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Quirky Judge Was Toughie on the Bench

By Scott Sandlin
Journal Staff Writer

As one of the founding group of judges on the Metropolitan Court in Albuquerque, Elizabeth Neprud Love kept a basketball with her at the bench and had a hoop in the courtroom, then located in scruffy quarters adjacent to the Downtown jail.

Privately unconventional — a “character,” as her son Carl described her — she countenanced no cutting up in the courtroom, especially when it came to missing court appearances. That’s what the hoop and ball were for.

She would tell defendants they’d be “slam-dunked” if they didn’t show up — and they’d lose their freedom, their job, their home and their family to boot. To underscore the point, she had some of them put the ball through the hoop. “They got it,” said her son.

Her family called her Betty; her husband called her Bess; she called herself Lizzie Borden, a self-mocking name that referred to her reputation as a “hang-‘em-high” judge, Carl Love said.

Love, who had also adopted an old family surname Anderson, died June 22 in Orem, Utah, of complications from cancer and a fall that broke her hip. A memorial service is planned at 10 a.m. Saturday at the University of New Mexico Alumni Chapel, followed by interment at Sunset Memorial Park and a reception at the Artichoke Cafe.

Love was born in Shanghai, China, where her mother was an Episcopalian missionary and her father became the head of tariffs at ports for the Chinese government. Both parents were from towns 40 miles apart in western Wisconsin where Norwegians had immigrated; Neprud means “turnip patch.”

The family left Shanghai in 1937, just ahead of the Japanese invasion from Manchuria.

After they returned to the United States in 1941, her parents divorced, the children were split up and Elizabeth ended up moving to live with various relatives and attending 26 schools.

One of them was the prestigious Sidwell Friends, a Quaker school outside Washington, D.C., her son said.

But religion didn’t take. She was a self-described atheist, he said.
Eventually, the family settled in Pasadena, Calif., where she studied at the Pasadena Playhouse, before transferring to UNM. Living in Hokona Hall in the 1950s, she met law student Jack Love at a Central Avenue pharmacy soda fountain now occupied by the Frontier Restaurant.

“She was kind of a beatnik,” who favored fiesta skirts and dangling beads, Carl Love said.

The couple married, moved to Lovington, named for Love’s forebears, and started having children — at one point she had three in diapers. In time, there were four.

She returned to school at Eastern New Mexico University to get a teaching degree, moved to social work and later enrolled at UNM School of Law.

She graduated along with three other women in a class of about 60 in 1971.

She worked as a city prosecutor, making waves by investigating traffic-ticket “fixing” in municipal court, before being named a municipal judge in 1977 by then-Mayor Harry Kinney. She became a Metro Court judge in 1980, a position she held until her retirement in 1996.

She and Jack Love divorced in 1980, and she never remarried.

She enjoyed raising and showing dogs — bloodhounds, Afghan hounds and French Briards, among others, thrift shopping at Goodwill and Deseret Industries, having her hands in soil and taking road trips in a beat-up van, accompanied by her canines and a pistol.

Love was preceded in death by her son, Eric, and sisters Margaret Wenzel and Anya Neprud.

She is survived by children Jacqueline Steffes and Carl Love, both of Utah, and Katherine Love of Seattle, and by dozens of grandchildren, nieces and nephews.

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