Previous Events

## Livestream

FEB **19**. 1:50 PM (ET)

SALUDANow  
Facebook Live  
Saluda, SC 29138

# Tribute Wall

“Wonder, Think, Learn!” Those were the first three words on Dr. Bela’s poster of objectives at Saluda High School. I also recall that if we did not “wonder, think, learn”, “life will be dull, tedious, and boring.”

One would not think that an engineer would be prone to like English class. To a certain extent, that still holds true for me to this day. Yet, much of my success as an engineer is due to my “Saluda county grammar, literature, and English classes.” From the grammar classes of Ray Matthews (Hollywood) to the literature classes of Celia Cone (Hollywood) to the freshman and sophomore English classes of Terri Powers (Saluda High) to the junior and senior English classes of Dr. Bela Herlong (Saluda High), the strong foundation for my writing skills was established.

I did not know back then how important that skill would be to my present career. In addition to being an engineer, I also carry the duty of a technical writer because of the aforesaid. With all the technical reports, procedure revisions, briefing packages, e-mail correspondences, and many other job-related writing assignments, I can say that each had their roots with term papers, novel essays, special topic essays, poems, critiques, and other forms of written work from grades 7 to 12.

Throughout my career, I have come to notice that several employers needing engineers also needed for those engineers to be effective communicators especially in writing. “Miss Bela’s” English classes fortified my writing skills. Thank you, Dr. Herlong. I would not be where I am today without those strong writing skills!

Yet, my most memorable moment with Mrs. Herlong actually did not take place during her English class, but her Teacher Cadet class. During a classroom discussion, the question was raised, “Why should someone want to become a teacher?”

Of the responses, one was, “Because of June, July, and August!” Another one was, “Job security.” I decided to throw my two cents in and said, “The hours. 8 a.m. to 3:15 p.m.” In the next second, “Miss Bela” erupted in opposition. She was not angry; just not in agreement with my statement. She pointed out that she has to grade papers when she gets home and does not get paid to do so. She also asserted that she constantly stays up late doing school-related work. I accepted her correction without further comment. Please know that I did not intend to “strike a nerve” with you, “Miss Bela.”

Mrs. Herlong would have been proud to know that her Teacher Cadet class paid off. Years later, I did procure a teaching job as a math tutor at Midlands Technical College (when I was in between federal jobs). I thoroughly enjoyed it! It was the most rewarding job I have held to date. No, the job did not pay well, but it had its rewards elsewhere. To have students come to me at the end of the semester in

*tears just to tell me they got a "A" in their math class because of my tutoring made me feel not only competent, but also fulfilled in knowing that I was able to make a positive difference in someone else's life. Seeing that positive difference made me want to go into teaching upon retiring from my current job. The only difference was that I did not stay up late to grade papers or do other tutoring work. That is the advantage of math over English.*

*Oh, how could I forget? "Miss Bela" battled cancer when I was her student. And, she beat it! During her recovery period, she did not stop working. She was like the Energizer Bunny – she kept going and going and going! It seemed as if work kept her mind off of her problems and aided in her speedy recovery.*

*In closing, I will always remember Mrs. Bela Herlong. Even though English was not one of my favorite subjects (I will spare the details as to why), I will always be grateful to "Miss Bela" for her skills at teaching me how to write effectively and to have a desire to be a teacher one day (even if it is not in English).*

*Saluda High School Class of 1991*

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**Gregory Goff** - February 24, 2021 at 08:36 AM

BS

“ *Bonnie Shealy Sikez lit a candle in memory of Ruby "Bela" Herlong*



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**Bonnie Shealy Sikez** - February 20, 2021 at 11:20 AM

EM

“ *Bela was very special person to my husband Ed Matthews and our family. It was a joy for us to share her knowledge of the Matthews family and the Bonham House. She was a kind person to all who knew her.*  
*Liz Matthews*

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**Elizabeth Matthews** - February 19, 2021 at 09:12 PM

TC

“ *Tricia Crouch lit a candle in memory of Ruby "Bela" Herlong*



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**Tricia Crouch** - February 19, 2021 at 07:16 PM

HD

“ *Bela Herlong was certainly a unique, giving person her entire life. My first memory of her is while vacationing with both Herlong families( Jimmie and Ben's ) at Hunting Island, Bela would read Uncle Remus stories to us kids at bedtime. As you can imagine, her way of speaking made the stories come to life. I can still hear her laugh, which was also unique, a youthful, girlish giggle. Later as Bela taught us juniors and seniors, we were challenged by the her passion for English. I credit her for my meager ability to communicate. We, her students, were given a gift that last a lifetime. May she rest in peace. Clay Duffie, Class of 1970.*

