

Margaret L. Silbar

Reader, Scribbler, and Squash Widow

March 25, 1939 – August 18, 2020

Maggie passed away following hospitalization on July 15th for pulmonary embolism, along with her advanced dementia, probably Alzheimers disease. Her last fourteen days were spent in hospice in our Brookdale apartment in Santa Fe.

Margaret Ann Lincoln was born in a farmhouse on the outskirts of Big Rapids, Michigan. Her mother's favorite house cat also gave birth to kittens under the bed as she was being born. She became the oldest of three sisters, the younger ones being born in a hospital with no cats.

She grew up in Big Rapids, becoming Maggie when, on entering kindergarten, it was discovered there were too many girls named Margaret. She did well in school, was on the debate team in high school, and graduated (I believe) as valedictorian.



After two years at Ferris State Teachers College, also in Big Rapids, she transferred to the University of Michigan on a debate scholarship, majoring in English and journalism. It was here she met me, Dick Silbar, on a blind date in her senior year. On graduating, she took a one-year internship as a reporter at the Worcester Telegram-Gazette in Massachusetts, where she took on the role as their science reporter. (By then she suspected that she was going to be involved with a physicist for the rest of her life.)

In 1963, she returned to Ann Arbor, where we were married on January 19th, which is also sometimes known as my birthday. While I was taking a long nine months writing up my thesis, she worked as a reporter for the nearby Novi-Northville newspaper. Among other things, she had to write a weekly cooking column, where in desperation she invented an imaginary professor who considered himself “a left-overs man” type of cook.

In August of that year we translated to Baltimore where I had a post-doc at Johns Hopkins. It was here that she began her career as a free-lance science writer, mostly specializing in physics and astronomy topics written for the educated layman. This activity continued through our times living in the Washington, DC, area and Los Alamos. Her articles were published in magazines such as Analog Science Fiction, Science Digest, NSF's Mosaic, the Griffith Observer, and Discovery. and in local

newspapers such as the Fenton Independent, the Los Alamos Monitor, and the Santa Fe New Mexican.

After the four years in Baltimore and Washington, we settled down in Los Alamos in 1967, where I was working closely with the meson factory there and she hosted a lot of dinners for our experimental and theoretical friends. We took up skiing and continued the hiking and backpacking that we began during her Worcester days. Skiing primarily at Pajarito Mountain (uphill from Los Alamos) but with numerous trips to Colorado areas. She made it to the top of Longs Peak, along with a few other 14-ers in Colorado, but mostly the hiking took place in the Jemez mountains and the Pecos Wilderness Area.

Maggie enjoyed the times we spent away from Los Alamos, when we had a sabbatical year in Switzerland at *their* meson factory, and semesters at Amherst and Stony Brook. There were also longish stays away: five months in Russia, three in Paris, and two in England (outside of Oxford), and one in Tel Aviv. And, over the fifty-odd years we lived in Los Alamos, there were many one-month vacations to foreign countries: one in Ecuador and Peru, one in Chile, one in New Zealand, about eight to Europe, and about nine in Mexico. There were, of course, also numerous shorter trips in the States and Canada. Maggie was always interested in languages and some of these times away were spent learning them. She could get by passably in French, Spanish, German, and Russian.

On one of our trips to Virginia, a Swiss friend introduced Maggie to the art of Scherenschnitte (the cutting of paper with scissors). This is painstaking, intricate work which she engaged in for a long time, until her eyesight began to degrade. An exhibit of her cuttings was held at the Los Alamos Public Library in July 2016.

In the 1990's Maggie switched gears and became involved with the Santa Fe Water Conservation Board. This eventually ended with her publishing, with Connie Slocomb as illustrator, two children's booklets, "How Coyote Brought Us Water" and "Coyote Wanders Upriver." They are available in Spanish editions as well as English. (There is a 46-page teacher's manual for these stories.) She also developed a "traveling trunk" full of items related to the history of water in New Mexico. It may still be available for loan from the Museum of New Mexico.

About three years ago, what with the problems from the infection after the hip revision and her incipient dementia, we began clearing the house at 168 Dos Brazos. Fifty-one years of living in one place develops a lot of accumulation. After three garage sales and the appearance of an eager buyer, we sold the house and moved at the end of August 2018 to the Brookdale Senior Living facility in Santa Fe. Here she has had a lot of help from the assisted-living staff, especially in the last four or five months.