



Gary Massoni

August 7, 1942 - November 3, 2019

Gary was born in St. Helena, California and grew up in Yountville and Napa. He was always delighted to boast he was from the famous Napa Valley. Gary, the only child of Gino (also written Genio) and Ruth Parkinson Massoni, was also proud of his Italian heritage. Although his paternal grandparents, who immigrated from Tuscany to San Francisco, died before he was born, his early memories included exuberant gatherings with the extended Italian side of the family where Italian was spoken and an uncle was in the back room singing opera.

During Gary's college years he began to think deeply about what he believed. After graduating from Stanford University, he married Betty Herndon and they headed to Chicago where he attended Chicago Theological Seminary, although not at all sure where this education would lead. The very first people they met in Chicago were Jesse Jackson and his wife, Jackie. This meeting began a friendship and direction that was woven throughout the rest of Gary's life. That winter Jesse organized a group including Gary to go to Selma, Alabama, in response to Dr. Martin Luther King's call for people to support the drive for voting rights and the marchers who had been beaten on Bloody Sunday. The next year Gary began working with Operation Breadbasket, the Chicago based program which SCLC, Dr. King's organization, had asked Jesse Jackson to lead. Gary continued to work with Breadbasket on issues of economic justice as well as finally earning his seminary degree in 1971. Being in the Lorraine Motel in 1968 and hearing the shot when Dr. King was assassinated always haunted Gary.

After leaving Chicago, Gary was ordained by the Disciples of Christ and worked on social justice issues for a group of churches in Stockton, California. He then became Director of Programs for the Southwest region of the American Friends Service Committee in Pasadena, California. Justice for farmworkers and peace in Palestine and Israel were probably the issues closest to his heart during that time. In 1985 Gary and his family moved to Corvallis for him to work as a campus minister at Westminster House at OSU. While there he particularly enjoyed teaching classes in the Honors College. In 1987 Rev. Jackson asked Gary to be the Director of Scheduling for his 1988 Presidential Campaign.

A whirlwind year plus followed. Looking back Gary would joke that during that year he was the second most popular man in the country because so many people wanted Rev. Jackson to speak at an event, but to make that happen they had to deal with Gary.

Gary returned from the campaign to Westminster House. After a few years he was drawn back to work with Rev. Jackson's organization, the Rainbow Coalition. He continued to work with Rainbow and later Rainbow-PUSH until he retired, holding a variety of job titles and responsibilities as Rev. Jackson took advantage of Gary's flexibility and ability to learn whatever he needed to get the work done. Gary also continued his concern for peace in Palestine and Israel. He divided his time between Chicago and working remotely from Corvallis. Despite his intense work life, he was always devoted to his family, sharing much time, love and laughter doing things with Betty, their daughters, Gina and Dara, and more recently their grandchildren, Kai, Rowan and Rose. Gary also loved photography, travel, mountain streams, and all kinds of music, especially Hawaiian slack key guitar. He was particularly proud of a project where he and Betty used his photography to create panels for a museum show by Vida Nueva, a women's weaving cooperative from Oaxaca, Mexico.

Gary had been healthy until he was suddenly sick and spent a month in the hospital. At the end doctors found the acute myeloid leukemia that killed him. Left grieving are wife Betty; daughter Gina and her husband Roger Marchand, daughter Dara Massoni, and her spouse Chere Taylor; grandchildren Rose Marchand, and Rowan and Kai Massoni, and a host of friends. His death leaves a huge hole in our lives.

There will be a celebration of Gary's life January 18, at 2 p.m. at First Congregational Church, 4515 SW West Hills Road, Corvallis. Messages for the family may be left on Gary's page at the McHenry Funeral Home, Corvallis. If you wish to make a contribution in Gary's honor, please consider Rainbow-PUSH, Chicago, or First Congregational Church, Corvallis.

<https://www.corvallisucc.org/>

Events

JAN **Celebration of Life** 02:00PM
18

First Congregational Church of Christ
4515 West Hills Rd, Corvallis, OR, US, 97330

Comments



“ I met you and Betty in 1968 at S.C.L.C. Operation Breadbasket and instantly called you friends. My children have grown up but they still remember Rev. Gary and Betty Massoni. We especially remember Gary's smile which could light up any room. One of the most gentle, even tempered persons in the movement. You could always go to him when you got upset or needed an answer to a Biblical question. Betty, my prayers go out to you, Gina and Dara. from my family. I'm so sorry we can't be with out. Rest In Peace, my dear friend.

Betty Magness, Rev. Tony Land and Michael Magness.

C. Betty Magness - January 17, 2020 at 03:56 PM



“ Betty,
I am sorry I will not be able to be there for Gary's memorial service tomorrow. But I will be thinking of him, and you, and all the useful work for peace and justice that Gary did during his life.
Not very many White Americans were "woke" enough to make their way down to Selma during the demonstrations there 55 years ago. Gary Massoni was one who took that trip, driving all night in an integrated car through the Old South, showing a depth of commitment to equality that he always maintained.
I met Gary during the Jackson campaigns of the 1980s, and was proud to call him a friend ever after. He took on many roles for Reverend Jackson over the years, but the one that took the most personal courage (or the least intelligence, I'm not sure!), was to agree to serve in the impossible job as Jesse's scheduler during the incredible 1987-88 Presidential campaign. But Gary knew that someone had to do it, and took on a job that literally could not be done in the time allotted--and did it well. Gary was a good man, and fought the good fight, and ran a good race.
We will miss him. Steve Cobble

Steven Cobble - January 17, 2020 at 10:46 AM



“ I will always be thankful that I met you. You and Betty are amazing and inspirational people. I will definitely miss your smile and the kind and encouraging words when I needed it most. However, I have a feeling that when I still am in need, your smile and words will not be far from my mind and heart.

