



## Rachel B. Jones

August 21, 1927 - December 30, 2019

Rachel B. Jones, stoneware potter extraordinaire, and beloved Mom, left this world peacefully in her sleep very early in the morning of December 30th, 2019 at the age of 92 years and 4 months. Only a year previous, she had told her daughter Bronwyn not to worry about a difficult passing; when the time came she would go, “Pfffft, just like that.” And so she did.

While our hearts ache with this immense loss, her wonderful, independent, creative spirit lives on in all who knew her and the gorgeous pots and vessels shaped by her amazing hands and forged in the fire of her kilns.

Born August 21, 1927 in Detroit, Michigan, she was the second child of Joseph (Joe) and Elizabeth (Betty) Buegeleisen. Her father was the founder of Buco, at its peak one of the largest manufacturers of motorcycle accessories in the country, including leather jackets, and innovative helmets. Convening a group of scientist/engineers to develop a special crash resistant synthetic material and cupped chin straps, her father catalyzed a much higher standard for motorcycle helmet safety. And indirectly inspired his daughter who showed an early gift for design and creating with her hands.

Drawn to clay and sculpting in elementary school, Rachel majored in jewelry making at Cass Technical High School and Russian literature at Highland Park Junior College (now Highland Park Community College). But it was at Cranbrook Arts Academy where her prodigious talent for ceramics bloomed under the tutelage of the great Finnish potter and teacher, Maija Grotell, head of the Cranbrook Ceramics Department until 1966.

Known as the “little boss” because Grotell trusted her to work with and guide the newest students, Rachel always spoke of her years at Cranbrook with great joy. Exulting in the vigorous training, she learned how to throw pots on kick wheels; mix and wedge all types of clay; and use complex chemistry to design, test, and fire her own glazes.

She often described how she would leave her parents’ home on Glendale Street every

morning, stop at the neighborhood Jewish bakery to pick up a bag of sweet rolls, and then get on a bus on Dexter out to Bloomfield Hills. Once at Cranbrook and in the ceramics studio, she arranged the rolls on a plate, brewed strong coffee, and plunged into clay. In 1947 and again in 1948 Rachel won awards in the prestigious Syracuse Museum of Fine Arts Ceramic National competition, her prize winning pots submitted at the request of curators to the permanent collection in the Smithsonian National Museum.

Two scrappy artists and recently returned WWII veterans, J.T. Abernathy and Paul Haller Jones (Hal), also students in the Cranbrook Ceramics Department, courted her. While J.T. became a lifelong friend, Rachel fell in love with and married Hal in August of 1950 and in 1955 the couple migrated east to New York City so Hal could pursue a promising career as an Abstract Expressionist landscape artist. While their marriage ended in divorce in 1967, it produced two children, Bronwyn and Sam, who Rachel always called her “two best pots”.

She loved working in her potshop in the basement of the home she and Hal purchased on Crescent Avenue in Leonia, New Jersey in 1956. She often said how much she loved creating with clay and then coming up in to her kitchen to create with dough. Her yeasted Stollen, poppyseed coffee cake, sticky cinnamon rolls and Zwieback crusted farmer’s cheesecake were legendary.

When she applied for a zoning permit to build a large natural gas fired kiln in the back yard of the house, Stanley Gallone, Sr., the Leonia fire marshal and barber, came for a site review before he gave permission, unsure about an “oven” big enough to hold a person sitting cross legged. She would run the natural gas burners of the kiln through the night, firing her pots to stoneware at temperatures over 2300 degrees F, the backyard lit up as if with a jet engine afterburner.

Rachel could fix almost anything, and knew best how most things should be done; woe to the carpenter, house painter or plumber who fudged a job and was then subject to her withering critique.

Yet, she never scolded when a pot was accidentally broken or cracked by a pet, her children, or their friends. Rather, she said it simply meant the spirit within the vessel was ready to break free and depart.

Her functional stoneware bowls, colanders, and teapots were in the Japanese tradition and heavily influenced by Shoji Hamada and Bernard Leach. She believed in the Buddhist idea of beauty, the quiet eloquence of a brush stroke, the inky pour of a blue-black glaze

over porcelain. She admired the centuries old aesthetic of Eastern art, the humble elegance of handcrafted ceramics from Japan, Korea and China, and she worked in that tradition.

She kept a Christmas card from December 1975 with this quote from Bernard Leach (the pronouns have been changed): “Every artist knows that she is engaged in an encounter with infinity, and that work done with heart and hand is ultimately worship of Life itself. Sometimes a pot sings out from its wheel head, from all its related parts, and the potter may pause in herself, thinking, ‘No pattern this time---just a single good glaze---or none at all’ and hope that fire will bless with added strength and variety that which her hands have made. Such a pot, or indeed any work of art, is not an expression of the maker alone, but of a degree of enlightenment wherein infinity however briefly, obliterates the minor self.”

Rachel exhibited and sold her work at shows throughout New Jersey, New York, and Michigan, and from her homes.

