

Half Staff – Patricia A. Watson

April 9, 2006

Patricia Watson was a bit on the quiet side for someone so strong, friend Jill Adels said. But when she spoke, everyone in the room listened. Watson, who was an activist for women and a member of several town and Cape Ann boards, died Sunday after a long battle with lung cancer. She was 65.

Watson and Adels were founding members of a consciousness-raising group of feminists that formed on Cape Ann in the early 1970s. But they were also members of the “Dining Duchesses” or the “Lunch Bunch”, where members met over a meal to “solve the world’s problems.”

Like many in the group, Watson’s involvement led her to become more active in the community. She graduated from Suffolk University Law School in 1977 and served on many town and committee boards over the next three decades.

“She was a woman of great character and determination,” Adels said. “She also raised a wonderful family.”

Friends and colleagues said yesterday they will remember Watson for her tireless efforts on many boards like the Rockport Town Committee, the Cape Ann League of Women Voters, the Cape Ann Symphony, the Cape Ann YMCA and the Rockport Board of Appeals.

Watson was a “life saver” for the Cape Ann Symphony, said David Benjamin, its orchestra manager. She served for several years as the president of the organization. She organized the symphony’s affairs during a time of growth, Benjamin said, and was conscientious in her job.

“She did a great job,” Benjamin said. Her death is “a big loss to Cape Ann.”

Watson was the vice chairwoman of the Board of Appeals for a number of years. Chairman Lloyd Starrett called her a hard-working and wonderful person.

Starrett wrote a recommendation for the reappointment of Watson in 2002 to the Board of Selectmen, citing her generosity in giving her time to the board. In the letter, Starrett said Watson often volunteered to write the decision in the most difficult cases and was one of the able decision-writers on the board. Watson became the board’s expert on the requirements for special-use permits for cell phone towers, Starrett said.

Peter Watson, her husband, remembers his wife as a “voracious” reader and an avid skier and swimmer. She also watched “Jeopardy” like a pro, he said, beating most contestants to the right answer most of the time.

“Afterward, she’d lament that, with so much nonessential information rattling around her brain, she wouldn’t have any room for new and more useful and important stuff,” Watson said in an email to the Times.

Peter Watson, who was editor of the Gloucester Daily Times from 1970 until the mid 1980s, also

remembered their Granite Street home as an “open house” to their friends. His wife would offer guests a drink as they discussed new happenings in everyone’s lives.

She was a host of many parties, Watson said; from small dinner parties to annual soirees with more than 100 people, and with her doing all the cooking. There was almost always a bottle of champagne in the refrigerator, and the last bottle’s cork somewhere on the kitchen floor.

Obituary

Attorney Patricia A. Watson, a founder of Cape Ann feminism in the 1970s and a civic and community leader for years, died Sunday, April 9, 2006, at her home in Rockport. She was 65.

A longtime cancer survivor who had part of her right lung surgically removed in 1985, she died of complications from a new lung cancer, this time in her left lung, which was operated on a year ago. She was a founding member of the first consciousness-raising group of feminists formed on Cape Ann in the early 1970s, with Mary Meader, Jill Adels, Sylvia Cohen, Fritzi Gale and others, women whose lives were changed by their shared experiences. She was a member of the Cape Ann League of Women Voters during those same years, and held increasingly strong political views, which she shared liberally. She was a member of the Rockport Democratic Town Committee, a volunteer in the Howard Dean and John Kerry presidential campaigns and contributed to other liberal candidates and causes, including the Democratic Party and Emily’s List. She was a member of the Rockport Zoning Board of Appeals since 1993, and served for many years as the board’s vice chairwoman, and was its resident expert on cell-tower issues. She chaired the Police Station Building Study Committee that recommended the new Rockport police station and served on the library building committee when the Tarr School was converted into the new Rockport library.

She served the Cape Ann community as a past president of the Cape Ann Symphony, and as a past member of the board of directors of the Cape Ann YMCA. She was a longtime volunteer at the Sawyer Free Library Adult Learning Center in Gloucester.