Betty - my heart is with you and your family.



Brandi Douglas - December 26, 2019 at 06:48 PM



“ God bless you all!!!

Edward - January 19, 2020 at 09:43 PM



“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



McHenry Funeral Home - December 19, 2019 at 07:16 PM



“ Seeing the picture of Gary Massoni smiling at the top of this page reminds us of his greatest gift to us: joy. No matter how difficult it was at the Jackson campaign office or at Rainbow/PUSH when there were insufficient resources to meet the huge demands thrust upon us by the mission, there was Gary's smile to lighten the load so that we may carry on. His smile said it all: be kind to yourself so that you may serve others better. Spread joy into the life of others so that we may all live in dignity and grace. I'm sad that he left us so soon with many projects and stories still to be completed and shared, but Gary has already done so much. He's answering another call now, rest in peace, brother. I'll remember your gentle spirit, vigilant love of justice, and humility. Love and Joy to everyone in the Rainbow Family - Eddie Wong, Oakland, CA

Edward Wong - November 14, 2019 at 02:25 AM



“ Gary Massoni
1942-2019

The shock and sadness I feel over the sudden death of Gary Massoni is tempered only by the knowledge that his life and witness will long outlive him.

From the days of Operation Breadbasket when he labored among us as a deeply committed and competent staffer, through decades as Rev. Jesse Jackson's trusted aide, Gary was always the insightful, hard working and humble servant of justice.

Gary's written legacy, "Perspectives on Operation Breadbasket" formed the basis of my more recently published book on Breadbasket. I am totally indebted to him, to his encouragement and friendship.

Gary has been a loyal and generous alum of Chicago Theological Seminary. He will be missed especially by the Rainbow PUSH family among many persons across Chicago. His warmth, intelligence, love of family and passion for racial equality cannot be measured.

My heart goes out to you, Betty, your daughters and families. A curious current of energy and love makes it way today between Chicago and Corvallis.

Love, Rev. Martin Deppe
November 11, 2019

Martin Deppe - November 11, 2019 at 04:56 PM



“ Karen Stephenson lit a candle in memory of Gary Massoni



Karen Stephenson - November 09, 2019 at 07:46 PM



“ Rev. Massoni, you and Mrs. Massoni have always been a joy in my life. I will miss you so much.

Felicia



Felicia - November 09, 2019 at 07:46 PM



“ Mrs. Massoni, special thoughts and heartfelt prayers are with you and your family during this time of sorrow. Prayers love Alfreda Weathers

Msaweathers@gmail.com - November 08, 2019 at 05:25 PM



“ Patricia Velez lit a candle in memory of Gary Massoni



Patricia Velez - November 08, 2019 at 03:46 PM



“ My heart is so heavy knowing that such a wonderful man is no longer with us! You were such a compassionate man. To know you, was to love you. I was very blessed to have been able to work alongside you at Rainbow PUSH. Rev. Massoni, you will truly be missed!!

My sincerest condolences and prayers to the family.

Patricia Velez - November 08, 2019 at 03:46 PM



“ It was always a joy to see Gary come into town. He would share with me many of the great life moments he had been a part of at Rainbow PUSH Coalition. He was very wise.

Gary left a monumental impression on this world. He truly will be missed. To his family and loved ones, I offer my condolences and prayers.

Sandra McKinley



SANDRA MCKINLEY - November 08, 2019 at 01:32 PM



“ Jason Robinson sent a virtual gift in memory of Gary Massoni



Jason Robinson - November 08, 2019 at 08:50 AM



“ When I think of the song, “Let There Be Peace On Earth (and let it begin with me),” I think of Rev. Gary Massoni. He didn’t just “sing” those lyrics; he actually “demonstrated” them.

It has been an honor working with him at the Rainbow PUSH Coalition.

To his family, I offer condolences and prayers, and I thank you for sharing him with all of us and with the entire world.

Jason Robinson

Jason Robinson - November 08, 2019 at 06:55 AM



“ Marjorie McKinnon-Price sent a virtual gift in memory of Gary Massoni



Marjorie McKinnon-Price - November 07, 2019 at 01:40 PM



“ Marjorie McKinnon-Price lit a candle in memory of Gary Massoni



Marjorie McKinnon-Price - November 07, 2019 at 01:39 PM



“ My heart is heavy as my mind slowly accepts the reality of Gary's transition. As an employee of the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, I had the pleasure and honor to work and interact with Gary for about 20 years. I could always count on him for counsel, support and a warming smile. I am sending my deepest condolences and prayers to his family. I know the Heavenly Bodies would say "Job well done humble servant Gary; Rest with us in Heaven.

Marjorie McKinnon-Price

Marjorie McKinnon-Price - November 07, 2019 at 01:22 PM



“ Rest in Power Gary-Don Kuss.

Donald Kuss - November 05, 2019 at 02:03 PM