

MARTHA BENNETT CARLAN HOLLERS

Martha Bennett Carlan Hollers, known to nearly everyone as “Bennie,” died peacefully at home on July 19, 2026, surrounded by family and friends. She was 85.

Bennie grew up in Candor, among extended family, lifelong friends and a pony named Lady. Candor was an idyllic place for her childhood and the colorful characters of the small town provided endless material for the stories she would tell for the rest of her life. Although she got in trouble on the very first day of school for telling a dirty joke, she was a serious and gifted student. She graduated from Candor High School in just three years before attending Peace College and later transferring to the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. In 1962, she graduated Phi Beta Kappa with a degree in English.

After graduation, Bennie married Russell J. Hollers Jr. The following year they moved to San Antonio, Texas, where Russ was stationed at Fort Sam Houston until 1967. During those years they welcomed their son, Russell, and, 15 months later, their daughter, Catherine. After returning to Candor, they expected to stop with “a pair and no spare,” but then Elizabeth joined the family. Bennie was a funny, thoughtful and loving mother who encouraged her children to stay curious, find joy and treat others with kindness.

Back in North Carolina, Bennie immersed herself in community life. She was active in Democratic politics, the Arts Council, bridge clubs and art classes. Governor Jim Hunt appointed her to the North Carolina Board of Transportation, and she was later awarded the Order of the Long Leaf Pine for her service

to the state. She was a gracious hostess whose home was filled with friends, lively conversation and laughter.

Bennie’s adventurous spirit reached beyond the bounds of her hometown, and in 1987, she set out to explore new paths. She worked to advance North Carolina’s seat belt safety laws, spent time in Duck trying her hand at real estate, and then, at age 53, made one of the boldest decisions of her life by returning to school. Her sharp intellect and even sharper wit earned a degree from the UNC School of Law and another generation of cherished friends.

After serving as a public defender in Beaufort, and then as an attorney with state agencies in Raleigh, Bennie settled in Greensboro with her sister, Mary Cabell Eubanks. She spent valuable years as a solo practitioner, where her sense of justice found its perfect calling. She approached every client with dignity, compassion and respect, especially those whose voices were too often unheard.

Bennie later moved to Chapel Hill and embraced perhaps her favorite role as Grandma Hat. She was a baby whisperer, encouraged them to appreciate a well-told joke and rarely missed an orchestra performance, beach trip, or sporting event. Wherever she went, she made friends across generations.

In recent years, Bennie proudly claimed her place “in a long line of shiftless people” while commanding parties, political discussions and sporting events from her beloved big red chair. Though notoriously unathletic, she was a passionate Tar Heel fan whose enthusiasm never wavered. Every Monday, she hosted a “Prosecco and Protest” gathering with friends



to write postcards, call elected officials and make signs for local demonstrations. She also enjoyed adult learning classes, bridge, evenings of live jazz and worked in pastel paintings. She completed portraits of each of her grandchildren and brought the same artistic eye to her own signature style, which almost always included a fabulous hat and beautiful shoes.

Bennie will be remembered for her boundless curiosity, quick wit, deep commitment to fairness, and love of family and friends. She truly never met a stranger. She had a perfectly-timed joke for every occasion. She believed that the sum of a life is found in the memories we choose to cherish. She spent a lifetime creating joyful memories for everyone fortunate enough to know her.

She is survived by her sister, Mary Cabell Eubanks; her children, Russell Hollers III (Susie), Catherine Powell (Biff) and Elizabeth Welsby (Ian); and her grandchildren, Augusta Hollers, Eleanor Hollers, Harrison Powell, Jack Marchuk-Welsby (Hannah), Carlan Welsby and Charlotte Welsby.

A celebration of Bennie’s life will be held Saturday, August 22, from 2 to 4 p.m. at the Carolina Club located inside the George Watts Hill Alumni Center at 150 Stadium Drive on the UNC campus.

In lieu of flowers, memorial contributions may be made to Team Up NC or UNC Hospice.