



Susan Jay

November 1, 1930 - March 16, 2024

Susan Jay, neé Kraus, passed away with much of her family at her bedside in the morning on Saturday 16 March 2024. She lived through 93 amazing years from being a child with a nanny in the Czech city of Brno where she lived at the foot of a castle, to running through Europe fleeing Nazi persecution and possible death, eventually making her way with her parents from Hong Kong to Los Angeles as passengers on a freighter. Throughout those early years she was instilled with a love of music, art, and languages which served as guiding threads for the rest of her life. Already fluent in Czech, German, and Italian, she learned English at school in Hong Kong which imbued her with the British accent that earned her a job in the imports department at Bullocks Wilshire where she worked while she went to school to become an x-ray technician. Once she received her degree she worked in the x-ray department of Cedars Sinai Hospital. After a couple of years, one of the physicians asked her to join him at Albert Einstein College of Medicine in New York where he was to become head of the department and she became lead x-ray tech. Even into her last days she was able to surprise medical professionals with her knowledge of human physiology and pull out of the air names of bones and organs which let them know they need not dumb down their conversation for her. Living in New York with a job as a professional, Susan was able to let her hair down just a bit, date, and explore the music scene in New York City. She would, on occasion, share stories of handsome, cosmopolitan men who took her to venues including Carnegie Hall and The Metropolitan Opera

House. Living in a rented room in the Bronx she heard music coming from the room of a fellow boarder, Strauss, Vivaldi, Beethoven, and much more. She and the medical student met and found they had a lot in common although this young man could hardly compete with the nights on the town offered by her usual suitors. However, there was a spark which quickly turned into a flame and she was soon married to Burton Jay, three and a half years her junior. While Susan knew she was Jewish she had been brought up in a non-practicing, largely secular family, her marriage to a practicing Jew combined with the loss of nearly her whole family in the holocaust kindled her interest in following traditions.

After 5 years, once Burton received his medical degree and became an intern at Santa Monica Hospital, their son, Michael, was born. Next was Tucson for 2 years living on Davis-Monthan Air Force Base as the wife of a military physician during the Cuban missile crisis and not long after moved to Danville, PA where Burton specialized in Dermatology and their twins, Debby and Danny were born. Just a few more years took the family back to the West Coast, Canoga Park, CA, where Burton worked as a Dermatologist for Kaiser Permanente and Susan managed their three young children. Burton was soon offered the opportunity to move to San Diego and work for Kaiser there, eventually becoming head of Dermatology for Kaiser Southern California. Finally able to put down roots, Susan was able to resume the pursuit of her interest in music through attendance at the San Diego Symphony, San Diego Opera, LA Philharmonic, and the La Jolla Chamber Music as all three of the children learned to play string instruments. This meant Susan was running children from lessons to ensemble practices and more. Once the children got old enough, however, Susan threw herself fully into her love of opera as she became an opera docent, getting school children excited about opera! Eventually, she became the lead San Diego Opera Docent where she

spearheaded an incredibly successful program. Her enthusiasm about opera was always evident and she befriended many involved with different facets of opera. More than just a fan on the proverbial sidelines, she coached several in Czech diction in preparation for singing operas by Dvorák, Janáček, and Smetena. One such artist was Renée Fleming whom Susan helped with Janáček's Cunning Little Vixen.

Her husband, Burton, was an avid boater and Susan was along for the ride supporting his rise through the ranks at Southwestern Yacht Club in San Diego. The pair made life long friends of others involved in the boating community and traveled up and down the west coast, mostly by car and plane, visiting other yacht clubs, making new friends. For both of them this was more about the community than actually sailing and Susan did a great job applying her leadership skills there as well.

In the mid-1980s Susan and Burton were lured to the Pacific Northwest where they looked for a vacation cabin in the mountains east of Bellingham. After a lengthy search they found one with a sign that read "Chateau Brno" which they took as an omen that they had found the right place. For several years, Susan and Burton spent time between their home in San Diego and their Northwest getaway where they would hunt for mushrooms (a loose mirror of her favorite Far Side cartoon of vegetarians returning from the hunt with a huge carrot slung between them), plant trees, and generally play house in their forested wonderland. As they got older, they looked for a place in Bellingham proper and purchased a townhouse where they lived for many years. Now living full time in Bellingham, Susan got involved with the Music

Society and other music activities throughout the community. Sadly, Burton passed in December of 2015, which opened a new chapter of Susan's life.

