

Charles Christopher (Chris/Papa Chrissy) Bratt

"Wasn't that a time!" (by Lee Hays, as sung by The Weavers)

Folk Singer, Carpenter, Activist, Writer, Poet, Teacher, Folk Artist and Collector, Red Diaper Baby, Family Man, Woodsman, Builder, Volunteer, Investor, Philanthropist, Environmentalist, Humanist



Chris was born at home 12/11/30 in San Francisco to Wiltrud Hildner Bratt and George Cleveland Bratt at the Columbus Apartments, 1492 Pacific Avenue. Chris passed away at his home in Applegate 4/8/19, surrounded by family and friends.

*Through all the tumult and the strife, I hear that music ringing.
It sounds an echo in my soul; how can I keep from singing!
(An old Quaker hymn, as adapted and sung by Pete Seeger)*

Chris loved to sing, knew hundreds if not thousands of songs, and sang them in his impassioned, clear tenor in living rooms, kitchens, picket lines, at potlucks, on stages, wherever and whenever the spirit moved him. He sang lead for a semiprofessional folk group (The Albion Trio) that played around the San Francisco Bay Area in the early 60's. Chris had wide-ranging, eclectic tastes in music. His main musical influences were Pete Seeger and the Weavers, but other musical influences included international folk dance (Chris loved all line dancing, especially the Kopachka Folk Dancers of Mill Valley), Puccini (especially *La Bohème*), Miriam Makeba, and Paul Robeson. He picked up songs and sang them his whole life long—everything and anything from YMCA camp songs to Ezio Pinza, Tom Paxton, and Woody Guthrie. It's only right to punctuate this story with some of his favorites.

*If I had a hammer, I'd hammer in the morning,
I'd hammer in the evening, all over this land...*
("If I had a hammer" by Pete Seeger and Lee Hays)

Chris had a hammer and knew how to use it. Chris's dad was a carpenter and Chris helped him on odd jobs during the Depression. Later, when WWII started, he went to work in a boat yard, still later in the Carpenters Union, Chris helped build the tract homes in South San Francisco Malvina Reynolds immortalized in her song "Little Boxes". Still later he became a general contractor, working as Little Gem Construction ("a jewel of a job"), a company he formed with partners Molly Malouf and Jim Holland. In the early 1960's, when the KKK was burning churches in Mississippi, Chris and Molly went there with the American Friends Service Committee to help congregations rebuild. In the late 60's Chris and his partners in Little Gem went to Delano, CA to build the Rodrigo Terrónez Memorial Clinic for the United Farm Workers. Chris's politics and music were strongly influenced by the United Brotherhood of Carpenters, the United



Farmworkers of America (UFW), Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), American Friends Service Committee, and the Peace and Freedom Party.

Back in the Bay Area in the early 70's, The Little Gem partners got tired of building ever fancier homes. A remodel calling for a fifth bathroom was the last straw: Little Gem dissolved. Chris got his teaching credential from San Francisco State and went to teach wood shop at Tomales High in California (which is where he met Joan Peterson, who was teaching English there). Chris and Joan moved their blended family to 160 acres on Thompson Creek Road in 1976. In Oregon, more carpentry jobs beckoned—large and small, volunteer and not—countless hours building stages and a portable burrito booth, remodeling the Headwaters Building on 4th Street in Ashland, along with serving burritos, delivering newspapers, and leading sing-alongs.

*All must work, for work is good,
and in work man finds brotherhood.*

("Hey Zhankoye", Jewish folksong, as sung by the Weavers)

Chris was a builder, figuratively as well as literally—and tireless. Besides building the stage in Stolte Grove for the Homestead Valley Improvement Project, Chris built forts for his kids, the famous and dangerous "rocking boat", homes and remodels for family and friends, tract homes like the "Little Boxes" tract, jungle gyms, and innumerable smaller miscellaneous projects.

Chris knew that working together on a project builds community. In the 1980's, putting his boundless energy, teaching experience, and carpentry skills to work, Chris organized a carpentry and woodworking co-op, The Billy Mountain Builders, which evolved over the years into Cottage Green Construction, a contracting partnership he formed with Richard



Goodnough. Up until the last year of his life, Chris was in charge of maintaining, improving, and repairing Bratt Family Trust properties in San Francisco and Grass Valley, CA. Chris's passion for work as a thing good in itself as well as the prime ingredient in bringing people together is exemplified—along with his rough and wry sense of humor—in a favorite phrase of his: "What do you think this is—a country club?"



Here in Applegate, Chris and Joan's 160 acres afforded plenty of room for a big garden, pasture for goats and horses, and sustainable forestry for timber and firewood. This picture of Chris in their big garden brings to mind another piece of a favorite song Chris and Joan sang often:

*Going to the Oregon, where everything is green,
Gonna have the best old farm that you have ever seen.*
("Times A Gettin' Hard" by Lee Hays, as sung and amended by Chris and Joan, who changed "Califor-ni-ay" to "the Oregon")

When Chris and Joan moved to their place on Thompson Creek ("Forest Farm" they called it) along with their children, they also brought Chris's parents George and Wiltrud (Beb). One night at dinnertime, a young woman they didn't know came to the door and told them the BLM was planning to spray large areas of the forest abutting their property. Beb overheard the conversation and said, "Christopher, you should *do* something about it." He did do something about it—and with a passion one Boise Cascade VP described as "relentless pressure, relentlessly applied". Besides organizing the Homestead Valley Improvement Club back in his Mill Valley days, up in Oregon Chris helped found and/or served on boards of ACOTS, NCAP, TREE, Headwaters, GEOS, Applegate Partnership, Applegate newspaper, Applegate Neighborhood Network, and probably others. In the office he built onto the main house, Chris kept extensive files on forest management, herbicide- and pesticide-spraying, clearcutting, small woodlands management, small-diameter timber products, and sustainable forest management.

Chris was predeceased by his parents George and Wiltrud Bratt and brothers Jonathan, George, Tom, and Peter. Chris is survived by Joan Peterson, his wife and partner since they met at Tomales High School some 50 years ago, and by his first wife Nancy Wilkins, the mother of his three children.



Survivors also include his children Toni Winter (Terry), Josh Bratt (Wendie), and Nick Bratt (Beth), step-children Gordon Smith (Malie) and Jenell Smith, his sister Susanna, his cousins Michael and Mandy, countless nieces and nephews, including Greg, Nadya, Peter, James, Kevin, Georgia, Karen, Alexis, and many grandchildren, grandnieces, grandnephews, and great-grandchildren as near as California and as far away as Norway.

*When I'm on my journey, don't you weep after me...
I don't want you to weep after me."*
("On My Journey" traditional melody with new verses by the Weavers)



He left it better than he found it.