



## Miriam "Mitzi" Goheen

August 10, 1942 - November 8, 2019

Miriam Goheen, known to friends and family as Mitzi, passed away at home in her own bed, as she wished, on November 8, 2019. She was 77 years old.

Mitzi was born on August 10, 1942 in Bellingham, Washington to Harry and Molly Goheen at her grandparents' farm, Arborcourt, a place she always held dear in her heart. From there, she went on to live in cities around the world, including Syracuse, NY, Madison, WI, Cambridge, MA, Amherst, MA, Corvallis, OR and Kumbo, Cameroon.

After graduating from Corvallis High School and Oregon State University, Mitzi received her PhD in Anthropology from Harvard University. Her field work brought her to the Nso Kingdom in Cameroon, where she undertook her life's work and found a true home. She lived in Nso periodically for sixteen years and there was accorded the title Yaa Nso (Queen Nso). A respected and dedicated scholar, her book "Men Own The Fields, Woman Own The Crops" is a classic in economic anthropology and gender studies (see this Wikipedia article for more on Mitzi's contributions). [https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nso\\_people](https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nso_people)

Mitzi taught at Tufts University early in her career and was a long-time Professor of Anthropology and Black Studies at Amherst College in Amherst, Massachusetts. During her tenure, she also served as Chair of the Anthropology and Black Studies Departments at Amherst, and as Editor of the African Studies Review.

Mitzi was married to Larry Mahaffey from 1960 to 1973, and they had a son, Patrick. Mitzi was an extraordinarily loving mother to Patrick, ensuring that he understood the intricacies of Hegel and Marx at a young age, and a devoted grandmother, lavishing love and gifts on her grandchildren: Harry, Siobhan and Alfred.

Mitzi married Steve Fjellman in 1977 in Sarasota, Florida, and Steve remained her partner, her caregiver, and her hero until the end. Mitzi retired from teaching in 2017 and moved home to Corvallis with Steve, where they enjoyed taking trips to the Oregon coast

with family, reading, following politics, and working in her gardens. Mitzi was a great cook, with large elaborate feasts a particular specialty, which she delighted in sharing with her close-knit group of friends and family. Mitzi had a special place in her heart for the people of Nso, and wished she could have travelled home to the Nso Kingdom in her last few years.

She was a brilliant scholar, a great friend, a dedicated daughter, a doting sister, a loving wife and a caring mother. Surviving Mitzi are her husband, Steve, her brothers, Mark and David, her sister-in-law, Jane, her son, Patrick, her daughter-in-law, Debbie, her step-daughter, Melina, her grandchildren, Harry, Siobhan, Alfred, Tynan and Tate, her nieces, Amanda and Jennifer, and her nephew, Matthew. We will all miss her greatly.

Services will be held Saturday November 30th at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (2945 NW Circle Blvd) from 2:00-4:00 PM, followed by a reception at the same location. We ask that in lieu of flowers, donations be made to the Harry and Molly Goheen Scholarship Fund at OSU.

# Events

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**NOV**   **Service**   02:00PM - 04:00PM

**30**

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Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

2945 NW Circle Blvd, Corvallis, OR, US, 97330

# Comments

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“ I remember meeting Patrick, Mitzi's son in the early 1970's, we attended the Cambridge and Latin School. I remember Mitzi and Patrick inviting me to their house for a bite to eat, Mitzi was a good cook , she seemed to enjoy cooking. If possible, could my obituary be passed on to Patrick, I think of him on occasion. You can give him my email address, ok? My email address is at the end of this message, thank you, Joseph Johnson Email: herrmausmann10268@gnail.com



**Joseph Johnson** - January 05, 2021 at 11:46 PM

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“ 4 files added to the album Memories Album



**Cate Calson** - December 04, 2019 at 02:09 AM

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“ I first met Mitzi when she was mentoring my anthropology major daughter, Ellie Swain Ballard, at Amherst College in the mid-1990s. I mentioned to her that my grandfather, Robert H.H. Goheen, then of Princeton,NJ, and her grandmother had figured out that our family connections went way, way back to two cousins who came over in colonial times. Our ancestor fought as a private in the Battle of the Brandywine outside Philadelphia and then settled near State College, PA. I appreciate that Mitzi also took Ellie in after she graduated and wanted to stay around Amherst for another few months, and then counseled her about next career steps. Trudi Goheen Swain, daughter of Robert F. Goheen of Princeton, NJ.

**Trudi Goheen Swain** - November 30, 2019 at 03:13 PM

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“ Mitzi and I had a very sisterly relationship almost instantly upon meeting each other soon after Byron and I returned to Cambridge. I really met “Mitz” through Steve, when Byron joined Back Bay Chorale, and Mitzi and I became fast friends. Walking Fresh Pond, taking classes at Health Works, cooking dinners for visiting scholars. In our later years when Mitzi moved to Amherst and on her summer break to Corvallis and the Coast, we spent hours talking on the phone about work and life and our friends and families, our colleagues and politics. When she came into Cambridge, we would resume our walks and talks in person. We traveled to London and Mexico (to the Spa Mitzi and her Mom would go to together,) and she introduced me to Paul Nkwi who took me to Nso where Mitzi was queened to meet the Frankfurt sociology PhD who was also the Fon. I learned much from Mitzi and her African friends and colleagues she so lovingly mentored and cared for.

