

# 'This is what happens when women fly.'

**With passion for family, travel, conservation, horses, community, philanthropy... Nancy Winter lived a remarkable life**

By Tom Ayres  
Senior Staff Writer

When she arrived in Woodstock 15 years ago, Nancy Corwith Hamill Winter immediately immersed herself in the community and service to the local conservation and equestrian communities — passions that had fueled her life in her native Illinois and in the Grand Teton region of Wyoming for seven decades.

Winter passed away unexpectedly on Feb. 27, while enjoying time with her beloved horses and friends at her seasonal retreat in Aiken, S.C. She was 83 and as vibrant and engaged with life as the day she was born. Family members, friends, and colleagues from Woodstock took time to remember Winter fondly in a series of interviews, eulogies, and email exchanges with the Standard last weekend.

Nancy Winter's daughter, a design specialist and architect based in Woodstock and Bachillon, Switzerland, spoke of her mother on Sunday morning and shared heartfelt remembrances of her in a eulogy she had posted on social media. Sylvia was joined in the conversation by her brother Ethan, the national smart solar director for the American Farmland Trust, based in Saratoga Springs, N.Y. Both of Nancy's children have passionately embraced the conservation ethos that was a hallmark of their mother's expansive life.

"[Mom] came to Woodstock 15 years ago. It was a moment when her father in Illinois had just passed away at the age of 99. She was figuring out as a single woman just

where she wanted to be," Sylvia Winter recollected. "Both of her kids were raising families on the East Coast: I was in Cambridge, and Ethan was in Saratoga Springs. As a horse person, she didn't really want to be in the suburbs of Boston or on the outskirts of Saratoga, even though there are a lot of horses there. She wanted a place that was equestrian from us, where she could continue to raise horses. We searched around for properties, and Woodstock is where she ended up. She loved the idea of being close to the Green Mountain Horse Association and that whole South Woodstock horse culture — that's what brought her here."

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— Ethan Winter

Remembering her mother in a poignant essay that Sylvia shared with the Standard, Winter's daughter, also based in Woodstock, wrote, "The day before she died, we talked about spring in London, the Chelsea Flower Show, and what to plant in the vegetable garden. About her

visit to Switzerland in the spring, and the alpine wildflowers we gleefully hiked through in the Engadine years ago. About what I was making for dinner, the kids, karate, skiing, soccer. She mentioned some chest pain and fatigue after her recent trip to Colorado. It must have been a pulled muscle from lugging her duffel and skis around. We talked about horses, upcoming events, the weather, and the graduations coming up. It was a completely ordinary conversation, unhurried, without a real end besides, "Let's talk tomorrow after your doctor's appointment." It was also my last one with her, and I will keep it close for the rest of my life.

"If I have had a single source of knowing who I am, not as a copy of her, but as someone who grew up inside her way of seeing the world, it was my mom," Sylvia Winter continued. "I knew her dreams and her pain and her vision and her stubbornness and her passions up close, for my whole life. She was interested in everything. She was always planning the next thing. She wanted no constraints. She was a free bird — like the red-winged blackbird that returns each spring on its own terms, following something ancient and internal that no one else can quite name. On a horse, she flew. There is no other word for it. And I think that is what she is doing now, finally, fully, without limit. This is what happens when women fly. She was a lot of things to a lot of people, and there will be much said of her and her legacy — all of it true, none of it complete," Sylvia added. "To me, she was the person who made everything feel navigable, even in periods of life that seemed anything but. She had a way — with a hug, a word, a plan, a laugh — of making the uncertain feel actually quite surmountable. Especially with the tincture of a long walk. A very long walk."

