



Bonnie Lee Smith

November 6, 1935 - December 16, 2021

Bonnie Lee Smith, 86, died peacefully at Cedarhurst of Bloomington on December 16.

Bonnie was born to Pearl and Edwin Anderson in Oakford, Illinois, one of 11 children. At 19, she married Vernon Smith, the literal “boy next door” and they shared 48 years together until his death in 2002.

Bonnie and Vernon began married life in Peoria, Illinois, where their three children were born. In 1967, following a year in New Orleans, they moved to Bloomington and embraced their new hometown.

As the mother of an autistic child, Bonnie’s highest calling was advocating for children and adults with developmental disabilities, like her son Brooks. Bonnie made it her mission throughout the 1970s and 1980s to fight for laws and public policies to ensure that developmentally disabled children received equitable treatment in education and healthcare, and to stop the practice of warehousing children in mental hospitals. She and Vernon were among a small group of parents who brought a Federal class action suit against the State of Indiana on behalf of their children whose civil rights were denied. She actively lobbied at the Indiana General Assembly and was invited to testify in Washington at a Senate committee hearing chaired by Edward M. Kennedy, who thanked her for helping him understand what autism is. Bonnie wasn’t

afraid to challenge the status quo. She was fearless and she was loud. Some might have described her as a difficult woman (and sometimes she was), but she got things done.

Those who knew her well understood that she was a kind, generous and loyal woman who loved to entertain, play cards and laugh. She ran fundraisers, was a Girl Scout and MYF leader, and ran for public office. She delivered tiny homemade fruitcakes injected (yes, injected!) with bourbon to friends and acquaintances at Christmas. She acquired a free, banged-up grand piano in the 1960s, took it apart, worked on it, then put it back together, piece by piece. Her daughters learned to play piano on that old Kimball. She was an excellent cook, and the “recipes” were all in her head. She was an avowed Republican but voted her conscience, often for Democrats. She never missed an election from her first in 1953 through her last in 2016.

When she couldn't work outside the home (because her son was denied school admission), she bought commercial sewing equipment and invented “Bridal Gowns by Bonnie,” creating beautiful custom designs for brides and their attendants. She spent several years as the Civic Newcomer Hostess, welcoming new families to Bloomington; and later became a successful Realtor and certified real estate appraiser. She was ahead of her time in many ways, and raised her daughters to be strong, independent women.

She is survived by son Brooks Smith, daughter Lee Ann Smith, son-in-law Mark Webb, grandsons Tyler and James Webb, sisters Connie Bottoms and Eldene McCoy, and brother Patrick Anderson. She was preceded in death by her husband Vernon B. Smith, daughter Lisa Anne Smith, five sisters, two brothers and many treasured friends.

Bonnie's family is grateful for the compassionate care she received at Bloomington Hospital and IU Health Hospice, and especially grateful to the

staff at Cedarhurst of Bloomington for tenderly caring for Bonnie during her six years of memory care.

Those wishing to honor Bonnie's legacy may consider a gift to Riley Children's Foundation, Bloomington Health Foundation, Life Designs (Brooks' group home), or charity of their choice.

Allen Funeral Home and Crematory 4155 South Old State Road 37 is handling the arrangements and online condolences, photos and memories may be shared with family and friends at www.allencares.com

Tribute Wall

MC

“ Lee Ann and Brooks,
Eileen and I are sorry to learn of your mother's passing. She was always such a good friend to us. We have so many fond memories of your mom and dad during our time at Bloomington Hospital. They were both people we admired. Eileen especially appreciated Bonnie's enthusiasm when Eileen first took up golf. They spent many hours working on the fundamentals while sweating and laughing at Taylor's Par 3. Then when our grandkids came along, your mom gave us the old clubs and bag/cart your boys had used, so we could take our grandsons to play. We hope to be able to attend the memorial service whenever it is held. Mark and Eileen Crain

Mark Crain - January 09, 2022 at 01:41 PM

SL

“ Bonne was a gift. She was so kind to my Grandmother and family. We are saddened to hear of your loss. Sending hugs, Sally and Peter Link and family.

Sally Link - December 28, 2021 at 10:04 AM

JW

“ As a teenager, I spent a lot of time at the beautiful Smith home. Lisa, Bonnie's daughter, and I were great friends. Bonnie was one of my favorite people and helped me through those teenage years. I appreciated her sharing her family with me. Bonnie had a great sense of humor and was such a good listener. I hadn't seen Bonnie for 40 years until I moved my mom to the same memory care facility a few years ago. I came upon her in the hallway and she immediately brightened and said, well if it isn't Judy Williams. 40 some years later and she still knew me! The Smith family will always have a special place in my heart. May she rest in peace.
Judy Williams

Judy Williams - December 28, 2021 at 07:31 AM