

# REMEMBRANCES

Julie Gordon Shearer

March 20, 1940 ~ August 24, 2022



# Memorial Concert

## Freight and Salvage

3pm February 5th 2023

## PROGRAM

Welcome - Kyle Pesonen

*Air for Alan* - Alan Shearer violin & Joe Herbert cello

*River* - Libby McClaren & Robin Flower

*Five Good Things* - Libby McClaren & Robin Flower

*Light As Song* - Jenna Mammina & Friends

Amy Pesonen-Falzon

*Alligator Promenade* - Tammy Hall

*Pretty Lies* - Nicolas Bearde with Tammy Hall

Marty Barklay

*Home Brew* - Ellen Hoffman & Anna de Leon

Russ Ellis

*From Where I Stand* - Solas Burke-Lalgee soloist & Ellen Hoffman piano

*Love Can Build a Bridge* - Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir,

Director Terrance Kelly

Thanks to the musicians for their will and shedding in support of this event.  
Thanks to The Freight for their easy cooperation. Thanks to Sibila Savage for her vision. Thanks to my daughter, Zoe, for everything!

## A Message from Our Master of Ceremonies

Julie Gordon Shearer – If you knew her, or her in her various political battles, she seemed fearless. Fear was a subject my mother and I discussed often. At first, she was amazed at my ability to climb up on stage and perform, albeit hidden behind a shield of drums. Fear, she said, can be crippling, inhibiting, but finding the courage to face it, or at least keep it in check is life changing. She loved music. Loved, loved, loved it – but the thought of having to perform kept her off the stage. However, as my mother often pointed out, overcoming your fear is where many of life’s greatest joys spring from. So, in typical Julie fashion, when she couldn’t defeat it head-on, my mother simply found another way, she wrote music for others to perform.

What my mother found was a children’s musical theater, walking distance from her forever-home in Berkeley, the Julia Morgan Theater. Mom quickly signed my sister Amy and me up for it, all of it. My sister flourished, I floundered. Yet Mom was always there, sometimes almost inappropriately so, as close as she could be to the stage, reveling in the music. I couldn’t sing to save my life, but Amy, my sister, could. Mom became so infatuated with musical theater that she started writing her own plays, her own musicals, but in her usual inclusive way, always kept in mind parts for kids like me that couldn’t sing.

The people at Julia Morgan, were very excited to have an original children’s theatrical play and they put Mom in touch with another local fledgling playwright. Together they wrote The Boy From New York City. Amy, was fortunate enough to be a member or the chorus for that first production. Luckily, I was too old to perform in it and instead was gifted with the magical experience of sitting next to my mother, beaming brighter than any of the stage lights, front and center as she watched her words and music come to life.

While Mom may have started writing music for children, including her amazing adaptation of the classic children’s book, Momma Don’t Allow, most of the music in today’s program is from her later repertoire, when she really hit her stride. Mom always wrote to her circumstance, and to acknowledge those around her. She wrote elegies, to departed friends understanding that in music we are immortal. She also wrote to acknowledge those she loved, with lullaby’s penned to each new addition to the family. For Julie, music was a way of letting us know she was always thinking of us. And for us, as we listen to her music, it becomes a way of remembering Julie Gordon Shearer and letting her know we will always be thinking of her.

- Kyle Pesonen

## Julie Shearer

March 20, 1940 ~ August 24, 2022

Julie Gordon Shearer cooed “Boo gee boo” when things were good, and she crooned “Bye dee bye” when parting. She loved her musical ear worms, often her own songs. She loved horses from a young age, when she’d take long bus rides for a job cleaning someone’s stable; in exchange, the owner would let her ride. She was a Minnesota girl who never let go of her high school group, The Kenwood Girls. She blossomed in California. She emanated warmth and openness. She maintained an ongoing unease about the behavior of large organizations, including her alma mater and her employer. She adored her family and music and animals and the world. She died last August of complications from type one diabetes. She was 82.

Julie was born March 20, 1940, to Alan McDougal Shearer and Virginia Gordon, joining her older sister, Stephanie, and later her younger brother, Alan, Jr. Theirs was a lively home bursting with song. Julie fell in love with musicals — why couldn’t life be more like Oklahoma? — though the terror of piano recitals put her off performing. She also discovered the joy of independence, living with a friend during her last year of high school when work took her parents to California. She went on to college at Stanford, where she helped pay her way with a job in a kitchen; it opened her eyes to a different side of the world. She majored in political science and kept a pet rat in her dorm room.

After graduation, Julie worked for the Mill Valley Record, where she interviewed — and ultimately married — the environmental activist David Pesonen. They had two children, Kyle and Amy (her Duckie Daddles), both of whom survive her, and pursued their years-long and successful fight against the Bodega Head nuclear power plant. In battle Julie was tenacious and polite.

After Bodega, she turned her sights on Berkeley’s Alta Bates Hospital, which was secretly expanding into her neighborhood. Julie became the leader of the Bateman Neighborhood Association, fought the hospital for two decades and ultimately reluctantly agreed to a 99-year agreement with the city to limit its expansion. She fought not with anger but joy. At one point she helped find funding for some 50 sycamores in the neighborhood. Decades later, the trees are a living monument to Julie’s love for her community. She also led the fight for traffic-reducing barriers and residential-area parking permits in Berkeley.

From 1978 until her retirement in 1994, Julie worked as an interviewer at U. C. Berkeley’s Regional Oral History Office of the Bancroft Library. It was while working at there that she again crossed paths with William Russell [Russ] Ellis, Jr. (Turned out they had met many years earlier at Cazadero Music Camp). They were different in personality and came from very different worlds, but they fit. They delighted each other, made each other giggle and sing; they opened each other up and opened their worlds to each another. (A minor accomplishment: She couldn’t utter the word “fart.” Russ made a point of saying it frequently. After five or six years, she came around).

Among Russ’s early memories of her fiercely independent spirit: a picnic on the St. Croix River, in which Julie’s uncle dared her to jump from a nearby train trestle to the water below, some 40 feet. She made her way to the bridge, walked to the edge and promptly jumped, no hesitation. She sustained a bloody nose, ripped her bathing suit and swam like an otter. Russ was profoundly impressed.

