

Elizabeth “Betty” Working Swift
3 April 1930 – 29 January 2021

Elizabeth “Betty” Swift passed away peacefully with her family around her on January 29 in Seattle, Washington after a brief illness. She was 90 years old.

Betty was born Helen Elizabeth Working on April 3, 1930 in Palo Alto, California to Holbrook and Helen (Rider) Working. She grew up near Stanford University, where her father was a professor of agricultural economics and her mother was active in civic and university life. The family, including beloved siblings, hiked and vacationed in the Sierra Mountains and the California coast, starting a life-long devotion to the outdoors, conservation and environmental issues.

She met Ward H. Swift (1929-1981) while on a ski trip in the Sierra. They married in 1950 at Stanford, where she was a student, and they honeymooned in Alaska. She transferred to UC Berkeley and received a BA in Art in 1951. The couple moved to Richland, Washington, where Ward started a career in chemical engineering. They had four children, born between 1952 and 1964: Barbara, Peter, Theodore, and Hally. While a full-time mom, Betty continued to teach and be involved with art and politics. She was active in the Audubon Society and League of Women Voters, volunteered on archaeological digs on the Columbia River, was a lover of avant-garde theatre, music and the arts, sailed the San Juan and Canadian Gulf Islands, hiked and skied. Betty’s diverse interests filled the home with ideas and materials from many cultures, creating an environment of exploration.



An adventurer whether hiking on a trail, kayaking, experimenting with art, or cooking new recipes to share, she was always ready for a new experience or to deepen an interest. With a rigorous and infectious curiosity, her interests were broad and emblematic of her approach to the world. In 1975 Betty moved to Seattle, where she received a BFA in 1977 and MFA in Metal Design from the University of Washington in 1980. She worked in graphical production for Pacific Search Press, and later for the City of Seattle as a technical illustrator. She traveled the world, from Nepal to Alaska and West Africa to Indonesia and Antarctica. She visited every continent except Australia. Though she planned to leave Europe for when she was in a wheelchair, she explored parts of Europe on several trips. Closer to home, she lead Mountaineers Club trips and volunteered for rare plant monitoring and seed collecting across Washington State, and collected “citizen science” water quality measurements in Portage Bay.

One of Betty's great loves was playing the recorder in the Seattle Recorder Society where she was described as a treasured member and a constant beam of light for the recorder music community not only in Seattle, but around the country as well. She would eagerly sign up for any ensemble, workshop, or musical activity that could feed her insatiable enthusiasm for learning and fuel her advancement on the recorder. Always willing to travel however far to participate in workshops around the country and in Europe, always welcoming of new experiences and meeting other players. She never shied away from the difficult, loved the challenges of embarking upon contemporary pieces as well as older works, and especially loved diving into the history and theory behind the scenes. The words that come to mind are-curious, humble, gracious, attentive, and enthusiastic.

Betty was a fabulous friend. She loved people and engaging with strangers or good friends. She was an outgoing and collaborative neighbor, spending the last 25 years living on a houseboat on Portage Bay, close to the water she so loved. Listening was one of her qualities that made her friends feel important, comfortable, and validated. Although Betty was knowledgeable in many areas paired with many talents and interests, she was humble and the last one to toot her horn. Her eyes always sparkled with enthusiasm, life, learning, and sharing whenever she was with her friends. Her friends are richer in spirit knowing Betty and she will be missed but never forgotten.

Betty was a loving presence in the lives of the next generation. She related to children so well, and could do something with nothing, teaching how to make one's own entertainment and exploration. She would pick up a few pine needles, gave them names, and enact a story for her young granddaughters.

Betty offered all a guide for how to tread the path of life, deal with its challenges, fight back when needed, and keep one's head held high throughout, and all who knew her feel deeply grateful for the benefit of her spirit. Her impact has been great, with close or distant friends and relatives. Shared values, experiences, and thoughts travel across the dimensions of family to emerge unexpectedly but with import.

Consistent with her commitment to the larger world, Betty would want donations made to organizations that she cared about. Given her life, the list could be long, but the family suggests that these represent her interests: Seattle Recorder Society (Music), Rare Care c/o University of Washington, and the Islands Trust Conservancy (Conservation and nature), and Emily's List (Women's rights and activism.). In the spirit of Betty and her love of people, a celebration will occur when gathering can occur.

Betty is survived by her brother John Working, sister Barbara Milligan, daughters Barbara Swift and Hally Swift, sons-in-law Donald Ewing and Eric Strandberg, all of Seattle, son Ted Swift and daughter-in-law Anne Hillman and granddaughters Eleanor and Grace Swift, all of Davis, California. Her husband Ward and son Peter preceded her in death.

http://www.seattle-recorder.org/About_Us.html

<https://botanicgardens.uw.edu/science-conservation/rarecare/donate/>

<http://www.islandstrustconservancy.ca/donate/please-help-our-campaigns/>

<https://www.emilyslist.org/donate>