

Susie (Caroline Erma) Greene Riefler

My mother, Caroline Erma Greene Riefler, died on July 19, 2019, age 93, in Hall Quarry Maine. Always an independent thinker, she renamed herself Susie at the age of five, in 1930, just as her parents were enrolling her and her sister in a German boarding school.

Susie was born in New York City to the children of missionaries with a passion for art. Her mother was born in Canton China and her father was born in Istanbul Turkey. This missionary upbringing led both of Susie's parents to have a strong aversion to Christianity, and Susie inherited both the love of art and the disregard of God.

Tempting fate, which they did not believe in, her parents took their daughters back to Germany in 1938, so that they could see the great European art museums and architecture one more time before they were destroyed in war. Again, they enrolled the girls in a German boarding school. Susie, age 13, desperate to fit in, wanted to join the Nazi Youth League and wear that brown uniform. She was forbidden by her parents, who were roaming Germany and Italy, soaking up all that great art. When Germany invaded Poland, they finally decided it was time to head back to America, the girls and their mother coming from Germany and their father from Italy. Fortunately for them, their train was delayed. They missed their reserved berths on a transport ship, which was promptly sunk off the coast of Holland. The next transport had better luck.

Back in Princeton, New Jersey, where Susie grew up, and where her father was a philosophy professor at Princeton University, she met her future husband, David Riefler. Susie and David described the dynamic girl, Susie, who was the class president and editor of the newspaper in junior high. When her mother insisted on sending her to a girls' academy for high school, Susie was furious. "It was like finishing school!" she would say.

The ongoing war made for uncertain times and understaffed colleges, so after an unsatisfactory year for Susie at Radcliffe, and for David at Harvard, they both left. She took training as an occupational therapist, doing arts and crafts with "mental hospital" patients and he was drafted. At the age of 20, against their parent's permission, they were married in Concord, New Hampshire, where the legal age for marriage was 20. Different times, indeed!

Susie and David raised three girls, in Hamden Connecticut. Susie loved teaching and taught this daughter how to read at the age of three. Susie became a special education teacher, retiring at the age of 62 to build their dream house in Hall Quarry Maine.

Susie began painting as a child and continued throughout her life. Her paintings were lively, with her vision of landscapes; always in motion and with fantastic, vibrant color. She said she painted them for herself and was uninterested in displaying or selling them. Her husband David framed and hung them in every wall, nook and cranny around their house.

In her last years of life, she would say, "I have my husband, my paintings and my books, what more do I need?"

In addition to Susie's husband, David, she is survived by two of her three daughters, Karen Steverson and husband Danny of Hall Quarry, and Jennifer Riefler and husband Patrick Reid of Verona Island. She was predeceased by her daughter Thali. With six grandchildren and six great grandchildren, she acquired two Chinese granddaughter-in-laws and two Chinese/American great grandchildren. It must be the missionary effect.