

# Remembering Lilli Ann Rosenberg

BY LESLIE LEE

My husband and I first met Lilli Ann and Marvin Rosenberg in the early nineties when we all had purchased properties in the Applegate Valley and had both shown up at a land use hearing to protest a zoning regulation on ceramic kilns. Having successfully argued a change in home business codes we went out to lunch to celebrate, unaware that we would share countless meals and events together over the next 20 years. We had been caught by their all-inclusive sociability, later dubbed the "Rosenweb," where we eventually met most of the people we know in the Applegate today.

Lilli Ann was an extraordinary attractor and connector of people. She embraced life and all its challenges with fearless enthusiasm and little regard for protocol or rules, charming her way into and out of unimaginable situations, which then became part of a captivating oral history recited years later over tables laden with food and encircled with friends. There were many times when my husband and I wished we'd been able to record Lilli Ann's lively stories. Now that she is gone, I regret even more that we did not make a better effort to do so.

A pivotal story Lilli Ann liked to tell was of leaving her home in Los Angeles and boarding a bus bound for New York City, where she was certain she could make her way as an artist. She was just a teenager with only a few dollars and a typewriter case for luggage. Though she attended art classes at the city's Cooper Union, her brother, Clair Killen of Ashland, does not think she graduated. "I think of Lilli Ann as a self-taught artist and as a very dynamic person, very compassionate, a good teacher, and in command of her

own life." In New York Lilli Ann became a strong believer in public art and the public's participation in it, which led to her being art director at the Henry Street Settlement House in New York City's Lower East Side for 17 years. She involved children in the community in making mosaic murals and play sculptures, making certain to draw potential troublemakers into her program knowing they would protect their work against vandals.

While in New York, Lilli Ann married and had her first child, Gigi. The marriage ended in divorce and she and Marvin Rosenberg, a social worker, were married in 1961. They moved to Newton, Massachusetts, and expanded their family with the births of Claire and Ben. Lilli Ann's career also expanded and Marvin joined her to engineer the construction and installation of her mosaics and cement sculptures. Of the public arts projects that Lilli Ann created throughout the country, the 12-ton, 110-foot-long cement mosaic in Boston's Park Street subway station, which she made in 1978, is considered among her most memorable. It depicts the history of the city's subway system and includes many found objects such as gears and tools alongside her ceramic pieces and mosaic tile.



Lilli Ann Rosenberg, 1924 - 2011

The Rosenberg's transition to the Applegate Valley included several years of splitting their time between doing east coast commissions and setting up a studio in their home on Little Applegate. Once settled into the community, though, it was not long before Rosenberg art was being installed throughout the region, including Portland hospital courtyards, Eugene's main library and in the Rogue Valley's La Clinica facilities, among many other sites. In the Applegate, Lilli Ann engaged the community in creating a mural for the entrance of the Ruch library and the Ruch

school students in a walkway connecting the two buildings. Jeremy Criswell of Upper Applegate, who studied with Lilli Ann for the last four years, said, "She shared her heart with everyone and she was willing to teach everyone without telling them how it should be done." Applying the techniques she taught him, Criswell has continued Lilli Ann's public art legacy with a sculpture in Grants Pass and was recently awarded a mosaic project there.

Lilli Ann's last home was a small house in Ashland, which she artistically renovated after Marvin died in 2010, and where she received a steady stream of visitors. She died of cancer at home on July 19, just a few days short of her 87th birthday, planning her next project and surrounded by family. A celebration of her life, which was held at the Ball residence on Little Applegate, drew a large gathering where her children, Ben Rosenberg, a professional artist and college teacher in Portland, Gigi Rosenberg, a published author also of Portland, and Claire Van der Zwan, an artist and art teacher at Crater High School in Central Point, had some poignant and hilarious stories of their own to share about their mother. This time I had a video camera ready, so if you missed the celebration you can enjoy a couple of these stories at <http://is.gd/abNBaz>.

Thanks to John Darling of the *Medford Tribune* and Gloria Negri of the *Boston Globe* from whose articles I appropriated some of the information for this article.

Leslie Lee • 541-899-7045  
leslie@leslieleeart.com

For more on remembering Lilli Ann, please visit our website at [www.applegater.org](http://www.applegater.org).

## A poem for Lilli Ann

BY KRISTI COWLES

Lilli Ann died last night and this morning my vibrant hot pink morning glories blossomed for the first time. They reseeded themselves from last year.

Lilli Ann died last night and this morning I walked up our dirt road past the Becker's and on the way down a

mostly yellow with black trim butterfly followed me for quite a distance. Then she reappeared again at the entrance to our driveway.

Lilli Ann died last night and on my walk there was a young deer eating apples from a tree; we stared at each other for what seemed like minutes.

Lilli Ann died last night and today I grieve as if she was my mother, my daughter, my sister.

Lilli Ann died last night and she was the one who welcomed me into this community almost four years ago when I moved to the Applegate from Wisconsin. She and Marvin warmed me so and helped me begin to fit in. The most difficult thing for me was that I wasn't known anymore.

Lilli Ann immediately knew me.

Lilli Ann died last night and she's still here making the rounds to say good-bye to us. This does not surprise me one bit.

Lilli Ann died last night and she will be greatly missed even by people she never met. Why? Because her wise-woman, artisan arms stretched far and wide. She was way beyond borders.

Lilli Ann died last night and Arthur and I feel honored to have spent time with her a week or so ago. She was one of the best storytellers I've ever met and this visit was no exception.

Lilli Ann died last night and left me with a hole in my heart. Yet I know it will fill back up with a bouquet of roses, for she was a dangerous woman and roses have thorns. I am dangerous, too, and hope to one day be as dangerous as Lilli Ann. I'm working on it.

Lilli Ann died last night and I believe she's hanging out with Emma Goldman, the mighty woman whose name she could not remember last week. I want, when I die, to hang with the two of them.

Lilli Ann died last night and I think about her children and how incredibly

blessed they are and were to have her as a mother. Not everyone is that lucky!

Lilli Ann died last night and I will grieve for a long time...

Kristi Cowles  
541-846-7391  
kkc@apbb.net



**RESTAURANT**

**HOURS**  
M-THU 10-9  
F,S,SUN 8-9

**BREAKFAST  
LUNCH &  
DINNER**

**McKee Bridge**  
serving visitors to  
the Applegate since  
1938  
**541-899-1101**

We can cater your event and  
seat 50 in our Banquet Room



**ROGUE VALLEY FRESH SEAFOOD COMPANY**  
YOU'VE TRIED THE REST - NOW TASTE THE BEST!

2714 North Pacific Hwy.  
Medford, OR 97501  
541-944-7519  
[WWW.ROGUEVALLEYFRESHSEAFOOD.COM](http://WWW.ROGUEVALLEYFRESHSEAFOOD.COM)


MICHAEL COOPER  
OWNER

**WHITE'S COUNTRY FARM**  
Quality produce ~ U.K. Goods ~ Collectibles

3939 West Main, Medford  
**541 773 8031**  
Mark & Linda Medeiros Owners

follow us on facebook *Open all year!*  
[www.whitescountryfarm.com](http://www.whitescountryfarm.com)

*Therapeutic Massage  
... adding life  
to your years*



**PAT GORDON, LMT**  
Licensed Massage Therapist  
OR Lic. # 7193

Applegate Valley  
541/899-7655