



Thomas Baird Feagans II

February 13, 1942 - March 13, 2025

When playing in a rec basketball league as a young adult, Tom Feagans's teammates gave him a T-shirt that read something like "Ask Me If I Played Basketball with Jerry West." The joke, to those who knew him, was that anyone taking the bait would get far more than a 'yes' answer from Feagans as he proudly shared personal anecdotes about the basketball legend who grew up in his same gritty corner of West Virginia coal country.

Thomas Baird Feagans II, 83, died March 13th at his home in Woodstock, Va.

Feagans, whose father worked as a coal mine accountant, also had an uncommon talent - in mathematics - that blossomed on the banks of Cabin Creek, in the West Virginia mountains. Born on Feb. 13, 1942, in High Coal, W.V., Feagans took to numbers early, skipped a grade during elementary school in Leewood, W.V., and then moved to Chelyan, W.V., and attended East Bank High School. When his family moved again to Hillsboro, W.V., for his senior year, Feagans at one point found himself instructing a math class because the teacher had departed. He went on to graduate from Hillsboro High School and earn his undergraduate and master's degrees in mathematics at West Virginia University, where he won several teaching awards, before studying at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and earning his PhD in decision theory at Penn State University.

Feagans wed in 1968 and, on the eve of his honeymoon, took his new bride to see the basketball hoop where, as a wide-eyed boy three grades below West, he would watch the future Hall of Famer shoot baskets with hardly a miss. Feagans and his wife, Lynne Vernon Feagans, started a family in Ann Arbor, Mich., and eventually settled in Chapel Hill, N.C., with their three children. Tom Feagans worked as an operations research analyst at the Environmental Protection Agency's Strategy and Air Standards Division. An avid chess player and voracious reader, he jogged regularly and, in addition to basketball, enjoyed hurling underhand in a fast-pitch softball league.

In 1985, the family moved to State College, Pa., where Feagans started a consulting firm called Decisions In Complex Environments, or DICE. Within the field of mathematics, Feagans had a passion for decision theory and game theory. He relished trying to solve mathematical paradoxes - the St. Petersburg Paradox in particular - and would fill pages of lined paper with solutions that, though penned in neat handwriting, were understood by few. His favorite place to work was at the McDonald's in downtown State College, where he was a fixture in one of the booths. His standard order was a Big Mac and a Diet Coke.

A few years after getting divorced, Feagans moved to Woodstock, Va., where he could often be seen jogging at the Central High School track or working at the Shenandoah County Library. His condo looked like its own library, with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves occupying space on nearly every wall. They held well-thumbed tomes on statistics, philosophy, political science, economics, decision theory, and Feagans's many other intellectual pursuits.

Feagans enjoyed visits with his children and six grandchildren. He was known for sending them letters and cards that reflected his quirky sense of humor and contained references to world events. Feagans, a lifelong Democrat, also welcomed a friendly political debate and would develop detailed statistical

analyses that he said pointed to who should be the party's presidential nominee. He would be very upset if in this space there was no mention that in recent years that person has been U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota.

Feagans's daily routine in Woodstock also involved a visit to McDonald's, where he befriended the staff and many of the other regular customers. Occasionally, he would tell them a Jerry West story, traveling back in time to his childhood, when he saw glimmers of greatness amid those coal-filled mountains, near Cabin Creek.

In addition to his former wife and six grandchildren, Feagans is survived by his three children and their spouses: Brian Feagans and Helena Oliviero Feagans of Avondale Estates, Ga; Laura Feagans Gould and Tate Gould of Falls Church, Va.; and Robert Feagans and Hailey Noble Feagans of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. Feagans was preceded in death by his father, Thomas Baird Feagans, his mother, Lena Leoneda Johnston Feagans, and his sister, Carolyn Patton. A burial and service are planned for a later date. In lieu of flowers, donations can be made in honor of Tom Feagans to the Shenandoah County Library Foundation, 514 Stoney Creek Blvd., Edinburg, VA 22824.