



Sybil Smith

August 24, 1939 - March 5, 2024

None of the fine details of life escaped the eyes of Sybil Smith. Whether looking at the clothing ensemble, grooming choices or the true character of people she encountered, her penetrating gaze, sharp wit and unvarnished assessments revealed her Brooklyn, New York roots.

Sybil, a complex person with deep convictions about family, politics and the human condition and strong opinions about absolutely everything, was at turns sweet and critical, loving and loud, bold and insecure, domineering and collegial. If you were a friend, nobody had a more fiercely loyal advocate. Conversely, if you crossed her or someone she loved, you would rue that choice forevermore. Sybil was not imposing in stature, but she was instantly recognizable as a force, someone to be reckoned with.

Sybil died Tuesday, March 5 at Hock Family Pavilion in Durham. She was 84 years old. While her long battle with acute pain has ended, she will be sorely missed by her immediate and extended family, as well as friends of long standing.

She is survived by her husband Francis (Frank) Smith of Cary, North Carolina; daughter Dr. Victoria (Tori) Smith Ekstrand of Chapel Hill and son-in-law Chris Ekstrand; son Gary Smith and daughter-in-law Jennifer (Jenny) Smith of Cary. Sybil established loving relationships with granddaughters Elizabeth Ekstrand, Bonnie Smith and Louise (Lulu) Smith. Sybil's mother Astrid of Brooklyn, New York, who did all she could for Sybil in life, predeceased her daughter.

Sybil, an only child, was thrilled to marry into Frank's large German-Irish family from Queens, N.Y., who often appreciated her unique and frank assessments. Here, she is survived by sister-in-law Kathleen Smith, brother-in-law Kenneth Smith, and sister-in-law, Dr. Marianne Smith and her husband, Dr. Marc Bogin. She was predeceased by her beloved mother-in-law, Anne Smith, and her much missed brother-in-law and sister-in-law, Dennis and Ceil Smith. She is also survived by many beloved nieces and nephews and their children, whose photos populated her wallet.

Born in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, in 1939, Sybil graduated from Fort Hamilton High School. After graduation, Sybil worked as a secretary for AT&T's Bell Labs in New Jersey, where she had government security clearance working for the engineers who created the Picturephone featured in the film 2001: A Space Odyssey. Needless to say, when she first used Skype and later Zoom, Sybil would remind her family of the people who first made it all possible.

On the subject of film, there were few who could match Sybil's encyclopedic knowledge of the history of various movie directors and film stars. She could tell you the backstory of actors, actresses, directors and their affairs, and she would scold you to see various films if you hadn't yet had the opportunity.

She met her husband Frank through mutual friends Pat and Sarah Rohan in 1961, attracted by his twinkling blue eyes and intelligent, gentle sense of humor. When Frank's work took him to London and later Tokyo, Sybil kept tabs on him, joining him for travels and ski trips around Europe. She married Frank in 1966 and within a few years they left Brooklyn and settled into a beautiful home in the New York City suburb of Hauppauge, New York, in Long Island, welcoming beloved children Tori and Gary. When Frank retired from a career that included many years at Time Life, Inc. in New York City, and Sybil retired from her part-time job in real estate working for DeSimone Realty and later Henrietta Homes, the Smiths moved to North Carolina, primarily living in Cary. Sybil was overjoyed to live close by to her three beloved granddaughters for the last decade of her life.

Sybil lived with chronic pain for the last half of her life. Despite pain being her constant companion, Sybil fought through it to ensure that her children Tori and Gary became well-educated, self-reliant, successful people. When Tori and Gary recorded an impressive collection of advanced degrees and awards both in academic and professional settings, nobody was prouder than Sybil, who invested years making sure her children knew high academic achievement was always the objective.

Sybil had a huge network of support that crossed all three major medical systems in the Triangle and several states. Thanks are owed to all her doctors and healthcare assistants, especially her sister-in-law Dr. Marianne Smith and brother-in-law Dr. Marc Bogin of Westfield, N.J., as well as extended family member Dr. David Cohn, of Columbus, Ohio. Thanks also to Dr. Monica Barnes-Durity, her Duke Primary Care internist, whom she adored and trusted (no small feat); Dr. Mark Kelly, her UNC cardiologist; and Dr. Vijay Chaudhary, her WakeMed oncologist.

Along the way, Sybil was (mostly) grateful to the many nurses, physical therapists, occupational therapists, and especially numerous nurse aides at UNC REX and at Duke University Hospital who helped her during repeat visits to the ER, surgery and recovery. She connected deeply with many of these nurse aides, encouraging them to continue their education for advancement in their healthcare careers. Special mention is owed to Patty, Stacey, Charleen, Sallut and many others at Signature Healthcare in Chapel Hill, who last year helped Sybil recover from her last serious fall. Jerry and his staff at Hayes Barton Pharmacy in Raleigh were absolutely critical to Sybil's longevity. Sybil and her family were also often assisted by Heidi Jaeger, who became not just a monthly housekeeper but a dear family friend. Though she was only in hospice a short time, Sybil's family is also grateful to the staff at Hock Family Pavilion in Durham, Duke's in-facility hospice, and Sybil's hospice nurse, Amy, who made her last hours as peaceful as possible.

A Celebration of Life will be held at 2 p.m. on Friday, April 12 at St. Paul's Episcopal Church, 221 Union St. in Cary, North Carolina. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in Sybil's memory to Disability Rights North Carolina. <https://disabilityrightsnc.org/take-action/donate/>.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

APR 12. 2:00 PM - 3:00 PM (ET)

St. Paul's Episcopal Church
221 Union St
Cary, NC 27511