



Nancy Joanna Downing Née Small

May 20, 1943 - July 27, 2025

Nancy Downing, née Small, was born at home in Harwich Port, Cape Cod, Massachusetts, on May 20, 1943, to parents Lawrence Small and Eleanor Chase Small. She died in the presence of her family at Whatcom Hospice House in Bellingham on July 27, 2025. The cause was cancer. She is survived by her husband of 59 years, Tom, her daughters Jennifer Thompson (Richard) and Lisa Helsen (Mark), her granddaughter Sophie Thompson, her grandson Benjamin Thompson, and her sister Cynthia Figge.

Nancy was raised in the idyllic town of Harwich Port on Cape Cod. She lived minutes from the beach, which she used extensively as a youth. After graduating from high school, she moved to Detroit to attend Wayne State University (nobody quite knows why), where she met her eventual husband, Tom. In the Spring of 1965, she left college to join Tom in Palo Alto, California, where he was attending graduate school. They were married on September 18, 1965, in Palo Alto. In the Fall of 1968, they moved to Bellingham, where her husband had accepted a position in the Philosophy Department at Western Washington State College (since 1997 Western Washington University). Her two daughters, Jennifer and Lisa, were born in Bellingham in the early 1970s. Her grandchildren, Sophie and Ben Thompson, were born in Edmonds in 2008 and 2010, respectively. She worked part-time in several places and eventually became a partner in The Sugar Plum Tree, a gift, candy, and Christmas shop in downtown Bellingham, until she retired in the

mid-1990s. However, she continued to work as a volunteer in various capacities at Lydia Place in town.

In addition to her family, Nancy loved reading, birding, gardening, genealogy, traveling, and almost anything related to her beloved Cape Cod. Her genealogical research had revealed that she was descended from three passengers on the Mayflower. She and her husband traveled to every state and visited 25 countries, mostly after she retired from WWU in 2011.

The family wishes to commend PeaceHealth Whatcom Hospice for its superb care of Nancy in her final, difficult days. Their kindness and competence were truly extraordinary and very much appreciated.

A celebration of Nancy's life will be held in September.