

Julia Green Sturges, 98, Was Woman of Adventurous Spirit

Julia Green Sturges, the cofounder of Tea Lane Associates, who combined the adventurous, strong-willed spirit of feminist pioneers with the gracious style of a member of old New York society, died peacefully at home in Chilmark on Thursday. She would have turned 99 on Sept. 11.

Julia, whose friends all called her Julie, had lived on Martha's Vineyard for the last 36 years with her companion and business partner Eleanor Pearson. The two of them moved to Chilmark on June 2, 1967, knowing hardly a soul on the Island, but over the years she became a beloved member of the town. She shared the charms and beauty of up-Island life with scores of new people, creating a vibrant and diverse community of friends. With her blue eyes twinkling and rosy cheeks glowing, she was perpetually inviting neighbors, visitors, business acquaintances and complete strangers into her home for cocktails, dinner and a killer homemade peach cobbler. She was an ardent and outspoken Democrat, a strong supporter of local charities and a successful entrepreneur who helped to build one of the Island's largest real estate brokerages.

Julie and Eleanor opened their real estate firm, Tea Lane Associates, not long after moving here from New York city. They acquired land in Chilmark and West Tisbury and handled summer rentals and property sales. The daughter of a Manhattan hotelier, Julie was a hands-on manager who made sure that the floors of homes had not a speck of sand and the hospital corners on the bed sheets were sharp and crisp.

But friends and family will remember Julie less for her business talents than her love of the outdoors, sports, art, music, liberal causes — and, most importantly, people who lived life with passion and didn't let social conventions stand in their way. She again and again befriended the disadvantaged, whether as a board member of and piano teacher at the Henry Street Settlement House in the Lower East Side of Manhattan in the 1950s or uncharacteristically boasting when her son, the late Perry MacKay Sturges Jr., became one of the first civil rights workers to be arrested

in the South in the 1960s. Long before Title IX and the widespread acceptance of women's athletics, she was the New Jersey champion squash player, a champion swimmer and the only woman skipper in the races sponsored by the Shelter Island Yacht Club.

Julie was born in New York city in 1904 to Julia Dismukes Green and Thomas Dunbar Green, who was described as "one of New York City's most illustrious hotel men" in the publication National Hotel News. She grew up in the grand Hotel Woodward surrounded by stars of the Broadway stage, opera singers and maestros, and members of the nobility from across the Atlantic. She was graduated from the Veltin School and attended Mt. Vernon Seminary in Washington, D.C.

Julie married Perry MacKay Sturges in 1923. In a newspaper report of their wedding found in the files at Tea Lane Associates (the journal's name was no longer on the clipping, but it carried the credit, "By Debutante"), Julie was called "society's swimming champion" and was identified as a descendant of Andrew H. Green, often called the "father of greater New York" for his efforts consolidating the boroughs into one city, among other contributions. On the day of the ceremony, "she radiated health, and the conventional kid gloves could not conceal the pretty well-rounded muscles that had resulted from summers at Shelter Island," the article reported.

The couple eventually settled in Princeton, N.J., where they raised three children, Perry Jr., who died in 1993, Julia Sturges O'Connor of Bronxville, N.Y., and Cary Sturges Burns of Rye, N.Y. Julie was a devoted and active mother. She recounted stories of "belly-whopping" on sleds with her children on winter afternoons, teaching them to sail in summers and learning piano alongside them so that they could all play together.

In 1949, after Julie's children had left the household, her marriage ended in divorce, and the next chapter of her life began: she studied music at Harvard, took



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classes in French and Italian and traveled around Europe spending months driving around the continent in a sporty convertible and occasionally even spending nights sleeping in the back seat.

In the early 1950s, Julie returned to the United States, rented an apartment in Manhattan and began doing volunteer social service work at Henry Street Settlement; the Leake and Watts Children's Home, which served orphans and abandoned youth, and the Wiltwick School for Boys, a refuge for runaway children. She had muted her progressive political be-

liefs during her marriage — she once told Eleanor that she hid her liberal magazines under her mattress so no one would discover them — but it was during this time that they emerged. When the Henry Street Settlement workers were trying to unionize, she was the only member of the board of directors to support them and was ultimately forced to resign.

It was also during Julie's tenure at Henry Street that she met Eleanor, then the organization's executive secretary. The two worked closely at Henry Street, but soon hatched a new dream: To live in a tropical paradise and start a business. They traveled together throughout the Caribbean: St. Thomas, St. Martin's, Grenada, Montserrat. All were beautiful, but none of them felt quite right. They were ready to give up when they stopped at Martha's Vineyard. They weren't thinking about settling here, they just wanted a break. And after a few days, they realized they had discovered their own paradise.

In addition to her daughters, Julia and Cary, Julie is survived by 11 grandchildren and 21 great grandchildren.

Funeral services will be held at 10:30 a.m. on Wednesday, August 27, on Martha's Vineyard at the Chapman, Cole and Gleason Funeral Home in Oak Bluffs. In lieu of flowers, Eleanor has requested that donations be sent to Hospice of Martha's Vineyard, which helped to care for Julie in her final days and was a favorite charity before that. The address is P.O. Box 2549, Oak Bluffs, MA 02557.