

Bernice Petersen, 90, Brookhaven lab newsletter editor, dies

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Newsletter editor Bernice Petersen died from liver cancer Nov. 21, 2013. She was 90. [Newsday obituary for Bernice Petersen](#). (Credit: Handout)

Bernice Petersen's articles for Brookhaven National Laboratory's employee newsletter were about more than photons and superconductors.

The Canada native, who died Thursday in Oak View, Calif., wrote wry commentary on topics ranging from golf to her struggles to quit smoking. In April 1975, she told the tale of an avocado tree that grew to a remarkable height after being planted during a lab beautification project.

"We won't need rockets," Petersen wrote. "We may someday climb to the stars on it."

Petersen, who lived in Bayport before moving to California last year, died from liver cancer, said her daughter, Karen Petersen of Santa Fe. She was 90.

Karen Petersen remembered her mother as a person of adventurous spirit who took flying lessons in her 20s, loved cooking and campaigned for Democratic candidates, including former Rep. Thomas Downey.

"It was wonderful watching election night," recalled Petersen, a retired journalist, adding that her mother would let her and her brother, John, stay up until the last race was decided. "She gave my brother and I a great appreciation of the excitement of breaking news, and the importance of the news business."

Born to Scottish immigrants on Aug. 9, 1923, Bernice Petersen was raised on a wheat farm in Regina, Saskatchewan. During World War II, she won a job at the British Mission in Washington, D.C., where she met Andrew John Petersen, an editor, at a Navy party. The couple married after a four-week courtship and moved to New York, where Bernice Petersen worked for UNICEF.

She joined the Brookhaven lab, in Upton, as an executive secretary in 1961 and later started writing for the newsletter. She was its editor from 1975 until she retired in 1986.

"It really became a beloved thing that everybody looked forward to reading," Karen Petersen said.

After her retirement, Petersen was a Bayport-Blue Point Public Library trustee.

She is survived by her daughter and her son, John Ross Petersen, of Oak View, Calif. Andrew Petersen died in 1967. Her remains were cremated. No services were planned.

CORRECTION: An earlier version of this story incorrectly stated where Petersen died.