

IN MEMORY OF ANDREA "TRACI" O'KELLY

September 16, 2025



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By Thomas Rayfiel

Andrea “Traci” O’Kelly, who joined the Coop in 1985, died on April 1 at her home in Brooklyn. She was 74 years old. Traci studied acting at the Afro-American Studio for Acting and Speech in Harlem. She performed a musical tribute to Billie Holiday at Danny’s Skylight Room and Don’t Tell Mama. Later, she settled in Park Slope and worked at several businesses, including Jumpin’ Julia, Tarzian West for Housewares and the Plaza Center for the Healing Arts.

At the Coop, Traci worked checkout and had a near-perfect attendance record. Her daughter Raine recalls that “the Coop was an essential space for my mother. She was very proud to be a member. She primarily worked at checkout because she loved talking to people and learning about all the items the Coop carried. She appreciated its affordability and organic food. My mother raised four young children as a single mother. Being able to provide us with artisanal, organic high-quality products was the reason she was grateful to be a member.”

Some of Traci’s favorite Coop items were chicken for roast chicken Sundays, kombucha, fresh corn, ramps, cantaloupe, and essential oils such as lemon, peppermint and lavender for sleep and meditation.

Membership Coordinator Jana Cunningham, who was often in charge of Traci’s shift, remembers: “Traci was always wearing a smile. She was one of those people who made the room brighter by just being present. Traci worked on the Shopping Squad, which could at times be very hectic and stressful, yet she remained pleasant, helpful, kind and...smiling.”

A great animal lover, Traci always had dogs and cats in her house. She was particularly fond of Irish setters, cocker spaniels and Maine coon cats.

“THE COOP WAS AN ESSENTIAL SPACE FOR MY MOTHER. SHE WAS VERY PROUD

TO BE A MEMBER.”

RAINE, DAUGHTER

Traci is survived by her daughters, Lani, Toi, Raine and Jurnee; her sisters, Donna and Frances, and her dog, Joey. Her mother, Helen, predeceased her in 2006. Her brother, Arnold, predeceased her in 2015. Her only son, Hunter, predeceased her in 2020.

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

IN MEMORY OF DAN CLEARWATER GROSS

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By Thomas Rayfiel

Dan Clearwater Gross, a Coop member who was heavily involved in composting, both in Park Slope and other parts of Brooklyn, died unexpectedly on July 14. He was 40 years old. Dan joined the Coop in 2010, left in 2013 then rejoined in 2022. Dan's partner, Alexia Cohen, describes how "for the past two-plus years we did the composting shift together on Saturdays at the Old Stone House community garden. We hauled and processed the compost in the garden. We loved our composting shift so much. We often did it while playing music on our speaker, chopping the compost to the rhythm of the music. Little kids would stop by and ask what we were doing. They loved participating in the process for a couple of minutes. We had nice interactions with all sorts of folks in the park. Dan was a socialist, and the Coop aligned with his values."

Sherry Showell, squad leader of the Composting Squad, remembers Dan as “a fascinating and enthusiastic person. I filed it in the back of my brain to try and introduce him to my son. I thought they had a lot of things in common—hands-on building, inventing, physics. This just is too sad. He really impressed me.”

Dan was also on the board of BK Rot, a bike-powered, fossil fuel-free food waste hauling and compost service that operates at the local level, enlisting community members. In the photo accompanying this obituary, he is standing in front of a compost sifter he and Alexia designed and fabricated.

During his previous time as a member, Dan was on the Commando Squad, an elite cleaning unit that met once every 12 weeks and gave the Coop a deep cleaning on Sunday nights from 8 p.m. to 2 a.m.

Dan’s professional life was varied. At the time of his death, he was Senior Director of Membership for the Newlab Brooklyn in the Navy Yards, a company devoted to helping startup technologies gain a foothold in the commercial world. Previously, he was a scientific instrument maker. He also collaborated with artists to create various art pieces and installations.

He is survived by Alexia Cohen, his life partner, his parents Penni Harmon and Alan Gross, his brothers Eliot Harmon and Mowgli Holmes, and his sisters Crystal Clearwater Gross and Lily Harmon.

