



Norma Jean Barnhisel

June 12, 1942 - December 14, 2024

Norma Barnhisel passed away at age 82 early in the morning of Dec. 14, 2024, at her home in Corvallis, of complications from heart failure and dementia.

Norma Jean Jones's parents were Norman Jones (originally of Rogue River, Oregon) and Emogene "Jean" Jones (née Hawkins; originally of Fair Play, Missouri). Norman and Jean had met at church in Pomona, California, in the late 1930s, where both had gone to find work during the Depression, and after their wedding settled in Klamath Falls, Oregon. Norman was drafted into the U.S. Army in 1942 and posted to Fort Lee, Virginia. A very pregnant Emogene rushed east on a Greyhound to join her husband, but Norma Jean's birth in Springfield, Missouri on June 12 interrupted her mother's journey. After a few days recovering with her family, Emogene and Norma Jean got back on the bus.

After Norman was discharged, the family returned to Oregon, where he worked as a journeyman carpenter and Jean cleaned motel rooms, bringing little Norma Jean along to nap in the linen cart. Later, the family built a successful construction contracting business and their lives got more comfortable. Her parents instilled in her their single-minded drive to escape poverty through hard work, education, and self-discipline, and Norma Jean graduated from Klamath Union High School and matriculated at the University

of Oregon, where she earned bachelor's and master's degrees in education and taught elementary school in Eugene.

While she was at the U of O, mutual friends from Klamath introduced her to Peter Barnhisel, a law student, who had been three years ahead of her in high school. (They had never met, although their parents had worked together.) Pete and Norma were married in 1966 and moved to Portland, where Norma taught second and third grades at Oak Creek Elementary School and Pete worked at the Spears, Lubersky firm downtown.

Soon after their son, Gregory Peter, was born in 1969, the family moved to Corvallis, where Pete founded a law firm with John Fenner. Norma left teaching to raise Greg and Stacy Jean, who was born in 1972. Although no longer working, Norma remained active outside the house in organizations like Welcome Wagon, P.E.O., the Gamma Phi Beta sorority, and especially the Assistance League of Corvallis. In the 1980s, Norma was one of the lead organizers for major Assistance League fundraisers like the annual "Red Stocking Revue," chowder feeds at Mo's in Newport, and the Oregon Sampler: Resorts and Recipes cookbook. After her children left the house, Norma returned to the workplace, spending ten years as a financial-aid counselor at Oregon State University, for which her teacherly inclinations suited her well. She loved working with most of the students, but often said that her favorite was future NBA Hall of Famer Gary Payton, who was "so sweet and funny."

In their first years in Corvallis, Norma and Pete assembled a large group of friends who remained close for decades and gathered often for dinners, picnics, tennis, and bridge. With three of these families, in 1975 they bought a small cabin in Black Butte Ranch, which became one of Norma's favorite places. Norma was also a member of "The Women's Syndicate," a group of friends who learned about securities and pooled their money to invest in the

stock market. With the proceeds, they would vacation together every year.

Norma was renowned for her skills in needlecraft: sewing, quilting, needlepoint, cross-stitch, embroidery. She had a remarkable eye for design and color, and filled her house with the beautiful things she made, inspiring Stacy to learn those arts. Later, she took great joy in her daughter-in-law Alison's accomplishments as a quilter, and after she was no longer able to do the work herself, accompanied Alison to classes at the Sisters (OR) Quilt Show in 2019 just for the vicarious pleasure of seeing her sew. Her decorating skills were also widely admired, and friends would come to the house to see her elaborate Christmas displays, many of whose elements she had made herself.

In contrast to her boisterous husband, Norma was reserved and quiet, but had a sly sense of humor—you had to listen carefully. She carefully deliberated on every judgment, and one was wise to follow her counsel, because it was almost inevitably correct. Norma was highly intelligent, curious about the world, iron-willed, maintained exacting standards, and although she could seem like a sweet small-town mother, had a real edge to her.

The last quarter of her life was marred by her struggle with a chronic illness that she bore stoically but very privately but that was often wholly debilitating, and she gradually withdrew from most of her activities outside the house. Still, she got sustenance out of her children and grandchildren and from Pete's selfless care for her, and from the family's regular gatherings in Portland, Los Angeles, Black Butte, and Puerto Vallarta.

Norma is survived by her son Greg, daughter-in-law Alison (Colbert), and grandsons Jack and Beckett, of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; and her daughter Stacy, son-in-law Josh (Haber), and grandchildren Harper and Milo, of Los

Angeles. She will be deeply missed.

The family requests that donations in their memory be made to the Benton County Library Foundation, the Good Samaritan Hospital Foundation, or the Benton County Historical Society.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

APR **19**. 3:00 PM - 4:00 PM (PT)

Benton County Library
Main Meeting Room
Corvallis, OR 97330

Tribute Wall

CL

“ *Sincere condolences from a sorority sister.*

Cindy L - May 16, 2025 at 03:42 PM

WO

“ *My parents met Pete and Norma shortly after they moved to Corvallis. Throughout the years of friendship between our two families, Pete and Norma gathered several stories of my parents, which they later recounted to me, laughing hard, finishing each other's sentences. The telling of the story was often more funny than the story itself! I enjoyed seeing them at various events, especially at the symphony or a hospital foundation fundraiser. They were great friends and helped to make their community a better place for generations to come.*

Whitney Olsen - December 26, 2024 at 03:20 PM

SB

“ *Greg and Stacie,
Todd and I arrived in Corvallis about the same time as your parents. Since Todd and your father were both young attorneys in a new town, we soon became acquainted and have many fond memories from that time in our lives.*

Although we know your parents faced a variety of health challenges in recent years, we also know it is never easy to say goodbye to a parent, much less both of them in a short period of time.

*Please accept our condolences,
With sympathy,
Todd and Susan Brown*

Susan Brown - December 26, 2024 at 02:55 PM