



Judith Van Kleef

NOV 2, 1926 - MAR 10, 2022



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Judith Van Kleef (nee Passikoff) died March 10, 2022 at age 95, at the David Simpson Hospice House, Hospice of the Western Reserve. She is survived by daughters Deborah (James K. Miller, Jr.) of Cleveland Heights, OH and Susan of Tariffville, CT, grandson Isaac Paul Miller of Santa Barbara, CA, two first cousins, three nieces, a nephew, other cousins, great-nieces and great-nephews. Her husband, Howard Van Kleef, parents, Pinye Passikoff and Alte Passikoff (nee Barish) and older sisters, Nora Gorchoff and Bernice Ellman, predeceased her. Deborah and Jim were with her when she died.

Judith was born on Election Day, Tuesday, November 2, 1926, in New York city, the third and youngest daughter of an immigrant Jewish labor union family. She grew up in the Bronx, attended Brooklyn College and received a B.S. in chemistry from the University of Wisconsin. She married Howard Van Kleef in 1949, and they moved to Cleveland in 1950. They lived in Old Brooklyn and several other neighborhoods. In 1964 they settled with their daughters in Cleveland Heights, buying a house on East Overlook Road. Judith trained in medical technology and worked in chemistry labs at Huron Road Hospital and University Hospitals until her retirement in the early 1990s. She was one of relatively few working mothers in her community during the early years of her career.

As the formerly white enclave of Cleveland Heights became racially integrated, Judith and Howard stepped up to resist blockbusting and promote fair housing in their neighborhood. They worked with their block club, Boulevard Neighbors and Heights Community Congress (HCC). In 1985 they received HCC's second annual Bernice E. Lott Memorial Award for the Outstanding Citizen of Cleveland Heights-University Heights, the first having gone to Bernice Lott the previous year.

A pint-sized dynamo with seemingly endless reserves of energy, in retirement Judith ramped up her activities, enjoying cooking, exercise, volunteer work, travel and the arts. She was proud of her



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ability to walk two miles to the Mayfield Road JCC, swim a mile, walk two miles home, and then put in a full day and evening of errands, chores, meetings and other activities. She and Howard were frequently seen ushering at Cain Park and Severance Hall and at political and cultural events of all kinds.

Judith found gratification in volunteering with children at the Cleveland Children's Museum and the Western Reserve Historical Society, and in the Cleveland Municipal School District. She served on the boards of the Women's Community Foundation, Greater Cleveland Community Shares and Women Speak Out for Peace and Justice (WILPF), canvassed and phone banked for countless political candidates and school levies, and advocated, along with other Cleveland Heights activists, for just and sound municipal policies.

In 2007 she was named Volunteer of the Year by both Greater Cleveland Community Shares and the Cleveland Children's Museum. During her late eighties she chaired the Cleveland Heights Commission on Aging. Many women in her daughters' generation saw her as a role model and mentor.

In 2014 Judith and Howard reluctantly left their home of 50 years and moved to a one-floor condo at the Victorian on Mayfield Road, home to several friends. Judith wasted no time getting involved, and was soon helping to organize potlucks, welcome new residents, and advocate for environmentally sound practices.

Even after COPD required her to use oxygen, macular degeneration limited her vision, and advancing age took its toll she continued to do as much as she could. Near the end of her life she was still attending two book groups (when Covid permitted), and spending hours listening to recorded books.

Judith's family is grateful to Visiting Angels for dedicated and conscientious home care, and to the staff at the David Simpson Hospice House (Hospice of the Western Reserve) for outstanding end-of-life care.

A memorial gathering will take place in the summer of 2022, date, time and place to be determined. Donations in Judith's memory may be made to Friends of the Heights Libraries, Pro-Choice Ohio (formerly NARAL Pro-Choice Ohio), or Hospice of the Western Reserve.



Memories only last if you share them

Join us in honoring Judith by contributing to a collection of shared memories.



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