

DONNA MATSON 1952-2010

In mid July we received the sad news of the passing of our dear friend and collaborator, Donna Marie Matson Jönsson, the result of a tragic accident. Her memorial service and dinner complete with spoken remembrances was attended by a host of friends and family.

She was *Báiki's* genealogy expert and "Our Gateway Ancestors" columnist. She last visited the *Báiki* library in Oakland a month before her passing.

Donna was full of interesting stories — especially how she found her Sami and Finnish relatives. Her family names include Kalantasa and Esko (yes, she was related to the Minnesota Eskos) and when she went to the Tornio and Sodankyla area and visited the church graveyards she would discover family names, and then the dusty old church record books would come out and relatives would too.

She was born August 22, 1952 in northern Michigan. Her parents were Robert Matson and Dorothy Mulvehill. She graduated from Hibbing High School on Minnesota's Iron Range where her father was a mining executive. She was steeped in the history and stories of the Sami and Finnish experience and spoke and read Swedish and Finnish as well as English. Donna was also editor of *The Tupa Times*, the newsletter of the Los Angeles Finlandia Foundation.

She earned a B.A. from Syracuse University and an M.A. in Cinema Production and Screenwriting from UCLA. After that she wrote corporate commercials and her clients included Toyota, Lincoln and Lexus — for which she won a Telly Award.

Donna was co-creator of the award-winning film *My Life as a Dog* with her then-husband, Reidar Jonsson — a well known Swedish film writer. She also co-wrote the cult horror film *Terrorgram* and recently was working on an original screenplay *Children of the Sun* for which she received a Finlandia Foundation grant. The script was about a young Sami American boy who grew up with Ojibwe friends in northern Michigan.

Always passionate about her Sami and Finnish heritage she served as Vice President and President of the Los Angeles Finlandia Foundation from 2006 until her passing.



photo: faith field

Donna Matson prepares a meal for participants in the Saami Camp at the Scandinavian Festival, Thousand Oaks, California. Over the years she was a spirited fixture at these events and her presence will be deeply missed.

Donna also had an interest in knitting and felting and she designed and produced a collection of Sami-inspired pouches and handbags. Her input influenced the design of the latest *Báiki* reindeer tee shirt.

Her son Aiden Jonsson survives her. From his childhood, he participated in many memorable West Coast Sami community events alongside his Mother. He was an Eagle Scout and is now an engineering student at the California Maritime Academy in Berkeley.

Donna had a great sense of humour and one of her favorite quotations was from Isaac Asimov: "If my doctor told me I had only six minutes to live, I wouldn't brood — I'd type a little faster." For these and many other reasons, Donna, you will never be forgotten. — *by Nathan Muus*



Felted wool pouch with petroglyph skier by Donna Matson.