

Janice Lorraine (Defenbaugh) Miller

June 11, 1942 ~ October 23, 2020

Janice Lorraine (Defenbaugh) Miller passed away on October 23rd suddenly but peacefully in her favorite chair. While family and friends are shocked and saddened to miss the many more years they had expected with her, they know she didn't want the decline and pain experienced in her mother's later years. She was found by loving neighbors and many escorted her to the mortuary van that night. The attentive care of this close-knit community let her stay in Salt Lake City longer than she could have without them.

Jan was a force of nature and always found a way to get things done. Born into difficult circumstances, she took the quiet tenacity of her mother and hard-edged grit from her father to fuel her academic achievement in high school and on through a double major in English and in history at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. The first in her family (and the only one of 32 cousins in her generation) to attend a four-year college, she worked at the Streator, IL glass factory in summers to put herself through school. She used her wits and created her own path.

She married Mark L. Miller in 1964; they moved from Illinois to Maryland, Iowa, and Pennsylvania before settling in SLC in 1974. She found the Western vistas and geology fascinating, and took many many family car trips to see the beauty of the Western National Parks and across the country to visit relatives in Illinois. She delighted in the details of life, and never passed an informational placard without reading it, in its entirety.

When her 11 year old gifted elder daughter was told not to ask questions in school because she was "taking time away from the boys," Jan sought out an alternative and helped found the Open Classroom parent cooperative charter program where all children were nurtured in their strengths and skills. She continued co-oping there half a day every week for six more years for her younger daughter, who would have climbed the walls if asked to sit at a desk but thrived in this environment. After her 1979 divorce, it was up to Jan to continue to expand her daughters' enrichment opportunities while increasing her work hours, allowing her children to experience things Jan saw as vital to their development.

Jan found peace and activist drive from her faith and was a founding member of the Salt Lake Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) when she arrived in 1974. She was an active member for over 30 years, serving in local, regional, national and international Quaker organizations. She found there a community of action, as well as forming many deep friendships which remained strong for the rest of her life. Jan was involved in nuclear weapons protests and the Sanctuary Movement, and helped orchestrate the congregation's first gay marriage there in 1991. She led by example to her children and to others, to stand for what is right.

Governor Scott Matheson appointed Jan to the Air Conservation Committee in 1979, where she served until 1995, building in Jan a passion for air quality that eventually became her career. She earned a Master of Public Administration in 1985 while working at the University of Utah's Institute of Government. Her specialty was training

officials in municipal governments across Utah on funding for capital improvements and other financial matters. She later worked as Rules Coordinator for the Utah Division of Environmental Quality, Dept of Air Quality and served on the Grand Canyon Visibility Commission. She was always working in the background to make a practical plan come forth to make a difference in her greater community.

In her retirement Jan found rest and creativity in knitting and quilting and formed a tight circle of friends sharing their stories and their projects. She joined the Red Hat Society, bringing out her playful side. She cared for her mother and stayed connected to her grandson, nieces and nephew, and grand nieces. She voraciously consumed the news and kept her circle very informed in her detailed and opinionated way, which many loved and some merely tolerated. When asked how she felt, Jan could articulate that she was happy and felt lucky to have come to this point where she could afford small luxuries and could still be physically independent. She intentionally put down her striving and enjoyed these last years of her life. May we all be so lucky.

She is preceded in death by her father Francis Hart Defenbaugh, mother Elvira Irene (Brennan) Defenbaugh Piepho, step father Earnest "Pete" Piepho, and brother John Harry Defenbaugh. She is survived by her daughters Jennifer (Aslam) Mukhtiar and Jessica (Zarah) Miller, her grandson Zane Carl Mukhtiar, her brother Daniel K. Defenbaugh, nephew Brett, nieces Trish and Sarah, and grandnieces Kourtney and Blakely. She is also survived by her closest chosen family, the Braxtons, with whom she shared 45 years of holidays, June birthday parties, and family dinners: Lowell, Jean, Nina, David, Elana, Tobias, and Lydia. Her family is overwhelmed by the support of all of her friends from her wide variety of communities.

While in-person services will be postponed until the COVID-19 pandemic allows hugging again, grieving together is important. Please visit the following site and join in collective grief action there sometime soon.
https://memories.net/timeline/janice-miller-95660

Jan’s daughters will spread her ashes privately in places of meaning to her. In lieu of flowers please consider a donation to your local food bank or Doctors Without Borders.