

Writer Margie Dukore led a vibrant, friend-filled life

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By Lee Cataluna



The facts of her life make for an impressive biography: She grew up on the campus of Kamehameha Schools, the daughter of a beloved scholar of Hawaiian history and granddaughter of a four-star admiral. She became an award-winning novelist, playwright, writing teacher and actor with a number of memorable roles on the original "Hawaii Five-0."

But beyond that, Margaret Mitchell Dukore Lisman was a person who lit up the room whether at a political gathering or on a trip to the chemotherapy unit.

Margie Dukore, as she was known professionally, died in her sleep Feb. 24 at her home in Lake Oswego, Ore. She had been battling cancer in the last several years.

"She was the most incredible person," said her husband of 15 years, Gary Lisman, who was having trouble scheduling a memorial for her because so many people wanted to come.

"My mom's singular pleasure was to talk on the phone, so she needed to keep a lot of friends," said daughter Joan Dukore, who is a magician in Las Vegas.

Among Margie's closest friends are author Maxine Hong Kingston and musician Peter Yarrow of Peter, Paul and Mary. Margie's college roommate, actress Markie Post, described it as "friendship-hoarding."

"She was sardonic, funny, a master storyteller and laser-focused on the people around her," Post said. "There were very few, if any, things that were off-limits as joke material. She was completely irrepressible, and there were times when I was with her that I would stand there with my shoulders scrunched up to my neck in anticipation of what she might say at any given time."

Margie kept friendships for decades, as with buddy Monte Merrick, a screenwriter whose credits include the movies "Memphis Belle" and "Mr. Baseball." "She and Monte wrote letters back and forth every week," Joan Dukore said. "They kept file boxes full of letters so if one of them got really famous, the other could publish the correspondence."

Margie was born in Honolulu on Sept. 27, 1950, and was adopted by Donald and Winifred Mitchell. Don "Kilolani" Mitchell was a teacher, scholar and writer of many works on Hawaiian history and culture. He was Hawaiian studies special consultant at Kamehameha Schools and associate in Hawaiian culture at Bishop Museum. Margie's mother was the daughter of four-star

Adm. Orin Gould Murfin, who led the Navy's search for Amelia Earhart.

Margie grew up on the Kapalama campus of Kamehameha Schools. She graduated from Punahou School in 1968 and Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Ore., in 1972.

In college she was known to plan capers, often dragging her roommate along. "One time we took a train from Portland to San Francisco to visit my family, and she suggested that we do the 12-hour trip with English accents," Post said. "We were both afraid to fall asleep because we might wake up and forget our accents and disappoint everybody who believed we were from England and 'lose faith in human nature.'"

Margie's first book, "A Novel Called Heritage," was published by Scribner and received the Maxwell Perkins Prize for the best first novel of 1982. She received a National Endowment of the Arts grant to write her second novel, "Bloom," which was published in 1985. Her play "Move" was seen at the Richmond Museum Theatre in Virginia. Other plays she wrote were produced in Hawaii.

Michael Crabbe met Margie at a political gathering in Oregon and soon was caught up in her collection of best friends. "Come to find out that her father, Dr. Mitchell, taught me at Kamehameha, Hawaiian studies when I was in the fourth grade," he said. "She just about died laughing when I did my impersonation of her father. That was the start of our friendship."

Crabbe visited with Margie throughout the course of her illness. Last fall she was on an upswing, and though she knew she wasn't going to be cured, she was making plans for the time she had left. "She said, 'When is the Rose Bowl?'" (Her team, the Oregon Ducks, was playing Wisconsin.) "I told her the 1st of January, and she nodded with a smile. Then she asked, 'When is the Super Bowl?' and I said, 'Late January or early February,' and she calmly replied, 'Oh I think I can make both of them.' And she did," Crabbe said.

She was first diagnosed with breast cancer in 2007. Then came throat cancer, which recurred after rounds of grueling treatment. The way she described her experience of radiation was terrifying — a metal mask was affixed to her face for the duration of the procedures, and some of her teeth had to be sacrificed. Yet she told these stories with a kind of gusto and became part of the "entertainment" in the cancer center.

"She would look at any bad situation in her life and she'd think, 'This will make a great story to tell later,'" her daughter said.

A celebration of life will be held for Margie on June 24 at 2 p.m. at Fir Acres Theatre on the campus of Lewis & Clark College. That would have been Margie's 40th reunion, and her classmates are making the memorial part of their reunion weekend.

"She had such an eclectic group of friends," Joan said. "Everyone saw a different side of her."

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