



Melissa Frances Canaday

May 4, 1965 - August 8, 2025

It is with profound sadness and deep love that we announce the passing of Melissa Frances Betskoff Canaday Edwards on August 8, 2025, at age 60 — a radiant soul who left this world far too soon. Melissa's life was a beautiful tapestry of love, adventure, and connection — woven together with kindness, strength, and compassion that touched every heart she encountered.

An avid and enthusiastic traveler, Melissa embraced the world with open arms and a curious spirit. Whether exploring distant lands or wandering through the beauty of her own backyard, she found wonder in every place, every culture, and every moment under the open sky. She was a lover of nature and the outdoors, drawn to the whisper of the wind through the trees, the stillness of the mountains, and the healing power of the earth beneath her feet.

Melissa carried her Native American heritage with pride and reverence, staying deeply connected to her ancestors and spiritual traditions. She found meaning in ceremony, connection in community, and peace in honoring the wisdom of those who came before her. Her creativity bloomed in her love for beadwork and other crafts, each piece infused with intention and beauty. She cherished reading, the cultural arts, and all forms of expression that brought people closer together.

Above all, Melissa was devoted to her beloved husband, Silas Neal Edwards,

with whom she shared a love story rooted in respect, laughter, and unwavering care. To know Melissa was to know a bright light in this world — one who gave without hesitation, listened without judgment, and loved without limits.

Melissa received her Bachelors degree from Baltimore University in Baltimore, Maryland and her Masters of Education degree in 2014 from College of William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia. She was a licensed Professional Counselor.

Melissa was also a dedicated leader and advocate, devoting more than 25 years to community-based programming, justice, equity, and healing. She served in senior leadership roles, including Program Director of the Homeless Veterans Reintegration Program and Incarcerated Veteran Transition Program at River City Comprehensive Counseling Services, and Executive Director of Focused Outreach Richmond, Inc. In these roles, she secured millions in federal grants, built strategic partnerships, and led with empathy to improve services for veterans experiencing homelessness. Her work extended across Virginia and into tribal communities nationwide, where she served as Executive Director of the United Indians of Virginia, Chair of the Charles City County Health Coalition, and member of the Virginia Department of Health Commissioner's Minority Health and Health Equity Advisory Committee. A strong supporter and certified facilitator of the White Bison Wellbriety Program, Melissa carried a deep passion for her Chickahominy tribal community and the healing of generational trauma. She also shared her knowledge as an adjunct professor at Virginia Commonwealth University, training others in conflict resolution, cultural competence, and wellness.

Melissa was preceded in death by her mother, Lucrezia Iona Canaday; her father, Merle Bernard Betskoff; her aunt, Anna Christina Canaday; her uncle, Llewellyn Winston Canaday; and her grandparents, William Sheridan

Canaday, Sr., and the late Lillian Ardath Winstead.

She is survived by her husband, Silas Neal Edwards; her uncle, William Sheridan Canaday, Jr.; her brother, Kevin Christopher Betskoff, Sr.; her cousin David Anthony Canaday and Sabine Christiane Canaday, with their children, Gabriel and Arya Canaday; her nephews, Scott Barnette and Kevin C. Betskoff, Jr.; her niece, Mariel Elizabeth Betskoff; cousins Alicia T. Adkins, Norma Purdue, Alvin Canaday; and a host of other relatives and friends.

She leaves behind a legacy of warmth, resilience, advocacy, and hope, as well as countless memories for her family and friends to carry forward. Though she has journeyed to the Spirit World, Melissa's light will continue to guide those who loved her, just as the stars guide travelers in the night.

In honoring Melissa's life, may we each carry a piece of her spirit with us — living fully, loving deeply, serving others, and treading gently on the earth she so deeply revered.

A graveside service will be held 12Noon Friday, August 22, 2025, at the Canaday Family Cemetery. Following the graveside, there will be a Memorial Service at 2PM, located at the Chickahominy Tribal Center. Repast and fellowship to follow until 5PM.

Cemetery Details

Canaday Family Cemetery

6325 Olivet Church Rd
Providence Forge, VA 23140

Previous Events

Graveside Service

AUG 22. 12:00 PM (ET)

Canaday Family Cemetery
6325 Olivet Church Rd
Providence Forge, VA 23140

Memorial Service

AUG 22. 2:00 PM - 5:00 PM (ET)

Chickahominy Tribal Center
8200 Lott Cary Rd
Providence Forge, VA 23140

Tribute Wall

CH

“ I knew Melissa in high school, and I’ve never forgotten her kindness and the light she carried. My condolences to her family and loved ones.

