

## Harriet Bullitt: A Tribute



Harriet Bullitt passed away peacefully in her sleep at home, early on the morning of April 23<sup>rd</sup>. She was 97 years old.

Philanthropist, publisher, broadcast executive, patron of the arts, creator of a mountain retreat and resort, fencing champion, horsewoman, pilot, tugboat captain, flamenco dancer, and much-decorated environmental hero, Harriet was a Renaissance woman. She lived an astonishingly full life, and embraced it with brio.

Harriet was born on September 2, 1924 at Seattle General Hospital, the first person on either side of her family to be born in a hospital. She was her mother's youngest child, and her brother and sister were probably correct in dubbing her the favorite.

From her earliest years, Harriet displayed indomitable self-confidence, coupled with an unbounded love of fun and adventure. Her mother, Dorothy Stimson Bullitt, was the first woman to drive an automobile from Seattle to Portland and one of the first women in broadcasting, and Harriet inherited her mother's delight in breaking barriers. Together, they went down the Colorado River in a rubber raft when Dorothy was 85. Years later,

when Harriet was approaching 70, she hosted a group of reporters and activists on a multi-day rafting trip down the Snake River rapids to debate whether to breach the Snake River dams.

Shortly after World War II, while living in Germany with her first husband, Bill Brewster, Harriet learned to pilot gliders and got serious about fencing. After moving to Massachusetts, she competed for the Northeast fencing championship. In the finals, she lost to 3-time champion (and later Oscar-winning actress) Olympia Dukakis. Harriet ramped up her training schedule to five hours a day, and the following year she defeated Dukakis and went on to successfully defend her title for several years.

In the late 1950s, Harriet moved with her family to Florida. She loved swimming, and one day she swam to an island so far offshore that it could barely be seen from the beach. On returning, she was delighted to find a dolphin swimming alongside her, darting around and seemingly enjoying the day and the company. Only after she got back to shore did she learn that the waters were teeming with sharks. Her dolphin companion may have been an aquatic bodyguard.

Years before NAUI and PADI made recreational diving popular, Harriet persuaded Navy divers to teach her to SCUBA dive. She made her own wet suit in order to keep warm on deep dives and cave dives. To test her limits, she descended more than 200 feet into the black depths of a Florida sinkhole and had a terrifying rendezvous with “rapture of the deep”—Jacques Cousteau’s poetic term for nitrogen narcosis.

During the Florida years, Harriet tried her hand at a variety of jobs. The most hair-raising of these was a stint “milking” extremely poisonous snakes for their venom in a lab dedicated to producing antivenom.

Young Harriet began her formal education in a small, one-room school in the Highlands just north of Seattle, then she went on to private school on the east coast. At the University of Washington, she was the only woman in the School of Engineering. The engineering dean banned her from the library, calling her a “distraction” to the boys. She left and didn’t finish her bachelor’s degree at UW—in zoology—until she was 40.

Harriet founded the magazine *Pacific Search* (which became *Pacific Northwest*) and operated it for 23 years. When she was recruiting staff, the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* refused to carry her classified ad because she insisted on noting that the magazine office was a smoke-free environment. *Pacific Search* was the first periodical to publish Far Side cartoonist Gary Larson and photographer Art Wolfe. She also published works by Ken Kesey and Ivan Doig.

Harriet was a champion of the Bullitt Foundation’s efforts to protect the ancient forests of Washington, Oregon, British Columbia, and Alaska. The Bullitt Foundation underwrote many of the groups that brought successful lawsuits to protect the ecosystems supporting the spotted owl and marbled murrelet. A 4-day horse trek through the Siskiyu in Southern Oregon led to the Bullitt Foundation’s long-term, support of efforts to create today’s

Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument. A similar trip throughout Clayoquot Sound in British Columbia fortified the Foundation's efforts to support protestors who were determined to end the practice of clearcutting the area's 600-year-old trees and create a Biosphere Reserve to protect habitat for bear, cougar and wolf.

In 2010, when the Foundation's board was debating whether to attempt to build the world's greenest office building, a couple of trustees raised spirited objections to the risks it could entail. The proposed Bullitt Center would be a net-positive-energy, net-zero-water, toxic-free, deeply-healthy, biomimicking structure—an unprecedented model of architectural sustainability. Harriet waited quietly until the debate had been fully aired. Then she quietly said, "My family earned the money that endowed this foundation. We didn't do that by avoiding risk, but by taking measured risks that could have high payoffs." The debate was over. The Center has outperformed its ambitious environmental goals and been a robust commercial success, winning many architectural and engineering awards.

Harriet had a deep sense of place. In her final decades, she devoted most of her energy and resources to the environment, culture, and well-being of Central Washington, around Leavenworth and Wenatchee. After traveling from Iceland to Antarctica, she found she was most deeply rooted here, where she had spent much of her youth.

Harriet built the deep green Sleeping Lady Mountain Resort, with its own 2-acre organic garden, to attract tourists and company retreats and support the local economy. She lived across the river. To get back and forth she took a ski chair from an old Stevens Pass ski lift that she had rigged across the river. One day, her daughter noticed that a family of rattlesnakes lived beneath her front steps. Harriet rebuffed the suggestion that they be exterminated, saying "No, they're not bothering anyone."

Next door to the resort, Harriet created the Icicle Creek Center for the Arts to introduce internationally-recognized musicians, singers, dancers, and other artists to the community. The Sleeping Lady Foundation sponsored a diverse array of notable, sometimes provocative, speakers. Her KOHO Radio aired a panoply of musical artists and a sprinkling of progressive political views.

Harriet founded and largely underwrote the Icicle Fund which has made grants to more than 100 groups to support the arts, preserve the history, and protect the environment of North Central Washington. Marrying key parts of her legacy, she transferred ownership of the Sleeping Lady Resort to the Icicle Fund to provide for its ongoing financial support.

Harriet is survived by her husband, Alexander Voronin; by her children, Wenda O'Reilly and Scott Brewster; her six grandchildren and six great-grandchildren.