

IN MEMORY OF HELEN HOLTZ

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*By Thomas Rayfiel*

Helen Holtz, a longtime Coop member and organizer of many memorable celebrations at the Coop, died recently. She was 74. Helen joined the Coop in 1979. In the early 1980's, she chaired many General Meetings and was later Recording Secretary, but it is for her pioneering work on the Fundraising Committee that she will be most fondly remembered.

"She was creative and dedicated to making every event work well," Sarah Zahnstecher recalls. "She made it fun to paint signs announcing the latest event and even kept one of mine after it was over. Importantly, she was a fighter for gender equality and social justice before many people understood the divisive society we live in. What else would you expect from someone who spent so much time making the Coop thrive and the world a better place by her presence in it? Helen was the kind of person I thought would always be here with us."

Martha Siegel, who succeeded Helen on the Fundraising Committee, points in particular to her organizing of huge parties for the Coop's fifth, tenth, fifteenth, and twentieth birthdays as well as the Food Coop Music Festivals from 1983-1987, which took place at PS 321. "Helen probably organized the food. Steve Browman and I ran the music," Siegel says. "They were very successful events and definitely increased the feeling of community."

Daniel Brooks, also a member of the committee, notes: "Helen led a dedicated team of 'Funsters' who organized dances, auctions, performances and other festival opportunities. We would meet in her apartment and discuss and argue over themes and events and the kind of flowers that would decorate the tables. She let no detail slip through the cracks and kept us all thinking of new ways to socially engage the Coop members."

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*DANIEL BROOKS, FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE MEMBER*

In her professional career, Helen liked to say she worked first as a “stripper,” a job that involved removing a photographic emulsion with its image from an individual negative and combining it with others in position on a glass plate. When that skill became obsolete, she retrained to become a diagnostic medical sonographer, a health care professional trained to use imaging technology to help physicians diagnose heart problems.

“She made a tremendous effort in going back to school in order to make a living for the purpose of helping people,” Zahnstecher adds. “It was very hard and she kept at it.”

Helen is survived by her husband, David Chorlian, her brother, Coop General Coordinator Joe Holtz, her sister-in-law, Kathy Blyn, her niece Sarah, and her nephew David.

*Member Thomas Rayfiel is the author of eight novels. He has also written “living obituaries” for VICE TV.*