



Peter Eric Kozak

May 7, 1954 - March 16, 2025

Peter Eric Kozak, 70, passed away suddenly from a heart attack at his home in Corvallis, Oregon on March 16, 2025.

Born May 7, 1954, in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania to Joseph A. and Dorothy (née Taraldsen) Kozak, Pete was the seventh of eight children. Following the death of Joseph, an attorney, in 1958, Dorothy and her mother moved the family to Valley City, North Dakota in 1959 and then to Lincoln, Nebraska in 1963, where Dorothy taught music education at the University of Nebraska. Pete graduated from Pius X Catholic High School in 1972, excelling in wrestling, football, and band (trumpet). In 1976 he graduated with a bachelor's degree in English from the University of Nebraska. Although he turned down an opportunity to play Husker football for esteemed coach Tom Osborne, his affinity for Husker football lasted the rest of his life.

Throughout high school and college, Pete hitchhiked extensively throughout North America, collecting adventure stories that would entertain family and friends for decades. He spent his college summers repairing railroads in central Nebraska and moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota after graduation. In 1979 he found his way to Oregon and was living in Portland when Mt. St. Helens erupted the following year.

While performing at an open mic night on a visit back to Lincoln on January 28, 1981, Pete met the love of his life, Dianne (née Moody). It was love at first sight, and later that year on November 7, Pete and Dianne married in Lincoln. They moved to Corvallis, Oregon in 1984. In 1989, they welcomed their

daughter Andrea.

Pete and Dianne spent 40 years in Corvallis, building a loving family and community. They cherished Oregon's natural beauty, spending many happy hours walking its trails with their beloved German Shepherd, Greta. With the birth of their granddaughters Ingrid in 2021 and Liesel in 2023, Pete became a proud and doting "Gramps." In all, he and Dianne enjoyed more than 43 years of joyful marriage as true partners and companions.

Pete's professional career was defined by service, working primarily with children, teens, and adults with disabilities. After earning a master's degree in education at Western Oregon University, he taught special education for more than 20 years, running the Transitions program at West Albany High School until his retirement in 2020. Students and colleagues appreciated his trademark warmth, humor, and music.

Throughout his life, Pete was an accomplished, prolific, and devoted musician and songwriter. He immersed himself in Bluegrass, traditional, folk, and country music. He was masterful on guitar, banjo, mandolin, and vocals, and a disciplined student of the Dobro, harmonica, fiddle, and cornet. Pete played in countless ensembles over the decades, including Yellow Rose, The Rubes, and The Bush Pilots. He recorded at least two albums, including *Drinking Friends* in 1983 and *The Rubes* in the late 1990s. He imparted his love of music to dozens of students over the years through private lessons in his home studio. In retirement, Pete shared his musical gifts with residents of senior living and memory care facilities throughout Corvallis and Albany, performing classic tunes for a captive and appreciative audience. In recent years, Pete expanded his repertoire to include Irish traditional music and enjoyed regular jam sessions with his son-in-law, Dave.

A man of many talents and interests, Pete was also a fourth-degree black belt and teacher of Tae Kwon Do. He could yodel, he could juggle, and he could recall most television theme songs from the 1950s and '60s. He collected—and voraciously read—history books on topics ranging from World War II, the Roman Empire, and India. He studied graphic design at Linn-Benton

Community College. He spent a year as a production assistant in Hollywood in the early 1990s, where Brad Pitt reportedly asked to take banjo lessons from him (Pete declined). He was proud of his Norwegian and Slovak family ancestry and traveled to both countries to meet distant cousins and experience their cultures. He was passionate about democracy and justice and could always be counted on for informed and nuanced analyses of current events.

Pete loved to connect with people wherever he went—whether a stranger with a Nebraska hat at the grocery store or someone walking a German Shepherd in the neighborhood. He could (and would) strike up a conversation with just about anyone. Many of his friendships started this way. Family and friends treasured his loyalty, good humor, sage advice, and elaborate story-telling. Pete is survived by his wife Dianne; daughter Andrea (David) Kozak-Oxnard; granddaughters Ingrid (3) and Liesel (1) Kozak-Oxnard; and seven siblings around the country: Andrew Kozak; Mary (Andrew) Coen; Ann Kozak (Christopher Stein); Dory (Andrew) Goodman; Jne (Bill) Van Clief; Joe (Leigh Ann) Kozak; and Harley Jane Kozak. He is also survived by his mother-in-law Norma Moody; brothers- and sister-in-law; nearly two dozen nieces and nephews; numerous cousins near and far; and so many friends, bandmates, and former colleagues. He is preceded in death by his parents Joseph and Dorothy Kozak, father-in-law Wayne Moody, nephew Matthew Coen, several dear friends, and beloved dog Greta.

