

**A Student-Centered (and Personal) Remembrance
of Mary Alyce Pearson
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David, Matthew, and Susan asked me to speak about Mary Alyce on behalf of David's graduate students over the nearly five decades of his career. So, I started the composing process by sending a message to a few students from each decade. What I received in return was an outpouring of expressions of admiration and gratitude--and deep sadness at the loss of this incredible person.

Many former graduate students recalled Mary Alyce's warmth and graciousness in welcoming each successive generation of new doctoral students. Terry Rogers, a graduate student during David and Mary Alyce's years at University of Illinois, recalled Mary Alyce as "remarkable." Terry wrote, "Mary Alyce was so intelligent, warm, active, engaged, and was a fabulous mother to two smart, talented, curious, loving and wonderful children. And she still had time and space to be welcoming to the swarm of graduate students and colleagues that came through....I hope she knew how much...she helped to make our time in Champaign-Urbana some of the best years of our lives."

Terry and many former graduate students recalled the occasions when the Pearsons welcomed graduate students into their home for holidays, parties, and special events. Kate Frankel, a UC-Berkeley doctoral student in the last decade, commented, "Mary Alyce and David threw the best parties." Kate and Jaran Shin, also from UC-Berkeley, recalled how Mary Alyce welcomed students at these events and, Jaran recalled, "showed her deepest interests in our studies and research. I will remember her generosity, kindness, and smiles."

Several former students, including, Mary McVee, a doctoral student at Michigan State University, recalled being in awe of Mary Alyce. Mary wrote, "there was a passion in the way that Mary Alyce lived out her life that I deeply admired. As a woman, she struck me as centered and grounded. And, over the years, as I have navigated academia while raising three children, I have often thought of Mary Alyce."

Former students who had not seen Mary Alyce for decades remembered her with great clarity. Beth Marr, a student from the 1970's at Minnesota, described Mary Alyce as "a beautiful woman both inside and out...She embraced life fully, taking an interest in everyone and everything." Alan Nielsen, a graduate student from the same era, recalled Mary Alyce's "elegance, quick mind and complete attention whenever we talked together."

Many former graduate students described how their relationships with Mary Alyce and David continued even after they had taken jobs far away. Joan Hughes, an MSU graduate, recalled how easily Mary Alyce connected with her new family at her wedding: "There's nothing better than seeing loved ones come together." Loukia Sarroub recounted a story about how, while she was a

visiting professor in the Bay Area, she and Mary Alyce marched together for peace and against the war in Iraq and shared gyro sandwiches after the march.

People told stories of adventure. Tom Nicholson remembered a road trip in New Zealand to visit the Rotorua hot springs and the glowworms at Waitomo Caves. And they recalled stories of misadventure. Taffy Raphael recalled the time they moved a 200 lb. cement bird bath from Taffy's patio to the Pearson's home in East Lansing.

Taffy talked about how what began as a relationship through David became a dear friendship with Mary Alyce. She captured a shared sentiment when she wrote, "writing this has been hard, saying this final good-bye...Nothing really could capture all I wanted to say."

I want to add my own reflections on Mary Alyce who I too considered a dear, dear friend.

Literature is filled with stories of friendships that were forged in the fires of shared experience. My friendship with Mary Alyce was formed through just such a trial.

I knew Mary Alyce in East Lansing, Michigan, where I did my doctorate. But I really got to know her after David took the position at UC-Berkeley, and Carolyn Jaynes and I moved to Berkeley to continue to work on David's research projects while we wrote our dissertations. I think of the real beginning of my friendship with Mary Alyce as the Heroic Cat Relocation Adventure of 2001. Mary Alyce and David had three cats (Champaign, Urbana, and Emmanuel) who needed to be moved by plane from Michigan to Berkeley. Since the airline had a policy that there had to be one human for each cat, I went along for the trip as the third human and Champaign's guardian.

The airline had additional policies about where the cats could be seated—one in first class and two in coach. I can't recall how Mary Alyce and I drew the short straws that day, but, while David was comfortably ensconced in first class with their peaceful Maine Coon, Emmanuel—who was apparently born to fly—Mary Alyce and I were in coach contending with two cats, one of which was having none of it. Champaign was vocal in her opposition to the journey, much to the dismay of passengers around us.

Mary Alyce and I coped with Champaign's plaintive cries, in part, by giving voice to Champaign's concerns:

Meow. I hate to fly.

Meow. Why does Emmanuel get to sit in first class?

As I learned that day, giving voices to animals was one of Mary Alyce's special gifts. Whether we were at home with her cats or walking at the dog park, voiced by Mary Alyce, animals would comment aloud about the absurdity of their humans and their places in the social hierarchy and universe.

By the end of the cat relocation journey, we were a little frazzled—and perhaps a little tipsy—and our friendship was formed.

In the years that followed, I had many, much more pleasant, adventures with Mary Alyce and David—exploring the museums of central Europe, on safari in South Africa, as co-geothermal explorers in New Zealand. Traveling with Mary Alyce was a joy for so many reasons—her breadth of knowledge, sense of adventure, curiosity, artistic eye—and it was like having a professional photographer along to document these journeys.

Academics like me pride ourselves on knowing a lot about a little. But the breadth of Mary Alyce’s knowledge and engagement with the world was breathtaking. Every conversation with Mary Alyce was a learning experience.

So, although I treasure my memories of our grand adventures, my favorite times with Mary Alyce were spent in the kitchen at 851 Euclid where we would often cook dinner together on the weekends. There, I came to know Mary Alyce as a kind of soul sister: a fellow vegetarian, political junkie, animal lover, feminist, and tormented Catholic—who knew more about the history and doctrine of the church after a few years as a Catholic than I did after a lifetime and 16 years of Catholic school.

Mary Alyce was a serious woman, seeing and struggling against injustice throughout her life, devoted to family, friends, and her animals. But she was also a marvelously silly person who never took herself—or any of us—all that seriously.

She was quick to laugh, quick to dance, quick to sing.

Neither of us had a particularly great singing voice, but we nevertheless often sang show tunes while we cooked. And, we could do a rousing version of “Oklahoma!” as we chopped vegetables. I will never forget those times together.

I am grateful to Mary Alyce for so many things, but particularly the way she always positioned herself as my ally. Whether I was making a decision about a challenging professional situation or trying to set a course of treatment when my beloved dog had cancer, Mary Alyce was always in my corner. She constantly reassured me that I was making the right decisions when there really were no right decisions.

That’s the thing about Mary Alyce: she always saw the best versions of the people she cared about and always stood with them.

To me, Mary Alyce’s life was just what a life should be –commitment to family, strong bonds with friends, devotion to community expressed through service, wide ranging interests and talents cultivated, and a worthwhile career. But her life was too short. And her passing leaves a huge vacuum.

Mary Alyce: A Remembrance from Gina Cervetti

I will remember Mary Alyce as one of the coolest people I have ever known. Without her, the universe is a little less interesting.