

IN MEMORY

Betsy Ann McDonald died on December 7, 2015, at the age of 95, from pancreatic cancer. Our family wants to thank so many people who visited, called, sent cards and supported her during her illness. She touched and inspired many people in her long life, and we are grateful that she had the chance to hear what she meant to them.

Betsy was born on September 30, 1920, in Iowa. She grew up in Lomita, California, playing sports, studying hard, and running the hills with her “gang of boys.” Her father was seriously injured in a work accident, and the family struggled during the Depression. She earned scholarships to attend Berkeley, graduating with a major in agriculture (specializing in food science) in 1942. She served in the Navy WAVES from 1943 to 1945. She met her husband, James E. McDonald, in a class at MIT; they had their first child in 1945. They lived in Ames, Iowa, while James got his PhD in Meteorological Physics. The family grew to six children by 1953, and they moved to Tucson in 1954.

The 1950s were a busy time of raising her large family, cooking meals every day, taking kids to lessons, attending school shows and going to PTA meetings. She called this her first life project, and did it with characteristic energy and love. While raising the family, she helped organize the Tucson Humanist Association and Junior Humanist Sunday School, where she taught comparative religions. She was active in civic groups including the Great Books Club, League of Women Voters and the ACLU. She was named a Mother of the Year by the Tucson Daily Citizen in 1960, but this “picture-perfect mother” was moving toward great changes along with the world around her.

Through the ACLU, she helped defend young black men in the courts and began to see systemic racism at work, leading her into the fight for black and Chicano civil rights. The Vietnam War radicalized her further. In the 1960s in Tucson, she helped organize antiwar marches, teach-ins and protests. She helped found and run the Peace and Freedom Associations Center and the Southwest Movement Press (where she trained herself to run an offset printing press). She studied hard, trying to understand the best way forward, and became convinced that she had to fight for socialism. She called this her second life project, eventually as a member of the Socialist Workers Party. She joined the SWP in 1972 and was a political activist in San Francisco, San Diego, Portland, Los Angeles, and Phoenix. She ran for U.S. Congress in 1978. She went to work in an industrial job when she was 58, continuing until she was 71. She returned to Tucson in 1995 and helped raise another generation of children. She remained politically active until the end of her life, particularly in the immigrant rights movement and the SWP.

Betsy pursued everything in her life with hard work, study, optimism, and more concern for other people than for herself. Her warmth and love of people was clear in her radiant smile and interest in everyone she met. She was an inspiration to many people, and to family members always a strong and loving presence. She will be missed!

**A celebration of Betsy McDonald’s life will be held on Sunday, January 3, 2016,
2:00 p.m. - 4:00 p.m., at the San Pedro Chapel, 5230 E. Ft. Lowell Road, Tucson, Arizona.
We invite you to share memories and stories at the celebration. No RSVP is required.**