They were married in 1992. Theirs became a lively, musical home. Something else had happened during that summer at Cazadero: Music exploded back into Julie’s life. She went on to become a founding member of the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir and a co-participant in Rhythmic Concepts, Inc., a nonprofit dedicated to saving Caz’s jazz program. Most of all, she became a prolific songwriter over the next 40 years, producing several albums and a children’s musical, “Mama Don’t Allow,” based on the book by Thatcher Hurd. She would often work late into the night on a single stubborn line. When she’d finally crack it, she never wrote it down; her music lived in her head. Much later, after a debilitating stroke, she feared she’d lost that mental catalogue. One, day out of nowhere, she turned to Russ and said “I found it. It’s in a different place.”

Her deep interest in other people never vanished either. It had been a constant all her life, even the most reticent no match for her affectionate curiosity. At one point, Russ’s stepmother had reluctantly agreed to have Julie conduct an oral history. The two were chatting one day when Russ heard a shout from the other room.

“Russ Jr!”

“What’s up mom?”

“Am I supposed to say everything?”

In her later years, with diminished sight and hearing, beset by creeping dementia, her world diminished, she and Russ took comfort in nature. They’d listen to music, watch the news, walk along the bay, greet the sunset in their beloved backyard. Julie Shearer was gentle, loving and humane. She loved dogs, photography, Tin Pan Alley.





She was devoted to her family, devoted to her friends. She lit up every room and is deeply missed.

Boo gee boo, Ms. Doilie.  
Bye dee bye.



Julie and Alan with baby chicks.



At the age of 6, Julie decided she would not be going to heaven after being informed that dogs were not allowed there.





## Remembering Julie Shearer, oral historian

Julie Gordon Shearer, an esteemed former colleague from the days when the Oral History Center was known as the Regional Oral History Office, passed away in August 2022.

Julie joined the ROHO staff in 1978, as the office was ramping up its second large-scale project documenting California's political leadership. Having completed a comprehensive project on California governance during the years of Earl Warren's gubernatorial administration, the office was now beginning to document the Goodwin Knight and Edmund "Pat" Brown administrations. Julie brought to the project an academic background in political science, relevant work experience as a journalist for the Mill Valley Record and as editor at UC's Agricultural Extension, as well as personal experience as an environmental activist, most notably in the battle to prevent the building of a nuclear power plant at Bodega Head.

Julie's interview subjects on the Knight-Brown project illustrate the breadth of the project's scope, as well as Julie's skill in connecting with diverse narrators. Her lengthy interview with Bernice Layne Brown focused on life in the governor's mansion and the supporting role played by political spouses at the time, but Julie's careful coaxing also elicited Mrs. Brown's insights on the personal impacts of the governor's difficult decisions, as in the Caryl Chessman capital punishment case. Others she interviewed included former Los Angeles Mayor Sam Yorty, who had opposed Pat Brown in the 1966 Democratic Party primary, and Helen Nelson, a pioneering consumer advocate and Brown's appointee as California's first Consumer Counsel.

In the early 1980s, ROHO's political team launched its next major project, interviewing key figures in the Ronald Reagan gubernatorial administration, along with legislative leaders,



political opponents, and community activists. Julie contributed numerous interviews to the Reagan project, delving into issues as broad as parent advocacy for children with intellectual disabilities, criminal justice issues, and tax reduction efforts of the Reagan governor's office.

Following completion of the Reagan project, Julie was on the ROHO team for the California State Archives State Government Oral History program, interviewing several legislators and agency administrators.

In the summer of 1985, Julie had a leading role in an innovative oral history project. Berkeley Chancellor Michael Heyman asked ROHO to conduct interviews examining how the campus managed the recent student protests demanding the university's divestment from the South African apartheid regime. Sixteen interviews were conducted with campus officials and police officers, intended not only for the historical record but also for current and future campus administrators tasked with managing freedom of speech and assembly issues. The interviews were for internal use until their publication in 2013 as *Six Weeks in Spring: Managing Protest at a Public University*.

Highlights of Julie's contributions in the 1990s include two gems: an extensive, two-volume oral history with Sidney Roger, *A Liberal Journalist on the Air and on the Waterfront: Labor and Political Issues, 1932–1990*; and a deep dive into the lives of S.I. Hayakawa and his wife, Margedant, in *From Semantics to the U.S. Senate, ETC., ETC.* Hayakawa was a noted semanticist, a controversial president of San Francisco State College during a turbulent period of Vietnam War protests, and a one-term U.S. Senator from California.

After more than two decades with ROHO, Julie retired, turning her attention to her first love, music performance and composition. Julie Gordon Shearer will be remembered not only for her many contributions to the oral history archive, but also for her remarkable personal qualities, her openness and joy in life, her gift for friendship, and her warm relationships with her interviewees as well as ROHO colleagues.

By Ann Lage

Oral history interviewer (retired)

