



Chara Aurora Cooper Haas

Chara Aurora Cooper Haas, whose love of family, community, nature and music touched all who knew her, died August 15, 2012. She was 85.

“In addition to her family, our mother loved nature and sharing life with other people,” according to a statement from her children. “She was emotionally affected by making music and that spirit carried over into everything she did. She had a passionate feeling about the world.”

Born in Bryn Athyn, PA, one of the seven children of Frederick J. and Aurora Synnesvedt Cooper, Chara Haas had a modest upbringing. She worked as a domestic at the Glencairn Estate in Bryn Athyn, and later as a shipping clerk and errand girl at Fred J. Cooper, the family jewelry store in Philadelphia. Her father died in 1941, and her mother in 1945, when she was 18. Her father, a watchmaker and native of England, had always wanted his children to visit Europe. In 1949 Chara fulfilled his dream and sailed by herself to England on the Queen Elizabeth and back on the Queen Mary.

In 1951, she was invited by a family she had worked for to move to Houston, TX to help care for their children. There she met John C. Haas, who was working at the Rohm and Haas plant in Houston at the time. The couple was married in Bryn Athyn on June 21, 1952. They lived first in Houston where their first child Barbara was born, and then in Wyncote, PA. Chara and John

raised five children and eventually moved to Stoneleigh, the Haas family estate in Villanova.

Chara had a deep appreciation for nature, with a particular love for flowers, and was very “hands on” in the garden. Whether at home or on one of many travels, Chara enjoyed the outdoors, walking, playing tennis, bird watching and swimming. She and John shared a special passion for preserving beautiful natural places in the Philadelphia area, as well as in the Berkshires where the family spent many summers together.

Chara and John hosted family and friends each May for the “Stoneleigh Stroll-About.” In a note welcoming guests to their home, they wrote, “The preservation and development of the gardens, grounds and house have been an ongoing project of love for us. We feel privileged to have been entrusted with the conservation of this historic and beautiful property.”

Chara had a life-long love of music, whether at the Philadelphia Orchestra, the Boston Symphony at Tanglewood in Lenox, MA, or anywhere in the world. She formed a special bond with the choir at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church, with whom she sang for many years. In 1970, she demonstrated this love of music by taking her two oldest sons to their first live music concert, Iron Butterfly at the Electric Factory. The organ in Verizon Hall, where she and John enjoyed many concerts, was named after her father, who was an amateur organist.

Long-time friend Ann Abbott said family was paramount to Chara, who was very proud of her children and her husband. She described Chara as a “true friend” who gave unconditionally to her many friendships.

“Chara attracted people to her with her joy, love and generous spirit,” Abbott said. “Her humor and mischievous sense of adventure could turn the simplest

events into special memories.”

Her warmth and sense of humor was demonstrated when Chara directed that the trunk of a tree near the road on the Stoneleigh property be carved into a family of rabbits. The rabbits have become a landmark in the area, and neighbors and passersby delight in seeing the rabbit family decorated for holidays and special events.

Chara had always been passionate about helping vulnerable children and youth become successful, productive adults. This concern was reflected in her personal philanthropy and in the work of the William Penn Foundation, founded in 1946 by John’s parents. She served on the board of the William Penn Foundation with John for 33 years.

Despite being a part of one of Philadelphia’s most well known families, Chara never forgot her humble beginnings, according to her nephew, Marvin Clymer, who chronicled her life in “Chara’s Story.”

“She cared a lot about people and didn’t forget her roots,” he said. “She was there for people who needed help. She used to say, ‘The purpose of having money is to make things better.’”

It was Chara who first introduced the idea of devoting the couple’s personal estate to helping children and families. In 2006, they established the Stoneleigh Foundation, which works to improve the futures of vulnerable and underserved children and youth by awarding fellowships to innovative practitioners in the field. Chara volunteered with many organizations, and was considered one of the founders of the Pathway School in Norristown, PA, where she served as chair of the board.

She was preceded in death by her husband and is survived by a daughter, Barbara, and sons David, Leonard, Frederick and Duncan, and 10 grandchildren.

Memorial services will be held Saturday, Sept. 15 at 10 a.m. at Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church, 625 Montgomery Avenue, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010, and

Saturday, Sept. 22 at 11 a.m. at Bryn Athyn Cathedral, 900 Cathedral Road, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009. The service at Bryn Athyn Cathedral will also be live-streamed and archived at <http://www.ustream.tv/channel/brynathynservice>. In lieu of flowers, contributions may be made in Mrs. Haas' memory to support the University of Pennsylvania Health System Penn Comprehensive Neuroscience Center. Checks should be written to the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania (write "John and Chara Haas Fund" in the memo) Office of Development and Alumni Relations, 3535 Market Street, Suite 750, Phila, PA 19104, Attn: Michael L. Balaban – Senior Major Gifts Officer. Donations may also be made to Academy of the New Church, Donor Relations, Box 708, Bryn Athyn, PA 19009; or to the Boston Symphony Orchestra's Tanglewood Fund, Attn: Chara Haas Memorial Gifts, 301 Massachusetts Avenue, Boston, MA 02115.