

Dee deFerranti Abrahamse

December 6, 2024

Dee's husband, Allan, writes that she died at home of heart failure, a condition that, in his view, may have been related to her underlying struggle with Alzheimer's disease over the past several years.

Dee was a much beloved part of our friendship group during our undergraduate years. We bonded as sophomores, living together in Pearson's annex and have stayed in touch in various ways throughout our lives, reconnecting in recent years through regular zoom calls.

Below, we share some memories of Dee as we have known her over the years.

Dee had a first rate mind and a lifelong love for the study of history. She majored in history at Mount Holyoke, graduating with honors, and was elected to Phi Beta Kappa. After college, she attended graduate school at the University of Michigan, earning a Ph.D in Byzantine history. She then began work as a history professor at California State University at Long Beach, serving as one of the university's first female members in its history department. She had a long and productive career at that university, eventually becoming the chairperson of her department. Later, she was selected to become the university's Academic Dean for Social and Behavioral Sciences, leading 23 academic departments for over 15 years.

Dee met her husband, Allan, in graduate school. Together, they raised two sons and are the proud grandparents of both a granddaughter and a grandson

Despite her widely recognized brilliance, Dee was an incredibly down-to-earth person. Conversations with her were always fascinating. She possessed a wide range of knowledge, was generous in sharing it, and was skilled at formulating issues in ways that enabled others to view them from new perspectives.

Dee was a warm and welcoming friend, someone in whom it was easy to confide, and a great listener. As undergraduates, whenever we felt the need to take a break from campus life and escape its underlying academic pressures, her home in nearby Pittsfield, Massachusetts, complete with its local downhill skiing opportunities, became our home away from home.

Dee was cosmopolitan in the sense of being able to relate well to others who grew up in sociocultural settings different from her own. Her interest in getting to know people of diverse cultural backgrounds and her ability to relate to them served her well in her work at her university, a university whose student body is incredibly diverse and consists of large numbers of first generation college students. A special treat for her was being sent by the university to southeast Asia so that she could experience first hand some of the cultures from which her students had emigrated.

Dee had a strong sense of social justice. Throughout her life, she volunteered her time to work on causes that she believed would create a fairer and more just society. Toward that end, she served on various boards and task forces that addressed local problems. She also worked actively to influence the views of her state and local representatives on public policy issues,

Dee enjoyed seeing history first hand. In recent years, she took a trip to various locations in the American south to better understand the civil rights struggle in our country. She found the experience quite moving and enjoyed telling our classmates about it at one of our recent reunions.

Mount Holyoke played a strong role in Dee's life. Her mother, Dorothy Parr deFerranti, was an alumna and a past president of the Alumnae Association and her sister, Katie, was also a Mount Holyoke graduate. Over the years, Dee supported the college through financial contributions, help with fund raising and help with reunion planning. She also recently served as our class president until health issues prevented her from doing so.

Tribute from Dee's Pearson's Annex Friends

Barbara Freeman Douglass

Cindy Freidman Sutton

Nicki Hutterer Haller

Jane Lauterbach Rifkin

Olivia McKenna August

Jo-Ann Meyer Orlinsky

Joan Schlosberg Kass

Judy Weinstein Segal