

Obituary: Christa Elisabeth Kunkel Smith

July 24, 2025

Christa Elisabeth Kunkel Smith, professor emeritus at Wayland Baptist University, died July 16. She was 92. She and her twin sister Gerda were born in Vietz, Poland, when it was part of Germany, in 1932. Her early years were marked by the devastation of World War II. Her father went missing during the war, and she and her sisters were separated before being reunited. She called their reunion “a miracle,” one of many moments where she saw God’s providence at work. Smith met her future husband, Don, an American serviceman, in Augsburg. They married in 1958, settling in Plainview. She enrolled at what was then Wayland Baptist College, graduating in 1963 with a degree in English, German and French. Smith earned master’s degrees in world literature and German from Texas Tech and joined Wayland’s faculty in 1970. She taught on the Plainview campus, as well as in Lubbock and Alaska, and at Kenya Baptist Theological Seminary. She retired in 2012 following a 43-year career with Wayland’s School of Languages and Literature, now the School of Humanities and Leadership. “Christa’s life is a testament to perseverance, faith and the transformative power of education,” said Wayland President Donna Hedgepath. “She shaped generations of students with her intellect, grace and unwavering commitment to Christian higher education.” In honor of her legacy, the Christa Kunkel Smith Modern Language Endowed Scholarship was established to support students pursuing language studies. For her faithful support of Wayland’s student athletes, she was inducted in the WBU Athletics Hall of Honor in 2017. She was a member of First Baptist Church in Plainview. She was preceded in death by her husband Don in 2023. She is survived by her daughter Caren; son Daniel and his wife Nancy; and son Derek and his wife Brenda; three grandchildren and

great-grandchildren. A memorial service will be held at 11 a.m. on July 26 at the Kornerstone Funeral Directors chapel in Plainview.