November 2022



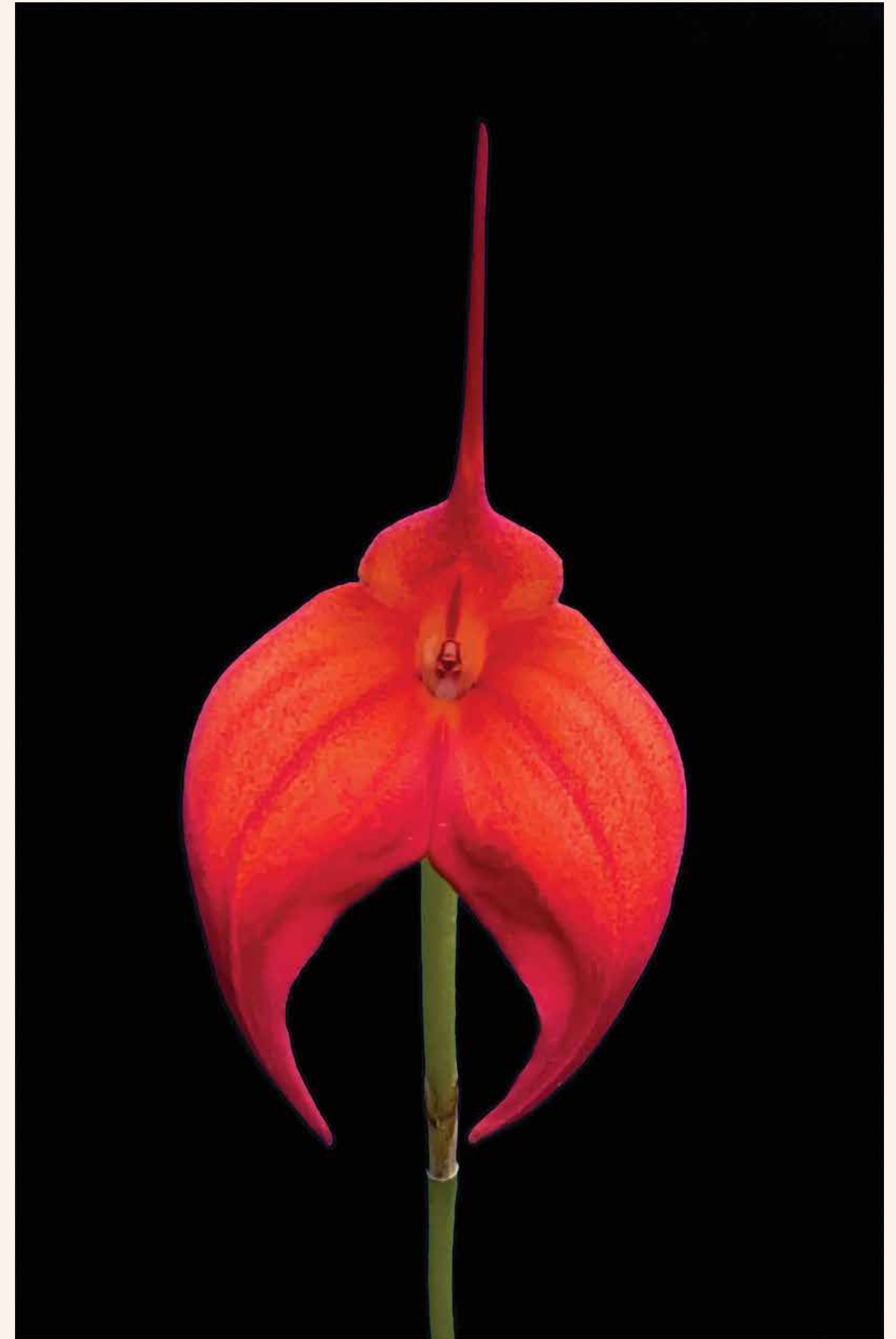
It's an honor to remember our friend and neighbor Julie Shearer by naming an orchid hybrid I've created. The creation of a new, unique orchid hybrid is a risky challenge for great shape, vivid color, and vigor, a goal not easily attained. It takes about five years from making a cross until it blooms.

Masdevallia Julie Shearer is a rare, cool growing, high elevation Andean orchid made within a neotropical genus suitable for outdoor culture in Berkeley. It is worthy of her memory.

The naming of an orchid follows strict guidelines as specified by the international naming authority, The Register of Orchids of the Royal Horticultural Society, England. It is a process that dates back more than a century. After Julie's passing, I asked Russ if Julie had a favorite color. He told me her favorite color was orange. As it happened, I was blooming out a new strain of remarkable seedlings, an orange hybrid and decided it would be the perfect match to honor Julie.

The registration certificate for Masdevallia Julie Shearer is appended. A plant has been gifted to Russ for his garden.

Fond memories,  
John Leathers







## REMEMBRANCES

Hello everybody. My name is Kathleen Thompson and I'm here to share a few memories of my friend, Julie Gordon Shearer.

I have divided my memories into three chapters:

Chapter one is entitled Rough Riders in the Sky: Over the Lake of The Isles skating rink.

We used to go to the hockey rink, which we were permitted – I'm sure reluctantly – to inhabit after the star hokey players had vacated the premises. We will never forget those beautiful moonlit nights.

Chapter two is entitled The Mark Bestowed on Me: Courtesy of On the Waterfront Knife Fight.

Julie and I used to have mock fights with pretend swords. Well, her weapon one night was a lead pencil, with which she proceeded to wound my left hand. The mark thereof is still with me. It is a noticeably lead mark in one of the veins on my left hand. I shall carry that proudly to my grave as a memory of our beloved fights at my home on the range.

Chapter three is called Hollywood Makeover, because this is something of which only Julie could have conceived.

She was requested to send photographs to a "very dear friend" in New Haven, Connecticut. Well, she posed herself with one leg on a chair or a footstool, barelegged. Very comely. There was nothing wrong with her real leg, but she had doctored her real leg, to the point where it would not have been recognizable by anyone who didn't know what to look for. So, all of you now must turn to that picture, find the doctoring that Julie conceived of, and wish her well.





Now, if music be the food of love, play on, dear Julie. We shall never forget. We shall always remember. We all love you. Thank you for being with us for the time that you were. Love to you, Julie dear.

(All of the above, with thanks and apologies to Winston Churchill and Miss Charlotte Westby, our English teacher at West High School).

Addendum: Julie happened to have a room in my house and the whole house available to her for the second half of our senior year at West High. Now, when she moved in, she brought one important item with her. It was not a dress or skirt. It was her own monogrammed English saddle that found its home on a sawhorse in my brother's bedroom. I loved that saddle. I don't know what happened to it. May it rest in peace.

- Kathy Thompson (for The Kenwood Girls. Phone call transcribed by R. Ellis)



The Kenwood Girls

I remember all of the Kenwood Girls met up in Minneapolis (all of us senior citizens) for a West High School class reunion. But mainly to be with each other.

There were seven of us then. We were all having breakfast together when Julie became ill. Daley Rennebohm Mayer and I took her to the hospital. We stayed with her in the Emergency Room.

We were struck by her grace, courage, and kindness. Those qualities were always part of her essence.

- Susie Goldstein Bob



When my late husband, Gus Schultz, who was a Lutheran pastor, officiated at funerals I remember he always called on the Oxford English Dictionary. There were several definitions of the word "remember" but he particularly was fond of citing the last definition which was "to put back together again." Through the many wonderful and amazing stories shared here today by all we have put back together again Julie, our beloved friend and neighbor. I am so grateful to have heard many precious tales by everybody who contributed and it helps us to broaden our appreciation and love for Julie. Thank you, everybody.

