



Frances Tarlton "Sissy" Farenthold
1926-2021



a Celebration of
Sissy Farenthold

Friday, April 22, 2022

at 3PM

Francis Auditorium
University of Texas School of Law



The Farenthold family requests that you kindly consider donating to the newly established Sissy Farenthold Fund for Peace and Social Justice. To learn more, please use this QR code or visit <https://law.utexas.edu/farenthold/Donate>

Hosted by
The Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice

A REMARKABLE LIFE

Frances Tarlton “Sissy” Farenthold was an esteemed lawyer, politician, educator, and grassroots activist who tirelessly pursued justice throughout her life. She was born in 1926 into a prominent Democratic family in Corpus Christi, Texas. With the staunch support of her father, who had a reputation as one of the area’s most charismatic and effective attorneys, Sissy attended The University of Texas School of Law. She graduated in 1949 at the age of 22, and was one of eight women of the 295 graduates that year.

In 1968, while raising her children and after serving as director of Nueces County Legal Aid, Sissy successfully ran for the Texas House of Representatives, where she was the only woman. Her legislative priorities included civil rights and welfare reform. She successfully co-sponsored the Texas Equal Rights Amendment.

Sissy’s support of open government and ethics reform as a key member of a coalition of lawmakers known as the “Dirty Thirty” made her a statewide name and political force, helping launch her campaign for governor in 1972. Though she ultimately lost in a Democratic party run-off, she defeated the sitting governor and lieutenant governor in the primary.

A few months later, at the 1972 Democratic National Convention, Sissy became the first woman to be seriously considered as a candidate for the vice-presidential nomination. In 1973, she was elected as the first national chair of the bipartisan National Women’s Political Caucus.

Sissy served as the first female president of Wells College from 1976 to 1980. When she later moved to Houston, she taught at Texas Southern University’s Thurgood Marshall

School of Law and at the University of Houston, where she developed one of the nation’s first classes on sex-based discrimination.

In 1978, Sissy became a member of the Helsinki Watch Committee, the predecessor of Human Rights Watch. In the early 1980s, she began a decade-long collaboration with her cousin Genevieve Vaughan, dedicated to the women’s peace movement. A staunch opponent of nuclear weapons, Sissy visited several women’s peace camps in the early 1980s, and helped organize the Peace Tent at the 1985 U.N. World Conference on Women in Nairobi.

Sissy served as chair of the board of the Institute for Policy Studies and the Rothko Chapel. She also served on the advisory board of the Bernard and Audre Rapoport Center for Human Rights and Justice at UT-Austin.

Sissy received numerous awards in her lifetime: the Lyndon B. Johnson Woman of the Year Award (1973), the State Bar of Texas’s Sarah T. Hughes Women Lawyers of Achievement Award (1996), the Lyndon Johnson Lifetime Service Award (1998), the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom’s Jane Addams Award for Peace Activism (2000), the first-ever Molly Ivins Lifetime Achievement Award from the ACLU of Texas (2008), and LULAC’s Award for Commitment, Contributions, and Leadership to the People of South Texas (2012).

Sissy Farenthold died on September 26, 2021 at her home in Houston. She is preceded in death by sons James and Vincent. She is survived by her sister Genevieve Hearon, three beloved children—George E. Farenthold II (Lisa Marsh Ryerson) of Washington, D.C., Benjamin Dudley Tarlton Farenthold, and Emilie Chevalier Farenthold of Houston—and by three grandchildren, three great-grandchildren, and countless friends and admirers.

CELEBRATION ORDER

A LIFE IN PICTURES

WELCOME AND OPENING

Karen Engle
George E. Farenthold, II

TRIBUTE

Lisa Marsh Ryerson

FILM

Sissy Farenthold: A Noble Citizen

REMEMBRANCES

Hon. Sheila Jackson Lee

Hon. Curtis Graves

Lulu Flores

Hon. Sylvia Garcia (video)

Hon. Al Green (video)

Genevieve Vaughan

READING

Robert Leleux