



## Nancy H. Smith

June 22, 1932 - July 11, 2021

.Nancy H. Smith, a long-time Claverack, NY, resident and former Columbia-Greene Community College faculty member whose desire to make a difference in the lives of others led her to careers in social work and teaching, and then to some of the world's most dangerous places, died on July 11 at the age of 89. Nancy had moved into assisted care last year.

Visiting hours will be on Tuesday, July 20, from 4-6 p.m. at Bates & Anderson Funeral Home, 110 Green St., Hudson, NY.

Born Nancy Joyce Harris, Nancy grew up in Jenkintown, Pa., but by young adulthood had set her sights on the larger world. She studied at the Sorbonne in Paris, where she earned her certifiact in French in 1954, and then traveled to Great Britain, Spain, Scandinavia, Germany, Austria, Italy, Greece, and elsewhere. Returning home, she enrolled at Penn State University to pursue a bachelor's degree in English, and it was there she met Thomas H. Smith, whom she married in 1956, the year she graduated. Shortly after the birth of their son, Sean, in 1958, the family relocated to Cambridge, Mass. Nancy decided to broaden her education by studying anthropology at Harvard University – at one point going on an archeological dig in France – and received a master's degree in 1961.

When her marriage ended, Nancy and Sean moved to New York City, where she got a job as a social worker and began attending the Columbia School of Social Work, earning a master's degree in 1967. She took a job at the New York State Training School for Girls in Hudson, where she served as director

of clinic and organizational development.

Four years later, she joined the faculty at Columbia-Greene, where she taught psychology and anthropology for 20 years. She drew praise from many of her students at Columbia-Greene, who remembered her fondly years later and often considered her a mentor and source of inspiration in their career paths. She also made a favorable impression on Columbia-Greene colleagues, whether through her teaching or endeavors in areas such as faculty governance, affirmative action, developing relationships with the Black community, labor-management negotiations, and strategic planning.

Nancy was active in the Old Chatham and Hudson Quaker meetings, participated in a local anti-nuclear power group and helped lead a weekly vigil for peace in downtown Hudson. She also enjoyed artistic pursuits, whether as a member of a theatrical troupe that staged productions of “A Thousand Clowns” and “A Member of the Wedding” in Hudson or a small choral group that gathered largely just for fun. She was a friend of Everett Nack, an area fisherman, hunter and naturalist who was an early advocate for cleaning up the Hudson River, and sometimes accompanied him on fishing trips.

These and various other experiences, combined with the relationships she formed through them, continued to stoke Nancy’s interest in social and political issues related to poverty, conflict and injustice, and she constantly looked for opportunities to enrich her understanding of how these affected everyday lives: In 1980, she directed the annual fundraising campaign for Oxfam-America. The following year, she served with Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA) in a tiny, isolated Athabascan Indian village in eastern interior Alaska, working on a community development project.

From 1985-87, Nancy was the Cambodia field director for the American Friends Service Committee, developing and implementing a wide range of programs in collaboration with government ministries that included physical rehabilitation of amputees, small-scale dam construction, animal vaccine production, education, and rehabilitation of small-scale industry.

Nancy finally decided to make these experiences the full of focus of her life.

Beginning in 1992, she worked for Oxfam-UK as a country representative in West Africa, Somalia, Nepal and Afghanistan. Her duties typically entailed developing and directing strategic plans, overseeing development programs, and negotiating contracts and other agreements with local authorities. In 1998, she became director for Save the Children-UK's operation in Iraqi Kurdistan, at a time when the organization was embarking on a more ambitious development program that, among other things, sought to strengthen the region's civil society.

But these job descriptions hardly convey the intense situations in which Nancy often found herself. In Somalia, she and her colleagues were witness to the battle between US-led United Nations forces against supporters of the warlord Mohamed Farrah Aidid, culminating in the October 1993 "Black Hawk Down" incident – which happened close to the Oxfam-UK office in Mogadishu. Nancy arrived in Afghanistan just after the Taliban seized power, tasked with developing and implementing a policy position concerning work with women – a controversial stance for Oxfam-UK that required careful analysis and presentation to the United Nations and other entities. Her job also entailed regular meetings with Taliban representatives; she recalled briefings with one official who would refuse to look at her because she did not wear clothing deemed suitable.

In Northern Iraq, Nancy had to deal with a challenging political environment but also had the responsibility of delivering payroll for staff. This necessitated a marathon trek, riding in the cab of a truck through the desert and down circuitous, winding roads, then ferrying across a river to the rendezvous point – and then making the trip all the way back.

After she left Save the Children in 2000, Nancy still sought out new challenges and other avenues to put her beliefs into action. She directed a retreat and conference center, Temenos, located on a mountain top in Western Massachusetts with no electricity or running water (a garden was later created in her honor) ; she was part of a two-person crew that crossed the Atlantic in a

sailboat; she spent several months near the demilitarized zone in South Korea working with an organization seeking to foster reconciliation between the two Koreas.

