



**Mary Birch (Buzzy Balch) 1941 - 2012** Mary Birch, 70, a long-time resident of Missoula, Montana passed away from complications associated with Alzheimers on September 23, 2012 in her Missoula home with long-time partner Lee Metzgar. Born October 7, 1941 in Boise, ID, Mary was the daughter of Elise and Glenn Balch, a celebrated Idaho author. She was known as Buzzy Balch during her early years in Boise. She graduated from Borah High School in 1959. Mary completed her undergraduate degree in International Relations at Stanford University and went on to earn her Masters in Social Work at Columbia University in New York City. In 1967 she

left New York and moved to Missoula where she and her (then) husband Ed Cummings raised two daughters, Kelle and Holly. At this time she also began her career as a professor of Social Work at the University of Montana. She encouraged her students to explore complex social issues, stand up for the underserved and seek to understand diverse cultures around the world. For fifty years, Mary worked professionally and personally as an advocate for social justice and equality. Her special interests included women's studies, ethics, underserved populations, minority studies, discrimination and human-animal connections. At the core of her being, she abhorred injustice and bully behaviors from interpersonal to international. Mary's lifelong love of animals began in her childhood with Queenie, her dad's hunting dog, and Windigo, a "wild" horse from the Owyhee Mountains south of Boise. Under her soft hands and voice, Windigo became so tame that Mary could crawl under her belly. For thirty-five years her peaceful cabin in the forest along Butler Creek provided the perfect connection to all living things. She raised llamas, befriended the forest's wild turkeys and shared her home with "Rabbit" (a rabbit) and her cat Lolly. And then, there was Daisy, a free roaming neighborhood dog, who adopted Mary. The llamas and Daisy were constant companions on Montana and Idaho trails. Mary, her partner, their families and many friends were devoted outdoor people and backcountry travelers who loved to hike, canoe, kayak and cross-country ski in the western landscapes and seasons that Mary loved. She traveled with her sister Nikki on many adventures, including a month in Africa where they trekked to the top of Mt. Kenya. She enjoyed a sabbatical in Jamaica studying Rastafarian culture and worked for AIDS relief in San Francisco. She delighted meeting people from around the world and made many friends. Mary was a generous donor to numerous local and national environmental groups and to women's and animal rights' organizations. Recently she donated her Butler Creek property to Wildlands CPR where it will complement their work to restore important wild areas. She is survived by her daughters, Kelle (Stuart) Bradshaw of Maine and Holly (John) Carnes of Missoula and by her partner, Lee Metzgar of Missoula. Her grandchildren include Kelle's children: Levi (Kilee), Athena (Adam Maher), Cameron, Zoe, Isaac and Holly's children: Sam and Andi. She has two sisters, Nikki Balch and Betty Weston, living in Boise, ID. Her brother, Olin (Karen) Balch lives in Cascade, ID. She has numerous nieces and nephews who will also miss her. She was also close to Lee's children and grandchildren. Mary wanted folks to remember her by donating to Hospice, their favorite animal welfare or human rights organization. At Mary's request, no memorial service is planned at this time. Friends and members of the community are invited to share personal sentiments and wishes at the Tumblr blogsite: <http://marybirchbalch.tumblr.com>

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