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Barbara Livingston



Barbara Timmins Livingston

Barbara Timmins Livingston, a vivacious, engaging and always funny force who was unwavering in her devotion to the preservation of the forested-nature charms of her hometown of Carmel-by-the-Sea, died Tuesday, Feb. 23. She was 92.

A village activist and retired city council member, Barbara died peacefully at her home on the corner of 13th and San Carlos, where she could always be seen sitting outside at a table in her sun hat and oversized sunglasses, smiling and welcoming her neighbors to come sit down for a visit and talk local and national politics. On either level, she was always up on current issues.

In quaint Carmel fashion, her home was announced as "Green Gardens" by a wooden sign on her gate. "Hello, darling," she would call out when the gate opened and the bell rang. In later years, she had mostly lost her eyesight due to macular degeneration but she could identify anybody instantly by voice. The people who made a point of stopping by were of all ages because Livingston had the energy to keep up with anybody, at any age.

Barbara 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. Barbara attended Sunset Elementary School and Carmel High School, class of 1946.

She earned her BA in world history at Stanford University in 1950, while working as a server in the dining commons, and summers at Village Hardware in Carmel. After her graduation, she was hired for the executive training program at the Emporium in San Francisco. She liked to tell stories of her years in San Francisco during the era of "Mad Men" cocktail parties.

She was snatched up for marriage by Barry Livingston, whose family ran Livingston Bros., one of the last family-owned department stores in the city. They were married in 1953 and lived in Presidio Heights. Barbara was active in city causes and served as the publicity chair for "Farewell to the Fox," a fundraiser before the beloved movie palace on Market Street met the wrecking ball in 1963.

In 1955, after their sons Michael and Brian were born, the Livingstons moved to Redwood City, then to Menlo Park.

A tennis player who hit the ball hard - usually harder than the men she was playing mixed doubles with - Barbara had tremendous self-confidence and a creative energy that could not be contained. She channeled it into Barbara Livingston Interior Designs, a thriving business she ran out of her home and her station wagon, which was always loaded with carpet and fabric samples

as she lead-footed it through the old design district Jackson Square in San Francisco, double-parking in front of her suppliers downtown and telling her passengers, "you kids stay in the car."

She was liberal, liberated and progressive. She could understand a problem and instantly know the solution. She'd make a decision and stick to it. She was also kind and charitable. She served as President of the Peninsula Volunteers and was on the board of the Palo Alto Junior League

By 1978, after her boys were grown and the Livingstons divorced, Barbara returned to the Monterey Peninsula. 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-by-the-Sea. Her mother eventually bought the house next door and they controlled that corner for the next 30 years.

Barbara was the founding President of Friends of Carmel Forest, which sought to protect every tree threatened by a developer's bulldozer. She was eloquent and rational in their defense and was first elected to the city council in 1992, and re-elected to three 4-year terms, retiring in 2004.

After retiring, she stayed active as President of the Carmel Residents Association. For its centennial, the Association produced "Stories of Old Carmel," for which Livingston wrote the introduction. Even in her '80s and '90s, she would attend every civic event in town, sitting in the front row at council and unfailingly asking hard questions.

She and Kohn traveled the world, by train, by ferry, and by Safari Jeep. Kohn, once voted Carmel Citizen of the Year, died in 2013.

Barbara loved a party, and for her 70th birthday, she hosted a black-tie Speakeasy where guests entered by a hidden door through a laundromat. A password was required ("Monica Lewinsky"). At the end of the party, she'd arranged to have the Carmel police arrest her and haul her away in handcuffs. For her 90th birthday, she hosted a bash at Carmel Mission Ranch. True, it was owned by her political nemesis Clint Eastwood, but she was never a grudge holder.

Livingston's home was stylishly appointed, but she did most of her socializing outside. The stubborn Carmel fog was never a deterrent. She was often in the company of Loretta Cook, her bookkeeper or Kelly Shoemaker, her personal assistant. They had to work in shifts to keep up with her pace. She also relied on the in-home care of Orlando Torino, Maria Cruz, Carmen Reyes, Veronica Nevarez, and Fatima Reyes-Demayo. Neighbors Greg D'Ambrosio, Doug Schmitz, Mike Brown, and Tom Parks always kept her laughing.

Survivors include 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.

Her sons are planning a virtual memorial in the near future. Donations may be made to the Carmel Residents Association, P.O. Box 13, Carmel, CA, 93921.