



On Their Shoulders Judy Peterson



Two themes embody Judy Peterson's life: children and food.

Judy was in Reno, Nevada in 1972 raising her four young kids (Larry, Beth, Robin, and our Tim) and supplementing

her monthly child support cheques by catering at the multi-denominational "Center for Religion and Life" when she met Michael. As a trial for their relationship, she suggested a camping trip with her kids to western Canada. At a campsite at Miracle Beach, a fellow camper likened them to Lasquetians. Curious about what this meant, they trundled off to the Rock where they encountered a beautiful panabode house on 10 acres for sale for \$19,400. They bought it the next day with the last of their travel funds.

Three years after getting married and obtaining immigration papers for the whole family, Judy and Michael moved from Reno to Lasqueti.

Soon after moving, Elizabeth – a five-year-old child with disabilities whom Judy met while volunteering with a mental health institution – joined the family on Lasqueti and lived with them until she was 16. It was through Elizabeth that Amber entered Judy and Michael's life. During a visit to Vancouver's Sunny Hill Hospital with Elizabeth, Judy spotted Amber, a one-year-old with severe disabilities. Judy immediately saw Amber's internal light, so she and Michael took her home where she lived with them until her death at the age 37.

Around this time, Judy founded a support group in Parksville for parents of children with disabilities. There she met a woman who was distressed about the mistreatment of her godchild, Latisha and was looking for alternative living situations for her. To Judy's delight, what started out as a one-year custody agreement with Tisha's father turned into a beautiful life-long family connection.

In addition to Elizabeth, Amber, and Latisha, nine non-birth children found refuge in Judy and Michael's loving home over the years. Each time a new kid was added to the household, Larry, Beth, Robin, and Tim accepted them with caring and grace.

Embedded in this tale of loving children is Judy's

passion for making and sharing food. In 1978, when Judy (a non-typist!) worked as a secretary at False Bay School, she initiated the free hot lunch program that continues to this day. Initially, she sourced all the food herself and prepared the diverse and wholesome lunches. Eventually, Judy prepared a booklet with recipes and clean up routine for volunteers and kids.

And then there's the beloved "new Mom food train". Judy initiated this in 1979 with the birth of Rachel Churchill. Last year, Katrina was her latest beneficiary. In addition, Judy has always cooked for islanders in need (i.e., for the Fire Fighters' picnics, Fall Fairs, etc.)

With Michael, Judy has nourished our stomachs and our hearts. More importantly, she and Michael have helped us see people with disabilities – to respect their rights to be cared for and to live in dignity. So, while it is true that children and food are integral themes to Judy's story, so too are compassion and love. – *Dana Lepofsky*



Judy and Michael at their wedding, 1974



Judy and Michael's gate