



Berniece Beaver Holt

September 13, 1926 - July 2, 2020

With her family at her side, Berniece Beaver Holt, 93, of Clemson, SC, found peace on July 2, 2020, at Cottingham Hospice House in Seneca.

Berniece was predeceased by her soulmate of more than 70 years, Albert Hamilton Holt, Sr., and is survived by children Teresa Holt (Bill Hoffman) of Novato, CA, Charlotte Holt (Tom Platt) and Carol Salter (Hank) of Clemson, and Albert Hamilton Holt, Jr., of San Francisco, CA; beloved grandchildren Megan Matthew Acevedo (Juan) of Corte Madera, CA, Bryn Salter (Tripp Mostertz) of Charleston, SC, Kelly Salter Acharya (Chaitanya) of Durham, NC, Lane Salter White (Quinton) of Washington, DC, Annie Platt Holley (Ryan) and Isaac Hamilton Salter of Clemson; and by great-grandchildren Leila and Isa Acevedo, Sameer and Nikhil Acharya, Henry Hamilton Mostertz, and Albert and Denny White.

Born on September 13, 1926, in China Grove, NC, Berniece was the daughter of Frances Duree Weddington and Hilbert Leon "Lee" Beaver, and she grew up in the homes of her grandmothers Betty Bostian Weddington and Charlotte Bruce Beaver. She was predeceased by her family, including her baby sister Peggy, brother William Hilbert "Buck" Beaver, and cousin Council Haywood Weddington.

Berniece met the love of her life in 1941 when Albert Holt became her high school English teacher. After exchanging hundreds of letters during his four years of active duty in World War II, they were wed at St. Mark's Lutheran Church in China Grove on July 6, 1946. Berniece attended both Appalachian State College and UNC-Chapel Hill before the couple moved to Clemson in 1947.

When Albert began his teaching career at Clemson Agricultural College, Berniece went to work in the College Library at a salary of 25 cents an hour. Over nearly 40 years she became an accomplished archivist in the Special Collections department where she helped scholars research the papers of James F. Byrnes, Edgar Brown, and other notable figures.

As newlyweds, the Holts lived on campus behind the Clemson Hotel and later in a pre-fab on Milky Way, just a short stroll from the dairy barns and the Clemson ice cream sales counter. They quickly formed a supportive family of lifelong friends from the College faculty, including Frances and Claire Caskey and Joan and Mark Steadman. They built their house on Walnut Street in “Chiggerville” and moved into it in 1955.

When Hartwell Dam was constructed five years later, they moved the house to higher ground on Strawberry Lane before the reservoir filled. This was the first of ten buildings Berniece would rescue and move to greater purpose over the years, including a second house in the lake’s path which became the home of their lifelong neighbors Jack and Evelyn Goodman. She later arranged the moves of the historic New Hope school building, four pre-fabs from the University, and two office buildings from Duke Energy’s Bad Creek Project to the original campus of the Clemson Child Development Center. She also saved one of the oldest houses on the Clemson University campus from the wrecking ball and moved it across the railroad tracks to the Calhoun community.

With the whole-hearted support of her husband, Berniece was always “a mover and a shaker.” Equal partners in the home, sharing child-rearing and household duties, Berniece and Albert Holt also worked tirelessly to improve their community. They were inspired by President John F. Kennedy’s charge: “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” And they spent their lives working for equality, justice, peace, and the environment.

Berniece’s activism began on a modest scale. She was a Girl Scout Leader, an active member of the school PTO, an advocate for children’s art classes, and one of the parents who worked hard to get the Calhoun Clemson Elementary School library accredited—one year before the school burned down.

She also helped found the Clemson Area Youth Theatre and supported the Clemson Little Theater from their early days of rehearsing in the YMCA, through the years of performing in the P&A auditorium, then in the Old Central School House, and into their current home in the Pendleton Playhouse. She never trod the boards herself but was a vital producer and assistant on many productions, including those directed by her daughter Carol.

