

Helen Jernigan

July 31, 1925 to January 18, 2024

*Retired Clerk of Courts
Community and Political Activist*



Helen Jernigan, 98, of Oak Ridge passed away January 18, 2024, at Canterfield Senior Living in Oak Ridge, Tennessee. Helen died of natural causes.

Helen was born in Pleasant Hill, Cumberland County, TN. She graduated from Pleasant Hill Academy and Tennessee Wesleyan College, with studies in music and English. In 1944, she took a summer job in Happy Valley, the satellite construction community for the building of the K-25 facility west of Oak Ridge. After college, she returned to Oak Ridge and worked for various organizations through the '70s including Union Carbide, Tenelec, Inc., Oak Ridge National Laboratory, and the Oak Ridger newspaper. She co-owned the Pine Tree, a women's clothing

shop. In 1984 she was elected Anderson County Circuit Court Clerk and served three terms.

Her political activities included membership in the Anderson County Democratic Party, chairing its Rules Committee, serving as precinct chair for Highland View, and for several years co-chairing the party's Platform Committee. She worked in many campaigns, partisan and non-partisan, local and national. Helen was also active in the Anderson County Democratic Women's Club and key to its scholarship program.

Helen was always involved in a variety of community organizations including the Oak Ridge Chamber of Commerce, Oak Ridge Big Brothers Big Sisters, Community Services for Exceptional Citizens, League of Women Voters of Oak Ridge, Anderson County Democratic Women's Club, Highland View Neighborhood Association, the Pleasant Hill Academy Alumni Association and more. In addition to her community interests, Helen enjoyed writing, reading, dancing, entertaining, and music. She liked chamber music, Bach, jazz, blues,

country, and bluegrass. A lifelong vegetarian, she was a member of the Vegetarian Society of East Tennessee.

Helen served the Oak Ridge Unitarian Universalist Church as pianist, chairperson of public affairs and personnel committees, board member, and congregation vice president.

Helen was predeceased by her husband of 40 years, Harold W. Jernigan in 2012. She is survived by children John Fairstein, Joel Fairstein and his wife Qiuping Wang, Mary Wool and her husband Dennis, Hal Jernigan, Jr. and his wife Pam, four grandchildren, and a great granddaughter.

The family asks that memorial contributions be made to Statewide Organizing for Community eMpowerment (SOCM), P. O. Box 12667, Knoxville, TN 37912-0667, <https://www.socm.org/> or to the Southern Poverty Law Center, 400 Washington Ave., Montgomery, AL 36104, <https://www.splcenter.org/>