



Jan E. Merz

September 2, 1924 - August 4, 2019

Jan E. Merz passed away peacefully on August 4, 2019, in Hadley, MA. Jan was born in Brooklyn, NY, on September 2, 1924, to George W. and Elsie Fincke (née Schehr). Jan's maternal grandmother, Elsie Schehr, also helped raise her. Jan excelled in academics, music and theater, graduating from Sewanhaka High School in Floral Park, NY. From an early age, she loved animals, especially dogs, and wished to become a veterinarian. Instead, her talents as a performer led her to leave home to tour as the singer for a big band. She ended up in Saint Louis, MO, where she met and, in 1951, married Marvin Solomon. They soon moved to Wisconsin where they had their two children, Linda and Marla. In Wisconsin, Jan continued an active acting and singing career under the stage name, Jan Olivar, with companies including the Hawkhill Players (which she co-founded with husband Marvin), the Milwaukee Repertory Theatre, and the Skylight Theatre. She also worked as a legal secretary for several years. Jan and Marvin divorced in 1962. In 1967, she married John Anthony Merz, a Milwaukee television personality and actor/singer, with whom she performed in a long-touring educational play about alcoholism for the Milwaukee Council on Alcoholism and in a musical variety act. In 1983, they relocated to Glen Ellyn, IL, where Jan took care of John during his struggle with pancreatic cancer, a fight he lost in 1986. Following his death, Jan turned again to her love of animals and the natural world, working as a volunteer at the Willowbrook Wildlife Haven of DuPage County for several years, and cultivating an incredible home garden. Her final

great love was her Yorkshire terrier, Muffin.

Jan was a spiritual seeker, exploring faiths and philosophies ranging from Christian Science to Buddhism to Theosophy. She was a voracious learner, educating herself deeply in the sciences, particularly as related to health and wellness, and using this knowledge to help her family members achieve greater well-being. She passed her love of music and theater on to her children, and in turn down to Marla's children, Pilar and Sajo Jefferson, who grew up singing and acting and loving the arts. Jan also loved travel. She spent six months in Venezuela, worked as a secretary for the Army Corps of Engineers in Iceland, and traveled abroad as extensively as she could afford to do in later life. In the early 1980's, Jan worked as a tour director for a national bus tour company, doing research for and leading tours for locations from the Canadian Rockies to the Smoky Mountains. Jan also enjoyed writing stories, poems, and essays.

Jan is survived by her two children, Linda Solomon, of Lakeport, CA, and Marla Solomon, of Easthampton, MA, their respective partners, Kees Ploeg and John Pepi, as well as her two grandchildren, Pilar Jefferson and Sajo Jefferson, both of whom now reside in Jan's birth city of Brooklyn, NY. She was predeceased by her husband, John (d. 1986), her ex-husband, Marvin (d. 2016), and her former son-in-law, Stephen W. Jefferson (d. 2018). A private memorial will be held. Those wishing to honor Jan's memory may send donations to the American Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals or to their local humane society. New England Funeral & Cremation Center, LLC, 25 Mill Street, Springfield, MA is assisting the family. Visit www.nefcc.net