

Robbie Dean Waller

July 2, 1920 - January 7, 2018

A vivacious artist, teacher and world traveler, Robbie Dean Waller, age 97, died January 7, 2018, at Jefferson Lodge in Dallas, Oregon.

Robbie was born July 2, 1920, to C.W. 'Pat' Hoffman, Sr., and Claudia (West) Hoffman at their home in Sale Creek, Tennessee. She graduated from Sale Creek High School then attended the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where she earned a degree in Home Economics Education. She promptly moved to Eastern Oregon where her parents had bought a ranch near North Powder, and she began teaching Home EC at Baker High School. She dearly loved teaching young people how to cook, sew, and prepare for adulthood.

In November 1943, after a simultaneous courtship with two different suitors, she chose to marry J.T. Waller, 1st Lt. in the U.S. Army Air Corp. They lived a short while in Fresno, California, where their one and only son, Steven, was born. In 1948, the couple divorced and Robbie moved back to Tennessee where her parents still maintained a large, river rock house her father had built. She resumed teaching in Sale Creek, but made frequent trips to Oregon with her young son. In 1955, after her father built up the Ronde Valley Lumber Co. in Union, Robbie settled permanently in Oregon, eventually moving with her parents into the Buckwalter ranch house on L Ave. in La Grande. She lived in that house, "across from the jail," she liked to say, for the next 55 years.

In the basement of their home, Robbie and her mother taught weekly ceramics classes. They created a studio filled with ceramics molds, firing kilns, and countless jars of glazes and paints. Eventually she learned to paint on porcelain china, which became her life-long passion. She was a meticulous student of china painting, regularly attending and hosting seminars until she herself started teaching it to others. Over her lifetime, she painted hundreds of pieces from plates to lampshades to dolls and figurines and won countless awards at the Union County Fair and beyond. She once said she felt ceramics was a "craft" whereas china painting was a "true art form" that she loved for its intricacies and fine glazes.

Aside from her painting skills, Robbie was also a talented musician and singer. She could play multiple instruments including guitar, piano and bass fiddle, but was most appreciated for her lively prowess on her white accordion. As a young woman, having grown up visiting the Grand Ole Opry and seeing Opry stars gather at her family's home, she played in a female musical trio gigging at local dances and grange hall hootenannies. She continued through her later years singing alto in the church choir. As music was such an important part of her life, she eventually created an endowment fund for the Bell Choir at the Presbyterian Church in La Grande and donated funds to the EOU Foundation for the crystalline chimes carillon and clock in the EOU quad.

Robbie was known by friends and neighbors as a fabulous seamstress, sewing many of her own outfits as well as dresses for her granddaughters, tiny doll clothes, and custom-made tutus for her toy poodles. She was an ardent



family historian and storyteller, never without a camera and film or video recorder. And she was a handy cook who loved to throw lavish parties and invite anyone into her kitchen for conversation, homemade goodies, and tour of her art studio. She had a boisterous

laugh, and if you got her going, she'd snort and exclaim with a hearty, "Oh my stars!"

Beyond her busy life in La Grande, Robbie also loved to travel. She was forever booking trips with close friends or organized tour groups to destinations like Europe, Australia, the Caribbean, and the Holy Lands among countless other places in the United States. She was also an active member of the Good Sam's RV Club, often attending campouts in her 28-foot Jayco motor home. She was a member of Eastern Star and La Grande sororities Beta Sigma Phi and PEO Chapter CO, as well as the First Presbyterian Church. Robbie was also a business woman. She managed eight rental units in La Grande and served on the board of Eagle Freightliner, of which she was co-owner, until its sale in July, 2015.

In March, 2013, Robbie's family moved her into Jefferson Manor (later Jefferson Lodge) in Dallas, Oregon, to be closer to her son, Steve. She was suffering from advanced dementia and needed specialized care. During her nearly five years there, she wooed staff with her southern charm and was a regular winner at weekly bingo games. She also had the best-dressed room, filled with beautiful furnishings, large family portraits, and several pieces of her beloved china paintings.

Survivors include her granddaughters, Caralee Anley and Mollie Waller; great grandchildren, Riley Hutchison and Darian Hutchinson; and other relatives and friends. She was preceded in death by son, Steve Waller, brother Clarence William 'Pete' Hoffman, Jr., and parents.

A memorial service will be held on Saturday, February 3, at 1:00 p.m. at the Presbyterian Church in La Grande with a cookie reception following at the Presbyterian Friendship Center across from the church. Entombment will be at 3:00 p.m. at the Grandview Mausoleum.

Contributions in her honor may be made to: PEO La Grande Chapter CO, the Bell Choir at the First Presbyterian Church of La Grande, or the EOU Foundation.