

# VALLEY NEWS

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## **A Life: Ethel Dolores 'Do' Roberts, 1930 - 2014; 'She Really Had Aspirations...And I Think She Succeeded'**

By Alex Hanson

Valley News Staff Writer

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For many years, "Do" Roberts was a member of a writers group that met in Hanover's Howe Library. And for many years, members of the group talked about starting a literary magazine.

Roberts was more a doer than a talker, and finally she and fellow writer Deloris Netzband decided to forge ahead. A group member suggested the name Bloodroot, after a flower with red roots and white blossoms that seemed a proper metaphor for writing, the transmutation of suffering into beauty.

Bloodroot Literary Magazine put out its first issue in 2008, and its seventh issue came out in January. The magazine's longevity, in a world in which few literary magazines have staying power, is a testament to Roberts' efforts. She was the main force behind Bloodroot, contributing considerable time and her own money to its success and had a hand in creating a community of writers that stretched beyond the Upper Valley.

"She would always refer to the Bloodroot writers as 'my writers,'" said Tom Kinder, a friend whose poetry was published in Bloodroot.

Roberts died Feb. 23, 2014, at her home in Thetford Center. She was 83, and the cause of death was a heart attack.

Her work with Bloodroot, pushing ahead with a project, typified her life. True to the spelling of her

1 of 4 nickname, which was pronounced "doe," she was a woman of action.

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Ethel Dolores Roberts was born in Macon, Ga., the only child of Lucille and Thomas Jefferson Roberts. Her father was from Alabama and all his brothers were named after presidents, said Kirk Glaser, one of Roberts' two sons. Her father never went to college, but rose to become an electrical engineer for Southern Railroad. He was an inventor who developed his own electric lawnmower and an electric-eye door before such devices were even heard of, much less commonly used. "Do" was a tinkerer herself. "She loved to get lost in hardware stores," Glaser said.

Her nickname came from her parents' use of her middle name. "Do," which she put in quotation marks, was a childhood mispronunciation that she embraced. In a 2008 interview about Bloodroot, she didn't want even to acknowledge Dolores, and never mentioned her first name.

Higher education wasn't always in the cards for young women in her time and place.

"From early on, she let it be known that she wanted to go to college and have a career," Glaser said.

"Do" wanted to attend Mercer College, in Macon, Ga., but her parents felt it would be a waste to pay for her education since she was just going to get married and raise a family, Glaser said.

So she left. After graduating high school early, she and a school friend ran away to New York.

She had studied stenography in high school and found secretarial work. She was "a petite, cute redhead," Glaser said, and soon after she started taking acting and modeling classes, she started to find work as a model, mainly in fashion shows for clothing distributors and in a few prints ads.

While she was working as a secretary she met Kenneth Glaser, who came into her office on business from his family's printing company. He was 11 years older. He got her phone number but at first she declined to take his calls because she learned there was a Mrs. Glaser working in his office. Turned out that was his mother. They hit it off and were married in 1951.

"She was a Baptist girl from Georgia, and he was a good Jewish boy in New York," Kirk Glaser said. "Her parents were really shocked, but they ended up loving him."

They settled in Stamford, Conn., where "Do" continued to act, but mainly raised their two sons, Gregg, born in 1953, and Kirk, born in 1961.

Roberts, who had taken her husband's name but continued to act under her maiden name, still wanted to continue her education.

"By the time I was in high school, she was champing at the bit," Kirk Glaser said. She started taking courses at the University of Connecticut's Stamford campus.

"I think that's when the move toward writing started," said Glaser, a Dartmouth College graduate who is now a senior lecturer in the English department at Santa Clara University in California and the adviser to the school's literary journal, *Santa Clara Review*.

It was during this renaissance that she went through her most serious personal struggles. Her husband

swam laps in the family's pool every evening, and one night in 1977, he drowned. He had a mild form of epilepsy and it was thought that he had a seizure in the pool that led to his drowning.

"Do" was devastated, her son said. "Her way of dealing with things was just to barrel through it," he said. She had some near breakdowns after her husband's death, including an episode of exhaustion about a year later.

Kenneth Glaser's family business had been successful and he had set up savings for his family, which meant that while "Do" had to work part-time, the family was well provided for. "Bless his soul, he left us in good shape that way," Kirk Glaser said.

But on a personal level, the death of her husband of 26 years was a deep wound.

"I don't think it's something she ever really recovered from," Glaser said. "The loss of him was the source of much of her poetry."

She went to work at a talent agency in New York and was starting to work her way up. She also finished her college education, earning a bachelor of fine arts degree in theater from the University of Bridgeport, before fate again intervened.

Roberts lost her mother in 1983. Her father sustained a severe accident and her mother had a heart attack as a result. She spent much of the next seven years taking care of her father before he died.

When Kirk was at Dartmouth, from 1979 to 1983, "Do" came to enjoy the Upper Valley. Connecticut was becoming built up, and she bought a house in Thetford Center in 1988.

She started to take an interest in poetry in part because she wanted to understand Kirk's interest in it. "She said, I want to understand what you love so much," he said.

She earned an MFA in poetry through the Goddard College low-residency program in the late 1990s. Around the same time, she joined the writing group at the Howe Library from which Bloodroot was born.

"'Do' was the big force behind the magazine," said Phyllis Katz, who met Roberts at a poetry reading and then submitted poems to Bloodroot.

The magazine was meant as an outlet for writers from the Upper Valley and elsewhere. In Vermont, most literary journals are centered in the west side of the state, Katz said. "She really did fill a vacuum in this area," Katz said.

Her two sons were both involved with Bloodroot as well, with Kirk acting as an advisor and Gregg, a beer judge and a writer about beer and spirits, co-hosting literary beer tasting nights at the Norwich Inn. Efforts to reach Gregg Glaser were unsuccessful.

In addition to editing submissions, Roberts handled all the nuts-and-bolts aspects of Bloodroot, which published once a year. She had experience in printing from her husband's business, did the fundraising and advertising, hired the cover artists and organized the readings. There are usually five or six readings

a year by Bloodroot authors. One took place a couple of weeks ago at Norwich Bookstore, and another is planned for May 21 at 7 p.m. in Corinth's Blake Memorial Library.

The journal and the readings, over which Roberts presided with a quiet, distinctly Southern grace and charm, created a sense of community for Upper Valley creative writers that hadn't existed before. Her own poetry sometimes took a back seat to the magazine.

"If it was a choice between working on her own work and doing something for the magazine, she would choose doing something for the magazine," Netband said.

"I think she really had aspirations for making Bloodroot a competitive journal and I think she succeeded," Katz said.

It isn't clear that Bloodroot will continue beyond this year's issue. Even Netband said she doesn't know whether the magazine will keep going.

"It's going to be a real loss for our community," Katz said.

Alex Hanson can be reached at [ahanson@vnews.com](mailto:ahanson@vnews.com) or 603-727-3219.

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