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IN MEMORY OF KATHRYN DRUMMER

September 16, 2025



April 1, 2025

By Thomas Rayfiel

Kathryn Drummer, for many years a Saturday morning Shopping Squad Leader, died on January 12, 2025. She was 73. Longtime residents of Park Slope may remember Kathryn's store Waltzing Matilda, on First Street off Seventh Avenue. From 1995 until 2004, the store featured an eclectic mix of salvaged and restored furniture, not to mention antique jewelry and, briefly, "retro candy," including wax lips and giant jaw-breakers. Over a varied career that included teaching, catering and renovating local buildings, her abiding passion was to haunt estate sales and flea markets, finding offbeat and funky décor which she displayed in a space reflecting her own very personal aesthetic. Her college friend and roommate Jan Cunningham Hodson, recalls:

"Kathy was the first person to interest me in antiques, in upcycling furniture, and she taught me the joy of finding treasures along the street. She knew about all-things-vintage at that young age and often came home from class with a treasure she had picked up from someone's junk at the curb."

CARING FOR OTHERS, BOTH HUMANS AND ANIMALS, PLAYED A HUGE PART IN KATHRYN'S LIFE.

Kathryn joined the Coop in 1990 and was, in the words of her daughter, Anna Sarfaty, "a true believer," not only arriving before 6am to prepare the Coop but coming earlier in the week to pick up the keys so she could open the doors. Anna remembers, in those less liability-conscious times, happily wandering in the Coop, bagel in hand, from the basement to the main floor to the upstairs offices, a child on the loose, while her mother ensured the smooth running of the early-morning rush. Kathryn loved to cook, later in life sending her daughter care packages of Coop food. She was willing to shop at any time, wait on any length of line, chatting with fellow members, enjoy-

ing herself.

Caring for others, both humans and animals, played a huge part in Kathryn's life. She volunteered to take part in hospice vigils, a program that provides support and comfort for patients in their final stages of life. She would bring homemade soup or talk or just sit with people. She would also take in stray cats and elderly, often sick, dogs, feeding and nursing them. "It's no wonder," Anna says, "that I became a veterinarian."

Kathryn lived on Sixth Avenue for 45 years and was an integral part of the neighborhood. Her friend Gerry McCleave wrote: "I must mention her joy when we would meet accidentally and her big welcoming smile and positive approach even when things got difficult. I was lucky to know her and enjoy her conversation."

Kathryn is survived by her daughter, Anna Sarfaty, grandson, Rafi, her brother, Alan, nephew and niece Dylan and Dasha, and her sister, Dorothy.

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IN MEMORY OF MAITEFA ANGAZA

September 16, 2025



By Thomas Rayfiel

October 15, 2024

Maitefa Angaza, a journalist, activist, filmmaker and spiritual leader who co-founded the Coop's Diversity & Equality Committee, died August 8, 2024. Maitefa joined the Coop in 1989. As Jasmina Nikolov, her friend and fellow committee member, recalls:

“The committee formed partially in response to a change that Black members of the Coop community had been feeling. As the neighborhood gentrified, the Coop had become less friendly to its Black and Brown members and more incidents occurred. Maitefa was one of those who felt the shift and wanted to bring about positive changes to ensure that all Coop members felt protected and included.”

Lewanika Senghor, former membership coordinator and liaison to the committee,

praised Maitefa's commitment to this mission. She did not live near the Coop. Despite pressing demands on her time at home, she would take a bus, then a train to attend meetings, supplying fellow members with vegan snacks such as Uncle Eddie's Peanut Butter Chocolate Chip Cookies and Cocomels. A consistent thread running through the reminiscences of those who knew her was Maitefa's empathy and resourcefulness in solving the often difficult problems this committee was presented with. Senghor emphasized her strong desire to contribute to the community and "help the Coop become a better version of what it could be."

Outside of the coop, Maitefa led an extraordinarily productive life writing for *Essence Magazine*, *Black Issues Book Review*, *The Network Journal*, *The New York Amsterdam News*, *Nu Origins Magazine*, and *Black Star News*, as well as serving as senior writer and copyeditor for *Our Time Press*. She also co-produced the documentary *In Our Heads About Our Hair*, in which Black women (and girls) talk about their hair and its relation to identity, politics and self-expression. In addition to her professional accomplishments, Maitefa was co-founder and one of the High Priestesses of Shrim Sa, an Afro-Kamitic spiritual organization. Kamta is a shamanic tradition based upon ancient Egyptian theology, Kongo-Angolan philosophy, Caribbean Spiritism and Afrikan American Spiritualism.

