

# Barbara James & Joe Laurence joint obituary

IN MEMORIAM

**BARBARA E. JAMES**

12/16/1937 – 1/28/2023

**JOSEPH P. LAURENCE**

12/19/1934 – 7/31/2023

Joe and Barbara have passed away at their home in Carmel Valley, CA. Barbara went first, on January 28th, 2023. She was a classicist, teacher, musician and attorney. As counsel for the Wisconsin Public Service Commission she appeared in front of the US Supreme Court to advocate successfully that electric utilities may not pass on the costs of failed projects, in that instance a nuclear plant, to their ratepayers. She was also endlessly intellectually curious, and famously one of the brightest people in any room she was in.

Joe followed her on July 31st. An extraordinary musician all his life, he soloed with the Cincinnati Orchestra at the age of 17. He played piano and violin in many musical styles with groups of all sizes, and was a remarkable and generous accompanist. He also worked for many years as a geophysicist, famously advancing geological research by setting off explosives in exotic places. He was a handyman, a gardener and a loveable curmudgeon.

It was the second marriage for both, a happy one lasting nearly 45 years. Each died peacefully in their own bedroom in the presence of family.

They fell in love, married and lived in old farmhouses with large gardens in Wisconsin then California. Their homes were full of love, fun, music, food, beer, animals of all sorts, and mad improbable shoestring projects. The door was never locked. You never ever knocked. You walked in, were

welcomed, then joined in whatever craziness might be going down. They weren't much for thinking a thing couldn't be done. Their hearts were always open to friends, and pretty much everyone was their friend. Creative misfits swarmed around them and built a marvelous community that will live on well beyond their passing.

Music and folk dance were a big part of their lives, and they played and danced together constantly. Through the years they wove their lives around each other as they grew old together.

They were also people of conscience, strong and active liberals who believed everyone was important and should have a say in things that affect them. They worked at the polls for countless elections and for environmental and social justice causes, including volunteering at the Monterey Bay Aquarium for many years.

They are survived by their friends, their stories and their families including Joe's children, Dan, Bill, John (Deb) and Jeff Laurence; Barbara's sister, Cathy McWilliams; her children, Martha Diehl (Ken) and Nellie Werger; grandchildren, Jamie Werger and Laura (Erich) Hiner, and great-grandchild Griffin Hiner.

A private memorial gathering will be held August 30th. To attend or share memories, please email [nellie@chaosrocks.net](mailto:nellie@chaosrocks.net)

If you are moved to honor them by helping others, Joe strongly supported the Food Bank of Monterey County because he believed nobody should go hungry, and Barbara was an indefatigable advocate for the work of Planned Parenthood Mar Monte.



**Barbara James,  
8/26/1986  
by Mary Mullen**



**Joe Laurence,  
by Ruth Inrrio**



**Joe Laurence, Al Nettleton, Barbara James, Warren Hagstrom, and Doleta Chapru**  
Joe playing recorders with the second incarnation of the Prairei recorder group, probably in the mid-80s-1990s. Photo courtesy of Ruth Calden.