

## Amazing Joanne Rife

The first question strangers ask Joanne Rife's daughter, Susan, after meeting Joanne for the first time is, "How old IS your mother?"

A valid question, since over her lifetime she has bicycled across the country; put in countless miles on High Sierra trails, including hiking the John Muir Trail (trail name: "Bad Ass Mountain Mama"), summiting Mt Whitney three times, and climbing Half Dome; logged many miles camping solo in her RV; and continues to make trips to her Bear Valley condo for winter snowshoeing and summer hiking. She also is a longtime volunteer at Henry W. Coe Park.

The answer to that question is followed by: "She's amazing."

She might demur, but it's clearly a point of pride to continue doing all the things she loves: keeping a daily journal for decades, taking up one musical instrument after another, paying close attention to politics and the news, and indulging her love of the outdoors and of books, writing, and classical music.



Born in Glendale, California, in 1932, she was the oldest child of a CPA and a homemaker. The young family moved around California during her early years, including San Francisco and Fresno, before resettling in Glendale, where she made lifelong friendships. She chose Occidental College in Los Angeles where she pledged the Gamma Kappa Theta sorority and majored in psychology.

"My thought was, I was a happy child so I was going to make people happy by knowing their psyches," she said. "That didn't work out too well."



The realities of starting a career became evident when, as a senior, she interviewed for a job at Braun Industries, along with a male classmate. “He was offered a fellowship, and I was invited to join the secretarial pool,” she said wryly. “I had far better grades than he did and it irritated me beyond belief.”



She met her future husband, Edward, during Easter vacation at Balboa Island, where she was struggling along the beach wearing a cast after she’d broken her ankle skiing that winter. Ed carried her piggyback around the island. She ditched her high school beau and shortly after completing her bachelor’s degree at Oxy married the young Air Force officer.

The newlyweds drove cross country to Langley Air Force Base in Virginia for Ed’s service as a jet fighter pilot.

Their first child was born in Virginia. Upon completing military service, they returned to California, where two sons were born.

But rural California life with three small children made Joanne “berserk,” and she applied for a job as a freelance “stringer” for the Santa Ynez Valley News, a weekly newspaper. She eventually became the first female editor of the paper, where she won several awards for community journalism, and went on to become editor of the twice-weekly Delano Record in the Central Valley. She also was the first female member of the Santa Ynez Valley Union High School board of education.

Ed’s career brought them to Morgan Hill around 1979 and after some freelance jobs in the area, Joanne joined the university relations office at San Jose State University.



She retired in 1992, and she and Ed celebrated their retirement by riding their 21-gear touring bicycles across the United States, from “Cape Disappointment (in Washington state) to Dismal Swamp (in Virginia)” over a three-month period, a trip that she recreated 30 years later, driving her RV “Troublefoot” solo along the same route.



Joanne learned about AAUW from Carolyn Wilson, a neighbor in Holiday Lake Estates, and joined in 1985 as a way to meet like-minded women in Morgan Hill. She has served as editor of the newsletter and public policy chair.

“Women’s issues are important to me, education, particularly public education, is important to me, and women’s rights,” she said. “And the fact that I have in the span of my lifetime seen and experienced early on, the barriers that women faced, and that I had to face, to see them slowly, slowly come down and be reduced in size, and that I am waiting waiting waiting for a woman to be president of the United States. Not in my lifetime, I’m afraid.”

She was a founding member of the evening book group, and started Hikers Unanimous, a bicycling group, and Ukuladies. “Carol Holzgrafe and I started Rowdy Outings,” a now-defunct group that visited many area attractions and museums, she said. “She claimed she did and I claimed I did, so we must have done this together.” She also has worked, typically as a course marshal, throughout the Wildflower Run’s history.

As has been true throughout her life, Joanne has formed many strong friendships with fellow AAUW members and has enjoyed trips with them to China, the Netherlands, England and Mexico.











In addition to her three children, she has six grandchildren. A great-granddaughter, Isha Jo, was born last March.

After Ed's death in 2009, Joanne has continued to travel solo and with friends and family. Last year she explored France and Italy, and plans to travel to Scotland this fall. She continues to live in the Holiday Lake Estates home she and Ed bought together decades ago, now co-habiting with daughter Susan and son-in-law Steve, who serve as "staff."

*Susan Rife 2023*