



Martha Karoff

May 28, 1936 - September 3, 2015

Martha Conant Karoff died peacefully and with grace at her home in Santa Barbara, CA, on September 3, 2015, at the age of 79. Martha was supported during an extended period of declining health by the love of her family – seventeen strong – and her many, many friends in Santa Barbara, in West Newton and Boston, MA, and beyond. Martha was born in Keene, New Hampshire to Kenneth G. Conant and Mary Ellen Hartnett Conant. Martha graduated with honors from Keene High School and attended Brandeis University ('58), where she met and married her husband of 58 years, Peter Karoff, who survives her.

Martha was the first woman president of the Neighborhood Club in West Newton, and the founding board chair of New Repertory Theatre in Watertown MA. In 2014, to celebrate its 30th anniversary, New Rep established the Karoff Award for Lifelong Leadership, with Martha as its first recipient. Part of her New Rep legacy was its first-ever fundraiser, with a scene from A.R. Gurney's *The Dining Room*, staged around Martha's dining room table. Martha was known as the "unofficial Mayor" of West Newton Hill, and served on the board of the All Newton Music School, and the New Arts Center. In Santa Barbara, Martha was a member of the CAMA Woman's Board and Social Venture Partners. She participated over many years in several spirited book and bridge clubs on both the East and West coasts.

For Martha, family was everything, and gatherings over Christmas and Thanksgiving – often with 30 + at the table – along with years of glorious summers on Martha's Vineyard and Chappaquiddick, made for great joy and enduring memories. At one especially memorable night in 1985, Martha was given a surprise party celebrating her 100 Years of Motherhood. Other standouts were annual Halloween parties in West Newton, where, for forty years, Martha and Peter served popcorn and cider to what grew to more than 700 trick-or-treaters. She will always be remembered by her children and grandchildren for demanding, but never getting, Christmas lists before Halloween.

Martha had a remarkable authenticity as a person who cared, listened to others, and was an empathetic and gifted friend, leader and mentor. She will be deeply missed by Peter, her daughters Deborah Ann Karoff of Santa Barbara, CA, Lorinda Karoff of Brooklyn, NY,

Rebecca Karoff of Madison, WI, and son Thomas Michael Karoff of Armonk, NY, and their devoted spouses, Anna DiStefano, Jeffrey Younger, Brad Wolbert, and Pamela Furtsch. Martha was in awe of the accomplishments of her children, and immensely proud of her seven talented grandchildren ranging in age from 7 to 23: Lauren, Sarah, and Devon, Sophie and Jacob and Emma and Kaeli. Martha also leaves behind her brother- and sister-in-law, Richard M. Karoff and Sandra Manzella, along with nephews, and their wives and children, and a sister, Betsy Conant Drouin and brother-in-law Raymond Drouin, and their children.

She dearly loved her family, her home, her community, art, music, wooden jigsaw puzzles, and knitting gorgeous sweaters. Most of all she loved her life with her soul mate of 58 years, Peter.

We wish you, we wish you a merry, merry ... life
With hue and cry and joy, the floribunda of family
And all those roses that tell of being and loving a wife.

A celebration of Martha's life will be held on Saturday, October 17, 2015, in Santa Barbara, and on Saturday, November 21 in West Newton. Details are listed below.

Contributions in her honor may be made to:

Foodbank of Santa Barbara County
1525 State Street, Suite 100
Santa Barbara, CA 93101

New Repertory Theatre
200 Dexter Avenue
Watertown, MA 02472

Rosie's Place
888 Harrison Ave
Boston, MA 02118

Previous Events

Celebration of Life - Followed by Reception

OCT **17**. 11:00 AM (PT)

La Cumbre Country Club
4015 Via Laguna
Santa Barbara, CA 93110

Celebration of Life - Followed by Reception

NOV **21**. 11:00 AM (ET)

First Unitarian Society in Newton
1326 Washington Street
West Newton, MA 02465

Tribute Wall

BH

“ Bev and I met Marty and Peter soon after they moved into our neighborhood in SB, as we already knew Deb and Anna. Once again, it was fascinating and joyful to meet the parents of fine people one knows, noting ways the "life fruit" is connected to the "life tree".

