

Kathy Mary Calvert Obituary

Kathy Mary Calvert, April 30, 1947, to January 1, 2026

It is with profound sadness that we announce the passing of Katherine Mary Calvert (nee Forest) on New Year's Day, 2025, at the age of 78. She passed away peacefully in her Cochrane, Alberta, home that she shared with her loving husband of 42 years, Dale Portman.

Kathy was born in Edmonton, Alberta, to Peggy and Don Forest. She lived an adventurous and full life, exploring the wilderness with her father and twin brother Ken. As a child she learned to hunt birds (ducks and geese), fish, hike, and camp, and she developed a great love for the outdoors. After moving to Calgary as a teen, she learned to ride horses, climb, and ski, including skiing alongside many friends in Canada's National Ski Team. She became an exceptional climber, one of very few women engaging in that sport at the time. For example, at fifteen she was among the early pioneers to ascend climbing routes like Grillmair's Chimney on Mt. Yamnuska, in Alberta.

Kathy was an excellent academic. She was always studious and gained top marks in school. She graduated from the University of Calgary with a degree in biology, later earning her Master of Science degree, also through the U of C.

At the age of twenty, Kathy met and married Jonn Calvert. Kathy and Jonn shared a love of mountaineering. They were divorced ten years later.

In 1974, Kathy was one of three women hired by the Federal Government as the first female park wardens in Canada. Kathy was the only one of these three to continue in this career, working as a park warden for 25 years. In this role, Kathy mentored her male peers in search and rescue, specifically in technical climbing techniques. She participated in many rescues, which included hanging under a helicopter in the earliest years of heli-sling rescues. In 1977, Kathy was part of the first all-female attempt to climb Mt. Logan, Canada's highest mountain, turning back just shy of the summit in bad weather.

During this formative time, Kathy met Dale Portman, whom she married in 1983. Together, Kathy and Dale travelled the world extensively, visiting 32 countries, including China at a time when tourism in that country was very limited. They also explored Western Canada's back country on horseback, skis, and canoes, and together they climbed many remote and difficult mountains. In 2010, she spent two weeks canoeing down Yukon's Wind and Peel Rivers with family.

Kathy gained experience travelling the back country on horseback. Upon moving to Jasper Alberta, she spent many summers patrolling the North Boundary of Jasper National Park in the Willow Creek District. This entailed travelling alone with three horses and her dog for 17 days at a time.

After retiring from the Warden Service, Kathy embarked on a prolific writing career, publishing six books focussing on biographies of exceptional mountain pioneers, and mountaineering rescue history. Her book *Guardians of the Peaks*, was finalist for the Writers' Guild of Alberta award for nonfiction in the year it was published. Kathy was also a talented artist, painting stunning western landscapes based in her deep and intimate knowledge of the mountain environment.

Kathy is predeceased by her parents, Don and Peggy Forest. She is survived by her husband, Dale Portman, her son, Les Perras (wife, Chiaki), and two grandchildren, Hugh and Rian. She is also survived by her brother Ken Forest, and sisters, Susan and Sylvia Forest, as well as many nieces and nephews.

Kathy was highly respected, and was a mentor to many women in non-traditional roles within the Warden Service and climbing community. She was a trailblazer and a leader at a time when very few women embarked on such an unusual life journey.

A service celebrating her life and achievements will occur in the spring or early summer of 2026. Details will be announced later. In lieu of flowers, please send donations to the Warden Alumni Association, an organization Kathy and Dale helped found, and which was important to her.