Mitzi also wrote me evocative cards, from Corvallis, from Amherst, and although she was at times difficult to contact (her wicked aversion to picking up phones, communicating via email and more often than not via her cell phone), out of the blue would come a humorous card, sometimes a cartoonish image of crazy women, with newsy black script, and loving words. When I told my friends of Mitzi’s passing their memories were of her amazing collection of boots, her blue and red streaked hair, her striking unique fashions, as well of course of her lively intellect. My hair dresser asks me every time I go “how is Mitzi.” Mitzi never had him cut her hair but she made a profound lasting impression on him and on so many for her conversation and her outsized personality. And also for her kindness and support for Amherst’s young scholars.

We arranged our last big party in honor of Professor Stanley Tambiah, Mitzi’s beloved mentor and our friend, and also to celebrate the publication of Radical Equalitarianism that Felicity Aulino, Mitzi, and Tambi edited, a collection of papers delivered at the American Anthropology Meetings, in Tambi’s honor, in 2007. Byron and I will upload photos from that event.

Steve and Mitzi visited Byron and me not so long ago, they were a happy old couple, looking good and having fun.

Mitzi your generous spirit remains with us. Condolences to Steve, Pat and Debby and Al, and all the family, especially to the children and grandchildren in Mitzi's extended family. Our conversations were always filled with loving stories of the kids filled with delight and pride.

With Love, Mary-Jo and Byron



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**Peter Geschiere** - November 27, 2019 at 12:05 PM



“ Mitzi was not only Queen-Mother of Nso, she was also the mother of Cameroon anthropology. Not only because she was such a good anthropologist but also since it was so much fun to be with her - whether in a Cameroonian 'maquis' or in an American bar, or even in an academic place. In general, academia and fun do not go together that well, but with Mitzi they did. Will miss her so much, she was a great comrade.

**Peter Geschiere** - November 27, 2019 at 12:10 PM

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“ Mitzi was a kind, generous, and warmhearted teacher and colleague. I will miss her.--  
Vanessa Fong, Amherst College Class of 1996 and Professor of Anthropology,  
Amherst College

**Vanessa Fong** - November 27, 2019 at 11:21 AM

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**Melinda Mahaffey Icden** - November 26, 2019 at 12:39 PM

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“ Mitzi was my first role model. I was young, just out of high school, when we met. She was getting off a plane returning from Africa. Visually, she was small and frail, due from her body fighting parasites she had contracted there. Despite this, she still emanated a glowing spirit. While she looked small that day I came to appreciate the strength and emotional fortitude she possessed. But, I never heard her boast. She didn't define herself by pieces of paper. She was kind, supportive and inspiring. Not to mention, she loved to cook. She was the mother I never had and I am sad I never took the time to share that with her. So here is what I would have said, “Mitzi, I am so glad that you were my (step) mother for even the briefest of moments. You brought light into my life and showed me that my destiny is mine own. Thank you for your grace and wisdom. Mitzi, you will forever live on in my heart.”

~ Cathy

Cate Calson - November 20, 2019 at 05:26 PM

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“ Mitzi was a lovely person, and she will be missed by many, many people.

She was a loving mother. She loved Pat and she adored his kids, absolutely adored them.

She loved and cherished her husband, Steve.

She was warm and nurturing, a great cook and a great hostess. I'm remembering all the parties she hosted in her Cambridge apartment.

She had a great sense of humor and loved to have a good time.

She was very caring. In 1983 I came down with very bad back pain. She would come over and cook recipes I gave her while I lay there on three chairs, doing nothing except talk.

She was very smart, as well as always concerned to do an excellent job. The fact that Stanley Tambiah, an eminent anthropologist at Harvard, became her advisor attests to this—he was demanding and did not suffer fools gladly. They were good friends, too.

How wonderful that Mitzi's family and friends have so many treasured memories of her as they come together to celebrate her life. How wonderful that there will be a ceremony in Nso honoring her.

Jean Jackson  
Cambridge, MA

Jean Jackson - November 19, 2019 at 06:23 PM



“ Sincere condolences Pat!! I'll always have the fond memories of Mitz in SJ, Santa Cruz, and Yorktown. We had great fun and serious bridge games. She was one smart lady and a great friend!!  
RIP Mitz and God bless.....Andy

andy stokes - November 17, 2019 at 12:07 PM

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“ Patrick and Debbie's wedding, June 2004



Debbie Mahaffey - November 16, 2019 at 08:57 PM

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“ Mitzi's retirement luncheon in Amherst, MA July 2017



Debbie Mahaffey - November 16, 2019 at 02:46 PM

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Debbie Mahaffey - November 16, 2019 at 02:01 PM

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“ 2 files added to the tribute wall



**Matthew Mahaffey** - November 16, 2019 at 10:36 AM

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**Gabrielle Pangilinan** - November 16, 2019 at 12:34 AM

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“ 1 file added to the album Memories Album



**DeMoss-Durdan Funeral Home and Crematory** - November 14, 2019 at 05:58 PM