



Donna Marie Smith

October 31, 1936 - September 30, 2020

A secure childhood in the seed bed of Minnesota Swedish Baptists was where little Donna Marie Smith was born. On October 31, 1936, Winfield and Olga Anderson, children of Swedish and Norwegian immigrants, welcomed their first daughter into their Cambridge, Minnesota home. Four years later, Donna was joined by sister, Judy. Life was good in Cambridge where the family attended First Baptist Church and Donna's young faith flourished, leading to her baptism at age 11. When Trout Lake Camp welcomed its first campers in 1947, Donna was proud to say she never missed a summer all the way up to her high school graduation.

Donna attended Cambridge public schools, graduating in 1954. Her solid Swedish Baptist roots then led her to Bethel College in St. Paul. There she met a young man from Indiana by the name of Gene Smith. Donna soon transferred to St. Cloud State University, where she was able to complete her elementary teaching degree, and receive a kindergarten endorsement. Gene transferred to Valparaiso University in Indiana, where he too, received a teaching degree. Both Donna and Gene completed their college courses in June of 1958, and were promptly married in August of 1958 back at First Baptist Church in Cambridge by Donna's beloved Pastor Bob Norstrom. A move for the young couple to Minneapolis was precipitated by both signing contracts to teach in the Minneapolis Public Schools. They found a home in the northern suburb of Brooklyn Center, and a church home at Brooklyn Center Baptist Church. In 1959, Gene and Donna became proud parents to

son Kirk, who was followed by their second son, Barry, in 1962.

In 1971, the Smiths moved their family of four to a townhome in Roseville, Minnesota. There was no question that they would now find themselves at Central Baptist Church in St. Paul's Midway neighborhood where college friends John and Barb Anderson, and Gene's childhood friend from Indiana, Ron Eckert and his wife Carol, were now the pastoral team. Gene and Donna found themselves involved immediately in the ministries at Central, working with the youth as high school teachers, and later leading the college and career class.

Donna continued to teach until the early 1980's. At that time Donna decided to act on her notion that the many educational tools and resources that had been available to her as a teacher could also be of benefit to churches, their Christian education departments, and their Sunday Schools. She decided to leave teaching and open her own business - an educational store for parents, teachers, and children, featuring parent and teacher resources educational toys, books, and both secular and religious curriculum. Her store was named The Learning Square. First housed in the basement of a small building in the Como Park neighborhood, it eventually moved to Milton Square in St. Anthony Park.

Donna's expertise was also sought after as she was invited to lead workshops in churches and early childhood circles. She added furniture and other equipment to her available inventory, helping many churches and pre-schools get good quality equipment at a discount. Central Baptist and Central Childcare were grateful benefactors of Donna's expertise and discounted merchandise, as the church burgeoned with young families and lots of lively children.

In 1989, Gene retired after 30 years of teaching in Minneapolis to join Donna in running the business. They closed the retail store soon after that and continued to do trade shows, catalog sales, and provide supplies and curriculum to early childhood programs, preschools, and churches. Gene passed away suddenly in 1993 leaving Donna to carry on alone until her

retirement in 2007.

After Gene's death Donna continued her active involvement at Central Baptist Church. She served on the church board as chair of the Personnel committee, the Family Life committee, and in Member Care. Through all of this, her passion was for the women's ministry at Central. She served for many years on the board of the Central Women's Fellowship. In 2016, a fall CWF event planned by Donna and her counterpart and longtime friend, Barb Erickson, led to the birthing of a new ministry for Central: Living Grace Ministries. This unprecedented program reached out to women who were facing the challenges of reentry after incarceration. Donna's love and passion for this ministry and the women it touched became her primary focus in her last years. She gained so much satisfaction from seeing how God called together a team of women from Central to join this great outreach. Out of the relationships built through Living Grace, grew evidence of the need for a Celebrate Recovery program.

Donna lived a full and blessed life. Her childhood was near perfect. As an adult, she experienced a fullness and purpose in all she pursued. Her wisdom and mentorship was a gift to all in her sphere of influence both at Central and beyond. But her life was not without hardship. Her hardest days in life were the sudden death of her husband and friend, Gene, at 58 years old, and the loss of her oldest son, Kirk, to cancer at age 53. Loss so deep allowed her to realize that she could not continue to live the life that might have been, but to instead live the life God had now placed before her. In her words: "Out of great pain comes great strength."

Donna Marie Smith is preceded in death by her parents, Winfield and Olga Anderson, husband Gene Smith, son Kirk Smith, Gene's parents Arn and Sue Smith, and brother-in-law William Freyberg. She is survived by son, Barry Smith (Carrie), sister Judy Pearson (John), sister-in-law Janet Freyberg, grandchildren Kelsey, Katie, and Emily, Joshua, Jacob, Abby, great grandchildren Finn & Lily and six nieces and nephews.

Donna asked to leave the following message to her beloved grandchildren:

"I am so proud of you and the fine young adults you have become, with concern for others, acceptance of diversity, and social justice. I feel as if I am leaving the world in good hands with millennials such as you. I leave you with two scripture verses:

'Learn to do right, seek justice. Defend the oppressed. Take up the cause of the fatherless; plead the case of the widow.' -Isaiah 1:17 NIV

'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind,' and 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' -Luke 10:17 NIV"

Memorials preferred to:

Global Horizons (memo: Cornerstone Academy)

Central Baptist Foundation

Due to Covid-19 a small family service by invitation is planned.

