



## Margaret "Margo" M Denison

September 27, 1927 - June 30, 2022

On June 30, 2022, Margaret (Mellinger) Denison died in Corvallis, OR of COVID-19.

Margo was born on September 27, 1927 in Ipswich, MA to Asa W. Mellinger and Edith Marion Ford. She was 94 when she died.

Friends and family are invited to post a remembrance here. To further honor Margo's memory, her children will host a Celebration of Life on Zoom on September 25, at 2 pm PST. To participate, please email [Margo@denison-johnston.net](mailto:Margo@denison-johnston.net) by September 23 to get the link. The family also welcomes donations in her honor to the Grace Center (<http://www.gracecenter-corvallis.org>) and the Corvallis Community Center via Friends of Corvallis Parks & Recreation (<http://www.lovecorvallisparcs.org>).

Margo is survived by her children (and their spouses): Ford (Cindy), Tom (Elizabeth), Glenn (Shelley), and Rebecca (Daniel) and grandchildren, Sophia, Sarah, Carson, and Paul. Margo is preceded in death by her husband, William C. (Bill) Denison.

Margo met Bill in 1945 at Oberlin College and falsely claimed she could make mincemeat pie, which led him (and two other men) to propose to her. They were married on September 11, 1948. They both loved nature, civil rights, and

practical shoes. In 1962, before the Pan-American highway was built, she and Bill (a botany and ecology professor at Swarthmore College) drove to Costa Rica with 4 children (ages 6 months to 9 years) and a gaggle of grad students to study tropical biodiversity.

In 1966, the family moved from Swarthmore to Corvallis, where she obtained a master's degree in education and taught elementary school, first kindergarten in Bellfountain and then three grades (at the same time) in Irish Bend. In the 1970s, she threw out her curlers, took her children to peace marches, moved to the country, fed her family on poultry and vegetables she raised herself, helped start the First Alternative Co-Op and the Corvallis Farmers Market, parented a dozen foster children and many of her children's friends, and joined the volunteer fire department. In 1985, she retired, took up photography, and traveled with Bill to Bhutan to provide advice on mushroom cultivation as guests of the king. In the 1990s, she became an HIV/AIDS activist, speaking in churches, tabling at community events, visiting people in the hospital whose families had rejected them, and waking at 3 a.m. to take calls from the Valley AIDS Information Network's 24-hour hotline.

Margo instilled a love of music in all of her children, who grew up singing carols and *The Golden Vanity* (a sea shanty) in 5-part harmony around a tree lit only by live candles every Christmas Eve. In her 80s, Margo took up a new hobby playing piano "for the old people" at community center sing-a-longs.

Perhaps the thing Margo loved the most was inviting children to discover the world and the many people who share it by teaching them to read. She loved reading to us when we were young, and loved being read to by us when she was old, but the one thing we were never allowed to request was the final chapter of "The House at Pooh Corner." As children, we didn't know why. She'd just tell us, "I can't." Now we know why...

“Pooh, promise you won’t forget about me, ever.”

We promise, Mom. We promise.

# Tribute Wall

TC

“ During my senior year at Swarthmore (1966), Margo and Bill were surrogate parents as Fred Koster, Fred Rhoades, and I roomed in their upstairs bedroom. They contributed enormously to making that final year extra special. We felt part of their family. During graduate school, Mimi and I always stopped off at the Denisons on our annual trek back and forth between California and Alaska—always feeling that we were coming home. Margo made us feel like family. She had such a big heart, such engaging chatter and was so welcoming of all the chaos we added to their lives as we came through town with two babies in tow. She never missed a beat, as if this were normal family life. One summer Tom joined us in Alaska—another tie that binds us to the Denison branch of our family. We feel so grateful to Margo and her family for opening their lives and sharing their optimism for a better world. It has always been inspirational.

Terry Chapin

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Terry Chapin - September 24, 2022 at 02:15 AM

FD

There must have been some extra work for Mom, who was also working long hours as a teacher, but I think she enjoyed having visitors, even the interesting hitch-hikers Dad picked up and brought home. It was great to see you at our Zoom memorial, Terry.

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Ford Denison - September 27, 2022 at 09:56 AM

AR

“ Margo was so lively and fun! One of my favorite memories of graduate school was when Margo and Bill came to our hippie house to sing. For three evenings we went all the way through the Fireside Book of Folk Songs start to finish, instead of just singing our favorites. I learned a new favorite--Willy the Weeper. I still have the piano and the book. Also, I love that Margo made cherry pies without bothering to take the pits out of the cherries. She didn't have time for that. Finally, I've really miss her holiday greetings year after year, sometimes even with a photo! She was amazing.

Amy Rossman - September 06, 2022 at 07:01 PM

TD

Amy, so good to hear from you! There is a copy of The Fireside Book of folk songs on her piano now.  
Tom

Tom Denison - September 25, 2022 at 11:31 PM

FD

I remember her telling about a student living with us who got a phone call while his cheeks were stuffed with cherry pits. She'd given them the option of pitting the cherries for the pies. I hope you are well, Amy.

Ford Denison - September 27, 2022 at 09:58 AM

DJ

“ 1 file added to the album Margo and Family



Daniel Johnston - August 25, 2022 at 03:53 PM

KF

“ Dear Denison Family- I am so sorry to hear of your mother's passing. What a wonderful woman she was! I have many happy memories of riding my bike out to the place off Soap Creek Rd and your mom making delicious meals full of homegrown vegies and fruits and feeding any teenage hippie who showed up! She was always welcoming. May your memories bring you comfort. Love, Karan Fairchild (nee Kiigemagi)

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**Karan Fairchild** - July 09, 2022 at 02:16 PM