- Flora Schultz, neighbor and friend of Julie Gordon Shearer for 42 yrs.





Julie with Russ's brother, David Vincent Ellis

Russ, There are some people in one's life whom one has known so long and so well that one doesn't take sufficient time to step back and consider the ways they have enhanced our lives. For me, Julie was such a person. I remember vividly meeting her in 1967, when I was assisting Jessica Mitford on a writing project that entailed legal background. Decca advised me to talk with a law student she knew named David Pesonen. I was invited

to the Pesonens' small bungalow in the shadow of the Hotel Durant, but I have no recollection of David's legal briefing that was the occasion for my visit. What I remember instead is the graciousness of his wife, who opened the door and remained engaged for the entire discussion. She seemed excited to get to know me.

People change of course over time, but that eagerness to participate, that gracious, welcoming presence was the same one I saw when I visited you a few months ago in your back yard. Julie never failed to tell treasured friends how much they meant to her, and I wish I could express in words how much I treasured her and her sunny, welcoming manner. She always opened doors, and she took such great delight in putting together people she thought should know each other.

That graciousness could be perceived as pollyannish. It was anything but. She fully understood the sociopolitical perils that so troubled all of us over the years, but she chose to emphasize the agency we retained. Her attention was on what we can do rather than on what we cannot, and she took the initiative countless times in making our world and our immediate surroundings a better place to be.

I always felt that Julie was in my corner whenever I poked my head above the horizon, and she always made sure that I knew she was there. I can't remember ever meeting her by chance on the street without her appreciative words for whatever venture I was promoting at the time. Nor was it just me. As vital, tireless and far-reaching as her own work was in holding giant institutions like PG&E and Alta Bates accountable, I will always remember her encouragement of others' work.

Berkeley is full of engaged activists preoccupied with the troubles that beset us, but Julie was in a separate category. Throughout the years of organizing and struggle,

she retained a sense of the ways our lives are enhanced -- by music, by community, by creativity, by activities such as the neighborhood caroling she initiated, and above all by family and friends. She shared it all with us, as she had her lovely CDs.

And then Julie enlarged our family by bringing you into it. Her instincts as always were impeccable. It's hard even to remember Julie in the years before "Julie and Russ."

The word I can still hear on Julie's lips, applied to so many of her friends, including lucky me, is "dear" -- "dear Peter" and often "dear heart."

As we reach the years of our greatest physical infirmities, Julie gave us all a model of bravery as she worked to maintain her selfless, independent spirit despite the cruel depredations of her lifelong diabetes. And you, Russ, gave us a model of how to be a loving, supportive and sacrificing partner in daily circumstances that would try any relationship.

One recent occasion stands out in memory as so very characteristic of Julie. Do you remember as I was leaving your house one day, Julie stopped me urgently until she'd had time to find something she'd had for some time and had been meaning to give me? It was a children's book on horses, and Julie had remembered our daughter Stephanie's childhood infatuation with horses, decades ago. She may not have laid eyes on Stephanie in a few years, but she remembered that she wanted Stephanie to have that book. It was so characteristic of the loving graciousness that was the bedrock of her character even in the confusion of her later years.

Another recent memory -- the trouble she went to to support me by coming to the recent opening of my photo exhibit. She had been there to support me for many book readings and parties over the years -- and, a decade or more later, to support Stephanie -- but it was especially apparent to me the effort she mustered to make it to the photo show opening and to try to stay engaged.

Dear Julie, we will miss you. You will always be an important part of our life story. Dear Russ, we take this occasion to thank you for all you did for Julie and still do for the rest of us.

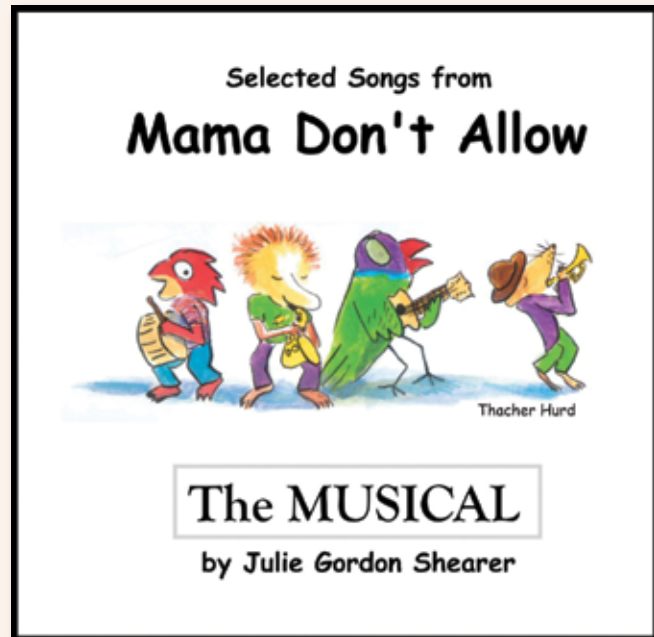
My love to you and to Amy and Kyle and the rest of your family.

- Peter Sussman



Her music, various and memorable, awakens expectation and satisfies it, each song in its way fresh and inevitable and complete in itself. Worshipful or wistful, upbeat or lowdown, after a few hearings it remains in the mind, ready to rekindle for us the joy its author surely felt when it was completed.

Martin Friedman

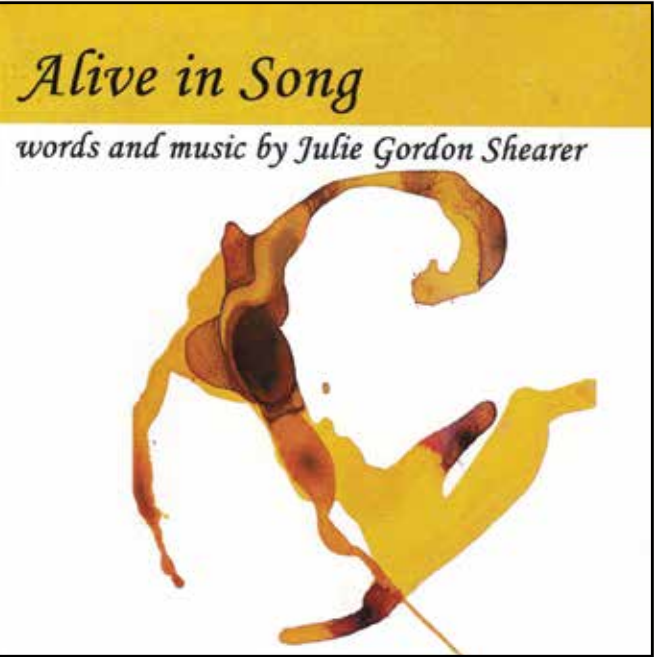


When I hear your tunes, the imagery is vivid. I can picture actors and dancers portraying, on stage, the stories that your songs tell. That's a gift. That's a concert I'd like to see.

