



Marjorie Contessa

February 4, 1916 - February 9, 2020

Marjorie Contessa, known to many as "Maggie", resided comfortably at English Village Manor since April of 2007, passed away Sunday, February 9, 2020. Cremation services have been entrusted to Kincannon Funeral Home and Cremation Services. Private family inurnment will take place at a later date.

Marjorie Van Alstyne was born in the small town of Anchar, Illinois on February 4, 1916. Her father, Guy Van Alstyne, a general surgeon and her mother, Gladys Van Alstyne, and her two older sisters, Beverly and Marion, lived in Chicago, Illinois. In the 1930's Marjorie traveled to Sweden to visit her sister, Marion, and her husband, Mats Bjerke before traveling to Paris, France where she worked as an "American Governess" for a wealthy french family. Then Marjorie went by train on the exotic "Orient Express" to Kitzbuhel, Austria where she worked as a secretary in Schloss Mittersill, an ancient castle on top of a Tyrolean mountain, which is now a vacation resort.

After returning to the United States, Marjorie married Robert Craig O'Hair in Glen Ellyn, Illinois in 1938. Brian was born in 1941. In 1946, after her divorce, Marjorie took Brian and sailed across the Atlantic by steamship to Gladys' (her mother) home, the Domain du Serre, near Aups in southern France. The Domain had a large grove of olive trees and a large vineyard. As part of the resistance and during World War II, Gladys hid allied flyers the resistance brought to her house by night. Her home had a strange, small 'secret room' with only a small outside entry hidden by bushes and brambled which could only be accessed by crawling on ones belly. Though the Germans searched her home several times, they never found the safe room. Monsieur Archier and Fernand Pere were both active members of the french resistance during the war and were friends of Gladys. She was awarded a medal, the cross of the resistance volunteer for her courage.

Marjories main focus throughout her life was writing. She has written children's books, plays, songs and been published in Grade Teachers Magazine. She has also published fiction, nonfiction and poetry books. During the late 1940's Marjorie worked as writer/director for the movie producer Wesley Ruggles in France, Denmark and Thailand. She also lived in Sweden, Denmark and the French-Indochina where she married John

Donovan in 1950. He worked for Time/Life magazines as a cover, but actually was an OSS (forerunner of the CIA) agent.

Soon after the birth of their daughter, Heather, Marjorie and John divorced. Marjorie supported them through her work as a lab technician and also with her writing until 1961 when she married Amedeo Contessa, the owner of Contessa Yarns. They moved from Ridgefield, CT, where Marjorie worked as a reporter for the Ridgefield Press, to the small town of Lebanon, CT in 1964.

Marjorie put her heart and soul into this new life in rural farm country. She taught french lessons to Heather and her friends culminating in a play (a musical) which was performed. She also learned to weave and applied herself to her new hobby with creativity and determination. She invited a famous Swedish weaver, Maria Ohberg, to come and teach on the 7 ft. high by 5 ft. long loom. By the time Marjorie's weaving phase came to an end she had woven; placemats, scarves, curtains, beautiful dress material and quite elegant shawls. Fully jumping into country life she grew a large garden and enjoyed having chickens, horses, cats, a dog and even a goat.

In the fall of 1971 Marjorie and Amedeo divorced. Her gypsy spirit alive and well, she traveled with her son Brian and his family to Tacoma. Venturing across the Strait of Juan de Fuca, she came upon a little town of Sequim which became her beloved home for the next 25 years. Here, in the Valley of the Rainshadow, Marjorie resurrected her talent for interviewing people from all walks of life as a newspaper reporter for the Jimmy Come Lately Gazette. Her optimism, curiosity and friendliness brought her into a circle of friends who also loved living by the sea. Here she taught herself photography--even converting her bathroom into a dark room to process her pictures.

Comments



“ I worked at EVM for several years & it was a joy to care for Marjorie. She was a classy lady. She always knew what she wanted and what she didn't want. I loved that she had wine with her evening meal. She may have not eaten but 3 or 4 bites but she drank her wine. She will be missed

Lynda Stewart - February 12 at 01:19 PM