

OBITUARY

Joan Peterson
1940-2025

BY DIANA COOGLE

On November 5, 2025, Joan Peterson died peacefully after receiving a loving massage from her granddaughter, Haley Peterson. She had had minor health problems for a number of years and was still taking daily walks.

Joan Caroline Peterson was born to Elmer and Janice Peterson on January 30, 1940, in Oakland, California. Early piano and accordion lessons stimulated a lifelong interest in music. An accomplished horsewoman as a teenager, she loved riding all her life.

After three years at the University of California, Davis, Joan married Jimmie Weldon Smith in 1960. They moved to Tulelake, California to work in his family's potato-packing business and farm potatoes. She thought it a magical time. Their children, Gordon and Jenell, were born in 1961 and 1962, respectively.

In 1965 the family moved to Davis. Joan finished a BA in English, obtained a teaching certificate, and began teaching at Sacramento Country Day School.

In 1968, now divorced, Joan moved with her children to Inverness, California, where her great-great-grandparents had built a house in 1911. She always spoke and wrote with love about the landscapes and relationships of Inverness.

Joan taught English at Tomales High School from 1969 to 1970 and, later, music at West Marin Elementary School. While at Tomales High, she and the school's woodshop teacher, Christopher Bratt, fell in love. Chris had three children. In 1976, Chris and Joan moved, with two of their teenagers and a niece and nephew, to their farm in the Applegate, where they kept sheep, horses, chickens, dogs, cats, and goats. From time to time, the other children and various family members lived with them. Joan learned to card wool and knit sweaters. She grew vegetables and

flowers, but she was especially good with animals. Reincarnation as one of Joan's horses was considered a lucky draw!

Many Applegaters have enjoyed music at Joan and Christopher's, with Joan on accordion, Chris on guitar, and their singing voices blending.

After earning a master's degree in English at Southern Oregon University (SOU), Joan taught writing at Rogue Community College. Poetry classes at SOU inspired her to start the Applegate Poets, a group she stayed with until she died. She helped found a singing group (Voices of the Applegate) and the Friends of the Applegate Library, where she served as secretary until her death. She was copy editor and writer for the *Applegater* in its early days and wrote *Applegater* articles about Voices of the Applegate until the group's recent disbanding.

Joan published two books of poetry, *Brilliant by the Door* (1999) and *Looking for a Place to Write* (2014). Her poems have appeared in several anthologies.

After Chris died in 2019, Haley; her husband Andy; and their newborn son, Koji, lived with Joan for several years. Koji was the light of Joan's life during that time.

Joan Peterson's talents flowed in many directions, but her greatest talent was the warmth she poured into her friendships.

Joan is preceded in death by her parents and by her husband, Christopher Bratt. She is survived by her son, Gordon Smith; her daughter, Jenell Smith; her stepchildren, Toni Winter, Joshua Bratt, Nick Bratt, and Greg Bratt; her grandchildren, Mehana Smith, Kainoa Smith, Haley Peterson, Levi May, Justine May, Jasper Smith, and Braenn Smith; her step-grandchildren Zachary Winter, Faun Winter, Alexander Bratt, Dylan Kellington, Jesse Bratt, and Abby Bratt; and her great-grandson, Koji Peterson.

A memorial service is being prepared by the family.

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What if our neighbors were fed?

BY ALISON SEXAUER

Across the Applegate and the greater Rogue Valley, a quiet movement is taking root, built on the simple belief that everyone deserves good food and that our communities already hold the relationships and creativity to make that possible.

For the past decade, the Rogue Valley Food System Network (RVFSN) has worked to build an equitable, resilient, ecologically sound, and economically viable local food system. RVFSN has served as a convener and connector, ensuring that farmers, food banks, educators, health providers, and businesses work together toward a thriving, regional food network.

Earlier this year, we released the updated Rogue Valley Community Food Assessment and Action Plan, a roadmap for access, equity, and resilience. From that plan, partners across the valley have organized into working groups focused on ensuring access to healthy food for all, supporting local farms, protecting soil and water, and reducing food waste.

Here in the Applegate, we are proud to be working alongside A Greater Applegate to strengthen the local food-and-farm network, connecting farmers, markets, and community organizations to one another and to regional partners. Together, we're identifying opportunities to grow, process, and distribute more of what's produced in the valley, right here at home. This work builds on Applegate values: community self-reliance, stewardship of the land, and care for our neighbors.

Still, the need remains great. More than 23 percent of Josephine County households and 16 percent of Jackson County households rely on SNAP, and food-insecurity rates are higher in these counties than in the rest of Oregon. Even before recent disruptions to SNAP benefits, food banks were seeing a 30 percent increase in attendance over the last year, a number that continues to rise.

The compliance of the US Department of Agriculture with a federal court order to release the full amount of SNAP contingency funds has allowed states to calculate benefits for each eligible household. This welcome news offers short-term relief, but our local food system is still carrying an unprecedented load.

Across the region, food banks are stretched thin, smaller rural pantries are struggling to stay open, and donations are down. Yet, something remarkable is happening here. Rogue Valley residents, organizations, and businesses are rising to meet the moment. Donations of food and funds are increasing, long-standing programs like Double Up Food Bucks

are adapting to reach more families, and new, community-driven solutions are taking root.

One such effort is the Rogue Valley Good Food Fund, a new initiative that allows food banks and partner organizations to continue buying directly from local farmers, ensuring that fresh produce and proteins reach the families who need them most. The fund builds on the success of the Local Food Purchasing Agreement program, which brought more than \$200,000 to Rogue Valley farms over two years. It's a simple, powerful model: keep dollars local, support farm viability, and move healthy food from farms to food pantries.

These efforts echo a deeper truth: food security is community security. It's not just about filling plates—it's about transforming systems. When we invest in local farms, food hubs, and distribution networks, we strengthen both our economy and our resilience. When we coordinate across sectors—agriculture, health, education, and emergency response—we create lasting change.

That's the spirit behind the upcoming Rogue Valley Food Solutions Summit, January 15-16, when community members, farmers, funders, and agencies will come together to continue this work by identifying the root causes of hunger and building collective solutions for a stronger regional food system.

So, we ask: What if our neighbors were fed?

What if all the food grown in the Applegate and across the Rogue Valley could reach those who need it most?

What if we remembered the importance of preserving the harvest—drying, canning, and sharing abundance while it's here?

What if we became masters of gleaning and reducing food waste, ensuring that everything we pour our time, water, and hard-earned dollars into fulfills its purpose?

These aren't distant dreams. Every gleaned apple, every local carrot in a pantry box, every partnership between a farmer and a food bank is a step toward that vision.

Because the question isn't whether we have enough food. It's whether we can move it, share it, and honor it—together.

To get involved, visit rvfoodsystem.org.

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