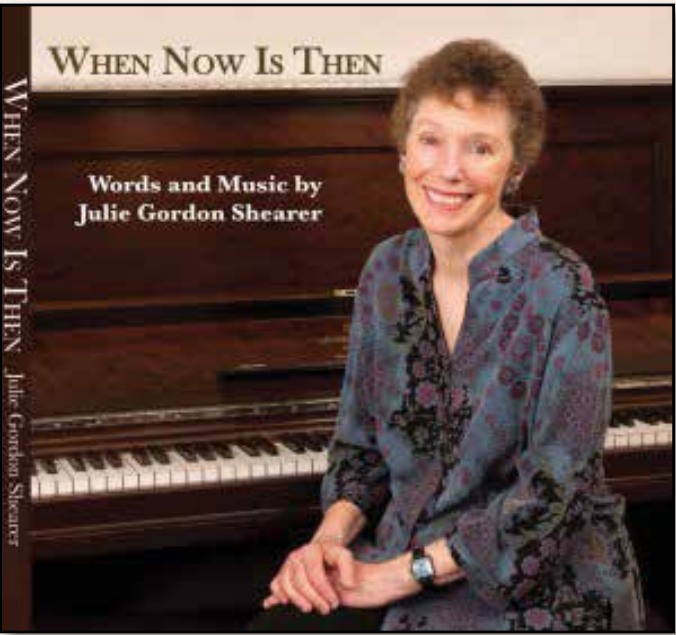
Mal Sharpe

Julie Shearer knows a thing or two about rivers, having in her younger years canoed the rivers of her native Minnesota. In this little anthem the flow of music in its multiple voices is given metaphorical form as a great river. It is a call to all of us to join that river, telling our stories, singing our songs. Julie dedicates "The River" to Robin Flower and Libby McLaren, colleagues in the production of this disk, as "Inspiring artists of traditional American song, and to their extended family of dedicated river keepers" at the Freight and Salvage, Berkeley's celebrated performance space for "traditional music."

Pack Browning

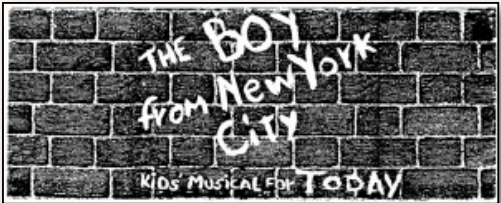


# MUSIC



In these hard times, I must mention the all-important FIVE GOOD THINGS –Julie's valuable reminder to practice gratitude regularly by appreciating five good things every day. After listening to Julie's CD, WHEN NOW IS THEN, I'm putting HER and IT on my list of five.

Melanie Berzon



Enjoy Julie's song, "From Where I Stand"  
Go to <https://juliegordonshearer.bandcamp.com/yum>  
In the white square enter the code on your download card.  
Click the blue square that says Redeem.  
This will allow you to download the song and/or listen to it online.

A Gift for You!

A Gift for You!

download card





Julie in Russ's musical family



My memories of Julie revolve around the Bateman neighborhood Association, my Montessori pre-school, and our families.

In 1968, while Guy was still in law school and I was working as a Social Worker, we moved into the most adorable Victorian white shingle house on Bowditch in Berkeley. We were in the flat below Julie and Dave and got to know what a kind, sweet person Julie was. Then in 1972, we moved into the Bateman Neighborhood on Woolsey with our first baby. Julie had a 2 year old son, was looking for pre-schools, and, when she found out that I had started a Montessori Pre-School in my home, she decided to buy a house close enough for her to walk Kyle to and from my school. She has lived at 2431 Woolsey St ever since. We became even closer and shared family times canoeing local rivers as well as my being privileged to teach and love both her children, Kyle and Amy. Even though Julie loved having my school just down the block, when I moved to the other side of town after 7 years, she was so dedicated to me that she drove Amy all the way from South to the far end of North Berkeley.

Julie became a leader in the neighborhood, fighting the Alta Bates expansion for years, finally forcing them to provide a much needed neighborhood park. She started a neighborhood Newsletter for Bateman's 600 homes and, when I became Safety Chairman with a Block Captain on every street, I contributed a Safety Column and helped her distribute the newsletter. She was always such a joy to work with.

We continued our friendship into her long and happy marriage to Russ, and enjoyed her annual Xmas Caroling parties which brought so many of her friends and ours together. Guy and I have moved to Paris but will always sing an extra xmas carol in Julie's honor.

- Jeanine Saperstein





When we arrived in Berkeley in 1960, Julie was my first friend. We met at a dinner with Eva and Jim Goodwin, and clicked pretty quickly, and then stayed friends as neighbors and confidantes for close to half a century. My favorite memory of her from those days was the time she asked me wistfully,

“Do you have songs playing in your head all the time?”

“Actually, no,” I replied, “Why do you ask?”

“Because I do...” she almost whispered.

“Sing one for me?” I asked, also in a whisper. And she sang a song that she later called, “HOME BREW.” To a wanderin’ man.

To put it mildly, I near fell off my chair - she clearly had the touch, and was absolutely brilliant at describing, musically, the frustrations of an at-home wife with a husband of public renown. It captured the longing and frustration with an upbeat giggle! It took my breath away. My friend Julie could do THIS? When I asked if she had it written down, she confessed she didn’t know how to - nor could she play it on a piano! Lordy! The rest of the story, as many of you know, is history.

Mind you, at first it wasn’t easy to convince her to take her talent seriously, and then it wasn’t easy to convince her to go to Cazadero for a Jazz Camp, and then to somehow get those pieces recorded so they wouldn’t be lost - but eventually she accepted that her gifts were real and worth preserving, though, before she went to Cazadero it almost cost us our friendship! Sigh...

