



Elizabeth Heavener Owen

April 2, 2024

Elizabeth "Betsy" Owen

She was preceded in death by her parents, Robert C. and Mary Edna Shelor Heavener, by her sister Margaret Massie, a brother, Robert C. Heavener, Jr and her husband James J. Owen. She is survived by her four children, Bob Owen, Ben Owen, Beth Noakes and Shelor Roberts, nieces, nephews, grandchildren and great grandchildren.

She will be buried privately in Westview cemetery beside her husband.

Cemetery Details

Westview Cemetery

723 E. Roanoke Street
Blacksburg, VA

Tribute Wall

“ Mom was unique. She had a range of personality characteristics: loving to cranky, sensitive to stubborn, fun to serious. She always had projects going, and a book she was reading. Her houseplants thrived. She loved to travel. She was spirited, yet unpretentious. One Christmas, one of us kids got a pogo stick, which nobody could ride – except Mom. She got on it, and bounced around the living room. Then outside, up and down the driveway.

Her parents were Mary Edna Shelor Heavener, of Floyd County, and Robert Heavener, of Montgomery County. Mary Edna, known to us as Chula, was among the most well-traveled people in the county. She took Mom and her younger, sister, Margaret, to Mexico City and raised them there from Mom’s 7th grade through college graduation at the University of the Americas. They came back to Blacksburg usually twice a year to visit.

After Mom’s graduation, she returned to Blacksburg, where she met and married my father, James J. Owen, who later became a much loved English professor at Tech. Mom’s Mexico experience influenced our family in many ways. In our carport, she taught the Jarabe, the national dance of Mexico, along with the waltz and foxtrot to the neighborhood kids. She cooked traditional Mexican dishes that were staples of our diet. One of her specialties was manchamanteles, or “tablecloth stainer.”

Mom was a teacher, off and on, for much of her life. Her first job was with Dad and one other teacher in what is now the Pilot Community Center in Montgomery County, where they taught all the 1st through 12th grade classes. Later, she taught Spanish at Tech, and then at Riner High School. She also taught piano for many years. One of her students went on to play professionally.

Mom was an accomplished musician. She played for weddings and other ceremonies for years, as well as for her family’s pleasure. Mom could play anything by ear, on piano or accordion, from American parlor music to spirituals and Appalachian hillbilly tunes to

Mexican rancheros. Sometimes other musicians were invited, making for fun musical ensembles and great sounds at the house. She also played recorder in the Blacksburg Recorder Group, which performed many Christmases at Smithfield Plantation.

She was also a serious genealogist. In pre-internet days, she and Dad drove to many court houses in the country to copy birth and death certificates, marriage licenses, wills and censuses for what became six self-published books about both sides of our family ancestry. We had a VW camper van that, for a time, hauled around a couple of family tombstones they'd found lying in a farmer's pasture. She was the registrar for the Allegheny Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution, and, for many years, enjoyed helping prospective members establish their connection to a Revolutionary War veteran or patriot. After retiring from that post, she continued her online sleuthing, probing further into family connections - relationships she could recite from memory, back many generations. We kids learned a lot about our family forebears, two of whom were Montgomery County members of the famed Civil War Stonewall Brigade. One cousin spent 20 days in jail for joining a "sit in" at a Lynchburg drugstore lunch counter in 1960. We heard stories of family deaths during the Spanish Flu epidemic, about Henry Fleet, a notable English colonist and explorer, and many, many others.

Mom was devoted to the Tech Study Abroad program, and to international students that she and Dad sponsored. She liked to stay abreast of national and world affairs, and the weather. She read every edition of the Roanoke Times, Wall Street Journal and National Geographic. She was a big VT sports fan, and was particularly excited about the women's basketball program. Mom maintained a keen interest in the activities of her 4 children, 5 grandchildren, and 4 great grandchildren. She led a full life and will be truly missed. Many stories will be told about her for years to come.

LP

Ben, thank you so much. I truly loved your Mom and spent hours discussing our mutual love of genealogy research. I was shocked to hear of her death. She always seemed so youthful. My condolences to the whole family.