Tribute Wall

MY

“ Dear Barry and family, What a wonderful service ! She was a special women. Our class reunions will never be the same without her. How fortunate we all were to have known her. Peace. Mary Lou and Dean

Mary Lou and Dean Yerigan - October 10, 2020 at 12:00 AM

VN

“ I will miss my dear friend, as many others will too, I'm sure. I have many good memories of our times together and her enthusiasm for life and her strong faith in God. She was an inspiration to us all. To her family I say, I'm sorry for your great loss and I pray that God would comfort you all and give you His peace.

Vernelle Nelson - October 09, 2020 at 12:00 AM

JW

“ Aunt Donna,
Thank you for always serving as a model of what it means to live for those around you.
We'll miss you dearly!

Love,
John Charles



John Weirich - October 08, 2020 at 12:00 AM

JM

“ Sincere condolences to her family. God has welcomed another special soul into His arms. She will be missed by her church family.

Judy Morneau - October 07, 2020 at 12:00 AM

BS

“ *The messages from the Bible that Donna chose to leave her grandchildren says everything about her: Her love of God and neighbor, compassion for others, and determination to seek justice.*

Barry and Beth Sullivan - October 05, 2020 at 12:00 AM

LF

“ *I still have the green, Christmas elf tree ornament I received from Aunt Donna and Uncle Gene. I hang it every year.*



Larry Freyberg - October 04, 2020 at 12:00 AM

PL

“ *Donna will be forever missed. She treated us like part of the family. We spent many Thanksgivings with Donna and her family and always had a great time talking about people in our lives, jobs, hobbies, sports, schools, and other things except for politics.*

Paul & Quyen Lam - October 04, 2020 at 12:00 AM

M(

“ *You will be missed by me and all of our class.*

Myrtle Danielson (Anderson) - October 04, 2020 at 12:00 AM

AP

“ *Donna holds a special place in my heart and I will miss her*

Anissa Peterson - October 04, 2020 at 12:00 AM

AR

“ Donna was an amazing woman. I am so fortunate to have gotten to know her in my time I attended central Baptist church. I was involved with her and her woman's Bible study.

Amy Ann Romero - October 04, 2020 at 12:00 AM

JH

“ It's been an inspiration to serve with Donna. Her lively determination in working with ladies in re-entry and bring a driving force in starting Celebrate Recovery energized a ministry that continues even as she has gone on ahead of us. She blesses all who come in contact with her.

Jim Hendrickson - October 03, 2020 at 12:00 AM

PS

“ Our deepest condolences on the loss of a bright and loving follower of Christ, Donna Smith. I have always admired her strength especially after Gene went home so suddenly. What beautiful words to describe an amazing woman. She is leaving behind a powerful legacy of love and faith- founded upon God's word. Praying for all Donna's loved ones and Central family. Scott and Paula Starker

Paula Starker - October 03, 2020 at 12:00 AM

BH

“ Any time I came home for a visit since moving to Arkansas, Donna would always make sure we had a conversation to catch up. As our Sunday school teachers from the moment they arrived at Central, the Smiths have been a big part of my life for decades, something I cherish and miss. Now she is reunited with Gene in Heaven, and no illness or pain. May the Lord comfort you in your time of sorrow.

Becky Hanson - October 03, 2020 at 12:00 AM

JL

“ I'm so grateful for a heritage that includes people like Gene and Donna. They were always rock solid in their faith and always fruitful in their ministry. I had the privilege to talk with Donna about a month ago, hearing of her cancer journey and her courage to finish well and looking forward to the joy that comes with seeing Jesus. I'm inspired to live my life this way no matter what life holds.

Judy Peterson Lustig - October 03, 2020 at 12:00 AM

FN

“ Barry,
I'm so sorry for your earthly loss. The obituary is beautiful and highlights the difference your mom made in so many lives. She lived a long and meaningful life. The scripture passages she left for the grandchildren are beautiful. I'm certain that by her charging the grandkids to be mindful of them as they live their lives she was able to take comfort in knowing that what was so important in her own life's work would carry on. Blessings to you and Carrie, the girls, your niece and nephews, and all that loved Donna.

Frances Nelson - October 02, 2020 at 12:00 AM

KG

“ My condolences to Barry, Carrie and the rest of the family.

Kris Green - October 02, 2020 at 12:00 AM

JF

“ Donna was a lovely, vibrant woman, with many talents, whose Christianity touched many lives. She is now at peace with her Heavenly Father, her Gene and other loved ones.

Janet Freyberg - October 02, 2020 at 12:00 AM

BS

“ *Rest in Peace MD!*

Barry & Carrie Smith - October 02, 2020 at 12:00 AM

JF

“ *We will miss you in this life Aunt Donna, but look forward to being reunited with the Lord.*

Jerry and Tammy Freyberg - October 02, 2020 at 12:00 AM

JH

“ *Aunt Donna was so loving to me as I was growing up and even though I only saw her once a year at Christmas, she was one of those people who made me feel like no time at all had passed in between visits. She was gifted in many ways including letting everyone know that their feelings mattered to her, each person she talked with felt they were important to her. Her legacy of love and caring for others will be passed on for many generations to come. Her love for our Heavenly Father and His Son, our Savior Christ the Lord was evident in all she said and did. Our world is a little darker now but her light shines ever bright in Heaven, her forever home. Her love and her beautiful laughter lives on in my heart ❤️*

John and Becky Freyberg Hart - October 02, 2020 at 12:00 AM