



Jeanne L. Peterson

January 23, 1926 - December 7, 2018

Jeanne Obergfell Peterson

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Jeanne (Obergfell) Peterson was born in Chicago Illinois. She grew up during the Great Depression and entered Carleton College during World War II. She majored in Chemistry and minored in English. By her senior year, her husband-to-be, Harney Peterson, had returned from a 5 year long hiatus in his education (due to the war), to finish his own senior year. She recounted that they met over a hot Bunsen burner, as they were assigned to be partners in a Chemistry lab.

They were married in the fall after they graduated and initially lived in Chicago. They greatly enjoyed the vibrant Dixieland Jazz scene there, during which time they became acquainted with jazz greats playing in clubs there, such as Louis Armstrong and Sydney Bechet. In 1949, however, they moved to Denver Colorado.

In 1951 they began building their own house in then-unincorporated Jefferson County, which later became Lakewood; the location was because Denver did not allow individuals to do their own construction while Jeffco was more lenient. They built the house, literally with their own four hands, over the next several years.

During this time, Harney was instrumental in bringing together the musicians who formed the original Queen City Jazz Band, and Jeanne and Harney lent their living room to them (once it was enclosed) to practice in for 17 years. They were also founding members of the Denver Jazz Club. Several years after Harney's death in 1990, Jeanne moved to Fort Collins. In 1995 she was a founding member of a second jazz society, the Northern Colorado Traditional Jazz Society. She continued to enjoy jazz and regularly attended the Poudre Valley Irregulars' First-Friday-at-Avo's events through the month before her death.

She engaged in much other volunteer work while in the Denver area. Though she looked for a job as a chemist, it was during an era during which it was considered acceptable,

and was legal for her to be told “you are our most qualified candidate but I’m giving the job to a man.” She did hold administrative jobs, including time working with the Saint Joseph Hospital (Denver) blood bank, and as the secretary to a pathologist, taking notes for him as he did autopsies and then typing the report for him. Once she had children she left the paid workforce to work raising three children, and doing volunteer work for multiple organizations, including the Jefferson Unitarian Church, League of Women Voters, the ACLU, the Urban League, the Jeffco Democratic Party, and the Jeffco school district. She served many years as an election judge for Jefferson County.

Though she had been balked at using her chemistry degree professionally, she put her English studies and sharp mind to good use. Any organization she volunteered for loved her, as she actually enjoyed writing, unlike so many people. She happily took on tasks such as church and jazz club newsletters, writing skits for fundraisers, and writing educational materials for the League of Women Voters, the ACLU and the Jeffco Democrats. She was eloquent and witty but also had the knack of writing clearly and understandably for diverse audiences. (And if she had written her own obituary it would be much more funny and eloquent than this one is!)

She was passionate about causes supporting social justice and political openness. She worked for these causes even during times when that was not the most popular view, such as during the House Un-American Activities Committee heyday in the 1950's. Despite holding clear views herself, one of her strengths was her ability to have genuine dialog with people holding other views. She loved learning what others thought, and sharing her perspective with them.

She is survived by her children, Susan Bonner, Karen Peterson and Alan Peterson; her son-in-law, John Bonner; and her sister, Nancy Nowaczek.

A celebration of her life will be held in conjunction with the next First-Friday at Avo's, starting at 4pm and going to 7pm on Friday, January 4, 2019. Address: Avogadro's Number, 605 S. Mason St., Fort Collins CO.

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