And, at age 78, she served a six-month sentence in federal prison for trespassing onto the controversial Western Hemisphere Institute for Security Cooperation military school (formerly known as the School of the Americas) at Fort Benning, Ga. In a YouTube interview, Nancy explained that the school – criticized for human rights abuses committed by its former students – was a symbol of the harmful impact of US military policies on ordinary people: “I wanted to be a witness to the relationship between the schools and the dictatorships the US is supporting. It’s unconscionable that we should be involved in the death of so many people and not take cognizance of that.” When a Korean Buddhist meditation and retreat center opened a few hundred yards up the road from her, Nancy befriended its administrators and staff, and frequently attended early-morning meditation sessions. She became interested in Buddhism and read about its philosophies and practices, though she never regarded herself as a practicing Buddhist – much as she liked to learn about other faiths but did not necessarily make them her own: It was not unusual for Nancy to go for her daily Buddhist meditation, then attend the Sunday service at a local Episcopal church, followed by silent worship at her Quaker meeting.

Nancy found time and energy for plenty of diversions at various points of her life, including beekeeping. She played folk-style guitar and later classical piano, and built her own harpsichord; she also enjoyed contra and square dancing. An avid hiker and walker who traveled parts of the Appalachian Trail and went on an Outward Bound wilderness adventure, she once tried – unsuccessfully – to complete the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage route in Spain. In her late 80s, before she was forced to give up driving, Nancy took informal lessons in Latin.

In addition to her son, Nancy is survived by her granddaughters, Kirsten and Shalyn Smith; her great-granddaughter, Hosea; her brother, Jay; and four

nieces and two nephews. She was pre-deceased by her brother Don and parents Mark and Eleanor Harris. Her longtime partner, Charles F. Grosser died in 1982.

A celebration of Nancy's life is envisioned for a later date.

Read a more in-depth obituary for Nancy H. Smith at <http://nancyhsmith.wordpress.com/nancy>

# Previous Events

## Visitation Hours

JUL **20**. 4:00 PM - 6:00 PM (ET)

Bates & Anderson - Redmond & Keeler  
110 Green Street  
Hudson, NY 12534  
(518) 828-3371  
<http://batesandersonredmondkeeler.com>

# Tribute Wall

BZ

“ 1 file added to the album *Walking with Nancy*



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**Beth Kelley Zorbanos** - July 28, 2021 at 03:33 PM

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“ *Temenos lit a candle in memory of Nancy H. Smith*



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**Temenos** - July 26, 2021 at 02:50 PM

MH

“ I met Nancy Smith in 1974 when I first enrolled at Columbia-Greene Community College. Meeting her and taking her classes was life changing for me. She inspired me to love learning and to explore possibilities I never dared to dream. I spent hours and hours talking with her because she was the most amazing woman intellectually and spiritually. The greatest gift, among the many she gave me, was to explore and know myself. That may sound simple, but in the 1970s I stepped out of the box in many ways and carved a life for myself. I reached my educational and career goals. I claimed my gayness with pride in the 1970s when it was risky to do so. I thank Nancy for directing me toward reaching my authentic self and for guiding me toward searching and self-acceptance. I will always remember her for her own bravery and hold her in my heart with much gratitude.



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**Mary Hanna** - July 19, 2021 at 07:57 PM

LC

“ Nancy will live on in my heart as a best friend, mentor and advisor. We worked together at the NYS Training School and Columbia Greene Community College. Nancy was always ahead of the curve, we were innovating programs and sharing life. When I was in the middle of my divorce and wasn't sure where to live, Nancy said, "Move in with me, I have room!" We laughed and cried and I got through it.



*I were together all the time; I would stop in and bring food--she never liked to cook or eat! She liked cheese and that's what she ate; I would make Italian food and of course we laughed.*

*She always fought the unpopular fights, stood up for what was right. I learned so much from her; I never thought about her leaving this early.*

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**Lisbeth Calandrino** - July 18, 2021 at 11:27 PM

MH

*Thanks for sharing. I remember you as well at Columbia-Greene. I learned so much in the group dynamics class. I still remember the process and Tavistock method. Regards.*

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**Mary Hanna** - July 19, 2021 at 07:59 PM

LC

*Thank you Mary.*

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**lisbeth calandrino** - July 20, 2021 at 03:57 PM

JH

“ There is SO much in this bio of Nancy that I didn't know, tho I thought a kew a lot. I'm reluctant to add something ELSE to who she was and her accomplishments. When we were at Hudson Friends together, she also strongly pushed for the Meeting's involvement in Hudson Pride. I think 4 of us participated the first year. It wasn't the numbers that mattered. It was the rightness. She also wasn't averse to cleaning out the Meeting's sheds in the back, or planting flower bulbs, or making friendly relations with the neighbors. I knew about the jail time and the retreat in Massachusetts without water or electricity and her early work in Hudson with Black Lives Matter. SO much I didn't know. She so much lived up to the biblical reference, that if you're doing something good with your right hand, don't even let your left hand know about it. I hope I will see her again some day and hear the stories I missed, and hear that beautiful laugh. So much wish I could be at the sharing July 20 but am quarantined in Mexico with COVID. She would understand, smile, hug, forgive.

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**Jan Hanvik** - July 17, 2021 at 04:20 PM

LC

*Thank you for sharing, she was an amazing person, I just loved her.*

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**Lisbeth Calandrino** - July 18, 2021 at 11:28 PM