

## Shepard remembered for wide-ranging contributions

Beatrice Shepard, who was a pillar in the Alaska United Methodist Conference and the Douglas Community United Methodist Church, died on November 1, 2013 in Juneau at the age of 94.

"I think the part I'll miss the most is her enthusiasm for life," said longtime friend Debra Gerrish. "She was always, 'OK, let's go!'"

According to Gerrish, Shepard was smiling broadly in the moments before she collapsed in the crosswalk at Franklin and Front Streets on Nov. 1, as she made her way over to El Sombrero for dinner with Gerrish and her husband, John — the trio's usual First Friday routine. She never regained consciousness, and died in the hospital surrounded by friends.

Shepard's wide-ranging interests were often pursued in collaboration with Claudia Kelsey, her companion for more than 65 years. Both women were honored with Lifetime Achievement Awards by the Juneau Chamber of Commerce in 2007 for their "outstanding contributions to the community and citizens of Juneau and the state of Alaska."

The women had the chance to meet many of Alaska's incredible people during a trip around the state in 1951 while working on a book, "Wild Edible Plants of Alaska," commissioned by the U.S. Air Force as a resource for military pilots who might be shot down without food in the wilderness. Kelsey was hired as the illustrator and Shepard as scientist, joining author and project director Christine Heller.

She arrived in Juneau in November of 1946 to work with the Territory of Alaska's Health Department in the microbial lab and stayed working there for 31 years. In her free time she cleared land and built a home near the ferry terminal at Auke Bay. Some of her roles over the years were lay preacher, writer, arts enthusiast, scientist, adventurer, and musician, all of which, friends say, she pursued with full force.

She was singing in the Juneau Methodist choir on her first Sunday in town. She became very involved at all levels in the church structure. She served along with Claudia Kelsey as Conference Historian for decades as well as on Archives Commissions at both the Jurisdictional and General Commission levels. In 1990 the General Commission designated Bea as Living Archive #21. *(Research from the General Commission found that the program appears to have stopped around 1990. The first award appears to have been around 1987, after a couple of years of meetings. One of the definitions of Living Archives was: "persons who have knowledge of various aspects of United Methodist history, and/or have experienced or made some of that history themselves." A more general statement was "To be eligible for nomination as a Living Archive, a person must ordinarily be a United Methodist, either lay or clergy, and be retired or of retirement age." Nominations were made through the conference commissions. Those involved were supposed to come to the Archives Center for training and do an oral history. What the training was was not clear. They were also to*

*promote the Living Archives program. They did have a newsletter - Pitching Horseshoes.)*

In addition, she served on Trustees and Finance at the Conference level. In the early 1970's, she became a lay preacher at Douglas Community United Methodist Church. Shepard's faith was one of the most important things in her life.

Bea was very active in her church at all levels, first attending the Juneau Methodist Church downtown. Bea was involved in building, and the obtaining title to, the land for the Eagle River Methodist Camp which she was one of the founders of at Mile 28. Bea loved being out at camp. When she died, Shepard was working on the final two chapters of her second book, about the Eagle River Methodist camp and its history.

"She lived her faith. She didn't talk the talk, she walked the walk," Gerrish said. "Her whole life was about doing for others."

Bea was a leader both in the church and in her community. She was a big supporter of the arts. Her retirement years were full of activity. Her love of Alaska and history came together in her volunteer work as a docent for the Alaska State Museum and as an effective advocate for the museum. She was a strong advocate for the new State Libraries Archives and Museums building for many years, lobbying at the Legislature and helping build community support at a time when the project wasn't very popular.

She was also a staunch supporter of the Oboe Section of the Juneau Symphony Orchestra. She was an organizer for and attendee of community movie night each Wednesday. Gerrish said during World War II, prior to moving to Alaska, Shepard played in an all-female orchestra in California (most of the men were overseas). "She played the flute, the oboe, and she could play a mean harmonica," Gerrish said.

Up until her passing, Bea was still doing the things she loved. She had just come from working at the Aunt Claudia's Doll Museum, which she started about 5 years ago. The museum was named after Kelsey, who died in 2007 at 95. Shepard started the museum as a way to honor her memory and showcase her extensive doll collection. In her final years, Shepard also contributed regular columns to the "Living and growing" feature of the Empire's Neighbors section that focused on her faith, reminding readers of chances to bring the teachings of the Bible into their everyday lives. Many years ago she had a regular radio program on KTOO with Cy Peck called "History without Headlines," interviewing elderly local residents about their lives.

Many of us looked to her as a role model and there was no better example of what it means to walk in the Christian life. The Sunday before her death, she preached in honor of Heritage Sunday from Jeremiah 20:9 and reminded people to not only speak of the Lord but to get out and do for others. Gerrish said Shepard and Kelsey were living examples of how that can be accomplished. "Everybody loved them because they were always so kind to everybody else," she said.

Composite notes from Debra Gerrish, Amy Fletcher (reporter from the *Juneau Empire*) and The Alaska United Methodist Conference staff.