Henry Clay Duffie - February 19, 2021 at 10:52 AM

DC

“ *Mrs. Herlong was truly a special person and the best teacher I ever had. She always made me feel special and pushed me far beyond my limits. She said she only had one rule, that we must learn something new. She challenged me in every way and I am a much better person because of her. I was fortunate enough to have her three of my four years at Saluda High. Heaven definitely has another angel now. My thoughts and prayers are with the family now. God Bless you all.*



*Deidra Cockrell Collier  
Class Of 1989*

Deidra Cockrell Collier - February 18, 2021 at 10:12 PM

HG

“ *Hey Alice,  
Very sorry that you lost your Mama. You had her for a long time and she obviously had a very fruitful life.  
Hope Garner*

Hope Garner - February 18, 2021 at 05:31 PM

MS

“ *Mose & Robin Salters lit a candle in memory of Ruby "Bela"  
Herlong*



Mose & Robin Salters - February 18, 2021 at 04:21 PM

LS

“ Lisa Smith lit a candle in memory of Ruby "Bela" Herlong



Lisa Smith - February 18, 2021 at 03:38 PM

TC

“ I'm so sorry for your loss. Mrs. Herlong was a wonderful lady and the absolute best teacher! I have so many wonderful memories of her class and how she expected our best always. She will truly be missed! Teresa Coleman (Gibson)

Teresa Coleman - February 18, 2021 at 02:33 PM

LY

“ I am so sorry for y'all's loss! Miss Bela was a wonderful lady! The best teacher I ever had!! You all will be in my thoughts and prayers! Love, Lisa Yarbrough

Lisa Yarbrough - February 18, 2021 at 12:11 PM

JA

“ Jill Q. Altman lit a candle in memory of Ruby "Bela" Herlong



Jill Q. Altman - February 18, 2021 at 11:29 AM

 Carrie Higbee

“ Carrie Higbee lit a candle in memory of Ruby "Bela" Herlong



Carrie Higbee - February 18, 2021 at 10:00 AM

HP

“ Hospice & Palliative Care of the Piedmont wish to extend its condolence to the family of Bela Herlong. Hospice considered it a privilege to care for Mrs. Herlong during her illness.

Hospice & Palliative Care of the Piedmon - February 18, 2021 at 08:57 AM

AH

“ We send our heartfelt sympathy to the family. Like everyone who knew Ms Bela, we loved her! We will miss her very much!  
May the peace of God comfort each of you in the days ahead.

Sincerely, AliceDawn and Grig Herlong

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**AliceDawn Herlong** - February 18, 2021 at 04:08 AM

SH

“ “Miss Bela” was such a special lady. Most everyone in Saluda has been touched by her. She was an amazing teacher and a wonderful mom and Saludian. She will sorely be missed by thousands of her children. We love you Miss Bela.

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**Steven Himphries** - February 17, 2021 at 06:46 PM

RS

“ No one loved inspiring young people as much as she did, I sent her note telling her what a treasure she had meant to her students. She laughed and no one had ever called her a treasure but she certainly was.. How many of her students and family were there to greet her.

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**Richard Starling** - February 17, 2021 at 04:50 PM

JE

“ Your Family are in Our thoughts and Prayers.  
Brenda, Jerry and Your Friends at The Hardware Store

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**Jerry** - February 17, 2021 at 03:45 PM

RR

“ What a beautiful obituary written just like Ms Bela would have written. Thanks to the family for sharing her for so many years with everyone she knew. She lived her life well and full. We shall always treasure her memory. Randy & Mable Robertson

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**Randy & Mable Robertson** - February 17, 2021 at 03:29 PM

CS

“ Thank you for sharing your mother with us. I will always be grateful to have been one of her students.

Charlyn Hancock Staubes  
Class of 1966

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**Charlyn Hancock Staubes** - February 17, 2021 at 03:02 PM

AR


“ *Bela Herlong. All you really have to say is Bela. Memories flood back to so many students of that beautiful smile she shared every day. That laugh that made all of us feel “Job Well Done”.*

*She made her students better people because she opened our hearts and minds to imagination we didn't know we had. Putting our ideas on paper. I am fortunate to have been her student. Thank you Bela!*

*SHS Class of 1982*

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**Angie Wood Routsaw** - February 17, 2021 at 02:57 PM

 Kelly  
Hagens-  
Swart

“ *Bela was one of the first smiling faces I met when I appeared at my first DAR meeting. Bela's love of community, literature, history, and life was infectious. Being so very smart, witty, personable , and charming in all things made her a welcome friend and guest at all occasions. Her willingness to share and encourage made Bela a joyous addition to our ranks. Our sincerest and deepest sympathy to her family and friends. Kelly Hagens-Swart, Regent Old 96 District Chapter NSDAR*