She is survived by her husband, Menshemsaga Angaza; her brother, Bradley Barton; her sons, Osayande Angaza and Hemamset Angaza; and her grandchildren, Tuji Foxworth, Kayson Fox, Maati Angaza, Annura Angaza and Senmeri Angaza.

Maitefa was also an author. Of her book, *Kwanzaa: From Holiday to Every Day*, a reviewer for the African American Literature Book Club wrote: "Her aim is not only to encourage folks to observe Kwanzaa during the seven days of the holiday's season, but also to inspire observers to keep it alive year-round by finding ways to put the seven principles (Unity, Self-Determination, Collective Work and Responsibility, Cooperative Economics, Purpose, Creativity, and Faith) into practice on a daily basis," principles Maitefa clearly embodied in her own life.

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

IN MEMORY OF JOSEPH OCCHIOGROSSO

September 16, 2025



By Thomas Rayfiel

Joseph Occhiogrosso, who joined the Coop in 1987 and was a squad leader for over ten years, died on August 20, 2023. He was 60 years old.

Maria Treglia, a member of his squad—a Friday night receiving shift—remembers him as:

An amazing guy. I used to wait for a cab in front of the Coop at the end of the shift, and he offered to drive me home. Our ride became a way to catch up about our lives and a way for Joseph to reflect on how smoothly the shift went. He was concerned when someone was absent and didn't call and often asked me about my feedback on ways to improve the efficiency of our squad. He was a kind squad leader who took on the task with care and understanding. I never saw him get uptight or argue with anyone. He never enmeshed himself in personality conflicts but made everyone feel comfortable and asked folks to do jobs they felt comfortable with. Shifts were pleasant and there was a strong sense of camaraderie. We got things done because we worked as a team.

“HE LOVED BEING A SQUAD LEADER AND THE CLOSE CONNECTIONS HE'D BUILT WITH OTHER MEMBERS OF THE TEAM. JOE LOVED THE COOP AS AN INSTITUTION. HE WAS VERY PROUD OF HOW LONG HE'D BEEN A MEMBER.”

JOSEPH'S WIFE, SUZY BORDEN

Joseph taught English for 30 years at John Dewey High School in Gravesend, Brooklyn. Testimonials from friends and colleagues mention his commitment to education, his passion for the Italian language and culture of his ancestors (from the Puglia region of Italy), as well as for music, photography, bicycling and the Mets. A student, Hryzoleta Ciercierka, wrote: “He was such an amazing teacher. Pushed me so hard and saw so much potential in me and my writing. To this day I think about how encouraging he was.”

Joseph is survived by his wife, Suzy Borden, and their adored cats Jasmine and Calypso; his loving sisters Joanne (Rob) and Marie (Steve); his niece Jessica (Jason); nephews Jeremy and Michael; grand-niece Avalee; Aunt and Uncle Carmela and Angelo Silecchia; Aunt and Uncle Angela and Stanley Pearlstein; and Aunt Connie Marzella, as well as many cousins and their children.

Suzy, his wife, recalls:

He loved being a squad leader and the close connections he'd built with other members of the team. Joe loved the Coop as an institution. He was very proud of how long he'd been a member. I came along much later, and Joe liked to correct me: When I'd ask if "they" carry a certain item, Joe would say, "you mean if we carry it!"

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IN MEMORY OF DONALD THOMAS

September 16, 2025



PHOTO PROVIDED BY DONALD THOMAS PARTNER

By Thomas Rayfiel

Donald Thomas, who worked the Coop's Sunday night inventory shift for many years, died Aug. 18, 2022. He was 71. Donald joined the Coop in 1989.

"He was a quiet, kind, and reliable squad member," shift coworker Andrea Dobro recalls. "Always happy to train new squad members and to stay late to get the work done. Whenever I would run into him, either while shopping at the Coop or walking in the neighborhood, it was always nice to see him. He had a great smile and friendly demeanor."

"DONALD WAS NOT ONLY A LOVING HUSBAND, BUT A CARING AND COMPASSIONATE FRIEND TO EVERYONE HE MET."

DONALD'S WIFE, EVELYN DAVIS-THOMAS

Donald's wife, Evelyn Davis-Thomas, says on their first date he made her a Coop meal of salmon and jewel sweet potatoes.

