



Ann Maureen Kilkelly

December 18, 1946 - September 9, 2023

- BA 1969, University of Minnesota
- MA 1974 and PhD 1981 University of Utah
- Professor at University of Kentucky (1979-1982)
- Professor at Transylvania University (Lexington, Kentucky) (1983-1991)
- Professor of Theatre and Women's and Gender Studies at Virginia Tech (1991-2016)
- Born Dec 18, 1946 and died Sept 9, 2023

Ann Kilkelly, 76, was Emerita Professor of Theatre and Women's and Gender Studies at Virginia Tech, where she taught for more than 20 years (1991-2016) alongside the love of her life, Carol Burch-Brown. She passed away on September 9, 2023, after a long struggle with dementia. In personal life, Ann was a mother, partner, daughter, sister, auntie, friend, and mentor. In professional life, she was a scholar of jazz-tap dancing, history, performance and gender studies, as well as a teacher, director, choreographer, performer and writer.

Ann's scholarship created new understandings of the ways in which jazz tap is shaped by gender, race and class. Ann received two Smithsonian Senior Fellowships and a National Endowment for the Humanities Collaborative Research Grant for "Tapping the Margins," and in 2008 won the American Tap Dance Foundation's "Tap Preservation Award", given annually to an "outstanding individual in the field for superior advancement of tap dance

through presentation and preservation.” She was co-author of *Performing Communities: Grassroots Ensemble Theaters Deeply Rooted in Eight U.S. Communities* (New Village Press, 2006), with Robert H. Leonard, in which she documented the work of Roadside Theatre and other grassroots groups. At Virginia Tech she was Senior Fellow at the Institute for Creative Arts and Technology and her work at Tech was recognized with the College of Arts and Sciences Service Award, the Diggs Teaching Scholars Award, and Faculty Woman of the Year.

Ann taught master classes in jazz tap around the world, and performed at the Kennedy Center’s Millennium Stage, off Broadway at LaMaMa Etc, and at the New York City Tap Festival. She studied with Brenda Buffalino, Cholly Atkins and Honi Coles. She initiated generations of students to the joys of the Shim Sham, Suzi-Q and Tack Annie, and had a long-standing tap company in the hills of Blacksburg Virginia, called “Footnotes”. She taught for over ten years for “Sing and Swing” week at the Swannanoa Gathering, and was coordinator of American Vernacular Dance Week at Augusta Heritage Festival 2013-2016. With percussionist Beverly Botsford and singer Elise Witt, she created the multi-dimensional “Hair, Hands, and Feet,” and her synchronized swimming choreography and her performances at Café Bizosso brought delight to the annual meetings of Alternate ROOTS, of which she was one of the longest-standing members.

Ann grew up on the St Croix River in Bayport, Minnesota. She was the daughter of working-class, Irish-Catholic parents. She grew up dancing with her mother, Margie Ann Grove, and father Joseph Thomas Kilkelly, both of whom died when she was young. She was the baby of the family, with older siblings Tom, Dan and Mary Ellen. Ann married after college, and had a beloved son, Dan Gavere. She delighted in Dan’s enthusiasm as a child for leaping carefree from high places, a talent he honed later as he became a leading professional snowboarder, kayaker and stand-up paddle-boarder. Ann lived in Spain and Germany with her husband at the time, Allan Gavere, before gaining her PhD from University of Utah, with a dissertation on

experimental theatre. Her first academic job was in Lexington, where she taught for ten years at University of Kentucky and Transylvania University. With Katherine Kramer, she was a founding member of the experimental tap dance ensemble Syncopated Inc. In 1992 she moved to Virginia Tech, where she met her life partner, Carol Burch-Brown, Professor in the School of Visual Arts at Tech, and Carol's daughter Joanna Burch-Brown, who was 11 years old at the time.

In the company of Carol, Joanna, Elise Witt, Celeste Miller, Rachel Rugh, Tony Waag, Ash Devine, Hank Smith, Lisa Mount, and innumerable wonderful dance and music companions, she gave legendary performances of songs like "Ain't too Proud to Beg", "Singing in the Rain" and "Ukulele Ladies". She directed plays, including "Places and the Displaced," "Return Addresses," and "Such Stuff: A Dream Rummage"; did devised theatre and dance with girls from refugee backgrounds through Sisters of the Circle at Jefferson Centre in Roanoke, Virginia. Ann and Carol enjoyed a long creative partnership, with collaborations that ranged from exuberantly whimsical (the Junk DNA Trio with Patrick Turner) to the ethereal and immersive ("Singing Darwin" and "Salt Marsh Suite").

Ann adored her family, which extends far and wide. She is survived by her partner, Carol; by her son Dan Gavere; and by Carol's daughter Joanna Burch-Brown; as well as Joanna's partner Will Baker and their children Sean Eliot Baker and Katie Lou Baker, of Bristol, England. She is predeceased by her brothers Dan and Tom, and sister Mary Ellen. She is survived by the children of her beloved sister Mary Ellen Connaughty and husband Curt - Chris, Sean, Ellen, Jill and Maureen - and by a host of nieces, nephews, and grand- and great-grand nieces and nephews in the Connaughty and Kilkelly families. Finally she is survived by an extraordinary extended family of creative friends in Virginia, Georgia, Tennessee, Louisiana, and across the country. At end of life, Ann was blessed by tremendously steadfast, skillful, loving care from family friend and musician Ash Devine, who was Ann's

professional companion for two years; and she was supported by many devoted friends including singer Elise Witt, long-time dance partner Catherine Gatenby, Kathy deNobriga, Bob Leonard and Carol.

Ann Kilkelly, from all your friends and family, as the tap dancers say, “Thanks for the boogie ride” - your exquisite fashion sense and bountiful closet, famous Italian pasta, farmers’ market salads, tamari almonds, tai chi, ukulele ladies, blackbirds’ wings, bobby pins, swing and contra, trips to Swannanoa and Sunset Beach, shrimp and peaches, and evenings on the deck in our Appalachian mountains. We love you and miss you already, and will be keeping you with us in our hearts always.

We will gather to celebrate Ann’s life on October 24, 2023 at the Creativity and Innovation District, 185 Kent Street, Blacksburg, VA 24060. Doors open 5:45 - 8PM, with performances and speeches from 6:00. Please RSVP to [jburchbrown \[at\] gmail.com](mailto:jburchbrown@gmail.com) by October 14. In 2024 we will also hold a celebration in Atlanta, Georgia (details to come).

We invite donations in Ann Kilkelly’s memory to Alternate ROOTS, an organization of artists in the South East USA whose work is at the intersection of arts and activism.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

OCT **24**. 5:45 PM - 8:00 PM (ET)

Creativity and Innovation District
185 Kent Street
Blacksburg, VA 24060

RSVP to Jburchbrown@gmail.com by October 14

Tribute Wall



“ *Blue Caribbean Bouquet was purchased for the family of Ann Maureen Kil Kelly.* ”



October 02, 2023 at 03:18 PM