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**Kelly Hagens-Swart** - February 17, 2021 at 02:15 PM

JP

“ *Judy Lake Price lit a candle in memory of Ruby "Bela" Herlong*



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**Judy Lake Price** - February 17, 2021 at 01:37 PM

MG

“ *Mary Evans Garza lit a candle in memory of Ruby "Bela" Herlong*



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**Mary Evans Garza** - February 17, 2021 at 01:01 PM

MG

“ To say Mrs. Herlong enriched my life and gave me a true passion for English is an understatement. She and Mrs. Caldwell encouraged me when I approached them about starting the first “publication” of the Prism. What a change from mimeographed, stapled sheets of the first Prism in 1967 to the Prism of today! Her exuberance in every facet of her life touched us all. Thank you, Miss Bela, for sharing your wisdom, passion, and love of life! I will miss you.

Mary Evans Garza - February 17, 2021 at 01:00 PM



“ RIP, Bela! You lived your life well.

Marilyn Grant - February 17, 2021 at 12:02 PM

TG

“ I met Ms Bela about 20 years ago when Mama & Daddy moved to Saluda from Batesburg. She became a loving kind friend to them & also to me. She was there with us through the good times & bad but also through the sickness & deaths of both of them & other family. I have honored to have been able to call her "Friend". You have earned your place in God's kingdom & I know you were greeted by the multitudes. RIP



Teresa Yarborough Griffin - February 17, 2021 at 11:26 AM

MM

“ MaryHelen C Martin lit a candle in memory of Ruby "Bela" Herlong



MaryHelen C Martin - February 17, 2021 at 11:01 AM

TC

“ Thinking of you!

Tammie Warren Covington  
Alpha Tau Chapter Member  
Batesburg-Leesville, SC



Tammie Warren Covington - February 17, 2021 at 10:53 AM

CB

*Bela was unique and her friendship is now a treasured memory. The history of Mount Willing actually brought us together as did our love of local history in general. It was through this common thread that we met Charlie Andrews and that friendship began a saga which lasted for more than 15 years and cemented a lively and lovely friendship for the three of us for we spent that long in compiling the four-volume history of Mount Willing. A noted historian recently told me that we set a new standard for researchers in compiling history. In those 15 years, Bela, Charlie and I did not have the first argument. If we disagreed on a point we discussed it and came up with a solution. It was as simple as that. Goodbye, dear friend. We will meet again on that bright and peaceful shore.*

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**Carol H Bryan** - February 17, 2021 at 03:17 PM

JR

*I was one of those fortunate students of Mrs. Herlong. And when I was accepted at Winthrop College, I was so excited to think that I would have professors who were equally as inspiring a teacher as she was. Sadly that was not the case but I loved Winthrop anyway. Saluda High was indeed privileged to have her on their staff. A scholarship for future educators in her honor is most fitting. Thank you Mrs. Herlong. From a retired high school librarian and member of SHS Class of 1962.*

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**Jackie Ridings** - February 17, 2021 at 08:50 PM

AS

*Mrs. Herlong was a beacon for me in classes that I dearly loved and appreciated. Since my Daddy died when I was 5 reading became my best friend very early on. English, grammar, and literature was always my favorite subjects but there is a big difference in learning and lighting up your life with word origins or correct speech or bringing a forgotten world to life. Some of you very well remember learning to correctly pronounce words in Ms. Bullards class - log; dog; hog; - need I say more?*

*When Ms. Herlong spoke in class and imparted her knowledge to us she gave us a part of herself to remember and carry throughout our lives to enrich our souls. I can truthfully say there have been times I knew she had given me what I needed right then.*

*My daughter Kim and her daughter Alice were friends and Kim was telling me how wonderful she was when she spent the night with them. She would read the girls stories and Kim was enthralled with her beautiful reading with the voices and sounds. Spending the night with them was always a highlight for Kim; now I know one of the reasons. God bless you Alice. Kim is working in Maryland and sends her love.*

*I will always love Ms. Herlong for sharing her love of literature with me and her joy in reading it aloud. God be you all and keep you in loving arms.*

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**Anne Shuler** - March 18, 2021 at 07:01 PM

AS

*I was blessed to be in Mrs. Herlong's first class of student's in Saluda and all my siblings had her as well. My sister, Anne, always said all her teachers told her how smart her brothers and sisters had been before her since she was the last one to come through and would she do as well. We all loved her class and we loved her as an educator and a person. To lose her mind is a such a loss to the world, to lose her joy is a loss to our hearts, and to lose her smile is the loss of another light in the world.*

*Daisy P. Porter*

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**Anne Shuler** - March 18, 2021 at 07:25 PM