She and I almost came to (softspoken) blows over this of dilemma, because I was leaving for China soon, and wished to bring her music with me on a CD, worried that by the time I returned, she might have forgotten the songs.

I asked, and then begged her to record the melodies she’d composed, somehow, and make me a tape I could listen to on our trip. I recall reminding her a few times, and with a week to go before our departure I at last threatened to never speak to her again if she did not come through for me. Not to mention, herself, of course...

The day before we left was awful for me because it was clear she was not going to follow through on my request, and my disappointment was profound. I figured I had lost a



Julie with Clara Ueland. Friend from childhood

friend, and was furious at her for letting that happen. But I shouldn’t have worried because the next morning, as Herb and I and our boys left for the airport, we tripped over a small package sitting on the doorstep...and the rest is history.

It was, of course, the cassette tape! She’d come through at the 11th hour and I cried most of the way into San Francisco!

Well, the rest is history, isn’t it? Her gifts were prodigious, her beauty legion, her brilliance apparent to everyone except maybe herself, and her music original and gorgeous. As she was.

Oh Julie, my dear and brilliant friend, I shall miss Thee, but so grateful we had such a long run together and I got to be alongside as you composed, often bursting into tears at the poignant beauty of your remarkable talents as they poured out of you over the years.

We have so many memories of music and love and friendship!

Thank you, my friend, and God bless Russ who stood with you through thick and thin, adoring you and your music, and being someone so worthy of your adoration all these years.

I expect we shall meet again just across the dimensions, however that works, and will sing together your song of Welcome at our front door, as loving neighbors there. Will you meet me there, when it is my turn one of these days, and pretend that you are surprised that I still remember all the words?

That was always one of my very favorites of your songs, dear friend - but then, I don’t think I have an UN-favorite!

I love you. And Russ.

- Carolyn North





Julie Shearer’s song-writing was consonant with her persona, her way of being in the world. More specifically, she was able to effortlessly blend lyricism with the simple uncomplicated language of hope. She didn’t reach for cleverness or riddle her songs with riddles – but focused her passion to keep the language unencumbered and straightforward – rhymes when they came easily, rhythms that synced.

Much will be said and remembered about her contributions to the Elmwood Community. Perhaps the most enduring was her tenacious and effective lobbying for a park – capturing in reality the question, and then the answer to Cat Stevens’ famous line about every bit of land gobbled by real estate interests: “but where will the children play?”

- Troy Duster



Julie with Amy and grandchildren, Delany Rose and Ryan, in the park Julie created.





I met Julie in 1966, when she was married with Dave. I knew Dave through his environmental work and when I got admitted to Berkeley Law School, he told me about an incredible flat at 2323 Bowditch directly below their flat. We effectively shared a house.

We met Julie and immediately fell in love with her. Who wouldn't? She was incredibly kind, friendly, intelligent and loving. Before we gave up on America and moved to Paris, we had known Julie for 56 years.

In 1972, we moved to Woolsey Street just a block away from the Pesonens. Julie and I became members of the neighborhood steering committee and worked on neighborhood projects, the most important of which was putting the brakes on Alta Bates' expansion. Julie was our leader. When I decided the neighborhood needed trees, Julie helped me collect money to buy 50 sycamore trees. Those trees are now mature, provide shade for the neighborhood and are a monument to Julie. Altho relations with Alta Bates often were harsh, I never heard Julie say an unkind word about any of them. We would, but Julie was above that. No matter what, she always looked for the best in people. She might have been the kindest person I have ever known. She was loved by everyone.

We moved away after 7 years, but always stayed in-touch. Julie was always a friend we never wanted to lose.

Sad to hear of her demise. It's hard to ever know what life has in store for us. I have had three life-threatening events---one where my doctors gave me a 2% chance of survival--but here I am, 14 years later, living happily in Paris.

Russ, we grieve for you. We know the last years must have been very hard. Maybe Julie now has the peace she deserves. In any case, she made a big impact on the world, on her friends and she never will be forgotten.

- Guy Saperstein



A few years back I inherited the mantle of Block Captain from neighbor Julie Shearer. For my tenure as block captain, I have restrained from writing personal or opinionated emails instead limiting email messages to issues germane to the welfare of Berkeley and our neighborhood. However, with the passing of Julie Shearer, friend and neighbor passed away on Wednesday August 24th It is with sadness and gratitude I share a bit about Julie and her importance to this neighborhood.

During our lifetimes we all meet extraordinary people. Berkeley and its environs are blessed with the extraordinary and Julie Shearer was extraordinary.

