



Mary Virginia "Bebe" Fearnside

April 11, 1940 - January 27, 2026

On January 27, 2026 Mary Virginia "Bebe" Fearnside, age 85, of St. Augustine, FL, joined her parents, brother and nephew in the presence of Jesus.

Bebe was born on April 11, 1940 in Palatka, FL to Frank Joseph Fearnside, Jr. and Mary Perry Fearnside. Bebe first realized her love of education in Miss Lillie's kindergarten right next door to her home. After graduating from Florida State University, Bebe taught kindergarten in Daytona Beach. She was inspired by the children in her classroom and decided to return to earn a master's degree in Special Education at the University of Florida. Bebe was an avid Seminole fan and long-time Seminole booster.

Her career as an early childhood educator spanned 33 years, during which she was a passionate advocate for the importance of early childhood education. Bebe spent several years teaching in Alachua County until she began to lead Project CIRCLE, a program at Woodland Park Housing Project. She had a heart for those in underprivileged communities. Later in her career, she became a preschool supervisor and eventually Head Start Director. Under her leadership, Head Start expanded from 200 to 1,000 children, State reform in child education occurred, and the Family Services Center was born. Upon her retirement in October 1995, the center was renamed to the Fearnside Family Services Center in her honor; she was further honored with the 2003

Children's Week Chiles Advocacy Award.

While she had a substantial impact on many young children and underprivileged families, Bebe's kindness and generosity extended well past her retirement. Bebe was a faithful servant of God and a member of Crescent Beach Baptist Church, where she attended for many years. Everyone Bebe met was greeted with a warm welcome and her heartfelt wish that God would bless them.

We remember with a smile and warmth one of the few phrases she learned in Spanish to connect with members of the Latino community ("Dios te bendiga," or "God Bless You"). We also remember Bebe for one of her most used phrases: "Last one out, bring the flag."

Bebe is survived by her sister-in-law Shirley Fearnside, cousins Barbara Gustafson and JC Ward, friend Linda Krall (Shirley Fearnside's sister), friend Anne McAllister, nephews Scot and Frank Fearnside, nieces-in-law Connie and Becky Fearnside, grandnephews Corey, Zach, and Mason Fearnside, grandniece Samantha Brawn, and a great-grandniece expected in March. She is also survived by numerous members of the Perry family and her beloved Crescent Beach Baptist Church congregation. She was preceded in death by her brother Frank Joseph ("FJ") Fearnside III and her nephew Craig Fearnside.

All who knew Bebe will miss the patient, compassionate, and devout sister-in-Christ that she will always be.