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LOCAL NEWS

A village loses 'Mrs. Carmel'

Barbara Livingstone dead at 92

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Barbara Livingstone in this 2016 interview laughs while recalling her childhood. Livingstone died Feb. 23 at the age of 92. (Courtesy Harrison Memorial Library)

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CARMEL — Whether you agreed with her or opposed her, few would disagree that Barbara Livingstone was passionate about all things Carmel, earning her the moniker of “Mrs. Carmel.” Livingstone died Feb. 23 at the age of 92.

“She was one of a kind,” said Carmel Mayor Dave Potter. “We just lost Mrs. Carmel.”

She was engaged in the town to a degree that she became a familiar face to nearly every city council member, planning commissioner and a host of committees and organizations throughout Carmel.

Livingston was the founding president of Friends of Carmel Forest, which decried lost trees to development. She was elected to three four-year terms as a member of the city council until she retired in 2004.

But retirement from political office by no means excluded her from political engagement. Potter said he was hard-pressed to recall any council meeting she missed until her health began to deteriorate. She was usually seen sitting in the front row at council meetings and never shied away from asking hard questions.

“Barbara always knew where she stood and never compromised,” Potter said. “If she didn’t like something, you would know it.”

After retirement, Livingston became president of the Carmel Residents Association where she remained engaged with policies and other actions of the city. In a Legacy.com remembrance, friends recalled how she would often sit outside her home at 13th and San Carlos streets, with a sign announcing “Green Gardens” on her gate. There, she often invited neighbors for a chat about local or national events.

Livingston was born in San Mateo on Dec. 30, 1928, and in 1936 her family moved to Carmel. Her father, Frank Timmins, worked for the telephone company and her mother, Marjorie Timmins, worked at Neill Engineers. Livingston attended Sunset Elementary School and Carmel High School, class of 1946.

She earned her bachelor’s degree in world history from Stanford University in 1950 and subsequently lived in San Francisco. Her Legacy obituary noted how she liked to tell stories of her years in San Francisco during the era of “Mad Men” cocktail parties.

And Livingston loved to party. In a 2016 video interview with Kathleen O’Connell, the local history librarian at the Harrison Memorial Library, she said that she did not want to see Carmel become a “jumping nightlife place.”

“People might say I’m an old fuddy-duddy, but I like to party. I really like to party,” she said.

In the late 1970s when her children had grown, she and her husband, Barry Livingston, divorced. She designed and built a hillside home deep in Carmel Valley with her partner Bob Kohn. But it turned out to be too quiet and her dogs were always giving her poison oak, so after several years and some raucous parties, she and Kohn moved to Carmel proper.

Her obituary described her as “liberal, liberated and progressive” and often clashed with her nemesis Clint Eastwood, who was mayor of Carmel during a part of her council tenure. In her later years, she fought to, in her words, ensure Carmel remained a special place.

“I think we are going overboard with commercialism,” she told O’Connell in the 2016 interview. “We need to look at what makes Carmel different, making it a small village and not emphasizing business over residents.”

Livingston is survived by her sons Michael (Laurie Foster) and Brian (Elaine), grandchildren Shayla (Paul), Ryan (Heidi), Zoe Rose (Bobby), Rory and Alix Livingston, and two great-grandchildren, all of Vermont.

It was perhaps fitting that on Tuesday, with Councilman Bobby Richards recalling how much fun it was to attend her birthday parties and Councilman Jeff Baron saying he missed talking with her over gin and tonics, all of Carmel's elected officials raised glasses in a final toast to Mrs. Carmel.

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