

I'm here today to share my memories of Iris Fribrock Ewing. I originally thought I would use this time to help you understand who Iris Ewing was and I was struggling to find the words, but I then remembered that you all knew Iris. You know who she was. Friend, confidante, art lover, proper and appropriate, yet fun and even sometimes silly at times as you just heard from Brenda. So with the memories I'm going to share, my goal is to celebrate the many facets of the Iris we all know and love.

I'll start with Iris the daughter and sister

Iris adored her parents and her brother. Eric and Emma Fribrock built the 7th house in the Carleton Park area of Magnolia. (for those of you who are not old time Seattleites, that's the part of Magnolia that sits beyond the village, above the bluff). Their friends thought that they were crazy, that they had moved to the wilderness. Those of you who know their house know that it was, and still is, a beautiful home. It was the last house on the bus line from Seattle. Mom would often tell the story of how Grandma and Grandpa would host wonderful parties. Many of their guests came on the bus and would enjoy music, conviviality and games of Pinochle. When the last bus was heading back to Seattle the driver, knowing that the Fribrocks were having another party, would come to the door and announce that the last bus to town was departing. Time to wrap things up.

I've never heard Iris say a negative thing about her parents and she absolutely adored her big brother, Joe. Throughout her life she was consistent in her proclamation that they never once fought. Not once. Never. I had many opportunities to see Uncle Joe and Iris together as adults and I believe it. They had the utmost respect for each other. And Iris had such a wonderful friend in Joe's wife, Dorothy who is here with us today.

Now I'd like to share a bit about Iris the student

Iris studied at the Magnolia School, Holy Names Academy, Queen Anne High School, and the University of Washington. In College she concentrated on music and drama and was well known on campus as a gifted singer. When the famous tenor, Jan Peerce, performed at the University of Washington he chose Iris to perform with him. Emerald Heights own Marg Dunnington was one of the organizers of the contest that led to that selection. From an early Iris stood out as a pro, but she also had so much fun with her friends. She was active in the Chi Omega sorority and enjoyed social time with many friends. This past week I came upon a letter from a singing friend of mom's. In the letter he described how fun it was to gather with friends after a particular concert. He wondered if singers today enjoy the friendship and camaraderie that they all experienced back then.

Iris the singer

You can read about Iris's many accomplishments in your service program. She was one of the strongest vocal talents to emerge from the Pacific Northwest region still to this day. She was gifted with talent and worked very hard to cultivate that talent. As mom's proud son I'm going to take this time to simply read one of the reviews that followed Iris's European debut at the Koncerthuset in Stockholm in 1950. There were several reviews, they were all great, but let me share this one.

Swedish critic Kausa Rootsen wrote: "It was a real artist we had before us. A young singer with musical intelligence and feeling for style who carried out her rather exclusive program so artfully and surely one would think she had been doing so for many years. Her voice is a clear, pure lyric-coloratura soprano, used with such agility and taste that one can safely speak of artistic perfection. Her name is well worth remembering."

Artistic perfection! I'll just leave it at that. 😊

Iris the wife and mother

Now I'm going to share a bit about my mother. My mom. I have always felt loved and I know my sisters feel the same way. Iris took pleasure in our company. It was clear she enjoyed spending time with us. She was nurturing. She was also encouraging and challenging, and her love was always unconditional. In our youth and even as we got older my sisters and I enjoyed spending time with our mom. She was good company.

Iris and Walter adored and respected each other. Each was confident and independent, but realized they were better together. Iris and Walter created a home that was safe and secure. Wherever we lived our house was always a home base. A safe place. Many of our own friends have said that our home was the safest place they knew as a child and that our mother was a rock for them.

You just heard some stories from my sister Brenda about some of the fun we had with mom, but I can't stand here before you today without saying again that sometimes we would just find ourselves with the most outrageous case of the giggles. There were times when mom and her four kids just could not stop laughing. We had many laughs around the dinner table and so many fun adventures together, not just as children, but also as adults.

Iris the friend

Both my sisters and I can't think about our family life without also thinking about the amazing friends that Iris and Walter always had in the various cities we called home. I know that much of my own character was shaped not just by my parents, but also their friends. The friends of Iris and Walter have always been good people. Iris enjoyed meaningful relationships. She and her friends engaged in deep discussion of spirituality, the arts, politics, gourmet cooking, and their favorite books. My brother Bob received his Masters of Divinity from the Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, California, and he used to say that mom and her friends were reading things and engaging in discussions that were as cutting edge theologically as those he was reading and discussing with fellow students in seminary.

Mom was so happy here at Emerald Heights because she loved all of you so much. She had many wonderful friends here. I hope you all know how much she valued your friendship.

This week I was on the phone with one of mom's friends from our years in Pittsburgh. I mentioned how mom had so many great friends. She replied that this was because mom was such a good friend. Iris was a good friend. I know that is true.

So today we celebrate Iris, the amazing daughter, sister, student, singer, wife, mother, and friend. She was an inspiration to all of us and our memories of her will be filled with joy and love.