And she supported her children in all their artistic and educational endeavors with all her heart. She allowed Sam to set up his drums in the attic and his electrified rock and roll band to practice at all hours. She owned a station wagon so she could drive Bronwyn and her concert harp to weekend gigs. She was not above sharing a doobie with friends. Sam’s friends were especially grateful for her finally calibrated pottery scales that made weighing out ounce bags a breeze. And she kept the fridge stocked with sheets of lasagna and pans of Apple Brown Betty.

Though she forbade a television in the house while her kids were growing up, once they were out on their own, she bought a set and promptly fell in love with Starsky and Hutch. She loved her many dogs and cats, and her son Sam attributes his affinity as a dog trainer to her special rapport with Ming the pug, Lila and Goliath, the Great Pyrenees, and Jesse, her beloved yellow Lab.

In 2002, she sold the house in Leonia and moved to Traverse City to be closer to Bronwyn and Sam and their spouses. She joined the Northwest Potters and Sculptor’s Guild, set up another potshop in the basement of her home, and donated her gorgeous bowls to the annual Empty Bowls Benefit in support of the Fresh Food Partnership. She adored the beauty, the forests, water and light of the Northern Michigan landscape. She loved playing chess with Alma, Marge, and Sam at the Senior Center, was a regular attendee of the Traverse City Film Festival and the National Writers Series. She loved the Great Lakes Bioneers Conference, the local group MidEast Just Peace, the Inuit Art collection at the Dennis Museum Center, lunch at Trattoria Stella, and the drive west on M72 out to

Empire. She loved Bronwyn and Joe, Sam and Joan so very much, and all her family and friends. She appreciated her kind neighbors Jerry and Joan, Ed and Joanne. Her bright smile lit up her face.

In the last years of her life, when Bronwyn or Sam asked how she was doing, she invariably replied, "Everything is good here; I'm super deluxe." And indeed, she truly was.

Rachel is survived by her children Bronwyn Jones (Joe VanderMeulen) and Sam Jones; her former daughter-in-law Joan Rizzolo; sister-in-law Div Buegeleisen her nieces Mimi Buegeleisen (Matt Jedla) and Judy Morris, and nephew Dan Buegeleisen (Janice Bird); and her beloved cat, Benjamin.

She was predeceased by her parents and her brother David Buegeleisen.

Rachel asked that when the time came, we send her back into the fire from which her pots emerged. Consequently, cremation has taken place and her family will host a celebration of her life on Saturday, May 30th, 2020 at the Cleveland Township Hall in Maple City.

In lieu of flowers, please send donations in her name to the Cherryland Humane Society, the Dennis Museum Center, Jewish Voice for Peace or any animal rescue or arts organization of your choosing.

Please share memories of Rachel by visiting her online tribute page at [www.reynolds-jonkhoff.com](http://www.reynolds-jonkhoff.com)

# Previous Events

## Celebration of Life

MAY 30. 4:00 PM (ET)

Cleveland Twp.  
Maple City, MI

# Tribute Wall

EL

“ Amen

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**elizabethpamelawalker** - October 25, 2021 at 08:40 AM



“ I am so sorry for your loss - she sounds like she was a wonderful woman. I am sorry to leave this message here - I have done a lot of research on the Buegeleisen family all the way back to Poland. If you are interested in taking a look I would be happy to share - please email me at [rijacksongenealogy@gmail.com](mailto:rijacksongenealogy@gmail.com)

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**Sally Brealey** - February 11, 2021 at 08:25 PM

MW

“ Sam I'm so sorry to hear of your mom's passing. I was grateful to have met her and see her beautiful home and pottery caring for her beloved kitty Toshi. I smiled reading her memorial, remembering her instructions for care that were detailed and precise, a woman after my own heart! Cherish the good memories, know that you were a good son to her, and she loved you. With love, Marsha Wheaton

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**marsha wheaton** - January 09, 2020 at 09:00 AM

MI

“ Rachel was a dear friend of Marjory Koster, my grandmother. Through their friendship I was introduced to Rachel, her wonderful pottery, her life in New York and her son. Her humor and cultivated taste made a strong impression on this young girl from a small town. I'm so glad to have met her and am sorry her time with us all has come to an end. I treasure the pottery she gave to my mother and will honor her every time I light a candle in the bowls made for this purpose. If my mother were alive she would have much more to say. On her behalf and mine, condolences to the family. Know her life had so much meaning to us and we loved her.

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**michelle** - January 06, 2020 at 08:59 PM



“ Rachel was a treasure to the world and to her family and friends. I used to marvel at her creations and her exuberance for life. I loved hanging around the house on Crescent and watching the lives lived next door from the Kitmans, as Andrea and I lived somewhat vicariously through the slightly older crowd of Sam, Jamie and the rest. I especially loved Lila and Goliath and would love them up through the fence between the two households.

*The Jones family like so many other unique souls made Leonia a truly magical place to grow up and draw inspiration for my own life from. Rachel crafted her life as beautifully as she did her clay. I am so sorry for her loss to her family and friends, and anyone who didn't get a chance to know her. She was a gem!*

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**Adaria Armstrong** - January 06, 2020 at 12:06 AM

SO

“ Sending peace and comfort to Bronwyn, Sam and family. Thinking of you as you honor your mother... an incredible human being.  
Susan Odgers & Tom Mair



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**susan odgers** - January 03, 2020 at 08:58 PM