

Elizabeth Lenore Rathbun

JULY 26, 2024

...died peacefully at home, surrounded by close family members, after dealing with the challenges of MS for over 25 years. Elizabeth was the beloved wife of Bernard Gobin; mother to Nicholas (Melissa Zaron) and Stephanie (Jacob Cramm) and grandmother to Noah and Celeste Cramm; sister to Jim Rathbun (Judy Rathbun) and Roger Rathbun (Bobbie Rathbun); sister-in-law to Jenny Gobin (Michael Steinmann); aunt to Joel and Anne, Andrew and Jocelyn and Oliver and Napier, Michael and Cécile; great-aunt to fifteen.



Accomplished in many fields of endeavour, Elizabeth had lifelong passions for literature, for music, and for being in and of the natural world.

As a thoughtful devotee of the written and spoken word, she read widely and deeply, and was especially interested in fiction and poetry. After pursuing graduate studies in English at Queen's University in Kingston, Elizabeth moved to Toronto and spent several years in the publishing industry. Working at Maclelland and Stewart - then the epicentre of English Canada's burgeoning literary scene - she enjoyed the contact with authors and reviewers. Eventually she moved to Vancouver to work with Stanton and MacDougall (a forerunner of Raincoast Books) and became more directly involved in sales and promotion efforts, arranging author media appearances and signings. When in later years Elizabeth turned to the study of theology, textual criticism and the interpretation of religious texts

remained a primary focus of interest.

Although she loved music of all sorts, Elizabeth had a particular affection for choral music. Singing was a great pleasure, and wherever she lived, she sought out the choral community. Over the years she variously sang with the Kingston Choral Society, the Orpheus Choir of Toronto, Vancouver's Bach Choir, and eventually Elektra Women's Choir. And when an opportunity arose to work with the Vancouver Chamber Choir as General Manager, she embraced the challenge and brought her considerable administrative skills to helping the ensemble become one of Canada's premier professional choirs. Organizing and promoting an ambitious performing and touring program was a labour of love, and her years with the choir saw them go from strength to strength.

Although Elizabeth stepped down as General Manager of the choir in 1988 to balance work and family priorities, she remained involved with music and the arts, serving terms on the BC Arts Board, as general manager of Festival Vancouver, founding President of Elektra, and founding board member of Turning Point Ensemble. And as her children's horizons began to expand, she took action to ensure that arts education would be a rich and vital part of their learning environment by spearheading the development and implementation of Artist-in-residence programs at her children's elementary schools.

In all her professional and personal undertakings, Elizabeth's North Star was a deeply held appreciation for the importance of relationship. She also drew upon her considerable public speaking abilities, having been coached in childhood by her mother, a skilled elocutionist. Whether providing toasts at weddings, engaging in advocacy on behalf of a group she supported, or thanking those she'd persuaded to contribute to a cause, she knew how to strike the right tone. She invariably spoke with clarity, conviction, and affection, leavened with gentle humour and rich diction. Her beautifully modulated speaking voice made her a natural choice to

deliver poetry readings at Christmas performances of Elektra and Remembrance Day concerts of Chor Leoni.

Beyond her professional focus on books and the arts, Elizabeth believed in the importance of being an informed and caring private citizen. She was passionately anti-war and an early supporter of efforts to combat climate change. Having spent a summer at age 20 in Grenada as volunteer with Canadian Crossroads International, she paid close attention to domestic and world affairs by attending to the news reporting, investigative journalism, and skilled interviewing she found in her favourite media sources: the CBC, PBS, The Globe and Mail, and The New Yorker.

Throughout her life, Elizabeth found respite and happiness through engagement with outdoor pursuits and interests - gardening, camping, and water-related activities, including swimming, kayaking, and (above all) sailing.

As secondary progressive MS began to take a toll on Elizabeth's physical capacities, she became a more attentive listener and learned to find joy and purpose through her many close interactions with family and friends. In the face of increasing dependency and various medical crises, her positive mindset, her curiosity, and her keen interest in the lives and doings of others served as an inspiration to many.

