



## Myra Sommers

January 13, 1937 - October 22, 2021

Myra Sommers lived a rich, full life, she touched many people over the years and made a difference in the lives of so many of us. Her genuine kindness and compassion are what I will remember most.

Myra was born in Omaha, Nebraska in 1937, her childhood was largely one of turmoil and continual relocation. She did her best to navigate the hardships of being an army brat while also looking out for her younger siblings Fred and Lynda. By the time she graduated high school, she had attended a staggering 22 different schools! Largely to escape her home, Myra wed for the first time in 1955. As most of you know this was a time in history when women were just expected to become homemakers after marriage, and Myra was no exception. She excelled at these traditional duties, sewing her own clothes and later those of her children, cooking elaborate meals, and hosting dinner parties. As she told me years later, her home was always neat as a pin, "It was the 1950's after all, that's just what you did... my floors were so clean you could eat off them".

The 1960s started off with a move from the Atlanta area to New Jersey so my father could commute into New York City every day where he joined the masses of neatly dressed men in skinny ties climbing the corporate ladder. During this time Myra was tasked with taking care of her mother who was dying of cancer. She did this in a small, one-bedroom, walk-up apartment

while also carrying her first child. That child, Kesa, was born in April of 1963 and Myra's mother died a couple of months later. This loss and a mountain of issues from her past created an existential crisis for Myra. To her credit, considering it was 1963, she sought out therapy for the first time in her life, Myra was 26. Many years later she recalled to me that this was one of the major turning points in her life, a point in time where everything was either before or after this.

By the late 1960s change was in the air and Myra had embraced the movements of the day. She cried when MLK was shot and again a couple of months later when Bobby was killed. She watched Neil step foot on the moon and welcomed her second child, Christopher, that November of '69. She marched for peace and later for woman's rights. Her awakening was in full bloom by now, yoga and meditation became part of her life as was volunteering at her local PBS station. Myra also enjoyed being a mother, she would frequently strap Kesa into the child seat on the back of her Schwinn bicycle and make the 15-mile trek from her home to the shores of Lake Michigan and back again. No helmets for either one of them! During this time Myra also started taking college courses for self-improvement and fun. She found that she had a talent for ceramics and took classes throughout her life at one college and then another as she moved across the country. She loved "playing in the clay" as she called it and found great joy in the creative process. At university she also pursued her other passion, helping people, eventually graduating in 1979 with a master's degree in social work.

The late 1970s was a difficult but promising time for Myra, her marriage to my father had ended but her world was expanding. A new group of friends was established and along with the hard work of graduate school, there was occasionally time to have fun. Remember, this was the disco era and Myra loved to dance! She also loved to roller skate; I fondly remember skating with her all over the neighborhood and beyond, occasionally going down to the

Chicago lakefront to skate until our feet hurt. Bicycling was also a love of hers and continued to be until she couldn't ride anymore.

College is also where she met the love of her life, Jim Sommers. Jim and Myra were married in 1985 and settled in Naperville, Illinois. From this point on it was the two of them together, always. I was so happy she had found her soul mate, if anyone deserved love and happiness she did. I think everyone they knew thought that they were a perfect match for each other. The harmonious longevity of this union certainly confirms this now! True love doesn't happen often, and true love that lasts is rarer still, this is what they found in each other.

During her years as a social worker and therapist, Myra helped countless people, from children and adolescents to more acutely troubled folks in a psychiatric hospital setting. For most of her career though she helped people like you and me who were just struggling their way through life and at times needed help. Myra was a fearless advocate for her clients and a truly gifted therapist!

Around the turn of the millennium, Jim and Myra moved from Naperville to Montana. There they enjoyed the beauty of big sky county and all that it offered. Glacier and Yellowstone National Parks were favorites but also lesser-known places off the beaten path. She also enjoyed just sitting on the porch with Jim, looking at the mountains and the frequent breathtaking sunsets. Watching wildlife and birds feeding brought her joy and even when arthritis ravaged her hands she still created art playing in the clay as long as possible.

After Jim's retirement in 2014 there was one last move to Corvallis, Oregon. This brought Jim and Myra closer to their children and grandchildren. It also

gave them easier access to quality healthcare services. As I was typing this up my daughters Kayla and Samantha recalled making pies with grandma a few years back before her stroke, they really enjoyed working in the kitchen with her. I remember them coming home from one of these cooking sessions and telling me "Grandma doesn't measure things out like you do, sometimes she doesn't even use a recipe". I told them that when you have cooked as long as she has you kind of know how much of what to use and that the recipe is in your head. It's knowledge plus wisdom, something Myra had in spades and in so many ways.

My mom was warm, loving, and compassionate but she also had toughness and perseverance. What she overcame in the first part of her life, the difficult childhood, the struggles of a failed first marriage etc., made her the outstanding therapist and person she was. Myra was a genuine soul, always empathic, never putting on airs or wishing for the trappings of success, to her the beauty of nature and her family is what made her rich, and rich she was.

# Tribute Wall

RH

“Almost 50 years. That is how long we were friends. I remember quite well the time I first met Myra, or, really, “encountered” her. It was at a weekend group encounter workshop of about 15 people. Red flags went up immediately. Here, I thought, is someone to be careful of. She was full of energy, fun and enthusiasm, but, as far as I was concerned, probably not someone to be trusted as an “adult”. How wrong I was. (Not too many years later, Myra would understand my initial perceptions of her perfectly, for she knew my “background”.) Within the next year or two both of us got divorced and found ourselves single parents. Hence, we shared this common bond and became fast friends. Another common theme we shared is we both moved around a lot growing up. That had consequences for both of us.

We met, oh so many times, at the Morton Arboretum to walk and talk and ponder and share the issues/problems we faced as single parents. I helped her as best I could, and she helped me. I saw first hand how hard she fought for Kesa and Christopher. I knew math, computers and physics and she knew people. I learned so much from her during these chats, and it was just the start. I continued to learn from her throughout our friendship.

There are many words to describe Myra, but kind and nurturing were the key qualities that forever attracted me to her – that and the fact that she knew so much that I didn’t!

She made a big difference in my life. I was very lucky I attended that workshop some 50 years ago and “encountered” Myra and became BFF.

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Richard Hosteny - December 02, 2021 at 04:01 PM

MH

“ 1 file added to the album Myra



Marcy Hall - November 27, 2021 at 08:00 AM

SR

“ Myra was one of the significant people that crossed my path of life. She was generous, kind, witty and talented. Always ready to lend an ear and excited for a new adventure. My thoughts and prayers to you all; Jim, Kesa, Chris and family.

Suzanne Rowe - November 27, 2021 at 12:11 AM

RH

“ 9 files added to the album Myra



Richard Hosteny - November 25, 2021 at 08:31 AM



CD

“ 69 files added to the album Myra



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**Chris Duffey** - November 12, 2021 at 06:11 PM