

Obituary

Heaven is where Ginny is

Virginia Heinlein passed away peacefully in her sleep in the early morning of Jan. 18, 2003. She was 86 years old.

Mrs. Heinlein was the widow of famed science fiction writer, Robert A. Heinlein, author of "Stranger In a Strange Land" and 55 other books, who died in 1988. Her death followed a prolonged bout of respiratory illness, including pneumonia, as well as a broken hip sustained on Thanksgiving Day, 2002, requiring surgery and a long recovery. The couple had no children, but countless readers around the world refer to themselves as "Heinlein's Children."

Virginia Gerstenfeld Heinlein was born April 22, 1916, in Brooklyn, N.Y., the daughter of a dentist. She went to the Packer Collegiate Institute, a college preparatory high school, where she finished in three-and-a-half years, always on the honor roll. She attended New York University, majoring in chemistry. She lettered in swimming, diving, basketball, and field hockey. She also reached national competitive levels in figure skating, the sport that became her lifelong passion. In the late 1950's, she served on the U.S. Olympic Committee for Skating. In time, she came to speak over seven languages, including French, Latin, Italian, and Russian.

Graduating in 1937, she worked for Quality Bakers as a chemist until 1943, when the WAVE Corps was formed. She enlisted immediately and was offered a commission as a WAVE lieutenant, serving first at the Bureau of Aeronautics, then at the Naval Air Experimental



Ginny Heinlein with her cat Snowy in their Florida home.

Station in Philadelphia in 1944 and 1945. She met Robert Heinlein there, working as a civilian aviation engineer because the Navy would not overlook his medical discharge due to tuberculosis in 1934. She served as his assistant on several classified development projects as a chemist and aviation test engineer.

After World War II, she came to Los Angeles to study for an unfinished doctorate in biochemistry at UCLA. She married Robert Heinlein in Raton, N.M., in October 1948. Thereafter, the two were inseparable; those who knew them spoke often of their intense and abiding love for each other. She became his closest companion, aiding him in his writing, and traveling the world with him. Virginia shepherded Robert through two severe near-

death illnesses in the seventies through constant care and love. She took over the business aspects of his writing career, freeing him to focus on his writing. Together, they made a special project of organizing local and national blood drives and facilitating cooperation among all the blood collecting organizations in the world.

Shortly after his death in 1988, she moved to Florida. She gathered a selection of her husband's letters in "Grumbles from the Grave," printed for the first time his travel memoir *Tramp Royale* and political handbook "Take Back Your Government" (originally titled "How to Be a Politician"), and oversaw the restoration of several texts she felt had been badly edited, including "Red Planet," "Puppet

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