Berniece was concerned about the health of the planet and was an early recycler and an active member of the Sierra Club and other conservation organizations. She educated herself on the science of nuclear power and waste management and helped found both the Palmetto Alliance and People for a Clean Environment, groups that worked to keep South Carolina from becoming the dumping ground for the nation’s radioactive waste.

She was also proud to be a founding member of the League of Women Voters of the Clemson Area, taking part in voter registration drives, lobbying for voter protection laws, attending City and County Council meetings, educating others on pending legislation, and serving for decades as a poll worker.

She was a lifelong member of the Democratic Party at the local, state, and national level, and served for many years as a precinct and county officer and as a delegate to county and state conventions. “Mrs. Albert Holt” is remembered for bravely disrupting the 1964 SC State Democratic Convention by reading a statement into the record in support of Black Democratic voters, a rebellious act that brought the Convention to an abrupt close and precipitated Sen. Strom Thurmond’s switch to the GOP. Contrary to what she was told at the time about her future in the Party, that was not the last convention she ever attended—she was a delegate to almost every state convention for the next 30 years, and traveled to the national convention in Miami in 1972 as a delegate for McGovern. That fateful 1964 convention, however, was the last Democratic Party convention that Strom Thurmond ever attended!

Berniece Holt fought the good fight for her entire life, always seeking to right wrongs and injustices. She was a vocal presence at countless marches, moratoria, candlelight vigils, and protests. She organized and marched for civil rights, lobbied to change unfair practices and discriminatory laws, supported anti-war efforts against US involvement in Vietnam and the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, often expressing her views in Letters to the Editor. She was outspoken against capital punishment and nuclear proliferation; she strongly supported women’s rights, sensible gun control, affordable healthcare, quality eldercare, and LGBTQ equality.

The Holt family found a spiritual home with the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Clemson where Berniece served for over 40 years in a variety of offices, including President, program committee Chair, and ordained Lay Minister. In the latter capacity she delivered sermons, represented the UUFC at public meetings, conducted memorial services, and presided over weddings, including that of her daughter Charlotte and Tom Platt.

Berniece was recognized for her civic engagement and service on the boards and committees of many organizations, including the City of Clemson Recreation Commission, Tri-County Technical College, Clemson Congregations in Touch, and South Carolina First Steps. She was honored to receive the 1980 Rotary Club International Award for Outstanding Community Service and the Clemson University 2002 Martin Luther King, Jr.

Award for Excellence in Service.

Of all her attempts to make the world a better place, Berniece considered her work in childcare and early childhood education to be the most significant and successful. In the 1960's she was instrumental in founding the Clemson Chapter of the SC Council on Human Relations, and it was through that groundbreaking bi-racial organization that changes were made on the local level that have had an impact on succeeding generations and into the future. Through meetings in each other's homes and churches, racial barriers between communities began to fall, and measurable progress became possible. Early activities of the Council were to name streets and obtain mail delivery and garbage pickup in black communities, to fight Jim Crow practices and voter discrimination, and to prepare black children to integrate the public schools.

The crowning glory of the Council, however, was the Clemson Child Development Center which has provided affordable and comprehensive childcare to a diverse population of infants, toddlers, and 4K students for over 50 years. In addition to her hands-on labor in the creation and early operation of the Center, Berniece served on the CCDC Board for many years and wrote dozens of grant proposals to help the Center grow and to keep it afloat. She was also a representative of the First Steps program that helped spread the concept of quality childcare and education for pre-Kindergarten children across South Carolina. In fact, on the morning of September 11, 2001, she was walking alongside SC Gov. Jim Hodges on a march from Clemson Elementary School to the Child Development Center to celebrate the First Steps program when they received word of the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center.

Eighteen years later, in 2019, the Clemson Child Development Center celebrated its 50th anniversary, in the historic Calhoun School building that it now shares with the Clemson Area African American History Museum and the Clemson Arts Center. Attending that birthday party was a highlight of her final year.