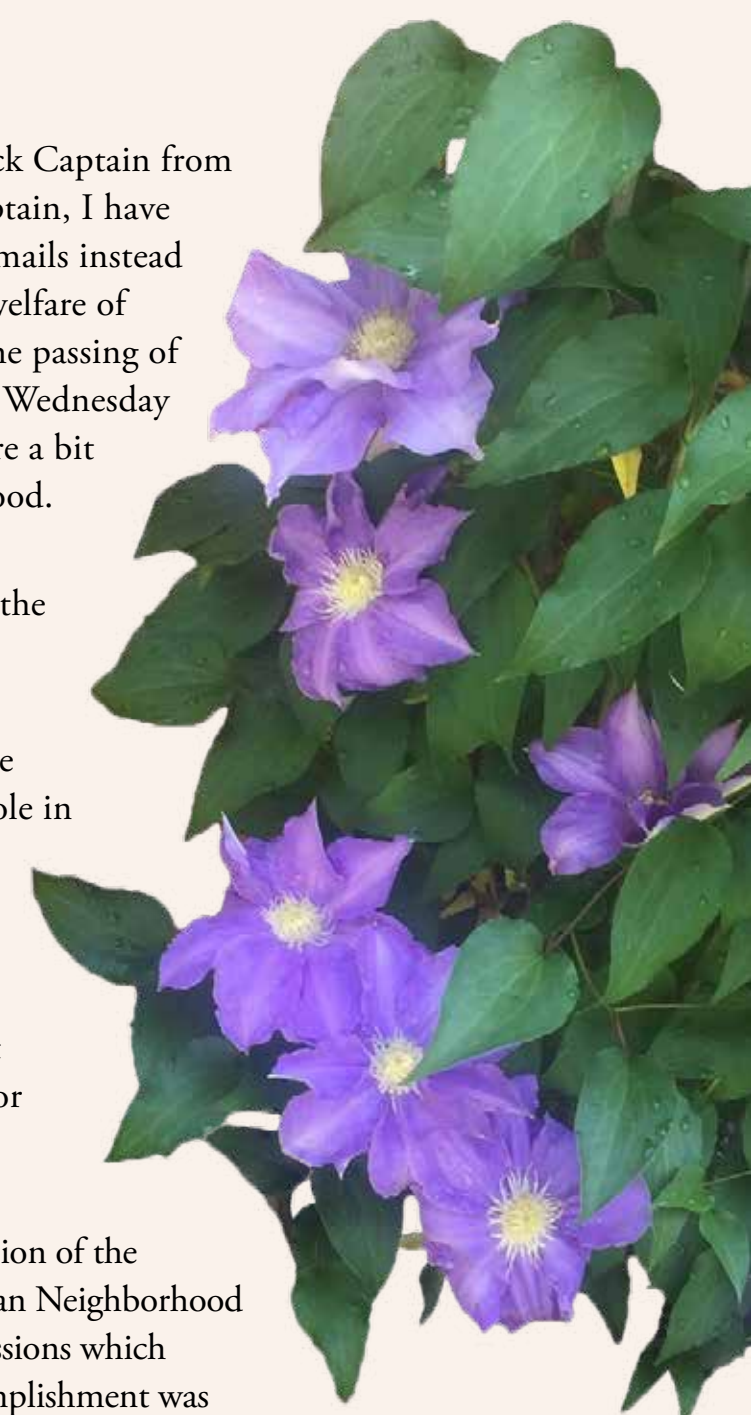
When John Leathers and I moved to 2439 Woolsey in 1979 Julie and family were some of the first to greet and welcome us. Dogs played a big role in our block's lives, and we soon found ourselves in step with neighbors on all sides for evening dog walks. We soon learned Julie and then husband David E. Pesonen fought the battle that defeated PG&E's attempt to build a nuclear power plant at Bodega Bay. The hole created to contain the reactor remains there today. The Hole in the Head.

Julie went on to battle the relentless attempts by Alta Bates Hospital for virtually unlimited expansion of the hospital. Julie was a founding member of the Bateman Neighborhood Association which fought Alta Bates and won concessions which benefitted greatly our neighborhood. One key accomplishment was the implementation of the "A" parking stickers which greatly reduced hospital employee parking in the neighborhood. Woolsey was the first permitted block, and the "A" parking sticker became the model for restricted parking in many Berkeley neighborhoods which meant homeowners could find parking places at or near their homes.

Other battles with Alta Bates reduced noise and limited further expansion with the accompanying loss of family homes and apartments.

Julie brought earthquake safety to our attention and worked to prepare this neighborhood for that eventuality.

Writing more personally I share a smile when thinking about Julie. Her enthusiasm and energy were remarkable; always positive and constructive. Julie was a true humanitarian





with remarkable dedication and vigor in defending human rights. Along with husband Russ Ellis their home at 2431 Woolsey became a hub for art and music. Julie loved music, composing songs, writing lyrics and poetry. Along with Russ they supported successful, talented young musicians many of whom were members of family.

An extraordinary neighbor has passed, and she will be missed. Julie Shearer did a lot to make Woolsey, Woolsey. May she Rest in Peace.

- Bob Hamilton



Julie was a longtime community leader and headed the Bateman Neighborhood's effort to challenge Alta Bates Hospital's plan to expand into the neighborhood south of the medical center. Rejecting the proposition that this neighborhood was on the verge of becoming a slum, Julie through a long series of negotiations, persuaded the hospital board to revise a proposal to build an emergency room that would have led to the demolition of homes and forced out residents.

Instead she convinced the board to revamp its proposal. Thanks to her tireless effort, a children's playground was created as a buffer between the neighborhood and the hospital. In gratitude the community dedicated the park to her.

In addition she supported a successful effort to create a permit parking zone that prevented hospital employees from leaving their cars in the neighborhood day and night. This program became the basis for a citywide permit parking program. The neighborhood was further protected by a network of barriers and diverters that promoted traffic safety in Bateman

As a community leader Julie was an effective negotiator and spokesman representing neighborhood interests at city council and planning commission meetings on a variety of related issues. As a composer, playwright and oral historian she also helped enrich the



community's rich artistic and literary tradition. Her home became a salon of sorts of artists and she was honored at a special event at Anna's where top Bay Area musicians spent a glorious afternoon performing her work.

Never far from her piano, Julie always found time to support the preservation of the Elmwood Theater which was transformed into a major Berkeley venue, the preservation of the two block long Elmwood shopping district and many neighborhood events. Her tireless efforts were central to the preservation of the Bateman community and Elmwood communities.

- Roger Rapoport



"without music, life would be a mistake" thus spake Friedrich Nietzsche  
i have no idea if Julie ever read these words, but in her heart she knew it.  
music was the leitmotif that hummed through her mind & body.

she composed songs for musicals

she composed songs for her friends & family

she shared music

she rounded up everyone to sing Christmas carols @ her home for as many years as she could

she & I attended Ben Simon's "classical @ the Freight series" once a month on Monday nights.

she explained to me that musicians exist to attend other musicians' performances.

she gave generously to musicians; she always pulled out her checkbook @ F&S to support someone or some organization.

she played the piano

she sang: she was a founding member of the Oakland Interfaith Gospel Choir

she danced: with Russ @ Ashkenaz music & dance community center the evening her son

Kyle's band was on stage

her laugh was musical!

- marcia flannery, longtime friend...

On February 27, 2022, Russ and Julie came to Castro Valley to support the Gators in the final flag football game of the season. With amaze and curiosity, Julie was focused on knowing the play by play of the game and I did my best to explain it to her. She was always interested in knowing Dexter and very supportive of his interests whether it was Pokémon cards or going to his first art show at Woodroe Woods School.

She loved watching him do cartwheels in the front yard. She was and is a big fan.

