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BY YOICHI R. OKAMOTO

Liz and Les Carpenter at a
White House reception, 1969

Liz Carpenter

1920 – 2010

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When news of the passing of our beloved Liz Carpenter reached us March 20th, many at the magazine who were friends, admirers, mentees and colleagues were deeply saddened. Liz graced our cover in Dec. of 2002, within the first six months of the magazine's inception. Not only was Liz one of our first cover women; she was a contributor, columnist and ardent supporter of our mission. Liz was a trailblazer in the areas of politics, journalism and women's rights and warmly and happily opened many doors for us to other lady legends like Lady Bird Johnson, Molly Ivins, Sarah Weddington, Ann Richards, Luci Baines Johnson and Helen Thomas, all her dear friends. For that we are forever grateful.

Liz's brilliance, sharp wit, sense of humor and personality broke down any barriers that ever tried standing in her way. She was the first woman elected vice president of the student body at UT; a reporter, writer and editor from her days at Austin High to Washington, DC and well into her 80s; first woman executive

assistant to a vice president (effortlessly drafting the 58 difficult but perfect words spoken by President Johnson after the assassination of President Kennedy); then became press secretary to the First Lady in the White House; and continued to serve under four presidents.

She went on to found the National Women's Political Caucus (along with Betty Friedan, Bella Abzug and Gloria Steinem); led the Equal Rights Amendment Initiative; was one of the first three woman members of the Headliners Club in Austin (along with Ann Richards and Sarah Weddington); was an enthusiastic campaigner and supporter of Democratic candidates and the Democratic Party; a prolific author of five books and bestsellers, countless articles and columns; and a sought-after speaker, humorist, advisor and Distinguished Alumna of the University of Texas for whom the Liz Sutherland Carpenter Distinguished Visiting Lectureship was named. She knew everyone – from poets to politicians, activists to artists – and she used that influence to help anyone who asked. (For more on her

amazing life and legacy, go to www.lbjlibrary.org/carpenter).

We will miss her terribly. We asked some of her closest friends to share some personal remembrances of Liz on our pages this month, with more to come in May.

I first met Liz Carpenter in 1959 when we both worked for newspapers with offices on the 12th floor of the National Press Building. I was with the Washington bureau of the *New York Daily News*; Liz was down the hall with The Carpenter News Bureau, which she ran with her husband, Les. Always a wit, Liz liked to boast that her daughter, Christy, was conceived on the couch in the Carpenter News Bureau, adding, matter-of-factly, "It was a slow news day."

In fact, Liz was an enterprising, 24-7 reporter. Later at the White House as Lady Bird Johnson's chief of staff and press secretary, Liz set new precedents for openness, fairness and

See *Liz Carpenter*
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**Wonder Ball
from page 68**

known among her students as “drama mamma,” looks forward to the ball each year. Friday dresses in an elaborate Fairy Godmother costume (which she designs and makes herself as a costume designer by night for local community theatre groups) and along with her enthusiastic students, spreads cheer and grant “wishes” to the children. Friday became involved in the event at its inception because her dear friend Cooper asked her. “How could I turn her down? It sounded so lovely, so fun, and so important. I was honored!” says Friday, who this year has one student who will be in her W&W troupe and who will also benefit from the services of the organization.

Consider joining W&W for their Wonder Ball this year, on April 10th, from 6 to 9 p.m. Daughters ages 4-12 are invited, but everyone is encouraged to attend and enjoy lots of fabulous taste treats, DJ music and dance the night away in a magical, colorful setting that any child would be bedazzled by. Grant your daughter or your favorite little girl one wish, and make hundreds of children in Austin happier and stronger.

Visit wondersandworries.org for ticket information, or to make a donation to this important organization. Wonders & Worries services are always free of charge, and they serve over 2600 people in the Central Texas area. *aw*

**Liz Carpenter
from page 70**

humor in public office. As a friend, she was delightful, demanding, loyal, giving and a joy to be with. Liz lived life to the fullest. Or, in her words, “I lived as outrageously as my family, friends and the law allowed.” I loved her dearly and will miss her tremendously.

– Gwen Gibson

Two of Liz’s most dominant traits were her penchant for humor and her determination to accomplish whatever she set her mind to.

Throughout her life, she loved to laugh almost as much as she liked to give others a chuckle, and she carried that need for humor into her old age.

Liz was the only 80-something-year old I knew who had watched every Jerry Seinfeld show more than once. In fact, she scheduled her weekly in-home massage for 9:30 p.m. so that she could indulge in two of her biggest pleasures simultaneously: laughing at Jerry and crew on television while getting a workout under the strong hands of Nancy, her masseuse. “You are the only exercise I get,” Liz would tell her as the therapist kneaded her tired muscles, grown tense from writing articles at the computer and giving several funny speeches that week.

When 85-year-old Liz heard that Seinfeld was coming to Austin, she quickly determined to talk to the comedian face-to-face. Accustomed to setting up meetings with senators, presidents and the like, the seasoned advance woman put all of her public relations skills into play. When she hit one dead end and then another with Seinfeld’s people, she didn’t give up. Calling upon her extensive network from her *Variety* magazine days in

Washington, Liz finally found the right person to unlock the protective barrier around her comedic hero.

Afterward, Liz's backstage photo with a quizzical, but accommodating Jerry Seinfeld sat on the bedside table for the rest of her life, alongside those of her with Hillary and Bill Clinton, Queen Elizabeth and various other dignitaries. Jerry rested his arm on the back of Liz's signature red electric cart, her sexy answer to a wheelchair, and both smiled for the camera.

— PJ Pierce

To remember Liz is to remember her ways and her humor.

She created great political humor. Molly Ivins always said that Liz's response to hearing that John Connally had organized Texans for Nixon in '72 was the most astute, funniest political quote ever. Liz said, "It's a good thing that John Connally wasn't at the Alamo; he would have organized Texans for Santa Ana."

After her second bout of breast cancer surgery, she helped Molly Ivins and me support the fight against breast cancer in part by creating humor. I can still hear her voice at so many related events saying, "I've always heard, 'A tit for a tat.' I've just given up a tit; but what is a tat and when do I get it?"

Anyone who knows Liz knows that she hated to fly. But, as always, she sought to make something good out of something that made her unhappy.

One stormy spring night, Liz was flying back from Dallas. Also on the plane by coincidence were Cactus and Peggy Pryor, Molly Ivins and Ann Richards. Arriving in Austin, they came off the plane laughing

hysterically. Apparently they kept themselves – and everyone else on board – entertained. Molly said, "It's a good thing that plane didn't go down because there wouldn't be a single laugh left in Texas."

This morning I grieve at our loss of Liz Carpenter, but I also grieve because of the combined loss of Barbara Jordan, Ann Richards, Lady Bird Johnson, Molly Ivins AND Liz Carpenter. We are poorer for lacking their voices and their leadership. We must find new leaders to play the front and central roles.

Death has ended the early life of Liz Carpenter, but it has not ended our relationship with her.

In my mind's eye she and Lady Bird are on a bench in heaven laughing and talking. Liz's secret service name was "Springtime;" how appropriate that her body quit on the first day of spring. And Lady Bird and Liz worked so hard for the beauty of wildflowers. How appropriate that this spring has been cool and wet, ideal for wildflowers. The bluebonnets in my yard are already blooming, and I bet there will be fields of them all over this part of Texas. Each field will remind us of Liz and Lady Bird.

— Sarah Weddington

In lieu of flowers, the Carpenter family has requested that memorial gifts be made to the Liz Carpenter Memorial Fund at the Austin Community Foundation: (austincommunityfoundation.org). *aw*

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