As a lawyer in general practice, she concentrated on estate planning, land use and real estate. She served for many years as a member of the board of directors of Neighborhood Legal Services in Lynn, and was a volunteer advocate in the Salem Courts.

Her home was always an “open house” to friends, whom she’d welcome with a keen interest in what they and their families were doing and an offer of refreshments. She was an enthusiastic party-giver, from small, sometimes themed dinner parties to annual open houses for more than 100, for which she’d do all the cooking. There was almost always a bottle of champagne in the refrigerator, and the last empty bottle’s cork somewhere on the kitchen floor. You’d never know who might be coming to dinner, because for decades she served as the housemother to a changing cast of more than 50 interns and young reporters who lived at the Watsons’ while working at the Gloucester Daily Times with her husband Peter, former editor of the paper. There was also a parade of young friends of the family and several summers’ worth of international au pairs.

For several summers, even as she continued to practice law, she cooked at the Seaward Inn in Rockport, and once catered a wedding at the Gloucester Fraternity Club.

She was a voracious reader, often of mysteries, many of them English, and on the first of several

trips to England, she delighted in visiting locales from the books she'd read. The same was true of trips to Arizona, where she'd seek out sites from Tony Hillerman's mysteries. And fulfilling a lifetime dream, she also traveled to Egypt, and went on a safari in Kenya. She skied at Killington in Vermont, counting the expert trails that she descended as brave moments to savor. A slow but steady swimmer, she was willing and able to circumnavigate the half-mile perimeter of Rockport's Steel Derrick quarry.

And she watched TV's "Jeopardy!" like a pro, most of the time beating the contestants to the answer. Afterward she'd lament that with so much non-essential information rattling around in her brain, she wouldn't have room for new, more useful and important stuff. It was a needless concern.

Born Patricia Ward in Queens, N.Y. on August 29, 1940, she was the only child of George and Mary (Doyle) Ward. Orphaned by age 8, she lived with her aunt Anna Leonard's family on nearby Long Island on the weekends and boarded out during the school week. She summered with the Leonards in Cutchogue, on Long Island's North Fork. For her high school years, she came to Massachusetts to live in Attleboro with close family friends, Charles and Marie Seltzer, whom she regarded as her aunt and uncle. She graduated from Attleboro High School in 1957, a majorette and academically second in her class.

She was in the class of 1961 at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, where she met her future husband, Peter, a fellow student. She was the editor of the editorial page for the college paper, the Collegian, and Peter was one of her writers. After graduating with a degree in English/journalism, she moved to Boston, sharing several apartments with friends while she worked for Little Brown book publishers, TV's Channel 7, and the Boston Herald, which she left on the birth of her first son, Seth, in 1966. On Cape Ann, she worked for Peter Smith Publishers. She entered Suffolk University Law School in 1973, and was a member of the Law Review, whose staff is made up of the law school's top academic achievers. She graduated in 1977, among the top ten students in her class.

She leaves her husband, Peter, former editor of the Gloucester Daily Times and retired general manager of Essex County Newspapers, Inc.; two sons, Seth, of Ann Arbor, Michigan, a human resources administrator for the University of Michigan, and Jared, of Seattle, Washington, vice president for programs and donor services for the Seattle Community Foundation. She also leaves a cousin, Steve Leonard, of Charleston, South Carolina.

ARRANGEMENTS: A memorial gathering will be held at a date to be announced. Gifts in her memory may be made to the Gloucester Adult Learning Center, c/o Sawyer Free Library, 2 Dale Ave., Gloucester, MA 01930, or to one of the political causes she supported, the Democratic National Committee or Emily's List. Funeral arrangements are by the Burgess & Mackey Funeral Home, 201 Main St., Rockport, MA 01966.

Boston Globe

A striking redhead whose political views could be as fiery as her hair would be enough to make many stop and listen. But the sound was just as arresting.

"I'll miss her voice – her lazy, slow, husky, raspy voice," Jill Adels said yesterday of her friend

Patricia Watson. “She sounded like somebody who could have sung the blues very well.”