"Donald was not only a loving husband, but a caring and compassionate friend to everyone he met. He was a master of conversation and always had some wisdom to impart to anyone who would listen. He had a sense of family and of friends, too, who were dear to his heart. There was nothing he would not do for either. He was cherished by everyone who had the privilege to know him."

Donald was born and raised in Brooklyn and lived here all his life. He was employed as a postal worker and a computer repair technician. He also volunteered at the Boys' Club of New York as a mentor and helped many young people individually. "A father to the fatherless," his wife said. In addition to Evelyn, he is survived by his sister, Maxine Eula Thomas, and his goddaughters, Anissa Smith and Tracy Alexis Ma-

cHolmes.

IN MEMORY OF RACHEL PORTER

September 16, 2025



By Thomas Rayfiel

During the pandemic, Rachel Porter began hearing store-wide announcements referring to “shoppers” and “customers.” Dedicated not just to the efficient functioning of the Coop but to the concepts behind its creation, she immediately wrote, in the *Line-waiters’ Gazette*:

“The Coop has never referred to members as shoppers or customers, because those

phrases suggest competing interests between store owners (or staff) and those who shop. Our Coop is practically unique in rejecting that division, which is why members can trust the Coop to provide the groceries we want without advertising or deceptive practices.”

Rachel, who died recently at the age of fifty-three, joined the Coop in 1995. She was, as her friend Sara Ivry recalls, “a principled, strong-minded brilliant individual who lived her ideals in a way that few others I know do. She was fiercely committed to the mission of the Coop and was a great champion of it.” A squad leader for ten years, she then worked on both the Revolving Loan and Committee Oversight committees.

“Rachel was the driving force behind the Coop having a 40th birthday celebration in 2013,” General Coordinator Joe Holtz remembers. “About a year before that, Rachel co-founded the Revolving Loan Committee whose purpose is to financially support start-up coops that use our member labor required model. Rachel loved our Coop and was always working to encourage us to build on our foundational strengths and not take continued success for granted.”

“SHE VALUED THE STRUCTURE OF INDIVIDUALS ORGANIZING THEMSELVES FOR THE COMMON GOOD. FOR HER, I THINK, IT WAS THAT VERY RARE AND TREASURED EXAMPLE OF THE WORLD ACTUALLY WORKING AS IT SHOULD.”

DAVID TEPPER

At Edward R. Murrow High School, where she was a special education teacher, Rachel initiated and led a Restorative Justice Initiative, “striving to establish an effective, evidence-based alternative to retributive criminal justice policies and punitive school discipline, capable of reducing violence and fostering public safety.” She was also, for many years, a social justice researcher volunteering for organizations involved in progressive causes.

But Rachel's engagement with the Coop extended well beyond serving on committees and monitoring store-wide pages. Almost everyone who remembered her raves about her phenomenal skills as both a baker and warm-hearted host.

"I have images of her cart overflowing with enormous amounts of produce, always the most straight-from-the-earth variety in terms of no extra packaging or pre-washing, of her leaving the Coop on her bike with a Garden of Eden bursting from her bags and basket, ready to be orchestrated into splendid food," says Lara Tabac.

"As a very skilled baker," David Tepper notes, "a voracious reader of recipes and all kinds of food writing, and an incredibly generous host who always had a crowd at her table. Rachel loved the Coop for its food and culture. (She was very upset when we stopped carrying yeast in bulk.) Moreover, she valued the structure of individuals organizing themselves for the common good. For her, I think, it was that very rare and treasured example of the world actually working as it should."

Rachel is survived by her two sons, Ulisse and Sasha Narici-Porter, her former husband Manlio Narici, her mother Joan, and her brother Josh.

IN MEMORY OF HELEN HOLTZ

September 16, 2025



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."

"SHE LET NO DETAIL SLIP THROUGH THE CRACKS AND KEPT US ALL THINKING OF

NEW WAYS TO SOCIALLY ENGAGE THE COOP MEMBERS.”

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.

JANET SCHUMACHER OBITUARY

September 16, 2025



Janet Schumacher (left) and Joe Holtz (right) receiving an award from the Gowanus Canal Conservancy, on behalf of the Park Slope Food Coop in 2007.

