



SERVING THE POTRERO HILL, DOGPATCH, MISSION BAY, & SOMA  
NEIGHBORHOODS SINCE 1970




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## Denise Meblin Kessler January 22, 1917 to April 5, 2015 – 98 years!

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Editorial

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**B**y Marc Passen

Denise was a lifelong friend of my mother's, Ruth Passen, who served as *The Potrero View's* editor for more than 30 years. They became instant friends when they met in San Francisco in the early-1950s, soon after Denise and her young daughter, Joanne – who later would sometimes “babysit” me! – moved to the City and resided in the same Turk Street building where my parents lived at the time.

Denise and Ruth shared similar interests in politics – progressive/leftwing – music – jazz – and having a good time; lots of parties! Denise later lived in the Upper Haight in the 1960s. On Sundays during football season we could see 49er

friends over for parties and political gatherings of all kinds over the years, including a huge 50th surprise birthday party for Ruth in 1976. Although Denise didn't live on Potrero Hill, she adopted the neighborhood as if she did.

Denise worked for a progressive law firm in the City as a legal secretary. She went to the South with the attorneys in the early 1960s to help promote voting rights for Black Americans. Denise and Ruth were very involved in protesting the Vietnam War in the 1960s, and were found regularly picketing and protesting in support of the United Farmworkers' grape boycott in front of Safeway stores in the 1970s.

In the early years of their friendship, Denise, Ruth and other friends flocked to the annual Monterey Jazz Festival. In 1984, they went on a jazz cruise to the Caribbean and mingled with the likes of Dizzy Gillespie and other contemporary jazz greats.

In retirement Denise found many ways to enjoy life, including working as a hostess at The Savoy Tivoli in North Beach, where Beach Blanket Babylon was created in 1974. She was a "Hula Dancer" in the original cast, performing on a sand covered floor in a back room of the restaurant. During this time more lifelong friendships were made, with the formation of The Last Hoo-Rah and The Last Hoo-Las, a Vintage Cheerleading Brigade and Authentic Barefoot Hula-Tap Troup that performed personalized greetings for all occasions with a kazoo exit to standing ovations. They were on television, radio and mentioned in the society column and Herb Caen when they cheered Beverly Sills.

Denise continued her tradition of playing her kazoo at any birthday party she attended, or would serenade by phone all of her friend's and family's special occasions...she never left home without one! Her granddaughter, Shelley, continues this tradition of "kazooing" today.

Denise found lasting comradery as a staff member on the *View* beginning in 1982. For many years she volunteered at the monthly *View* site on Carolina Street, where she helped review and type articles. But her claim to fame became the "Birthday Column" for which she researched and added her usual flare. In addition to noting Hill residents' birthdays, Denise livened up

for that month's issue!

Throughout her colorful and adventurous life, Denise and Ruth always referred to one other as their "Bosom Buddy"! Their weekly visits became more difficult to accomplish after Denise moved eight years ago to The Redwoods, a senior retirement residence in Marin, and Ruth moved into an assistive living residence in Montara, both to be closer to their families. But the few times each year that they were able to get together for lunch, the Potrero Hill Festival or New Year's Day parties, the brightest smiles and biggest hugs told you that their storied friendship would last for the ages, on and off the Hill.

A celebration of Denise's life will be held on Sunday, May 17, 2015, from 2 to 5 p.m., at the Potrero Hill Neighborhood House.

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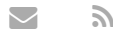
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