



Melissa C. Brown

August 10, 1950 - March 26, 2026

Melissa C. Brown, 75, of Holland, Michigan, passed away peacefully in her sleep on Thursday, March 26, 2026, after a long battle with dementia. Her peaceful passing stood in fitting contrast to the bold, brilliant approach to all things in life. She was a powerful intellect, fierce mom, and highly accomplished professional and attorney.

Melissa was born July 10, 1950, in Sydney, Australia, to Douglas and Celia (O'Donnell) Brown, the youngest of two daughters. Douglas, a Staff Sergeant wounded in action during WWII while serving in the Army Air Corps, married Celia in Australia and they briefly made their home there. In the 1950s, the family returned to the United States aboard the Queen Mary and settled in Spring Lake.

Melissa showed tremendous academic and musical potential at an early age. She played French horn and was a gifted pianist, later becoming a member of the National Honor Society. She initially attended the University of Michigan and completed her undergraduate education at Grand Valley following the birth of her son Iain. She then began a distinguished career in communications, first with Herman Miller and later Steelcase, before going on to earn a master's degree from Ohio University. Melissa moved to Grand Rapids in 1987, where she wrote award-winning speeches for numerous executives in the furniture and other industries.

Melissa met Dr. Edward Baum soon thereafter at Fountain Street Church. They married in August 1992. Their mutual connections to Grand Valley State University were powerful: Melissa's mother had been an accountant with GVSU since its founding in 1962; Ed was a chemistry professor and led the Honors College; Iain graduated from GVSU in 1998. By the time of Ed's retirement in 2017, someone in the family had been in the administration, faculty, or student body for 55 years.

At the age of 44, Melissa undertook her greatest academic and professional challenge, this time by enrolling in Notre Dame Law School. Her grit, determination and vision propelled her to the top of her class, earning honors in legal writing and distinguishing herself in an exceptional class that included a future Supreme Court Justice. She went on to professional acclaim at large firms in Chicago, returning to West Michigan in 2009. Along the way, she took the "hard" cases, represented indigent and unpopular clients who needed help the most, and nobly applied her legal acumen in service to others.

Beyond her professional life, Melissa pursued her lifelong passions for dogs, horses, music and the arts, found joy in the small kindnesses of home in West Michigan, and, most importantly, embraced her role as "Babo" to her beloved grandchildren.

The world may be a bit dimmer today than when Melissa illuminated it with her bright, brash intelligence and courage. But that peaceful passing is a temporary sunset in anticipation of the dawn that brings with it the dividend of all that her family, friends and colleagues learned from her as they put those things to work in their own lives.

Melissa is survived by her husband of 33 years, Dr. Edward Baum; her son, Colonel Iain Pedden (USMC) and his wife, Danielle; their children, Grace,

Jack, and Josephine; and Ed's daughters Laura and Jeanne.

Visitation will be held from 1:00 to 2:45 p.m., followed by a memorial service at 3:00 p.m., on Thursday, April 2, 2026, at Langeland-Sterenbergh Funeral Home, 315 E. 16th Street, Holland, Michigan. Interment will take place at Pilgrim Home Cemetery. Memorial contributions may be made to the Equestrian Center in Rockford or the ASPCA.

www.langelandsterenberg.com

Cemetery Details

Pilgrim Home Cemetery

370 E 16th St.
Holland, MI 49423

Previous Events

Funeral Service

APR 2. 1:00 PM - 2:45 PM (ET)

Langeland-Sterenberg Funeral Home
315 E 16th St
Holland, MI 49423
(616) 392-2306
info@langelandsterenberg.com
<http://langelandsterenberg.com/>

Funeral Service

APR 2. 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM (ET)

Langeland-Sterenberg Funeral Home
315 East 16th Street
Holland, MI 49423

Tribute Wall



“ *Langeland-Sterenberg Yntema Funeral Homes created a Tribute Video in memory of Melissa C. Brown* ”



Langeland-Sterenberg Yntema Funeral Homes - April 02 at 09:55 AM

“ Zbig and I are heartbroken over the loss of our dear friend Melissa. We send our prayers and deepest condolences out to Iain, Danielle, and their family. She loved you all so much.

Melissa was fearless, vibrant, funny, brilliant, caring, outspoken, passionate about social and criminal justice, and always fun to be around. She was the best friend I could ever have.

Melissa never failed to inspire me. I first met her during our first year of law school when we had both given up careers to embark on a new path and life. We soon became best friends, and remained so in all the intervening decades. Law school was scary for me, not really knowing what I was doing, but Melissa quickly set me right and I knew I would be just fine.

A couple of years after law school, we ended up living on the same street in Chicago as Melissa and Ed and had so many happy memories with them—we spent many weekends and holidays together, attended New Year’s Eve celebrations and many other events, walked in the Saugatuck Halloween parade (Melissa was a spot-on Maleficent), took a trip to New York to see Spamalot, and more. Melissa always had great stories to tell, and was very funny. These were just normal things that friends do, yet Melissa made them so much more.

Melissa continued to inspire me with her passion for justice in all forms. Melissa twice represented a criminal defendant in a very difficult case over two trials, and she never wavered in her commitment to and belief in her client, regardless of the challenges and the enormous cost to herself. She was the bravest person I ever knew.

Melissa’s love for animals—especially horses and dogs—was also a defining characteristic. She loved our dogs as much as she did her own—she once crawled on her belly on precarious ice to pull our two labs out the water after they had fallen off the end of the ice.

They were so scared, but she was fearless and did not hesitate. Zbig sent her flowers every year after that. This is who she was.

Through all these years, Melissa was always there for me, through the ups, downs, and middles. Even after Zbig and I moved to California in 2009, Melissa and I were in touch nearly every day, and our close friendship continued despite the distance. It was as if the distance did not exist.

We love you , Melissa. You will be forever missed.

- Kathy & Zbig Zalewski

Kathryn Zalewski - April 02 at 01:42 PM

KZ

And of course our love and deepest condolences also go out to Ed.

Kathryn Zalewski - April 02 at 01:49 PM

BB

“ *I am so sorry to read of Melissa's passing. Although it's been years since I last saw her, I do have very fond memories of her. We met through her sister Helen who babysat for us as kids and up on Mackinaw Island. Melissa filed in several times for Helen and also cared for us on her own. She was such a pleasure, and I always enjoyed when she played her horn for us. I send my prayers to her family that their memories will carry them forward. I wish I could attend the service, but unfortunately, I'll be in chemo. Much love to you all. Bruce J. Burnside*

Bruce Burnside - April 02 at 09:17 AM

KZ

“ Kathy & Zbig Zalewski planted a [Memorial Tree](/store/Product.aspx?ProductId=4518) in honor of Melissa C. Brown.

Kathy & Zbig Zalewski - April 01 at 12:06 AM

KZ

“ Kathy & Zbig Zalewski purchased the Magnificent Life Spray for the family of Melissa C. Brown.



Kathy & Zbig Zalewski - April 01 at 12:06 AM

TO

“ The Marines & Sailors of the AJAG-02 Org purchased the Peaceful White Lilies Basket for the family of Melissa C. Brown.



The Marines & Sailors of the AJAG-02 Org - March 31 at 08:47 AM