An aspect of Marty we particularly celebrate was her personal presence and total responsiveness when talking/listening with others. All else in the world -- in those moments -- was secondary. That wonderful trait is so rare, in our increasingly noisy, complex social lives. Here's to continuation of that sense in the family.
Love, Bev and Bruce Hanna

Bev and Bruce Hanna - October 17, 2015 at 12:32 PM

JG

“ Our fond memories of Marty and Peter, for they were inseparable from our perspective, are centered on shared events and dinners. We began a somewhat random practice of sharing dinner together at Sly's in Carpenteria, with cocktails, appetizers, entrees, desserts, and after dinner drinks... washed down with a good bottle of wine. These dinners seemed to pass with a wink of the eye, as time often does when you are with your favorite friends, solving the world's problems, or determining what adventure we're going to explore next. There will always be a seat at our table for Marty and Peter, Peter in person and Marty in spirit! Thank you both for being part of our lives!

John Glanville - October 12, 2015 at 11:08 PM

LF

“ We had so many truly delightful childhood experiences with Marty as a warm, merry, loving presence smiling over us all. I particularly remember the Thanksgiving dinners we had with the Karoff clan, running around in the cold, brisk air and coming in and seeing Marty's sparkling smile, her lovely, laughing eyes, the table covered with beautiful dishes, the cheer of the adults, and everything made so welcoming and so festive and so celebratory. dear Marty! We are so lucky to have grown up with her in our lives!
Lesley Finlayson

lesley finlayson - October 07, 2015 at 08:48 PM

AR

“ Knowing your amazing daughter, Deb, tells me what a wonderful mother and example you were for your children and grandchildren. Reading these memories tells me what a wonderful friend and presence you were for others.
Angeli Ruiz

Angeli Ruiz - October 05, 2015 at 11:02 AM

PB

“ We met Marty and Peter when they were still living in West Newton and visited Santa Barbara. We were privileged to enjoy some good times and dinners with them and friends after they moved here. It was quality time which we remember with joy and fondness.
We send our condolences to Peter, daughter Deborah Ann Karoff and Anna DiStefano and the extended family on the loss of a very special lady.

Paul and Virginia Barrett

Paul and Virginia Barrett - September 28, 2015 at 09:16 PM

AB

“ Peter, Melora and I were so sorry to hear of Marty's passing. She (and you) were stalwarts of the West Newton Hill community. "Unofficial mayor" is the right description. She will live on in our hearts. And through the popcorn machine that still goes strong every Halloween. Our condolences.

Andrew & Melora

Andrew Balson - September 24, 2015 at 08:01 PM

CM

“ Marty warmed our hearts with her sense of humor, intellect, and engaging manner. It was always a delightful surprise to find her at a social event and have a chance to talk with her at length. Marty and Peter were a couple that worked so well together as well as “a la carte.” We extend our most sincere condolences to Peter and family. Marty will always be an inspiring remembrance for us.

Charles McClintock and Carol Wilburn

Charles McClintock - September 20, 2015 at 03:51 PM

BW

“ Having learned of cousin Martha's passing would like to express our condolences to her family My wife Dolly Stalbird graduated with her in 1954 and was a friend in school We had lost touch all these years but happy she had such a wonderful caring life and family
Bruce Conant Wright

Bruce Conant Wright - September 20, 2015 at 12:08 PM



“ Having loss touch with cousin Marty after high school, I am so glad to know what a joyous life she enjoyed, with so many friends and loving family bringing so much happiness to each other. Thanks to you all for your part in her life.

Peter Wright - September 17, 2015 at 07:26 PM

PK

“ Marty's magnetic personality made us feel we were the only ones in the room when we spoke together. Our deepest sympathies to Peter and family. Our warmest thoughts are with you.
Paul and Lisa Karofsky

PAUL I KAROFSKY - September 17, 2015 at 08:48 AM

AF

“ I recall Marty engaged in a game of Bridge with a group at the Santa Barbara Yacht Club. It was a pure delight to meet her and to share my time with her and Peter -- role models for all of us.

Anita Perez Ferguson - September 17, 2015 at 01:46 AM

CG

“ Marty: always delighted to see you. Avid reader, great opinions. Proud of children and grandchildren. Superb listener! Pretty colors and fabrics, classy fashion sense. Hearty laughter, usually over dinner! Enjoyed fine dining. Kind and gracious and accepting of all. I can't quite believe she's gone. I'll miss Marty.

Cheri Gurse - September 17, 2015 at 12:38 AM

PK

“ Peter Karoff is following this tribute.

Peter Karoff - September 16, 2015 at 07:18 PM

TG

“ *May the wonderful memories of Marty provide you comfort at this time. She was a very special woman who lit up the room with her kind, gentle spirit. She always made you feel welcome and special. My thoughts are with you all.*



Tanya Gonzales - September 16, 2015 at 11:43 AM