By Thomas Rayfiel

In 1975, the Coop was in danger of collapsing . . . for the third time. Two previous methods of member labor had failed. A new attempt—the basis for the ABCD Week squads we were familiar with until the onset of the pandemic—was also running into massive difficulties. There was no way for one squad to pass on information to the next. When the Coop closed one day and then reopened on another there was an even greater disconnect. Janet Schumacher, an early and passionately devoted member, sought out Joe Holtz and told him that “we’ll fail again,” despite having finally come up with a workable system—unless a radical step was taken. Her idea was that the Coop should hire a full-time employee to oversee member labor and coordinate the myriad of narratives that go into running a successful organization. At the next General Meeting, members voted to start accepting applications for its first employ-

ee. Janet encouraged Joe to apply. He did, and he got the job. It is from then on that the Park Slope Food Coop, as we know it, really began. In Joe's words, "Janet envisioned the demise of the Coop, and she envisioned a solution."

Janet Schumacher died on February 3, of pancreatic cancer. She was 76. As one of the twenty-five or so people who helped get the Coop off the ground after its inception, Janet devoted an amazing amount of thought and energy to its survival. Her contributions have come to be seen as foundational to the many aspects of the Coop we now take for granted. From 1989, when she became a General Coordinator, to her retirement in 2015, she was responsible for ordering 75-80% of what the Coop sells. Members will remember her as being everywhere: in the office, on the phone, paging out, in the basement, in the aisles. She was deeply involved in so much of the Coop's growth—from its early shift away from individuals pre-ordering groceries to the more recent introduction of scanners, which revolutionized our inventory system.

AS ONE OF THE TWENTY-FIVE OR SO PEOPLE WHO HELPED GET THE COOP OFF THE GROUND AFTER ITS INCEPTION, JANET DEVOTED AN AMAZING AMOUNT OF THOUGHT AND ENERGY TO ITS SURVIVAL.

She had an amazing sense of food—at early organizational pot-luck dinners her cooking and baking was almost always the star attraction—and a preternatural ability to determine which products were just fads and which were not, an important skill when dealing with limitations of space and capital. "You can't tie your money up in something you can't sell," she told Hayley Gorenberg in a *Linewaiters' Gazette* profile.

A constant presence, Janet was never too busy to answer a question or just talk. The community the Coop provided clearly answered a deep need in her. Allen Zimmerman, her fellow General Coordinator for many years, recalls: "When I think of the thousands of Coop members who knew or worked with and loved Janet, or of the thousands of Coop members I have known, I can say with certainty that no one loved the

Coop more than Janet.”

MEMBERS WILL REMEMBER HER AS BEING EVERYWHERE: IN THE OFFICE, ON THE PHONE, PAGING OUT, IN THE BASEMENT, IN THE AISLES.

Janet Schumacher was born on a dairy farm in Clyman, Wisconsin. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin, she joined the Peace Corps and served for three years in Ethiopia. Her experience there, witnessing extreme poverty and hunger, reinforced her interest in food as being “a very practical, hands-on” way to effect social change. After completing her service, she crossed Asia, taught English in Japan, and ended up in New York. Although an extremely community-minded Brooklynite (she was particularly supportive of the Brooklyn Public Library), her interest in birding, at first confined to Prospect Park, The Green-Wood Cemetery, and Jamaica Bay, eventually took her to over thirty countries.