Elizabeth and her family would like to thank her many health care providers, including those at the UBC MS Clinic, GF Strong Hospital, Blusson Spinal Cord Centre, UBC Respiratory Clinic, Provincial Respiratory Outreach Program, VGH, and Pacific Spirit Community Health Centre who were essential in maintaining her ability to live and thrive over the last 25 years; ...also the providers of MAiD and the dedicated staff of Motion Specialties and Technology for Independent Living.

Most especially, we thank the dedicated caregivers since 2008 who have been woven into the fabric of our lives. They have honoured the web of our family relationships, and we hope that we have honoured theirs. Dōmo arigatōgozaimasu; agyamanak unay; maraming salamat; salamat kayo; thank you very much.

Elizabeth's desire for a green burial has been fulfilled. A Celebration of Life will be held at VanDusen Gardens (Visitor Centre Hall) on August 18, between noon and 3:00 pm. Please [RSVP here](#) if you plan to attend. Complimentary access to the gardens is included for those who RSVP.

Messages of Condolence

Such a beautiful tribute to dear Elizabeth, who will be So Very Missed. What a remarkable person, who got so much out of - and gave so much to - life. I am grateful to have so many happy memories of her. I can't even picture her with a serious expression on her face! She always exuded such warmth. May her memory do the same. Big Hugs and so much love to you all.

— **Esher**

Elizabeth was easily one of the most interesting people I've ever known. And one of the most accomplished. She was memorable in every way, but what I shall hold onto most are the conversations. She could be silly. She could be profound. But she could never be inattentive. An inextinguishable capacity to remain curious seemed to underlie the obvious knowledge and wisdom she brought to the table. To that she added an extraordinary capacity to listen. The high arts, the low ones, politics, the planet - they all came alive when Elizabeth spoke, and though you never knew, going in, quite what views you'd leave with, going out, you did know that you'd feel better about yourself when it was over, and usually about the world itself. We have lost a luminous soul. Farewell, my dear dear friend.

— **Stephen Slemon**

Elizabeth was estimable in many ways but one trait was unique in my experience. Whenever she talked with someone, that person had her complete & unwavering attention. Every conversation I had with her enriched and uplifted me. My future is poorer now that she won't be in it.

— **Don Paterson**

I'll miss Elizabeth so much—our chats and our projects, our shared stories, and so many belly laughs—and I always reflect on her courage and wisdom to adapt to her situation. She once told me, "Sure, I used to complain about MS changing my life but realized that was taking my time." Instead, she chose to be fully alive, within the limitations she was dealt. And gosh, what an amazing reader, writer, thinker, activist, music lover and listener she was. Elizabeth showed fascination in my work and my life, and I'm guessing everyone who knew her has felt a similar delight in her presence. My heart goes out to her family, with unending gratitude for all you and her care providers have done to support Elizabeth over the years.

— **Jane Slemon**

I've always been impressed by Elizabeth. I used to enjoy sitting with her at the Music Academy as we waited for our kids to finish their lessons. She had good taste in all things including, like me, naming her daughter Stephanie! It was great to sing with her in Elektra and to watch her at work with the Chamber Choir. But it was in her latter years dealing with MS that I was most impressed. She took what life gave her and carried on, thoughtfully and with resilience. I found her CBC interview uplifting and it revealed a most beautiful soul. I'm so sorry not to be in town for the celebration of life. I'm sure it will be glorious. Much love to Bernard and all the family.

— **Mary Lage**

Dear Elizabeth,

I loved your authenticity, your passion, and your courage, but I'll miss your laughter most of all. Thank you for so many years of friendship. May you be at peace. Love, Gordon

Dear Bernard,

I feel so unskilled
so unable
to express
how I truly feel
so distraught
that neither
silence
nor words
help
they're only gloss
they can't explain
that your loss
guts me as though my own
so please
let my tears say
what I cannot. Love, Gordon

— **Gordon Thorne**

Elizabeth was always the elegant and eloquent woman across the street. She was always proper and precise. I didn't have the manners or the musical abilities of my brother, but I always admired her grace and willingness to engage with out family. Through Bernard, Nic and Stephy, I learnt the other qualities that she commanded. She will be missed by the Pugh Family.

