



Nancy and Jerry Kohlberg at their Edgartown Great Pond home in 2010. *Mark Alan Lovewell*

Nancy Kohlberg, Quiet and Generous Force for Sustainable Living, Dies at 92

Julia Wells *Thursday, September 1, 2022 - 7:41am*

Nancy Kohlberg died peacefully on August 25 at her home in Edgartown, surrounded by family. She was 92 and had been a modest but powerful force in a variety of causes from sustainable agriculture to environmental protection on Martha's Vineyard.

With her late husband Jerome Kohlberg Jr., Mrs. Kohlberg quietly and generously supported an array of charitable and community activities, both nationally and on the Island. Among other things, they co-founded the Martha's Vineyard Vision Fellowship, a fund that awards grants across disciplines to further the environmental and social sustainability of the Vineyard. In 2010, they acquired the Vineyard Gazette to ensure its continued vitality.

Forthright and practical by nature, Mrs. Kohlberg had a lifelong love of the outdoors that began at a young age and eventually grew to include small-scale organic farming in Mt. Kisco, N.Y., where she and her husband founded Cabbage Hill Farm in the late 1980s. In the early 2000s, she opened the Flying Pig Restaurant, one of the first farm-to-table restaurants in the Hudson Valley. She was also keenly interested in education and had been involved in educational causes throughout her life.

Nancy Seiffer was born on August 12, 1930, in New York city, the daughter of Albert and Ethel Okin Seiffer. She was educated in the Scarsdale public schools and in summers attended Camp Vega on Echo Lake in Fayette, Me., where she became a Junior Maine Guide. Her father had a farm in Phoenicia N.Y., which spurred a lifelong dream to own a farm.

After high school she attended Mt. Holyoke College for a year and a half, and then transferred to Mills Teachers College (now part of the New School in New York), where she graduated with a degree in primary education. After college she taught preschool at the Pengilly School in Larchmont N.Y.

She met Jerry Kohlberg while she was finishing her teaching degree and he was in law school at Columbia University. They married on Sept. 4, 1949, at her family home. Both came from modest backgrounds, and they spent their honeymoon camping across the country.

They raised four children and an assortment of beloved family dogs throughout their long married life. They always took vacations with the family, Mr. Kohlberg recalled in a warm tribute that he recorded for his wife before his death, as a future gift for her on her 90th birthday.

In 1986 Nancy and Jerry established Cabbage Hill Farm, where they raised rare agricultural breeds and established an aquaponics operation. Their organic beef, lamb and pork was sold to restaurants locally and in New York city.

In 2000 Mrs. Kohlberg opened the Flying Pig, which served organic and locally-sourced foods, a forerunner of the locavore movement. The restaurant was first located in the Mt. Kisco train station, and then moved to Lexington avenue in Mt. Kisco. It closed in 2011.

In 2010 the Kohlbergs bought the Vineyard Gazette (<https://vineyardgazette.com/news/2010/11/25/vineyard-gazette-sold-island-philanthropists>) from the Reston family, continuing a long tradition of independent family ownership at the newspaper. They hired Jane Seagrave as publisher and took a keen interest in maintaining the Gazette's voice for future generations, frequently attending weekly news meetings in the summer, cheering on the paper's accomplishments from the sidelines.

"The Gazette will go on without Jerry and Nancy, but we've lost two of its greatest champions and two of the finest people I have known," Ms. Seagrave told the Gazette staff this week in an email.

Mrs. Kohlberg became chairman of the Gazette board following Jerry Kohlberg's death in 2015. (<https://vineyardgazette.com/news/2015/08/01/jerome-kohlberg-jr-businessman-who-challenged-wall-street-owner-gazette-dies>) Their daughter, Pam Kohlberg, succeeds her in the role.

Mrs. Kohlberg's wider philanthropic work following her husband's death included prison reform, long-term legacy grants for HBCUs and support for the Brennan Center for Justice at NYU. "She touched thousands of lives and made a huge difference in areas like voting rights, democracy . . . working boldly and without recognition," Kohlberg Foundation executive director Nancy McCabe told the Gazette in a text message.

Her hobbies and interests included tennis, skiing, weaving, needlepoint, knitting, maple syrup production and honey production. A skilled cook, she welcomed countless people from all walks of life into her home over the decades for vibrant meals, always prepared with the freshest, locally-sourced food.

Her life on the Vineyard dated to the early 1950s. Nancy and Jerry often rented houses in Chilmark, including from Tom and Rita Benton in the early years. (Once when Rita had double booked the rental of their house, she gave the Kohlbergs a Benton lithograph as an apology). Around 1969, they bought land fronting Chilmark Pond and hired Emmett Carroll to build a house, which was completed in 1971.

In the early 1990s they bought a larger piece of land on the Edgartown Great Pond, where Nancy initially had farm animals with some of the breeds she had on her farm in New York, including Scottish Highland cattle.

They hired John Abrams at South Mountain Co. to build a house to accommodate three generations. Nancy had a hand in the design and pushed for environmentally sustainable materials, such as bathroom tiles made from recycled windshields, carpets made from recycled soda bottles and cypress paneling retrieved from a Florida swamp. She felt strongly about energy saving innovations long before it became mainstream.

Later Nancy and Jerry purchased a smaller house also fronting the Great Pond, renovating it to suit their needs. This was the place Jerry chose for his last chapter and likewise, Nancy did the same.

Mrs. Kohlberg was a founding board member for the Kohlberg Foundation, the Cabbage Hill Farm Foundation and the Martha's Vineyard Vision Fund. She was a board member for the Jacob Burns Film Center from 1998 to 2018.

She is survived by her four children: Karen Kohlberg Davis of Petersham, Pamela Kohlberg of Newton, James A. Kohlberg of Santa Monica Calif., and Andrew S. Kohlberg of Rancho Santa Fe, Calif.; 12 grandchildren: Jake Davis, Becky Aures, Hannah Johnson, Nate Davis, Samuel

Vinal, Jonathan Vinal, Nancy Vinal Rocha, Casey Kohlberg, Maddy Kohlberg, Charlotte Kohlberg, Justin Kohlberg, Michael Kohlberg; and seven great-grandchildren: Cian Davis, Mira Davis, Emelia Aures, Liam Aures, Carter Johnson, Tanner Johnson and Emory Davis.

A memorial service is being planned for this fall in Mt. Kisco, with a service planned for Martha's Vineyard in the summer of 2023.

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