For all her efforts for the greater good, Berniece was always Mama and Grandmama first. She and Albert loved raising their children and grandchildren in the foothills of South Carolina, and they took full advantage of all the culture, arts, and athletics that Clemson University had to offer. There were also daylong picnics in the nearby mountains, multi-family beach vacations on the Grand Strand, and camping trips across the country. Berniece's summer vegetable gardens provided abundant good eating throughout the year. Family and friends regularly overflowed their house during lively holiday and birthday meals. Life was good.

The Holts supported each of their four children as they found their ways in the world, and then they welcomed their six grandchildren with love and delight. They took an active role in those lives, eagerly baby-sitting, endlessly reading and re-reading favorite stories, providing an after-school haven in their home, playing cheerleader at their swim meets, and bursting with pride at their performances and graduations. These grandparents have modeled the best of both civic and family life, and today the grandchildren they had such a hand in raising are happily following in their considerable footsteps.

For allowing Berniece and Albert to remain together in their own home well into their nineties, the family is grateful to caregivers Jackie Chapman, Bethany Dawson, Regina Guyton, Dolores Patterson, Kisha Ramsey, Irene Wheaton, and Stephanie Wideman. They are thankful to the staff of Creekside Cottage at Clemson Downs for keeping Berniece safe and engaged during the past year, and to the staff of Prisma Health Hospice of the Foothills Cottingham House for their gentle support of Berniece and her family during the final days of her life.

A celebration of Berniece's life will be planned when it is safe to travel and gather together. Meanwhile, written remembrances are most welcome and can be sent to CLHolt@gmail.com or to 206 Strawberry Lane, Clemson, SC 29631.

Those who wish to honor Berniece Holt's memory are invited to donate to her living legacy: the non-profit Clemson Child Development Center, 216 Butler Street, Clemson, SC 29631, or to the charity of their choice.

Comments



“ How can I begin to speak to the many memories I have of Berniece Holt? She and Dr. Holt both influenced my life in such wonderful ways; and because of their deep and abiding love for each other I cannot think of one without the other. She was the most courageous woman I have ever known, and he the sweetest, kindest and most intelligent man. My life is riddled with memories of them and their family : memories of a troubled teenager who always knew she would be welcomed at their home... memories of times when I had no one else to call on and I knew that they would be there for me.... A particular memory of Dr. Holt and I discussing his disdain for the writings of Ayn Rand, as for some reason he drove me home from Daniel High.... Distinct memories of being with Charlotte and Berniece as she packed for the 1972 Democratic Convention in Miami and of the two of them standing with me in the cemetery as we buried my mother years later.... The memory of her and Dr. Holt sharing the joy of my graduations from UNC Chapel Hill and from Duke of working in the garden of the Childhood Development Center alongside them ... of sitting at the kitchen table with them and us catching up over a cup of coffee ... of the sound of Dr. Holt's voice ... of Berniece's laughter ... and sadly of tears as her memory failed and more tears when Albert died. I have so many memories of being loved and accepted by two of the most amazing people I'll ever know ... memories of people who helped me to strive harder and reach higher because they were people who stood up for what was right in this world and they made folks around them want to stand up too.

Jeanne Ross Neal - July 14, 2020 at 08:42 AM



“ I met Bernice for the first time in, I think, 1977 after a radioactive spill from Oconee Nuclear Station precipitated her and others to start what I think might have been the first local citizens environmental awareness group. I remember helping her and others to fill helium balloons to release with messages warning folks that if the balloon landed where they were it could just as well be part of a release. I continued to see her once in a while until joining the UUFC and then I remember her welcome, a big Unitarian hug. Bernice had no enemies and was everyone's friend. You could always count on that contagious smile while at the same time you could count on her speaking her mind. I remember my amazement at how she would persevere as what seemed to be almost a lone liberal voice in the Clemson area, and welcomed the fact that because of her I didn't need to feel alone for the same reason. Thank you, Bernice. I am going to really miss you but your ideas and deeds will certainly live on for a very long time.

John Hains - July 09, 2020 at 07:35 PM