Without her lifelong partner after 60 years of marriage, Susan reinvented herself when she moved into The Willows independent living facility. There she found an incredibly supportive community where she found her footing and exercised skills she didn't even know she had. Improv and playing Rummikub with friends were two of her favorite activities. Having never had an opportunity to live in a dormitory she also learned new skills of communal living from dining to being in close quarters, of sorts, with others around her on a daily basis. She developed so many new friendships and met people she might never had a chance to know. She gave periodic talks on a variety of operas, highlighting those she had known her whole life and shared insights gained from a life immersed in opera.

Her good friend Roger Pines, who many may know from his many appearances on the MET's Saturday Broadcast "Opera Quiz", shared:

"I admired Susan's passion for music — her lifelong devotion to it. She loved opera as much as I do, and to discuss any opera with her was always a joy for me."

Susan and Karen Keltner, former Resident Conductor, San Diego Opera, who were incredibly close writes:

“Susan’s knowledge of opera was extensive and her love for the art form was boundless. Her work with the Docents, her work as SDO’s Czech-diction coach, and Susan and Burt’s attendance at our San Diego Opera productions, many of which I conducted, (coupled with wonderful post-performance meetings backstage and beyond...) evolved into the friendship I extol above and which I cherish.”

Evelina de la Rosa, Soprano, also a very dear friend, shares:

“Susan was such a loyal friend... she never failed to ask me, “what’s coming up next for you”, and made sure to follow up afterwards to see how that musical work went. She was involved, and cared for those in her life!” and continues, “Someone meeting Susan for the first time might describe her as “refined and serious”, and she was both of these... but I knew her tremendous sense of humor and love of laughter! I was tickled pink to know that she took an Improv class in these past few years.”

Susan will be missed by many from all the facets of her life. As with many who reach her age, she mourned the loss of close friends recognizing that those with whom she shared history were leaving her in a changed world with fewer peers. Her body failing, she knew her time had come and we, her children, are relieved that she passed on her own terms in the quiet of her home. We appreciate what each of you gave to her in your friendship and invite you to share your memories of her here.

Tribute Wall

JB

“ Susan Jay crossed my mind today and I was determined to see if I might locate her. I am so very sad to learn that she passed before I could share with her what a significant impact she had on my life. I met her when I was a young college student and single mother. I taught her son ,Daniel , the cello for about 3 years. However, after the weekly music lesson, Mrs. Jay would teach me—about strength, being positive, never giving up, and being kind to others. She was a brilliant, remarkable woman with an extraordinary ,beautiful spirit. I send my condolences to all the family. Please know she will never be forgotten.

Janet Williams Bernard - April 07, 2025 at 12:00 AM

JA

“ Susan Jay was one of most thoughtful, intelligent, humorous, supportive, and humble women I've ever known. I had the privilege of co-creating music programs and opera trips at The Willows with her...and playing improv too (and so much more). I am forever grateful to have spent time with her one-on-one the last time I visited The Willows close to her passing. I will never forget how precious and meaningful that time was with her.

Jen Andrews - April 15, 2024 at 12:00 AM

GA

“ What a gift to have known Mama & Daddy Jay. Mama Jay (Susan) gave acceptance, love and care to me as a young adult just being her beautiful self, she made my life richer and kinder. I am eternally grateful for her and always think of her with love. Every time I hear classical music my memories go to the kitchen on Cresita. Susan Jay had a very beautiful heart and soul. She will be extremely missed by so many whose lives she touched. My love to the whole Jay family.

Gili Acajale - March 22, 2024 at 12:00 AM

MJ

“ Always sad to lose a wonderful talented person at any age but 94 years is truly a mitzvah for her and the family. As a cousin we remember her fondly and a pillar of the family. May she rest in peace. Cousins Michael and Susan jay of Boston

Michael Eliot jay - March 22, 2024 at 12:00 AM