Linda Phillips - April 05, 2024 at 07:19 PM

BO

Thanks, Linda. Mom definitely considered you her Ancestry.com compadre. As she got older, she leaned on your friendship and expertise. Thank you.

Ben and Paula Owen - April 05, 2024 at 08:49 PM

CA

Thank you so much for writing this Ben! She was so much more than the short obituary she requested, and this really captured how fun, loving and adventurous she was.

Carly - April 06, 2024 at 04:41 PM

DI

I loved getting to know your mother in DAR. I was honored she trusted me to follow her as registrar of the chapter. She had big shoes to fill. I was sorry to hear of her passing. She was a wealth of knowledge.

Diane - April 06, 2024 at 05:44 PM

KF

I am so sorry she is gone! We worked together in many groups from Smithfield, to DAR, to her sometimes attendance at our church Circle. She is the reason I joined DAR because I didn't think I was eligible and she proved I was. My first acquaintance with your parents was almost 50 years ago when we were in the Faculty Wives gourmet group with them. I don't remember which recipe she assigned to me but I do remember that she brought me a flower pot filled with growing cilantro to use in the dish. At that point in time the local markets didn't carry the fresh herb but she had planned ahead, planted the seeds, and had it growing for me to use. My husband and I really enjoyed both your parents and you have my sympathies for the loss of both of them.

Karen Finch - April 06, 2024 at 08:01 PM

KA

*Bob, I loved your stories! Thank you for sharing them with friends....
Kay King, Richmond, VA*

Kay - April 08, 2024 at 09:54 AM

KA

I meant Ben! Sorry about that other brother..Ha!

Kay - April 08, 2024 at 11:37 AM

SM

Beth and Ben, B&B, what a terrific mother you had for so long. Beth, you were faithfully by her side weekly. Ben, at the passing of your English professor father I sent my VA Tech sisters his obituary. My youngest sister, VT '80, wrote back saying she remembered him from freshman English and what an amazing professor he was! Thank you for sharing your parents for so long!

sally Moxley - April 08, 2024 at 04:00 PM

NN

Ben, love all these rich details. The pogo stick! Mexico! Dancing in the garage! What a life story! Wish we had known her. We are thinking of you and of her very much. Love to all your family. Naomi Nye

Naomi Shihab Nye - April 08, 2024 at 07:13 PM

MD

*Dear Ben,
What a wonderful, vibrant, curious, accomplished, energetic and intelligent person your Mother was--and fun and complicated too! She was such a gift to you and your family.
My love and deep sympathy to you all. The lasting life lessons, memories, and love that she left you you all are precious and life affirming.
With much love and sympathy to you all.
Meredith Dean
P.S. And the memories.....especially....the Pogo Stick!!*

Meredith Dean - April 08, 2024 at 07:54 PM

BO

Ben thank you for sharing your mom with all of us that didn't know her- please know my prayers are with you all

Bonnie DeHaven lancaster oh - April 08, 2024 at 09:59 PM

AM

With love and remembrance, I share in your sorrow. I will miss Betsy ... our telephone conversations, written notes, and the love we shared of our family's genealogy will always be treasured. My prayers are with you all.

Avis McKnight - April 09, 2024 at 07:10 PM

CS

I work across the street from Mrs. Owen at the Blacksburg Library. It was always fun when she came over to borrow books and talk a little. Her work on genealogy was the most fun conversations we had. Thank you for the extended version of your Mom's life. I always suspected she had led a more exciting life. I also met your Dad and enjoyed talking about eastern Virginia where he was from and where I am from too. I hope I can read as many books in my life as your Mom read! She always had good suggestions for future reading too. May the memories you have of her be enhanced by knowing how many lives she touched and how much she was loved by others. She was a very remarkable woman and I will miss her! As a footnote, my husband was a student of your Dad's in his freshman year and later in life, our daughter benefited from a study abroad through Va Tech to London. Their legacy will stretch on!

Cathi Smith

Cathi Smith - April 12, 2024 at 12:47 PM