A celebration of life will be at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Corvallis at 2945 NW Circle Blvd. In lieu of flowers, please consider a donation to a Democratic candidate or progressive organization of your choice.

Previous Events

Celebration of Life

MAY 24. 3:00 PM (PT)

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Corvallis
2945 NW Circle Blvd
Corvallis, OR 97330

Tribute Wall

MW

“ Dear Dianne, Jim and I just heard the news of Pete’s passing. We are saddened. We met Pete shortly after we moved to Corvallis. I remember walking along the river front and hearing the faint sound of a banjo drawing us in. The artist was none other than Pete playing a gig at Belle Valle tasting room. Jim immediately became a “groupie” and enjoyed taking lessons from Pete for many years, until we moved away. More than the lessons, Jim would often comment about the time they spent talking about life and music. I remember once requesting a song from Pete that he didn’t have in his repertoire; Heart of Gold by Neil Young. The next time we saw Pete perform he had mastered it and gave me a shoutout. Pete was a great man who will be missed. Mary and Jim Wolfe



Mary Wolfe - June 17, 2025 at 05:03 PM

DC

“ Oh, Dianne and Andrea -
This hurts. I just heard of Pete's passing this last week and was thoroughly distraught. When fellow musicians die, it feels like our community chorus/band is out of balance. I was glad that we got to have a "Best Cellar" together recently. I was hoping to do more music with him in the future.
I am also missing a fellow Cornhusker. Please know that I am thinking of you and singing the Blues at the moment...
Doug Crotty

DOUGLAS P CROTTY - June 01, 2025 at 02:36 PM

MW

“ I first met Pete and Dianne when I moved to Corvallis in 1986. We all lived on the same dead end gravel road in south Corvallis. Pete and I got to work together at Work Unlimited where Pete was able to win the hearts of both clients and co-workers with his skills and compassion in working with individuals with disabilities in the community and his ability to tell a great story. He was a stand up, talented guy. I feel lucky to have been able to work with him. He will be greatly missed.

Miriam Waintrup

Miriam Waintrup - May 25, 2025 at 05:16 PM

JM

“ I didn't know Pete but wished I could have. From all the wonderful tributes he sounded like a very special man.

Judy McCann - May 19, 2025 at 12:47 PM

AS

“ The thing about Pete was that he was kinder than he needed to be. Even in high school when most guys weren't. He always made you feel special. He used to get a kick out of the connections we had. We went to the same high school in Nebraska, the same University, ended up in the same small town in Oregon, our daughters took dance classes together, went to the same high school and the same small college in California. He loved storytelling. He was going to perform at my sister's assisted living facility. Another connection! I had planned to go listen. I miss him and his goodness. A unique personality.

Anne Schuster - May 17, 2025 at 05:51 PM

VZ

Pete had a passion for working with people with disabilities for decades. He was patient, kind, and understanding. He benefited scores of students at West Albany High School. I followed him in a similar path as a Special Educator, getting a Masters in Education at Western Oregon University to give his best to students with great challenges. His sudden passing was a shock to all of us who knew him. His music was another passion that he shared with others and he will be greatly missed.

Vince Zettler

Vince Zettler - May 24, 2025 at 11:32 AM

JS

“*I’m in complete shock. I just saw Pete 2 weeks ago at the grocery store. We worked together when I first moved to Corvallis years ago, and our daughters were in the same play school. I hadn’t seen him in years. We had a great conversation about how happy he was in retirement, how much he loved his wife and daughter, how he was still playing music and had been enjoying playing for “older folks” at a retirement home. I told him I’d come watch him play soon. He looked fantastic, healthy, happy and I was robbing him about retiring so young. Andrea and Dianne you are in my thoughts. He loved you mightily. I don’t remember a conversation in the last 20 plus years where he didn’t talk about you, and he was always happy when he did. I’m so very sorry for your too sudden and early loss.*

—*Jana Svoboda*

Jana Svoboda - April 03, 2025 at 11:19 PM

KC

“*What a talented and kind soul. He was my music teacher for a brief time and I always admired his talent and ability to connect with people through music. Rest in peace, Pete.*

Kimberly Copeland - April 01, 2025 at 06:19 PM

KS

“ My mind just keeps peeking and then looking away quickly from the idea that Pete is gone. We had six years as teaching partners and only 10 as friends. Dianne, please call on me any time.