Mrs. Watson died Sunday at her Rockport home, where a newspaper often lay open on the kitchen counter to an article she hadn’t quite finished reading when she paused to welcome a friend who had stopped by unannounced. They would fall into conversation over cheese, crackers, and wine from a bottle that always seemed to be chilling – just in case.

She was 65 and had been battling lung cancer.

A lawyer long active in Cape Ann civic affairs, Mrs. Watson was a Democrat – as anyone who broached the subject of politics soon knew. And yet, she tended to quietly listen before offering her thoughts.

“If she was Southern, I’d call her a steel magnolia,” said her friend Mary Meader of Gloucester. “She had a wonderful, sweet presence about her, and was intense at the same time. She had a great sense of presence and a great sense of justice.”

Mrs. Watson was born in Queens, N.Y. Her parents died by the time she was 8. As a boarding school student, she spent weekends with an aunt and her family on Long Island, N.Y., and summers with them on the rural North Fork of the island’s eastern tip. Moving to Massachusetts, she lived with family friends and graduated second in her class at Attleboro High School, where she was a majorette.

While attending the University of Massachusetts, she went to a party at a fraternity house and met Peter Watson in 1959.

“I had the good sense to drive her back to her dormitory,” he said. “She was probably the most striking redhead in the world.”

She graduated and moved to Boston, where she worked for the Little, Brown book publishing firm, Channel 7, and the Boston Herald. The couple married in the summer of 1964 and she left the Herald in 1966, when the first of her two sons was born.

Living in Rockport, where her husband eventually became editor of the Gloucester Daily Times and general manager of Essex County Newspapers, Mrs. Watson and several friends started a consciousness-raising group in the late 1960s.

“That was a very pivotal time for women,” said Meader, who recalled her friend as “just one of those stunning redheads with freckles and big eyes.”

Adels, who lives in Rockport, called the meetings of the Cape Ann feminists “a heady experience.” Using a list from a Psychology Today article as a guide, they tackled an issue each week that challenged each member to confront her core beliefs.

“People were changed and they ended up either getting a divorce or going to grad school,” Adels said. “And Pat was one of those who wisely went to grad school.”

At Suffolk University Law School, Mrs. Watson was a member of the law review and graduated

in 1977 in the top 10 of her class, her husband said. Initially she handled divorce cases.

“Then she stopped doing them and the law life was better,” he said. “Even though she was good at it, she hated doing divorces,” Adels said. “All the messy emotion and anger.”

Mrs. Watson concentrated her practice on estate planning, land use, and real estate. She and others had breathed new life into the Cape Ann League of Women Voters, and she was a member of the town’s Democratic Committee. More recently, she volunteered for the Howard Dean and John F. Kerry presidential campaigns.

Serving on the Zoning Board of Appeals, as vice chairman for many years, Mrs. Watson lent her legal expertise to issues such as cell towers. She also was a past president of the Cape Ann Symphony.

With work and civic commitments, it would be easy to imagine she was rarely at home. To the contrary, her hospitality was as renowned as her political views.

“You could just open the door, stick your head in, say ‘hi’,” said Carol Ackerman, a friend from Gloucester. “She’d say, ‘Hi, come on in.’ You’d head to the kitchen. They would offer you something to drink and haul out the cheese and crackers, if it was that time of day. She was almost always ready to put down what she was doing, sit down, and talk with you.”

She liked to swim not far from her house in Steel Derrick Quarry – often in a green bathing suit, a color complimentary to her red hair. Perhaps because her family life was interrupted as a child, she held fast to certain traditions.

“She had to have a particular kind of birthday cake every year,” Ackerman said. “Yellow cake with white frosting from the grocery store.”

Also, each year around Christmas, the Watsons opened their house to about 100 people.

Part of her right lung was removed in 1985. More recently, cancer was found in her left lung. “Even in her battle with lung cancer, she showed that same kind of quiet reserve,” said Meader, who added that while two other members of their group previously died, Mrs. Watson’s death “really signals the end of something quite wonderful in our history, a coming to a close. She was a beacon for a lot of people for a lot of things.”

In addition to her husband, Mrs. Watson leaves two sons, Seth of Ann Arbor, Mich. and Jared of Seattle.

A memorial gathering will be held at a later date.