-Kevin Pugh

— **Kevin Pugh**

I knew Elizabeth for 45 years, first as she managed the Vancouver Chamber Choir, then was a founding singer in Elektra, followed by her leadership of our board. Most recently, she was part of our The Lost Words Committee, where we met at her house to plan a choral project that celebrates nature, art, and words - a meeting of so many of her passions. I always loved our conversations. The limitations of her disease never took centre stage over her clear joy of life, of art and ideas, and her family. She was a friend and an inspiration. I will miss her kind voice and thoughtful perspectives. Hugs to her amazing life partner, Bernard, and all her family.

— **Morna Edmundson**

Elizabeth often had a news article to share or a new music CD to play. She was always talking about the latest singers in town or encouraging people to get involved in music. It's because of her pushing me to join the Children's Bach Choir and getting a chance to perform on the Orpheum stage at a young age that I'm certain I was more confident to pursue choirs throughout my life. She brought joy and care wherever she went and a musical laughter. No wonder her charming and humourous family love cracking jokes around her. She will be missed. Much love to Bernard, Nic, and Steph from the Pugh Family.

— **Steven Pugh**

Elizabeth was such an inspiration....so many of us would find it so hard to be positive with what she went through and yet every time I would see her she always had a smile and positive attitude about life....she would engage in such wide ranging conversations as well and she always knew about your interests. She even bought me a book to read (The Return of History) which is very applicable these days....I will miss her spirit and personality and I'm grateful for the time I knew her - our condolences to all of the family...

— **Don Douglas**

I will always remember Elizabeth whom I followed only very intermittently in my practice. She knew how to maintain joy in life in spite of her many challenges towards the end. She always was able to make me smile and laugh! I also got some great book titles from her. Rest in peace Elizabeth. I will never forget your resilience

— **Susan Purkiss**

Bernard ;hugs ;I can remember when Elizabeth first started to date you .

Many memories from Trenton days; all good

Alan

— **alan greer**

I knew Elizabeth long ago while she was General Manager of Vancouver Chamber Choir and I was staff at Vancouver Foundation. We met a number of times over grant applications, meetings that were always informative, interesting and delightful; such was Elizabeth's manner. Years later I was moved to tears on hearing/reading an interview given on CBC as she recounted her story of dealing with the MS that had been dealt to her. I was astounded by her positive outlook and her ability to redefine finding joy in her life. She is blessed to have had such devoted family, friends and caregivers.

— **Lynn Kagan**

A beautiful tribute to a very strong lady who fought a terrible disease with so much courage, not allowing it to prevent her from following her passions and passing her knowledge on to so many of us.

I only met Elizabeth a few times, her courage always impressed me, as did the the amazing respect her family and caregivers had for her. She came by that respect honestly due to her beautiful personality . Elizabeth will be dearly missed and loved forever

— **Sally**

Elizabeth was the dearest of friends, and taught all of us who had the good fortunate to know her so much about what it means to live life intelligently and fully. She was a fountain of knowledge on an extraordinary range of topics, a wise critic on issues of the world, a thoughtful seeker of deeper wisdoms, and a brilliant conversationalist. Bernard, Stephanie and Nick, I hope you feel the circles of love and support around you at this time of great loss and transition. May her memory always be a blessing in your lives.

— **Sally Thorne**

My deepest condolences to your family for the loss of Elisabeth. May your memories of her help you heal

— **Linda Zaron**

Despite the ocean between us, I felt close to Elizabeth the few times I saw her. Her passing brings great sadness. She faced MS with remarkable courage and was an example of strength. She was a wonderful listener and always offered encouragement, especially during my medical studies. Her support and belief in others will not be forgotten.

To my wonderful Canadian family: my thoughts are with you.

— **Cécile Gobin**

Oh sadness, I just heard of her death. Liz and by extension Bernard were my best friends at Queen's since 1971, Then in Toronto and very short visits to Vancouver in the early 80s when we were both arts managers. So many wonderful memories my words cannot suffice. We had many wonderful dinners in my deceased great aunt's Annandale apartments with my friends Heather and Harold. Best of all was Elizabeth and Bernard throwing snowballs at the 4th story window to get me out of my grief to go caroling!

I did and will always love her, although we were never a romance, she was a woman I admired. Her twinkling eyes will be missed. May the Heavens shed tears because I am.

— **Bruce Chown**



<https://www.myalternatives.ca/obituaries/rathbun-elizabeth-lenore>

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