

Geraldine Sue Grant-Hansen

July 21, 1944 ~ June 23, 2025

Geraldine Sue Grant-Hansen died on June 23, 2025 in Salt Lake City, Utah. She was one month shy of her 81st birthday.

Gerri was born in New York City on July 21, 1944, the second child of Peter and Alice Grant. There was something seemingly improbable about the pair—he a Jewish Latvian immigrant and she a farm girl from a Calvinist family in Western Michigan. But, apart from the question of human chemistry, they shared one thing—a common vision of the way the world was and how it ought to be. Peter had been radicalized as a very young man by the great working-class struggles of the 1910s and 1920s. Alice's views were profoundly shaped by her parents, who broke with the Dutch Christian Reformed church and, withstanding denunciations from the pulpit in the small town where they lived, became determined socialists.

Alice and Peter remained firm in these ideals and imparted them to Gerri and her sister Jacqueline. For Gerri, they were an alpha and omega. She retained them to her dying day. Indeed, Gerri, who, as a result of illness, had towards the end of her life increasingly lived in her dreams, was very busy during her last weeks leading a workers' uprising on an island somewhere. As one of the aides at her assisted living facility noted, "She was always up to something."

Gerri's early years were spent in the Bronx. She and her sister grew up in a basement apartment on Bedford Park Boulevard. Her father was a pocket-book maker who labored on a piece-rate basis. Her mother was a clerical worker at a music school. The family barely had enough to make ends meet and was constantly pressed. "Moving up" constituted relocating to a housing project in Brooklyn during her first year in junior high school.

Despite their limited means, Gerri's mother insisted that each summer the family return to the Michigan farm where she grew up. It was here that Gerri forged her happiest childhood memories—of a grandmother who was the embodiment of human sensitivity, of a grandfather who was outwardly stern and inwardly tender, of family who went to church and others who refused, and of countless cousins who alternately played with, teased, loved, and protected her. To them, she was always little "Gerri Sue." Her ashes will be spread on this Michigan farm in the summer of 2026.

Of Gerri's youth in New York City, there were many stories. She played with the Rammelkamps, yelled "Hey, fat lady!" at her mom as she was walking home up the street, and was great at double-Dutch jump rope. Her father's parents, who spoke only Yiddish, adored her and her sister, although there were certain barriers stemming from language and religion. Gerri recalled her grandmother visiting and eating only a banana, apparently the one thing available to her in her daughter-in-law's non-kosher home. This experience likely contributed to Gerri's remarkable ability to love across boundaries.

A decisive, perhaps the most decisive, time of her early childhood was the McCarthy Era. Gerri's father, a trade unionist and leftist, was monitored by the FBI and feared being stripped of his naturalized citizenship. "Not everyone's daddy was walked home from work every day," Gerri would recall of the police escort assigned to shadow her father's daily moves. It was a searing experience. Johnny, her father's friend, wrote her and her sister letters from prison, attempting to explain that he was trying to make the world a better place. "Cousin Alfred," she once recalled, "came to visit us. He was being deported to Austria. He didn't have a winter coat. My dad gave him his." The cousin in question, from her mother's side of the family, was Albert Goetz, leader of the 1932 Ford Hunger March.

Gerri was whip smart, albeit in her high school years, not always focused on academics. She was more interested, her sister reports, in teaching a group of vagabond children how to read. Nonetheless, she completed the 12th grade at age 16. She later enrolled in Brooklyn College, where she majored in anthropology, and then graduate school, where she took up the same subject. She was drawn to the field because of its promise to unlock, with the aid of scientific investigation, the mysteries of human culture—varied, complex, strange. During this time, Gerri was, like so many of her generation, a partisan of the social and political struggles that challenged the most powerful forces on the planet.

Along the way, Gerri had a child with her first love, Christopher, an African exchange student. Gerri, confronting Christopher's return to Kenya, her father's looming death from lung cancer, her own youth, and the realities of racial prejudice in 1963 America, gave her daughter to another family to be raised as their own, which they did with infinite love. The greatest happiness of Gerri's later life was when, 32 years later, her daughter found her.

In the interim, Gerri finished her Ph.D., married her first husband, Kenneth Friedman, and had three children. Completing her doctoral work was no small accomplishment, not in the least because her fieldwork took her to Chile, where she and her family arrived on September 1, 1973. Ten days later, General Augusto Pinochet seized power and overthrew the country's elected left-wing president, Salvador Allende, in a bloody coup. Bodies littered the streets, tens of thousands were imprisoned, tortured, and disappeared. As Gerri bluntly said many decades later, "I watched the working class get its ass handed to them."