Ethan Winter offered his own



Winter competing in show jumping at the highest level of the 1984 Olympic Trials in Lexington, Ky., riding Connemara TreAwain Belfast. Photo Courtesy of the Winter Family

thoughts on his mother, both in the form of a remembrance he wrote and during last weekend's interview, where he shared details of Nancy Winter's lifelong commitment to conservation, environmentalism, globalism, and the horse world. "[Two months ago], the earth shook. We lost a beacon and a champion for collaborative, community-based conservation as my mother Nancy passed away," Ethan Winter wrote in a eulogy. "From her devotion to stewarding native grasslands to deep engagement with Native American elders, from far-flung learnings around the world to gritty, on-the-ground work for local wildlife habitat, Nancy brought her full self to every endeavor and team project. She touched a lot of folks

along the way and impacted so many organizations. Acutely aware of the challenges we face with climate change and thoughtless environmental degradation, Nancy was resolute about the collective effort needed to leave the world a better place. That work is ours to carry forward now. . . Rest in peace, Ma — the Big Sky welcomes you now." Ethan Winter also spoke on Saturday of the wealth of organizations that his mother nurtured, served, and invested in over the course of a rich, rewarding life lived in the Midwest and Far West, where she raised horses for equine eventing competitions and owned farmland and rural properties. Among the organizations

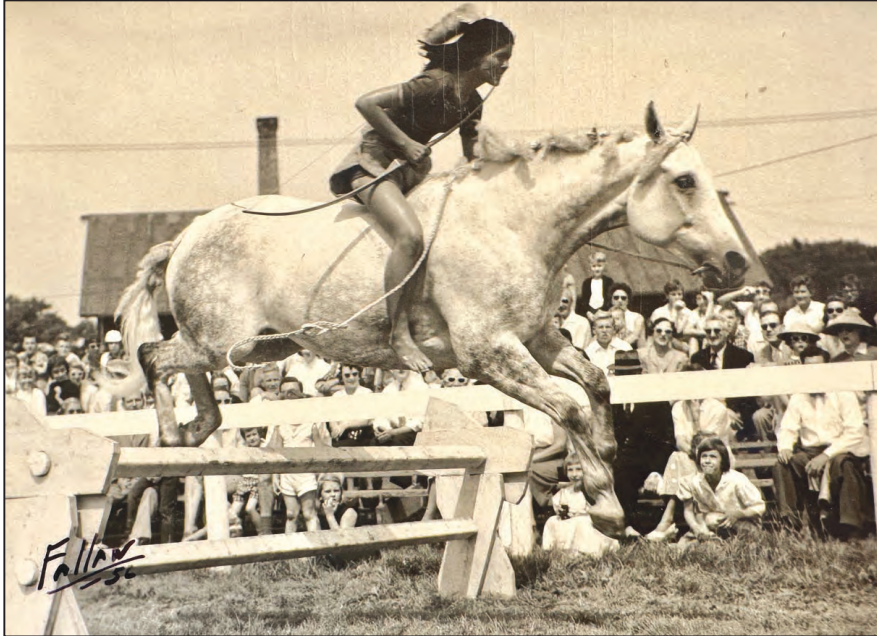
See NANCY WINTER - Page 4D



Nancy Winter and her dog Spotty near Winter's favorite oak tree on her farmstead in Taftsville. Photo Courtesy of the Winter Family



A veteran world traveler, Nancy Winter visited Guatemala last year with colleagues from The Nature Conservancy. Winter was an active member and ardent supporter of The Nature Conservancy statewide chapters in both Illinois and Vermont. Courtesy of The Nature Conservancy



Left, Nancy Winter riding bareback in 1956 at the Dunham Woods Horse Show in Wayne, Ill., with her horse, Jock. Above, Winter delighted in teaching her grandchildren to ride horses on her farmstead along Happy Valley Road in Taftsville.

Photos Courtesy of the Winter Family

**NANCY WINTER** From Page 1D

dear to the elder Winter were the Illinois chapter of The Nature Conservancy; the Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation in Elizabeth, Ill.; the Equine Land Conservation Resource; the Teton Regional Land Trust and Grand Teton National Park Foundation; and the Bhutan Foundation and other conservation, environmental, equine, and human rights organizations throughout the country and around the world.

The Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation is a nonprofit conservation land trust whose mission is to preserve land for the lasting well-being of people and wildlife in Jo Daviess County, Illinois and the surrounding area. The foundation is headquartered in Elizabeth, Ill., a rural community in northwestern Illinois, near the Iowa and Wisconsin borders. In a tribute to Winter published after her death, Daviess Foundation executive director Steve Barg wrote, “Through her family foundation and her own personal wealth, Nancy donated millions of dollars towards our annual operating needs and to stewardship endowments on property that she

donated. To add to this generosity, in November of 2025, she gave a significant lead gift to establish our Endowment for the Future, an operating fund to sustain our work in perpetuity.” Barg added, “Nancy was also an ardent supporter and participant in our work with tribal nations. While there is no record of her French ancestors taking part in the removal of Native Americans from this region [of Illinois] in the 1830s, Nancy nonetheless felt a deep sense of responsibility to both recognize this injustice and take steps to address it.”

Once she arrived here in the Woodstock area, Nancy Winter took immediate pains to engage with the local community, advocating for the Moonrise Therapeutics equine therapy program in Taftsville, engaging with the Green Mountain Horse Association and, most especially, becoming one of the earliest board members of the Woodstock Community Trust (WCT) when that organization, founded in 1997, was revived in 2018 after being moribund for a number of years. WCT-supported projects include the ongoing renaissance of East End Park, The HUB community assistance program, the Woodstock Village Conservancy, and Pride of Woodstock. In her later years, Winter contributed immeasurably to WCT’s growth and development, all while immensely enjoying her years on her horse farm off Happy Valley Road in Taftsville.

Woodstock-based attorney Mariza McGee is a former trustee of the WCT who served on the trust’s governing body with Winter. The pair became good friends while advocating for the betterment of their community. In an email last weekend, McGee offered her thoughts about her friend and ally in community service.

“Nancy had that rare ability to enter a room and quietly elevate it. Conversations seemed to stand up a little straighter in her presence — not because she imposed anything, but because she offered dignity and respect so naturally that you found yourself wanting to meet her there. She listened deeply, spoke thoughtfully, and always made space for collaboration. I truly appreciated working with her on the governance committee [of the WCT]; she brought both wisdom



Nancy Winter is pictured last year, joining together with Illinois land conservation partners from the Ho-Chunk Nation and Jo Daviess Conservation Foundation.

Courtesy of the Daviess Conservation Foundation



Ethan Winter joined his mother, Nancy, at an event in 2025 to recognize the leadership that created a new community forest in upstate New York.

Courtesy of Saratoga PLAN

and a kind steadiness that made the work feel purposeful,” McGee remembered.

“Her generosity extended far beyond board service,” McGee continued. “Nancy so effortlessly opened her world to others — offering our family time at her swimming pool, welcoming us to come enjoy the land and horses, and encouraging us toward experiences we might never have discovered otherwise. It was Nancy who recommended Farm & Wilderness camp for our daughter, Violet. Violet went on to spend several wonderful summers there, including in its day program — formative, happy, outdoor-rich days that simply wouldn’t have happened without Nancy’s thoughtful suggestion. That was so like her — she paid attention to what might nourish others and then quietly made the introduction,” Winter’s friend and colleague added. “In that same thoughtful way, she once suggested that my husband Patrick consider volunteering at Moonrise Therapeutics, knowing his love of horses. He took her advice and has found the experience incredi-

bly meaningful and enjoyable. It was another small but perfect example of Nancy’s instinct for connecting people to things that would enrich their lives.”

At the end of her email missive, McGee noted, “Nancy lived fully — not loudly, but expansively. Family, travel, conservation, democracy, philanthropy — she managed to hold all of these commitments with both seriousness and lightness. She was capable of being wonderfully wry, too — just when a conversation risked becoming overly solemn, she would tilt it gently back toward humor, reminding us that earnest work need not be humorless.

“I suspect Nancy would prefer that we not wring our hands too long,” McGee concluded. “She believed in showing up, doing the work, caring for the land and one another, and then — when the day was done — admiring the view and perhaps a fine horse. What a remarkable life to have lived, and what a privilege to have shared even a small stretch of the trail with her.”