



## Mrs. Vesta Lou Skelton

December 19, 1919 - October 30, 2023

Vesta Lou Skelton died Monday, October 30, 2023 at the Southern Estates assisted living facility. She was 103 years old.

Vesta was one of Jackson County's last living World War II veterans, and she was to be recognized for that milestone at a November 11 ceremony. She would have celebrated her 104th birthday next month.

She was born on December 19, 1919, in Eastwood, Georgia to Sheppard McLemore, a railroad employee, and Florence Smith McLemore, a teacher and native of Aspel, AL. When Vesta was five, her mother died of Spanish Flu at age 27, and her aunt Desie (Dea) McLemore, brought her to Scottsboro to the home Dea shared with the John Gross family. In Scottsboro, she had extended family, notably the Stocktons, a prominent family who were active in local education for decades.

During her school years she moved between her aunt Dea in Scottsboro and an uncle in Birmingham, receiving most of her education in Birmingham schools. She returned to Scottsboro, however, for her senior year. In her yearbook entry, she's referred to by her nickname, "Toots." The high school yearbook credits her with being captain of the girls' basketball team.

She returned to Birmingham to study nursing and earned an RN certification at the South Highlands Infirmary, a training facility associated with St. Vincent's Hospital. After certification, she worked for county health departments in Colbert and Cullman Counties. She traveled to schools and isolated homes where she treated impoverished residents for a variety of

conditions made worse by the lack of availability of health care: problems arising from malnutrition, parasites, and chronic childhood diseases such as rheumatic fever that had gone undiagnosed and untreated for years.

In 1941, shortly after the attack on Pearl Harbor, Vesta enlisted and was commissioned as an ensign in the Navy. She was deployed to Norfolk, VA where she and her fellow nurses treated casualties from the European theater. The patients were mostly burn victims who arrived by ship. And as in her days with North Alabama health departments, she tended to young men who were suffering from chronic undiagnosed childhood illnesses.

After Norfolk, she did a brief stint in West Palm Beach, FL before being stationed in the Panama Canal Zone during the height of the hostilities. The staff there was overwhelmed by the wounded who arrived by ship from both the Atlantic and the Pacific theaters.

In 1945, at the end of the war, Vesta left the Navy, having been promoted to the rank of lieutenant. When she had her choice of where she wanted to resume her civilian career, she chose Jackson County. She was one of two nurses assigned to the Jackson County Health Department.

After her stint with the county health departments, she began work in private practice, serving with Doctors Ingram Bankston, Joe Cromeans, and the newly arrived Samuel Parks Hall. In one instance, Vesta was the sole contact in a local clinic for nearly six months while a doctor recovered from a persistent medical condition. During that six-month stint, she also tended the doctor in his home.

In 1947, she married Mark Scott Skelton, who she was fond of saying was the best dancer she'd ever seen. Six months after their first dance at the Scottsboro Recreation Center, they were married.

After marriage, Vesta continued her medical career, becoming the second nurse to be hired at the newly opened Jackson County Hospital on Woods Cove Road.

After five years as director of nursing services at the Jackson County Hospital, she began a five-year stint at the nursing home facility associated with the

hospital, thinking that in the absence of incessant off-duty calls, the nursing home would give her more freedom to be with her family, which now included two sons, Mark Scott Skelton Jr. born in 1950, and Andrew Douglas Skelton, born in 1953.

In the late sixties, she left the nursing home to serve as chief health officer at Revere Copper and Brass. After her tenure at Revere, she worked for fifteen years as a psychiatric nurse with the Marshall-Jackson Mental Health Center. There, she worked with alcoholism, drug abuse, and marital relationships. She retired from mental health in 1989 after 15 years, at age 65.

She was active in her community, and she loved her church, The First United Methodist Church of Scottsboro. She served as President of The Three Arts Club during the first Art Sunday, was Director of Council on Aging, and was past President of Highlands Ambassador Chamber of Commerce.

She enjoyed spending time at her Lake House with friends and family, working in the yard, traveling, reading, playing Bridge, and dancing with her husband, Mark. She was proud of her grandchildren and sons and loved to talk about them.

She was preceded in death by her husband, Mark Scott Skelton, Sr., who died in 2015 at the age of 95.

She is survived by two sons, Mark Scott Skelton, Jr (Rita) of Eagle Colorado and Andrew Douglas Skelton of Scottsboro and three grandchildren Anna Christine Skelton of Idaho Falls, ID; Graham Scott Skelton of Seattle, WA, and Colleen Jane Skelton of Weaverville, NC.

After 48 years as a nurse, attending to combat casualties in WWII and then attending to Jackson County's most marginalized and isolated inhabitants, Vesta Lou saw more misfortune and suffering than most can imagine. She had police escorts subdue patients who refused to take mandatory vaccinations. She whisked newborns whom attending physicians deemed unviable into her car and drove them to metropolitan hospitals to ensure their survival. She held the hands of numerous frightened county children as they

were wheeled into surgery, and she was still by their side when they woke from anesthesia. Through it all, she remained infectiously optimistic, gregarious, and unfailingly self-confident.

Vesta Lou stated in a recent interview that what she wanted most of all in life was to make a difference. This goal was successfully achieved. She will be remembered as a positive, kind, caring, and loving person.

In place of flowers, please consider donations to The First United Methodist Church of Scottsboro, 1105 S. Broad St., Scottsboro, AL 35768.

Visitation is at The First United Methodist Church, Wednesday, November 1, 2023, from 1:00 to 2:30 p.m., and the service will follow at 2:30 p.m.

Arrangements Entrusted to Scottsboro Funeral Home

# Cemetery Details

## Cedar Hill Cemetery

210 South Cedar Hill Drive  
Scottsboro, AL 35768  
(256) 609-8166

# Previous Events

## Visitation

NOV 1. 1:00 PM - 2:30 PM (CT)

First United Methodist Church Scottsboro  
1105 South Broad St.  
Scottsboro, AL 35768

## Funeral Service

NOV 1. 2:30 PM (CT)

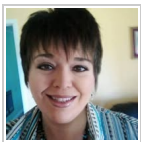
First United Methodist Church Scottsboro  
1105 South Broad St.  
Scottsboro, AL 35768

# Tribute Wall



“ *Such a beautiful life, she defined vibrant. The mention of her name brings back the memory of her unique laugh, always smiling. A lovely woman that was a big part of my growing up years. And she made a mean pineapple sandwich on white bread with mayo. God bless her and keep her till we meet again. John Eaves*

John Eaves - November 01, 2023 at 08:16 PM



“ *I had the honor of helping Miss Vesta Lou and Mr Mark a few years ago. I learned way more from them than any help I could give them! Miss Vesta was so proud of her sons. She always wished I could have one of my own. I finally did and now I fully understand the love of a Mother and Son because of her! I love you Miss Vesta and please hug Mr Mark for me! I'm so proud you are reunited but you will be missed! I love you both!*  
Ginger

Ginger Helms - November 01, 2023 at 10:52 AM



“ *Divine Peace Bouquet was purchased for the family of Mrs. Vesta Lou Skelton.*



October 31, 2023 at 02:22 PM



“ *A [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) was planted in honor of Mrs. Vesta Lou Skelton.*

October 31, 2023 at 02:22 PM