



### Obituary for Betsy Young Fenhagen

Betsy Young Fenhagen, of Chapel Hill, North Carolina, died peacefully at the age of 94 on May 30th, 2024 in Durham, North Carolina. She was surrounded by her three adoring children. In her last four years of life, Betsy faced Alzheimer's Disease with resilience, humor, kindness for others, and without a trace of anger or self-pity. While her family and friends are devastated to lose her, she lived a wonderful life. It was a life filled with love, adventure, music, art, travel, activism and a passion for helping others that will be a continuous reminder for how to live a life of fullness and meaning.

Betsy was born in the Roland Park area of Baltimore, Maryland on May 4th, 1930, to her parents Colston and Nellie Young. She spent her youth with her three younger brothers and her parents at the home of her beloved grandfather, Hugh Hampton Young, a founding father of American Urology. Her family instilled in her a lifelong passion for science, the arts, and learning. She attended the Calvert School and then went to Garrison Forest for middle school and high school, spending her final three years in boarding school at Miss Hall's School in the Berkshires. At her high school graduation, unbeknownst to her family or the school, Betsy was 6 months pregnant with her oldest child, Darby. She soon after eloped with her first husband, Edward Stinson, and they began their life as a young family in Baltimore.

Betsy started her career as a journalist for the Baltimore Sun in the 1950s as one of the few female reporters. It was the heyday of print journalism with luminaries like H.L. Mencken and William Manchester working for the Sun. Betsy spent several years at the Sun covering the arts and social scene in Baltimore. However, following the unexpected and tragic death of her second child, Teddy, Betsy moved with her husband and Darby to St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands. In St. Thomas, Betsy began working as the household manager at Bluebeard's Castle.

In 1960, Betsy returned to Baltimore as a single mother. In 1962, she married her second husband, Weston ("Westy") Fenhagen, a journalist. Her life with Westy took Betsy all over the world, as he left journalism for a career as a diplomat with the U.S. State Department. Never content to just be a diplomat's wife, Betsy immersed herself in the cultures of the countries they lived: Morocco, Tunisia, Ivory Coast, Malaysia, Cyprus, and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. She worked to help local students who wanted to attend college in the United States, she volunteered in local prisons, and she spent time living and researching family structures in the longhouses of Borneo. Betsy and Westy had a lifelong love for travel and they were fortunate to have the opportunity to explore so many parts of the world. Their children, Cait and James, were born in Morocco and the Ivory Coast, respectively.

After 25 years in the Foreign Service, Betsy and the family moved to Chapel Hill, North Carolina in 1984. It became her home quickly. She began a career as a court mediator at the Dispute Settlement Center and immersed herself in Democratic politics, while raising two teenagers. In the early 1990's, after caring for her brother, Colston, who died of AIDS, Betsy joined with others to build and open an AIDS House in Carrboro, despite objections from neighbors. In its first year of operation, the house witnessed 52 deaths. New medications ultimately reduced those deaths, but the house remained a caring and loving home to many people with AIDS in the community.

In addition to serving on the AIDS House Board for nine years, Betsy served on the Boards of the UNC Campus Y, the Orange-Chatham Alternative Sentencing program, and Club Nova. She also volunteered as a Guardian Ad Litem and at the Rape Crisis Center. Betsy was passionate about many issues including her desire to see the death penalty abolished in her lifetime and her commitment to supporting women returning to the community from incarceration. She visited people on death row at Central Prison for many years and continued to write even as she couldn't go in person. Betsy was a loyal Democrat and worked tirelessly to support the party and progressive candidates. Later in life, she became a member of the Chapel Hill Friends Meeting and enjoyed being part of the Quaker community.

In 2011, Betsy was recognized as a Town Treasure by the Chapel Hill Historical Society. At that ceremony she stated, "My hope for the future is that Chapel Hill will never abandon its history of social reform and compassionate concern for justice." But beyond her advocacy and service, Betsy was a wonderful mother, sister, wife, grandmother, and friend. She adored her grandchildren Kimball Carstarphen, Lucinda Carlson, and Cash Fenhagen. She never met a stranger and her warmth and generosity never ceased, even as her Dementia took hold.

Whether bungee-jumping in New Zealand at 75 years old, skydiving at 81, or having "Hi Docs!" tattooed on her chest to greet the med students who will receive her donated body, Betsy will be remembered for her fearlessness, kindness, and joy for life. To her devoted family and friends, she has left so many wonderful memories and a blueprint for living.

Betsy was preceded in death by her husband, Westy, her son, Teddy, her three brothers, Hugh, Jim and Colston, her grandson, Kim, and her step-daughter, Helen. She is survived by her children Darby Carstarphen, Caitlin Fenhagen (John Carlson) and James Fenhagen (Christy Fenhagen), her grandchildren, Lucy and Cash, her nieces and nephews, and many close friends. Gx

A Celebration of Life will be held at a later date this summer. In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to the Center for Death Penalty Litigation in Durham, NC or to Eyes, Ears, Nose and Paws in Hillsborough, NC. Or please consider a contribution to a Democrat running for office this November.