

Martha Cherry Fiske, 86, Award Winning Teacher, Grew Up in Darien, Where She Met Her Future Husband in 7th Grade

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Martha Cherry ("Martie") Fiske, a pioneering teacher and spirit, died in her Weston home on July 21, 2022, with her husband at her side. She was 86.

She was born in Albany, New York, on Jan. 16, 1936, the daughter of Harold Schwarz Cherry and Catherine Field Cherry. She grew up in Darien, where she met her future husband, John Adams Fiske, in seventh grade.

She was a passionate teacher and courageous intellectual throughout her life. Martie and John became and stayed best friends for 75 years. She graduated from Smith College in 1957, and married John on June 13, 1959 in Darien. They wowed their audience by memorizing their vows, which they kept for the next 63

years.

Martie was a pioneer in her work and family life. She had a passion for science, great literature, funky art, and the truth. She became an award-winning English teacher at Wellesley High School, where she pushed her students to challenge conventional thinking by discussing the writing of innovative authors.

In 1978, she and John took their three children (12, 15, and 17) out of school for a year of real-world learning, bicycle-camping in Europe and backpacking in Turkey, Egypt, India and Nepal.

During that year, she advised John to develop a career suited to his natural talents, in the then-innovative field of family mediation. Once home, his practice became a success.

In her mid-60s, Martie re-invented herself and became an architectural designer, re-designing several homes and fully designing a new-build home. After graduating from Smith College, she earned a master's degree in English from the University of Michigan.

Martie and John raised their three children in Ann Arbor, New York City, and Boston. While John worked as a lawyer in New York City, Martie taught English at the Spence School while raising their children. During that time she was the subject of a Wall Street Journal article about working mothers.

In 1970, she became an English teacher at Wellesley High School. When she did not receive pension benefits because she was part-time, she protested, leading to pension benefits for part-time teachers.

For more than 20 years at Wellesley High School, Martie was a highly respected and beloved teacher. In 1985, she was invited to the White House as a "Distinguished Teacher" after one of her students, a presidential scholar, named her as his most influential teacher.

Less than a year later, she had become so dissatisfied by the lack of respect and support for teachers, that she resigned and publicly criticized the town for not supporting good teaching. She was featured [in a televised interview](#). In 1988, the town asked her to return, and she resumed her teaching, until her retirement in 1996.

Martie continued to seek improved respect and resources for teachers, gaining national attention for doing so.

In the 1980s, Martie and John (with help from friends) built a whimsical, rustic, timber frame vacation retreat on Bald Mountain in [Campton, New Hampshire](#), that Martie filled with creative touches and innovative design elements. The retreat remains a favorite gathering place for family and friends hankering for a hardy, zany getaway.

Martie's fierce independence and dignity shone through as she confronted curvature of the spine and Parkinson's Disease, diagnosed in 2015. She continued her love for nature and the outdoors, still walking with canes, and then with a walker. She died as she wished, in her beloved garden home with John at her side. She donated her body to Tufts Medical School.

Darienite

News for Darien

<https://darienite.com>

Her family and friends are now celebrating her remarkable life. There will be a Memorial Celebration in late December.

She is survived and loved by her husband, John; her children: Addie (Dennis Saylor) of Weston, Hal (Kim Yen) of Brisbane, Australia; and Jeff (Michele) of Framingham; and her seven grandchildren: John (Caroline), Charlie, Alex Saylor, Joy and Grace Fiske, and Kate and Maggie Fiske.

Contributions in Martie's memory may be made to the [Massachusetts Audubon Society](#), the [Weston Council on Aging](#), or the [Museum of Science, Boston](#).

— [This obituary](#) previously was published by the *Boston Globe* on Legacy.com, where online condolences may be left.