

# Ellen Hartz

## ***Her Core***

Ellen's warmth, energy, enthusiasm, fun, and free spirit immediately attracted people to her. Her authenticity, responsibility, social skills, selflessness, and respect for the needs and opinions of others made her a valued friend. Her organizational abilities, competence, positive attitude, and intelligence made her a great colleague.

It was an additional feature, however, that put her in a class by herself—her relentless, egoless drive to make others happy. No one did more to assist friends, welcome strangers, or appreciate the contributions of others. Her strongest regret after she became bedridden was not that she couldn't

take her beloved hikes in the woods; it was that she would not be able to help her daughter's family with their move.

This combination of traits made Ellen one of those few instantly attractive people who become more attractive the longer you know them. Those who knew her well, considered her to be wonderful. Her closest friends and family worshiped her.

## ***Her Activities***

Ellen threw herself body and soul into those activities that gave her gratification. One of them was singing in Sweet Adelines' women's barbershop choruses. She loved perfect intonation and adventures into the musical weeds to improve the sound. Her exuberant personality and over-responsible character made her a favorite chorus member. The Mountain Jubilee Chorus in Salt Lake City created the "Step Up to the Plate" award specifically for her. Subsequently, it became the highest annual honor that could be given to a chorus member. The citation accompanying her award read: "She always was one to volunteer for any project, and her sense of humor and positive attitude helped to make any event a success."



In the River Blender's Chorus in St. Louis, she volunteered for jobs that required high levels of organizational skills and diplomacy. These jobs included the annual Sing for Scholarship program and handling the personal needs of judges at regional chorus competitions. On her own initiative, she welcomed every new member.

One of her most difficult jobs she created for herself in both the Mountain Jubilee chorus and the River Blender's chorus. This involved summarizing the ideas of outside experts who came in to coach the chorus. Before Ellen took on this job, it was done by the chorus director, who had to review hours of the recorded coaching sessions.

Ellen's range of passionate involvement extended from the sublime of the music to the practical of local governance. Twice, she served on local planning commissions, once in Hummelstown, Pennsylvania, and a second time more than 30 years later in University City, Missouri, where she was devoted to a planning commission that she believed was as close to perfect as government agencies get. Between these times, she took a leading role in the efforts of the League of Women Voters in Shorewood, Wisconsin, to encourage smaller communities to share services.

Anyone who saw her in either her music or government activities would immediately recognize the signature Ellen: all-in enthusiasm, making everyone feel good about what they were doing, and working incredibly hard and competently without the need for attention or dominance.

### ***Her Love of Nature***

Ellen was not okay without her frequent and heavy doses of nature. Her best childhood memories were the visits to her grandfather's farm in New Hampshire. In her early teens, the highlight of each year was the outdoor activities of Girl Scout camp that once included a ten-day canoe trip on the Susquehanna River. As an adult, she loved helping to restore a prairie near Iowa City, taking long rafting trips with family members in Utah and Arizona, hiking the mountains and inhaling the geology of Utah, and hiking with family and friends wherever she lived or traveled.

When she worked as a teacher, nature was her classroom of choice. Instead of primarily teaching facts, she taught her students how to find their connection to nature—what they saw, what they found interesting, and what more they wanted to know. She hoped that her students would apply her approach to studying nature to studying everything else. She did this at Riveredge Nature

Center near Milwaukee, the Litzsinger Road Ecology Center in St Louis, and the ECHO Alternative High School in Tiffin, Iowa. The education centers involved numerous students in single encounters, and the high school involved nine months of three-hour biweekly nature experiences with only a few students.

### ***Biography.***

Ellen was the daughter of William Vastine, a preacher man with the looks and charisma of a fire and brimstone Methodist minister, but who lost his way and, instead, became a flaming minister of liberation theology. In the early 1960s, he went to Mississippi to register 'Negros' to vote and later won the NAACP Person of the Year award in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The preacher married Louise McConnell, the daughter of another wild-eyed Methodist minister who gave away his paltry income to poor people. Ellen's mother shared her husband's political sentiments but was intellectual and quiet instead of charismatic with intense convictions. Both parents had charm and the first-rate social skills that she inherited.

In the Methodist movement of the 1940s and 50s, ministers had to be approved by their current congregation every two years, or else they were reassigned to another. Methodist ministers who were avowed socialists never made it past the two years. Although Ellen's father was adored by many of his parishioners who were loyal to him for life, he was forced to move many times. Ellen lived in two towns on Long Island, Connecticut, a suburb of Chicago, and New Cumberland, Pennsylvania. All her moving made childhood friendships difficult but may have sharpened her social skills.

In high school, her major activities were music (playing the French Horn, which she took up initially just to go to out-of-town football games with the band but soon grew to love), girls' basketball, and Girl Scouts. She excelled at her music and her science and math courses but made no effort in the courses she didn't like. She was forever scarred because she was forced to take 1950s home economics, which she hated, instead of shop, which her later history proved she would have loved.

Ellen attended Ohio Wesleyan, a Methodist College attended by several family members from previous generations. They included her mother's father, who was a college roommate and lifelong friend of Branch Ricky, the general manager of the Brooklyn Dodgers who integrated baseball by hiring Jackie Robinson. Ellen began college planning to major in biology, but she changed as a freshman when a charismatic botany professor ignited the talent that

became so evident later. She became his best student and only lab assistant. She never recovered from his influence.

After college, Ellen worked as a research assistant in medical schools, first in Cleveland and then in Albuquerque. It was there she met and married Arthur Hartz in 1968. While in New Mexico, she got a degree in education. When she moved to Baltimore with Arthur in 1969, she worked for three years as a 7th-grade classroom teacher in the inner city. Her first child, Alisa, was born in 1972, and the family moved to Milwaukee in 1974. In that same year, she had her second daughter, Sarah.

Most of Ellen's years in Milwaukee were primarily devoted to raising children and maintaining a household. In 1977, with no pressure from her Jewish husband or his parents and with the full support of her own parents from the Methodist aristocracy, she converted to Judaism. In 1986, she went back to school and earned a Master of Science degree in biology. She also was active as a Girl Scout leader, member of the League of Women Voters, runner, and tandem bike rider. In the latter capacity, she scrupulously avoided any clothing that could possibly be considered a match to what her husband was wearing.

In 1997, Ellen and Art moved to Iowa City, where she first joined a women's barbershop chorus and learned to square dance. In 2007, she and Art moved to Salt Lake City, where she continued her involvement in barbershop singing and reached the peak level of her life in nature.

In 2012, she and Art moved to St Louis to be near their grandchildren. Soon afterward, she developed sarcoma. After her disease miraculously responded to treatment and became stable, she grandma'd a great deal and became very active in hiking, women's barbershop, square dancing, and creating a native prairie in her front yard and a farm—chickens and bees—in her back. Near the end of 2023, her cancer became active again but did not interfere with her life for another year. She died comfortably at home while in hospice care.

She is survived by her husband, Arthur; daughter Alisa Hartz (husband John Flynn) of Sacramento, California; daughter Sarah Hartz (husband Yehuda Ben-Shahar) of St. Louis, Missouri; grandchildren Itai and Noa Ben-Shahar of St. Louis; and her sisters, Jane Tessier of Columbus, Ohio, and Ruth Fuller of Austin, Texas.

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