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Anne Whitlock Westaway-Palk

Saturday, June 12, 1937 - Friday, July 03, 2009

Westaway-Palk, Anne Whitlock The family of Anne Whitlock Westaway-Palk sadly announce her death at the Stedman Community Hospice, Brantford on Friday, July 3, 2009. Wife of the late Douglas Palk. Mother of Julian and his wife Marianne of San Francisco and Stephen of Orange County, California. Grandmother of Luke and Zach Philipp. Sister of Janet Alderson-Smith and her husband Christopher of England. Aunt of Daniel, Katherine and Toby. Anne was passionate about the heritage of Brantford and her involvement in the Parks and Recreation Department. A Memorial Service will be held at St. Andrew's United Church, 95 Darling Street, Brantford on Thursday at 2:00 p.m. If wished, memorial donations to the Stedman Community Hospice gratefully appreciated. Funeral Arrangements entrusted to the McCleister Funeral Home, 495 Park Road North, Brantford (519) 758-1553 www.mccleisterfuneralhome.ca

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Outspoken heritage advocate had passion for community
By MICHELLE RUBY
Posted 1 year ago

Anne Westaway-Palk had an outspoken passion for Brantford.

As a member of the city's heritage committee for two decades, she fought vigorously for the preservation of the city's past and railed against what she considered bad development.

"In older sections of a city with fine, old buildings, preservation and development are necessarily linked," Mr. Westaway-Palk wrote in 2005. "How that meeting of old and new is handled will make or break the revitalization process."

Mrs. Westaway-Palk died on July 3 at Stedman Community Hospice. She was 72.

Mrs. Westaway-Palk was born in Brantford and attended Brantford Collegiate Institute. Her family moved to Paris, France, in 1954 when her father, a chemical engineer, was asked to set up a business there. She attended finishing school in Switzerland before moving back to Canada, where she studied English at McGill University in Montreal, graduating with honour.

Following graduation, Mrs. Westaway-Palk married and lived in Toronto, Switzerland and Belgium. She had two sons, Julian, born in Canada, and Stephen, born in Switzerland.

After divorcing, Mrs. Westaway-Palk returned to Canada with her sons. She r studies, this time in planning, and worked for the Region of Haldimand-Norfolk.

Julian said the happiest years of his mother's life may have been when she met her second husband, Douglas Palk, in the mid- 1970s and the family moved to California. The couple opened a bookstore that became "a hallmark" in Carmel, Calif., known for its extensive mystery section, said Julian.

Mrs. Westaway-Palk returned to Brantford, driving cross-country, following the 1986 death of her husband.

"She was a different kind of mom," said Julian. "Every other mom I knew as the housewife type. She was very passionate and adventurous, with an inquiring mind. She was always on the go.

"She was extremely loving and supportive in her own way."

Bill Darfler met Mrs. Westaway-Palk in 1980 when the Albion Street cottage he was living in at the time was historically designated. Later, the two co-chaired the heritage committee and became neighbours on the same block of William Street.

"Her passion was the shape of the city, the architecture, the way the city was built," said Darfler.

"She was loud and opinionated."

Mrs. Westaway-Palk also served on the city's brownfields community advisory committee, the board of directors on the W. Ross Macdonald Memorial Foundation, and was involved in numerous projects for the city's parks and recreation department.

City planner Matt Reniers said Mrs. Westaway-Palk's commitment to good urban design was connected to her grandfather who owned Cromar Construction and whose labour created many of the city's important buildings, including the Wellington Street land registry office, opened in 1910.

"It wasn't self interest," said Reniers of Mrs. Westaway-Palk's heritage work. "She just wanted Brantford to be a good city to live in."

Maureen Sinclair, the city's director of parks and recreation, worked with Mrs. Westaway-Palk on several projects, including signs that now line the city's parks system describing local history. Mrs. Westaway-Palk was also a member of the group of women who called themselves the weed warriors and volunteered to tend unsightly abandoned properties across the city.

Sinclair said Mrs. Westaway- Palk was so often at the parks and recreation office she became like a staff member.

"Anne challenged you," Sinclair said. "But, by challenging us, she forced us to be better people."

An avid reader who operated Brant Avenue Books for six years, Mrs. Westaway-Palk's varied interests extended beyond heritage and urban planning. She could speak astutely about science, gardening, nature, travel, cooking, even weather patterns.

"She was an incredibly intelligent person," said Darfler.

Mrs. Westaway-Palk was the first person Alannah McQuarrie met when she moved to the city 12 years ago. The pair shared a quirky sense of humour and an interest in good books.

So committed to aesthetics was Mrs. Westaway-Palk, said McQuarrie, that she had difficulty even travelling through parts of the city she considered unattractive.

"She loathed the north end where I lived," said McQuarrie with a laugh. "She would actually close her eyes when we drove past the mall."

Those standards extended beyond architecture, said McQuarrie. Mrs. Westaway-Palk would sometimes refuse to display books in her store if she found the covers' design offensive.

Mrs. Westaway-Palk was a proponent of Jane Jacobs, a Canadian urbanist known for organizing grassroots efforts to block urban-renewal projects that threaten to destroy local neighbourhoods. Annual Jane's Walks encourage Canadians to explore their communities. Darfler is organizing the first Anne's Walk, in honour of Mrs. Westaway-Palk, for next May.

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Sinclair said other local groups are also considering ways to honour Mrs. Westaway-Palk.

"I will miss her very much, and I'm not alone," said Darfler. "She had quite an impact."

Mrs. Westaway-Palk is survived by her son, Julian and his wife, Marianne; son, Stephen; and grandchildren Luke and Zach Philipp. She is also survived by sister, Janet Alderson-Smith and her husband Christopher.

A memorial service will be held at St. Andrew's United Church, 95 Darling St., on Thursday at 2 p. m.

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