

RUSSELL FIELD CARPENTER

1932 – 2016

Russell Field Carpenter, of Williamstown, Massachusetts, died July 20 at the Vermont Veterans Home in Bennington, where he had been a resident for six months. After a period of declining health, he finally succumbed to the complications of Parkinson's disease.

He was born in 1932 in New York City, the son of Dr. Russell L. Carpenter and Elsie Stuart Clark Carpenter. With his family he moved in 1938 to Medford, Massachusetts, when his father was appointed Professor of Zoology at Tufts College (now Tufts University). He grew up on the campus of Tufts, which was a major influence in the course of his later life.

He graduated from Belmont Hill School in 1950 and Williams College in 1954. He worked briefly for Vick Chemical Company before serving two years as a commissioned officer in the United States Air Force at Hanscom Field in Bedford, Massachusetts.

In 1958 he joined the staff of St. Albans School in Washington, D.C., as Director of Development, beginning a 39-year career in academic fund raising. In 1959 he was named Staff Associate for the Council for the Advancement of Small Colleges (CASC) in Washington, where he met his wife-to-be, Mary Jo Pugh. They married in 1961 and shortly after moved to Northampton, Massachusetts, where Russ was named Assistant, then Associate Director of Development and Public Relations at Smith College. He remained at Smith for ten years, where he became the first Secretary of the College in 1964. In 1971 he joined the staff of WGBY-TV, a new public television station being established in western Massachusetts by WGBH-TV in Boston, as its first Director of Development and Community Relations. His duties included on-air fund raising and playing the role of auctioneer in its live auctions, which appealed to his love of the theater.

Feeling the pull of academia, he and his family moved in 1975 to Burlington, Vermont, where he became the first Director of Development at the University of Vermont. Continuing his interest in public television, as a volunteer he helped Vermont Educational Television produce its first on-air auction, once again assuming the role of auctioneer. In 1978 he returned to his alma mater, Williams College, serving as Associate Director of Development until his retirement in 1997. In 1995 he was awarded the Eleanor Collier Award by the New England District of the Council for the Advancement and Support of Education. His particular responsibility in later years was guiding classes of the 1940s through their fiftieth reunions, resulting in many friendships with alumni of the war years.

In Williamstown he served as chairman of the town's Cable Advisory Committee and learned of the availability of funds provided by the cable company for local public access television. His experience in public television inspired him to help establish Williamstown's public access station which he named Willinet. He served as president of its board and once again relished on-air appearances, including that of the "man in the street" at July 4th parades and annual Christmas walks.

Throughout the years, Russ was elected by his class of 1954 at Williams College to many volunteer roles: class treasurer, class secretary (winning the Thurston Award for outstanding class secretary in 1989), class reunion chairman for multiple years, including the 50th reunion, class vice-president, and class president.

In his retirement he merged his television experience, his fund-raising expertise, and his interest in the genealogy of his family, the Fields of Stockbridge, with the goal of producing a documentary for public television. His advancing illness prevented completion of the project.

Russ is survived by his wife of 55 years, Mary Jo Pugh Carpenter, and three children and their spouses: Jonathan Field Carpenter of Natick, Massachusetts; David Russell Carpenter (Molly Ring Carpenter) of Brunswick, Maine; and Katherine Stuart Tokarewich (John Tokarewich) of Bartlett, Illinois, as well as five grandchildren: Lauren, Nicholas, and Jacob Tokarewich and Julia and Anna Carpenter. He also leaves a sister, Cynthia Carpenter McFadden, and her partner, Duncan Craig, of Meredith, New Hampshire, and a brother-in-law, John S. Pugh, and his wife, Ruth Pugh, of Virginia Beach, Virginia, and many nieces and nephews and two cousins. He is predeceased by an infant granddaughter, Elsie Thomas Carpenter.

Private burial will be in the Williams College cemetery; arrangements are by Flynn and Dagnoli Funeral Home. A gathering of family and friends is planned for sometime in the fall and will be announced later. In lieu of flowers, donations may be made in his memory to Willinet or Williams College.

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