

Dr. Grace Poksyn Song Yoon

Poksyn Song Yoon died peacefully at her home on January 5, 2008 of natural causes related to a kidney transplant she received in 2007. She had suffered severe internal injuries in a near-fatal car accident in the early 1980's and battled the after-effects of that accident for the rest of her life.

Poksyn had a distinguished academic career. She received a B.S. in Zoology from the University of Michigan and a Ph.D. in Biochemistry from the University of Wisconsin at Madison, before becoming a postdoctoral fellow in biochemistry at the University of Connecticut, UCLA and the University of Michigan. She won a Fulbright Scholarship to work at the University of Seoul, South Korea, but chose not to pursue it. In 2008, she was posthumously awarded an Ed.D by Johnson and Wales University in Providence, RI., where she was working at the time of her death.

Poksyn began her career as a staff biochemist at the American Red Cross in Lansing, Michigan, and was later a biochemist at the Veterans Hospital in Boston. She became Director of Education and Training at the American Red Cross in Providence, RI, and later held director positions at Roger Williams University and at Johnson and Wales University, both in Providence. In the latter position, she directed Business and Industry Liaisons for J&W. She later became Adjunct Professor of Science there, and eventually was a full professor and chair of the science department.

While at J&W, she informally changed her first name from Poksyn to Grace, to honor the memory of her favorite aunt while making it easier for her students and colleagues to pronounce her name. She enjoyed vacationing at her aunt Grace's summer cottage in Northport, Michigan, near Traverse City.

Poksyn was married to Kurt Byers, whom she met in the fall of 1982 at Mr. Flood's Party in Ann Arbor during Kurt's first semester at Michigan. Their career paths took them to different parts of the country - Alaska for Kurt, Boston and then Providence for Poksyn and they eventually divorced but remained good friends and she did not remarry.

A lover of nature and animals, Poksyn supported many charities and was a volunteer for the American Heart Association and the American Red Cross. Her personal passion was breeding and showing Birman cats. In a 1999 email to Kurt, she wrote: "Victor won 19 ribbons. Placed 3rd out of 52 kittens. He would have won 1st place but he hissed directly into the judge's face and refused to play with the silly feather they kept waving in front of his nose...." And from a 2004 email, "Speaking of Birmans, my little girl, Zinnia, stole the show at the Pioneer Valley Cat Show last weekend in Springfield, MA, won all six rings, and is now a Grand Champion...much to my surprise." Her award-winning cats have been adopted by her friends and colleagues in Providence and are living in happy homes.