Poem from Julie to Dexter for his birthday:

Dexter is so dexterous; he really does take to it.  
Performing stunts so various; we've all watched him do it.  
Acrobatics, mathematics--heading for the top  
And having fun along the way; it's clear he'll never stop.  
He'll win competitions; we see that from the start.  
And frequently we also see him act with loving heart.  
So, Congratulations, you two whose love made three;  
It's a pleasure just to know that we are FAMILY!

- Laura Shaw



Julie was not really Julie for me in my mind. She was always Kyle's Mom, because there was a stark contrast between the mom and mom relationship Kyle had from the one I had with my mom. They both were kind to me and honest with me at times, but there were important differences for me. I have never told Kyle this, but I always envied his relationship with Julie and hers with him. Coming from a place where familial love was very much conditional, seeing unconditional love was awe inspiring and painful at the same time.

When I met Julie, I was addicted to meth, homeless, irresponsible, selfish, and a number of other unsavory things. I was a mess and not easy to be around. Julie didn't care about all that. She saw a kid in pain and in need and treated me with kindness. She was not afraid to be honest with me about realities such as my need for a shower, but she would do it kindly. She would let me know in more subtle ways such as letting me know there was nobody in the shower and plenty of clean towels I could use.

I did not get backhanded compliments from Julie meant to shame rather than encourage, like I got from my parents. I got questions from Julie about how I felt about things. Sometimes the conversations would be on things of little consequence to me like sulfites in wines but I enjoyed the time talking anyway. She 'saw' me when even my own family could not. From the time I met Julie, I wished I had grown up in her home. Julie was the embodiment of strength in kindness for me. She treated me with dignity and care when even I could not see myself worthy of such things.

When I learned that Julie had passed, I felt a deep sadness but also calm because I know Julie's grace would have made her able to pass beyond with ease and wonder. I have little doubt in my mind that Julie is excitedly taking in all of the wonders of the next plane of existence because that is who she is. She sees the good where others do not and the wonder in everything. Julie is synonymous with joy in my mind.



While I selfishly wish I could have one more conversation with her to say thank you, I know the universe has other needs for Julie to fill on her eternal journey. I am grateful for what limited time I had with Julie as it enriched my life beyond measure. I have no doubt that she was one of the larger influences that has allowed me to find my kinder side at times and embrace it without fear of negative response. Were it not for Julie's kindness to me, I might never have come to the place of learning how to be empathetic in a real sense.

- Troy Wilson-Ripsom





I lost my life partner, Mark, in February and just like Russ and Julie, we were together for 30 wonderful years. Mark would always call Julie, Jules. He did that because he said she was a jewel, always shining brightly. Following is a short poem I recently found that reminds me of how he would have described her.

When she walks into a room, time stands still.

Her smile stands out like a bright moon in the dark midnight sky.

Her laughter fills your heart like helium filling a balloon,  
lifting you to new heights.

One look can turn the darkest night into the brightest of days.

I call her Jules.

Not because it's short for her name, but because she's more precious than any gemstone.  
She's a real jewel.

Whenever Julie and I would talk, either on the phone or in person, she would always express how happy she was and what a blessing it was for our families to have been brought together by Kyle and Lynn. Of course, she and I would always say how great our two kids are and also our grandson we shared. I will always cherish the memories of our family get togethers at birthdays, holidays and just because. I love you sweet Julie. I know Mark opened his arms to welcome you to your new paradise.

- Kiki Beniares (Kyle's mother in love, Lynn's Mom, Ryan's YiaYia.)

Dearest Russ,

I just heard about Julie's death. I'm so sorry. I hope she died peacefully in her sleep. I didn't know Julie well but each time I saw her or communicated with her was a pleasure. She was a warm and welcoming person. I always felt accepted and appreciated in her presence. She was so modest despite her many accomplishments. It was clear how important you and your family were to her. She took pride in the grandchildren especially.

I can't imagine the difficulties with managing her diabetes, both for her and for you. To me, it seemed you both managed it pretty well. You presented as a solid, loving couple. I hope it was true and that you gave each other the support and love that makes our lives worth all the other nonsense.

- Vilunya Diskin



I remember Julie Shearer as a gentle human being with a warm and engaging personality. She showed concern and compassion for both people and the environment. Julie was interested in meaningful conversation and always made interesting and thought-provoking connections. She was a very talented singer, song writer and pianist. I remember her singing and playing the piano regularly in her home. I have fond memories of her Christmas caroling parties on Woolsey Street when she welcomed family and friends to her home and neighborhood for such a fun, festive and well-orchestrated event. Such great memories! Most importantly, she was the mother of my very best friend, Amy Pesonen Falzon. I am eternally grateful to Julie for raising such a wonderful daughter. She was well loved and will be well remembered.

- Corinne Marshall, friend of the family

*Please Come to Our*  
**Annual Caroling Party**

*Sing Holiday Favorites (indoors)  
around the piano.  
Ellen Hoffman! will play.*

**8 pm, Sunday, December 14, 2008**

Julie Shearer & Russ Ellis  
2431 Woolsey Street, Berkeley 94705  
(510) 549-3856  
or  
[jshearer2@earthlink.net](mailto:jshearer2@earthlink.net)

Please bring a  
"finger food"  
to share;  
we'll supply  
beverages.

Take Telegraph  
to Woolsey St.  
Turn east, go  
1 1/2 blocks.  
Brown shingle  
on left. Big  
red door.

2431 WOOLSEY STREET • BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA 94705-2007



When I remember Julie, I think first of her voice. Her beautiful speaking voice itself seemed to be an expression of her kindness, a profound, really personal, kindness. Hers was a wonderful singing voice, too. I loved hearing her sing, hearing in that singing the deep connection between the music and her inmost self. That was a revelation to me. I liked music, listened to music, but music, to her, was something more. Something transcendent.

When I arrived at Stanford I was absolutely clueless about social justice issues. She was the first person my age I knew who really cared about the wellbeing of the safety of unknown others. Another revelation. She also had very cool parents.

I left Northern California in 1965 and didn't return until the 1990s. We kept in touch with cards and the occasional photo in the mail. I learned of her activism. Then the divorce, which was sad, of course. Along with all of her other friends, I rejoiced when she and Russ found one another. It was a delightful, wonderful surprise to see them together. Such a gift. It was a joy to know Julie through all those years.

- Katie Crum