Chris Hartlove - May 31 at 02:54 AM

CS

“ My condolences to the family. Ms. Canaday would provide support to the incarcerated veteran population at RRJ. She was so helpful and kind. It was always a pleasure to have her around.

Candace Stokes - January 25 at 07:17 AM

VP

“ Violet Peyton lit a candle in memory of Melissa Frances Canaday



Violet Peyton - November 15, 2025 at 11:28 AM

HD

“ My deep condolences for the loss of Melissa's presence in your and our lives. May she continue to be a blessing through memories of her loving spirit.

Helena DeLigt - September 25, 2025 at 12:36 PM

VC

“ *Velma Canaday lit a candle in memory of
Melissa Frances Canaday*



Velma Canaday - August 22, 2025 at 08:05 PM

FG

“ *Four Mile Creek Prayer Group lit a candle in
memory of Melissa Frances Canaday*



Four Mile Creek Prayer Group - August 22, 2025 at 07:14 AM

TD

“ *Tammy And Dave lit a candle in memory of
Melissa Frances Canaday*



Tammy and Dave - August 22, 2025 at 12:45 AM

BC

“ *Bruce Cutler lit a candle in memory of Melissa
Frances Canaday*



Bruce Cutler - August 21, 2025 at 09:46 PM

VR

“ *Veralyn Ruttley lit a candle in memory of
Melissa Frances Canaday*



Veralyn Ruttley - August 20, 2025 at 04:00 PM

MC

“ *Melissa was such a kind and caring person
with a heart of gold, May you Rip cousin you
will be missed by many ❤️.*



Mary Crewe - August 18, 2025 at 09:20 PM

AR

“ *2 files added to the tribute wall*



Augustine Reichenbach - August 17, 2025 at 09:57 PM

HS

“ *Hilda Sakiewicz lit a candle in memory of
Melissa Frances Canaday*



Hilda Sakiewicz - August 17, 2025 at 07:53 PM

EC

“ *Esther Cannada sent a virtual gift in memory of Melissa Frances Canaday*



Esther Cannada - August 16, 2025 at 08:39 PM

BG

“ *Sending Condolences and prayers to the family. I appreciate the fellowship with MiMi celebrating our granddaughter's family functions. A caring, friendly and loving woman. Thank God for her time here on earth.*
Brenda and Lester Gordon



Brenda Gordon - August 16, 2025 at 11:19 AM

LD

“ *Lori Diaz lit a candle in memory of Melissa Frances Canaday*



Lori Diaz - August 16, 2025 at 09:03 AM

SH

“ *Susan Holmes lit a candle in memory of Melissa Frances Canaday*



Susan Holmes - August 15, 2025 at 08:31 PM

CS

“ *Clark E Stewart lit a candle in memory of Melissa Frances Canaday*



Clark E Stewart - August 15, 2025 at 12:25 PM

TW

“ *Sorry For Your Loss*



Thomas Widgeon - August 15, 2025 at 07:11 AM

HS

“ *Hank Sellers lit a candle in memory of Melissa Frances Canaday*



Hank Sellers - August 14, 2025 at 10:28 PM

FC

“ *Melissa you fought the fight to the bitter end, I will hold all of the good times we all shared growing up together when you came over to grandma and grandpa's, RIP my cousin and wonderful friend! Love You*

Fran J Canaday - August 14, 2025 at 07:52 PM

DA

“ *Danny & Kordi Adkins lit a candle in memory of Melissa Frances Canaday*



Danny & Kordi Adkins - August 14, 2025 at 05:01 PM

JD

“ *Jason & Victoria Davis lit a candle in memory of Melissa Frances Canaday*



Jason & Victoria Davis - August 14, 2025 at 09:06 AM

SB

“ *Love you always Melissa* ❤️

Shelby Bradby - August 13, 2025 at 08:15 PM

RS

“ *Robin Stewart lit a candle in memory of Melissa Frances Canaday*



Robin Stewart - August 13, 2025 at 06:17 PM



“ *Dottie Cannada lit a candle in memory of
Melissa Frances Canaday*



Dottie Cannada - August 13, 2025 at 04:44 PM