



COURTESY PHOTO

Behind the lens: Remembering Joan Mitchell

Dec. 1, 1956 — Oct. 7, 2023

Longtime Pinedale Roundup and Sublette Examiner contributor Joan Snyder Mitchell, 66, passed away in her Big Piney home on Oct. 7. Hundreds of Mitchell's photos of countless local sporting and community events graced the pages of both publications over the years. Mitchell was the type of person who could recognize a gap and fill it, so it's no surprise that Sublette County residents crossed paths with her in a variety of roles, including as the coach of the Big Piney coed cheerleading team, director of the Southwest Sublette County Pioneers Senior Center and volunteer board member on the Sublette County Health Foundation.

In addition to her two sons, two daughters-in-law and five grandchildren, Mitchell's

greatest legacy is in the way she captured Sublette County's community spirit and preserved it in a priceless portfolio of images. Whether on the sidelines of a field or court, parade route or fundraiser, Mitchell could be found carrying her Canon camera and grinning from ear to ear. After hours spent covering an event, she would upload hundreds of shots to her Facebook page, Auntie Joan's Sports Shots, where she made sure "everyone is a star."

We are forever grateful for the professional, but most especially the personal relationships that our editorial team formed with Mitchell over the years and we offer this tribute in her honor.

*With love and light,
Cali O'Hare, managing editor*



KELLY KUNARD COURTESY PHOTO



Joy Ufford PHOTO

Always looking for the redhead and her camera

By Joy Ufford



COURTESY PHOTO

Years ago, Joan and I began finding each other, cameras in hand, at many of the community events, mainly in Marbleton and Big Piney, where her generous heart wrapped around every person she met.

We occupied different corners at many high school sports games, where her shutter never stopped clicking – one of the benefits of the digital age.

I might take 236 pictures of a Big Piney girls' basketball game just off the court or from behind the basket, hoping for one or two closer shots that might translate into newsworthiness. Joan, with her much better camera and longer lens, sometimes sat far up in the stands to fit a young athlete's face into the close-up shot.

It seemed like she was taking these pictures to document a community, a year, an era for

each and every person she met, and if I needed a better photo or if I missed a game, Joan had the email sent before I finished asking.

I wasn't the greatest sports reporter or photographer by any means, but I always felt better just seeing Joan was there. As we crossed paths more often at other events, we would stand together for a little while as I took my pictures and she took hers – same place, very different photos.

Seeing Joan at the county fair's junior livestock shows became another given, where she beamed with pride at her grandchildren. Joan was one of the first people I looked for, her red hair giving her away as she sat at her best vantage point.

We had a routine with big winners at the fair that started with getting everyone into place – I with my regular point-and-shoot got first dibs for my group photo and then Joan took over while I moved aside, standing back about 20 feet with her super lens.

When she spent her days (and some special event evenings) at the Marbleton Senior Center – christened "Joan's Place" – I'd see her tirelessly working, laughing and encouraging people around her. "Where's Joan?" I'd ask. Someone would point her out, more often in the kitchen.

When COVID became a serious concern locally, I wanted to "do something." I called Joan.

If anyone would know about the pulse of compassion and how to feed it, she was the one to know. I wrote about Joan and crew making hundreds of brightly colored face masks, not content but moving on to sewing utilitarian cape-like garments for doctors and nurses.

Of course, she connected me with a face-mask-making group in Pinedale, many of whom I never met. We'd separately leave fabric, thread, garbage bag ties or elastic at Our Lady of Peace's hallway or the Visitors Center doorway, and return with or deliver finished masks.

On and on and on she went.

I didn't take many pictures of Joan herself – like me, Joan was all about chronicling here and now – the photographer, not the photographed.



BELINDA COLINGA COURTESY PHOTO

Everything I learned, I learned from Joan Mitchell

By Robert Galbreath



ROBERT GALBREATH PHOTO

Joan Mitchell meant so much to me – she was a mentor and a good friend.

When I first arrived in Sublette County five years ago, my knowledge of community journalism was limited and I knew next to nothing about sports – points after touchdown and a volleyball ace were all the same thing to me.

I showed up to one of my first games, completely lost and a more than a little bit scared. Joan suddenly appeared with a huge smile and an outstretched hand.

"Follow me," she said.

For the next five years, I followed Joan everywhere.

She taught me where to stand to get the best photos, which way the teams were running, who was who in each game, how to deal with the lighting at the county fair and what the difference was between a return and a field goal.

Joan directed traffic – turning an unruly but boisterous mob of kids into a memorable team photo. She made sure the senior athletes and their parents stopped at exactly the right spot for a picture. Somehow she got even the most hardened athletes to smile – no small task.

Most of all, Joan taught me how to be caring and compassionate with the camera and on the printed page. I learned that every athlete on the team mattered.

A few weeks ago, Joan and I were talking during halftime about a professional sports photographer she was following to learn tips from. The seasoned photographer emphasized following a single athlete for the entire game, ignoring all the others, to get an award-winning photo.

"How can I do that?" Joan asked. "I need to make sure I get photos of all the kids!"

Joan loved every athlete and couldn't wait for each season to begin. We talked excitedly

for hours about upcoming games or the awesome things the kids accomplished the week before. Even when the situation deteriorated out on the gridiron or the court, Joan was always there, cheering the kids on.

Joan was an integral part of the team at the newspaper – for both the Sublette Examiner and Pinedale Roundup. Joan's beautiful photographs filled the pages of many newspapers, bringing the community to life with her images, from a State track meet to the county fair.

I cannot begin to recall all the times Joan stepped up to help, always volunteering, always with a smile – to assist in making sure games were covered when there were multiple events in one night, to lend an emergency SD card or provide an ear to listen and a kind word of advice.

Joan's encouragement helped me get through some tough times.

I feel lost without Joan – the void she left is immense.

Thank you Joan, from the bottom of my heart, for being you and becoming a part of my life.



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