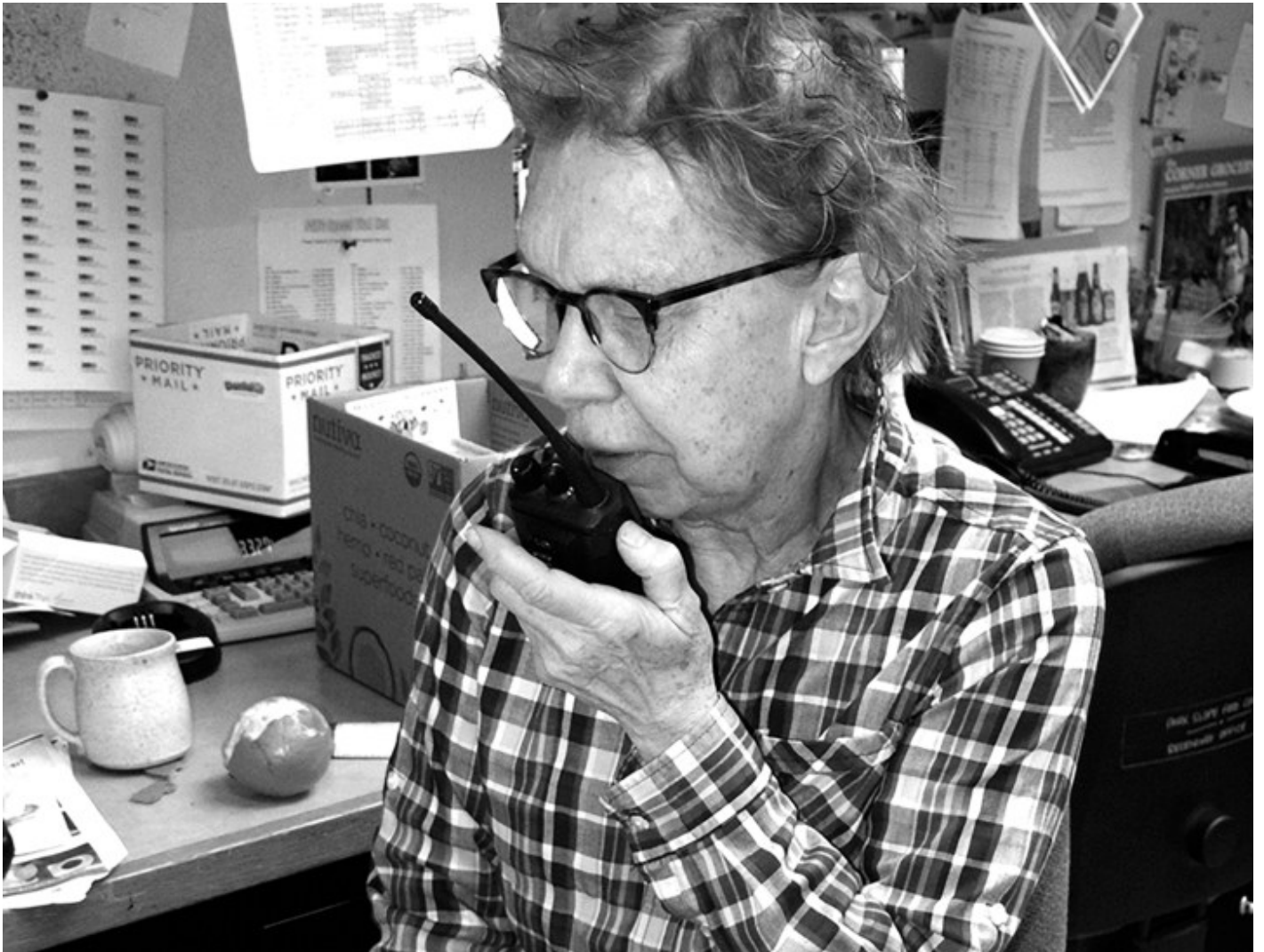
Janet is survived by her longtime companion, former General Coordinator Mike Eakin, as well as her sisters Barbara Jean Mullin and Mary Lee Peterman. Her ashes will be deposited in Mike’s plot in Green-Wood. The site, one of her favorite birding spots in the cemetery, will have a plaque bearing not her name but, as she requested, Emily Dickinson’s, “Hope is the thing with feathers.”

Guest Reporter Thomas Rayfiel is a novelist. Prior to his retirement, he spent twenty-eight years in the Coop dairy cooler.



FORMER GENERAL COORDINATOR JANET SCHUMACHER HAS DIED

September 16, 2025



“A fundamental thinker in the nitty-gritty of super-fresh food and fast turnover at the Coop.” That’s how posts on the Coop’s official social media accounts summed up former General Coordinator Janet Schumacher’s service to the Coop.

Schumacher had “the critical insight that kept the Coop alive,” Coop General Manager Joe Holtz told the *Linewaiters’ Gazette* in 2015, for an article on Schumacher’s retirement.

A full remembrance will be featured in the next edition of the *Gazette*.

JEFFREY RICKIN

September 16, 2025



PHOTO BY RICKIN FAMILY

Jeffrey Steven Rickin, July 20, 1945-November 14, 2021

Jeffrey Steven Rickin was a member of the Park Slope Food Coop for over 40 years. Jeffrey lived and raised his children in the Slope and was a lover of books, art, music and all things Brooklyn. He is survived by his wife, Sue Baldassano; his children, Taina, Alicia and Daniel; his brother Michael; nine grandchildren and three great--grandchildren. May his memory be a blessing.