

Janet Ruth Heller

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Janet Ruth Heller passed away on Sunday, October 12, 2025. She was born on July 8, 1949, in Milwaukee.

Janet is the past president of the Michigan College English Association and a past president of the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature. She has a Ph.D. in English Language and Literature from the University of Chicago. She has taught literature, creative writing, women's studies, linguistics, and composition at eight colleges and universities: Michigan State University, Northern Illinois University, Nazareth College, Western Michigan University, Albion College, Grand Valley State University, Olivet College, and the University of Chicago.

She is a founding mother of the Rape Crisis Center in Madison, Wisconsin. She also cofounded the Professional Instructors Organization union at Western Michigan University. She served on the women's advisory board for the public television station WGVU in Grand Rapids, Michigan. She is a past president of the Ladies' Library Association in Kalamazoo, a charitable nonprofit organization devoted to literacy, education, the arts, and culture.

Heller was active in the Jewish community throughout her life. At Temple B'nai Israel in Kalamazoo, she served on the environmental Green Team, the Chevra Kadisha to assist with Jewish rites for the deceased, and a committee to write a new ethical code for TBI. At the Congregation of Moses in Kalamazoo, she served as a teacher and the assistant principal of the Religious School, a Board member, President of Sisterhood twice, Chair of the Adult Education, Library, Kitchen, and Visitation Committees, and member of the Religious Activities Committee. She also chanted Torah and haftarah portions and helped to lead Sabbath and holiday services.

Janet was a loving wife, sister, aunt and great aunt. She is survived by her husband, Michael Krischer; siblings, Will Heller (Nancy Lee), Paul Heller (Diane), Nancy Joan Heller (Roger Lob) and Pegi Christiansen (Dale). She was preceded in death by her parents, Bill and Joan Heller.

She has published four books of poetry: *Nature's Olympics* (Wipf and Stock, 2021), *Exodus* (WordTech Editions, 2014), *Folk Concert: Changing Times* (Anaphora Literary Press, 2012), and *Traffic Stop* (Finishing Line Press, 2011). She is a founding mother and former editor of *Primavera*, an award-winning literary magazine. The University of Missouri Press published her scholarly book, *Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and the Reader of Drama* (1990).

Her essay "A Visit to Isle Royale" was aired over Michigan Public Radio (1999) and published in the *Toho Journal* (2021). Her creative nonfiction "Returning to Elkhart Lake, Wisconsin" appeared in *Midwestern Miscellany* (2008). Her play *The Cell Phone* won fourth place in a national contest and was performed at the Fenton Village Players One-Act Play Festival in Fenton, Michigan (2011). Her play *Pledging* was performed at Triton College in Illinois as part of the Tritonysia Play Festival in 2017. Choeofpleirn Press published *Pledging* in its anthology *Rushing Through the Dark* (2022).

Heller's fiction picture book about bullying, *How the Moon Regained Her Shape* (Arbordale, 2006; 7th edn. 2022), has received many awards, including a Book Sense Pick (2006), a Children's Choices selection (2007), a Benjamin Franklin Award (2007), and a Gold Medal in the *Moonbeam Children's Book Awards* (2007). She has also published *The Passover Surprise* (Fictive Press, 2015, 2016), a middle-grade fiction chapter book for children. Her website is <https://www.janetruthheller.com>

Services will be held Monday, October 20, 2025, at 11:00am at Paradise Memorial Gardens, [9300 E Shea Blvd, Scottsdale, AZ 85260](#).

A memorial service will be announced in the weeks ahead and be held at Temple B’Nai Israel, [4409 Grand Prairie Rd, Kalamazoo, MI 49006](#).

Contributions in Janet’s memory may be made to:

(i) The Dane County Rape Crisis Center: www.thercc.org/donate

Funds are exclusively used for the direct needs of survivors (rent payments, new bedding, food or gas cards, replacement clothing, transportation, etc).

(ii) Oberlin College Jewish Studies Program to fund special events and departmental initiatives:

<https://advance.oberlin.edu/donate>

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