Kate Skinner - April 01, 2025 at 02:18 AM



“ Ann and family, I am sorry for your loss. I remember when Pete played his guitar for us at Charlie Brown's Kids in Lincoln. --Steve Leypoldt

Steven Leypoldt - March 28, 2025 at 06:22 AM

CR

“ Pete was my musical mentor and friend. As a teacher, he was supportive, insightful, and inspiring. So many in the Corvallis music community will miss him. --Christine Robins

Christine Robins - March 25, 2025 at 05:54 PM

MH

“ Pete will always be one of my best growin up in high school buddies. A magnet for fun and adventure he just had a calm way about him. I'm very lucky to have known Pete but for too short a time. Mark Houlihan

Mark Houlihan - March 25, 2025 at 05:54 PM

CC

“ The problem with life is that people are only loaned to us. I met Pete and his brothers when I was 16. They exposed me to hunting, fishing, art, literature and music. Their influence is an important part of who I am today. Here's to you old friend and the faith that we will met again. Carey Cook

Carey Cook - March 25, 2025 at 11:31 AM

DP

“ Always fun to run into Pete: hear his stories, talk about music. Enjoyed listening to and playing music with Pete. Stunned by his loss. Love to his family ...

Dave Plaehn - March 22, 2025 at 06:51 PM

CS

“ Met Pete when he still lived in Lincoln through another Pius X grad, Terry Keefe. Was always in awe of his Musical talent and was so proud that he included one of my original songs, "This Hearts On Hold" on his Drinking Friends Album. A life well lived if there ever was one, my sincere condolences to the family.
Chris Sayre LHS 1972

Chris Sayre - March 22, 2025 at 11:37 AM

TL

“ I first met Pete when we worked together in “the dungeon” at Hillcrest Country Club washing members’ golf clubs (yes, that was a real job!) during our high school years. We also played together as starters on the offensive and defensive lines (Pete as a junior) for the Class B championship Pius X High School football team in 1971. But my best memory of Pete was our epic hitchhiking trek to Fairbanks, Alaska and then on to NYC, before returning to Lincoln, Nebraska 6 weeks later! We briefly worked in a carnival up in Alaska after running low on funds. Pete wrote a song about Kenora, Ontario, where we were stuck waiting 3 days for a ride! Amazingly, Pete could recite in chronological order every single ride we had over that six-week period. Then our lives took us in different directions for over 40 years. I reconnected with Pete (and Dianne) a couple of years ago in Corvallis, and then again when he was in Lincoln for his 50th high school union. I feel like I’m a better person for having known Pete. I can just picture Pete in heaven sharing stories with his patron saint over his latest journey!

Tim Loudon - March 21, 2025 at 08:35 PM

LO

“ I met Pete while he was playing with the "Bush Pilots" and from that he became my banjo teacher. He turned this old dinosaur into a "middlin" banjar picker. He is a great guy that was able to tolerate me. I was always impressed at how much Pete gave of himself outside the musical community. Hard to fine 'em like that anymore.

Louie - March 21, 2025 at 05:51 PM

JL

I became acquainted with Pete during my years working at SAHS. I have one particular strong memory of a day when we took students on a field trip and he was so kind and helpful...what a great person and much beloved teacher.

He also gave me advice as just before a gig with my band I was coming down with a cold. "Drink some Blackberry Brandy as it always works for me." And it did.

There were a group of us who would go hear him play with "The Rubes" or "Bush Pilots" or solo at New Morning.. A pleasure to know him and enjoy his gifts as such a lovely soul. My heart goes out to his family and all of us who enjoyed his friendship .

Jackie LaBonte - March 24, 2025 at 11:55 PM

SJ

“ Hey was a great friend and a great teacher he will be deeply missed farewell on my friend!!

Simon Jordan - March 21, 2025 at 03:45 PM

MV

“ Oh Pete. He was such an amazing, kind, generous and funny guy. We will all miss him immensely. Sending so much love to all the family 💜🌟💜

Margot Vance-Borland - March 21, 2025 at 03:36 PM

PC

I remember a few years ago, I guess it's been over 20 years ago. Pete was a red belt and he needed to compete at a tournament in order to test for his black. I was happy about because at the time hardly anyone was competing. I had went to the last couple by myself. I didn't sparring with Pete though cause I'd always get bruised. He was all legs and arms and it was hard to get inside. I remember when Pete turned 50 and I asked how 50 was I had just turned 40. He laughed and said well when you get to 50 you have good days and bad days.

Patrick Cayvell - March 25, 2025 at 07:19 PM

SS

Kristen and I both worked with Pete. We last spoke with him when he was playing at this years' Rotary Crab Feed. A few months before, Pete was at my mother's memory care facility where he sang and played his guitar for the ladies. He was a great human being.
Steve and Kristen Schuttpelz

Steve and Kristen Schuttpelz - March 27, 2025 at 06:47 PM

HK

I loved reading all these wonderful comments and memories of my brother. Thank you all. I don't suppose any us will ever not miss him.

Harley Jane Kozak - November 19, 2025 at 05:26 PM