Gerri, her husband, and their two-year-old son Peter were unable to flee the country, as the borders were sealed. The army shot up their apartment building, and security services hunted the hallways for opponents. She credited their neighbor for saving their lives. The woman, talking nonstop, somehow convinced the soldiers that they were "just stupid Americans who knew nothing." There was an element of truth to this statement. With the help of acquaintances they had in the country, Gerri and her family eventually left Santiago but remained in Chile for a year, managing, somehow, to complete her research. But, as her eyes betrayed whenever she spoke about the experience, she was forever and deeply shaken.

Gerri finished her dissertation, "A Path to Marginality: The Rise of a Provincial Chilean Middle Class," in 1978, with three kids ages 8 and under in tow. She went on to teach anthropology at Queens College, LaGuardia Community College, and other institutions in New York City for the next two decades. She wrote scholarly articles on Latin America, new immigrants, the state, and other topics. Gerri was an accomplished and serious educator, admired by her students.

During this time, she married her second husband, Edward Hansen, who came into the relationship with three children of his own from two prior marriages. Along the way, they informally adopted another, bringing their total number of kids to seven. To add to the confusion, this included two girls with the same name, such that there was now an Andrea "Primera" and an Andrea "Segunda."

Gerri and Ed had an expansive understanding of family, and there was frequently a changing assembly of wayward and wonderful souls at their dinner table. Their home in Brooklyn was filled with people, intense feelings, major difficulties, a good deal of craziness, and also love. At its best, it was "uproarious," as their nieces described it, and at its worst, an "ordeal," as Ed noted once. However, both despite and because of their parents, Gerri and Ed's children all came out on the other side. Along the way, Gerri taught them a very important principle—family is boundless and there is always room to add a few more.

The 1990s and early 2000s brought Gerri both great fortune and tragedy. The child she had at the age of 19, Anna, contacted her—“our first baby,” as Gerri’s mother put it. Neither turned back. From that time forward, Anna was one of the kids, along with all the others. The total number of children in the Grant-Hansen clan now reached eight. Gerri also acquired a most excellent son-in-law and two beautiful granddaughters, her very first.

But in 2001 at the age of 60, Gerri’s husband suffered a debilitating stroke that left him paralyzed on one side of his body. She spent the next two decades caring for him. The daily needs were constant, the stresses endless. In a state of panic herself, she frequently yelled at him to “Stop panicking!”

And yet, they managed. More grandchildren appeared. They looked after them. They moved back and forth across the country. They roamed the world. Gerri traveled with her daughter Anna to Kenya, where she saw for the first time in three decades the man who stole her teenage heart. She and Ed together toured Italy, Spain, Greece, Chile, France, England, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Argentina, Russia, the Caribbean, the Panama Canal, and elsewhere. They went down a river with the Chilean national rafting team, nearly fell into a Venetian canal, and were attacked by penguins. Whether out of an indomitable spirit or a large dose of foolishness, Gerri planned the next trip.

In 2021, Ed died. The absence of the man she loved, “my person” as she described him, was very hard. She managed to the best of her ability. Through the loneliness, she still enjoyed visits with friends and family, including her last grandchild, Julius. He brought her a lot of joy.

In 2023, Gerri was diagnosed with a form of dementia, which she resisted as long as possible. She rallied for a final trip to the East Coast in October of last year to see her son Zeke get married and welcome yet another marvelous person into the Grant-Hansen clan. It made her very happy. Ultimately, however, Gerri’s body gave way to disease, and she died peacefully, surrounded by her family and friends. She never lost her long-term memory and knew to the very end the names, faces, and voices of all those she held fast to her heart.

Gerri will be remembered as an exceedingly intelligent and sharp woman who let very little past her. She was dogged in her views. She was an egalitarian who believed that all people were equal and that inequalities were the result of society, not anyone’s personal attributes. She was distinguished by extraordinary depth of feeling, albeit not always rational. She was, to say the least, tough on her kids. But to her family, she was devoted. To her friends, she was loyal. She loved and was loved. She was unforgettable.

Gerri is survived by her children, Anna, Peter, Juliana, Andrea “Segunda”, Zeke, Gregory, Andrea “Primera,” and Cecilia, as well as twelve grandchildren—Arielle, Ashley, Ned, Molly, Lindley, Julius, Niccolo, Sophie, Kylis, Eli, Chloe, and Sydney—her sister Jackie, and her two nieces, Jenny and Debbie. Max the dog also remains, faithful as ever.

Gerri would have been very happy if anyone wishing to give a donation in her honor would contribute to the Rosenberg Fund for Children (www.rfc.org).