

S. Clement Swisher

September 23, 1930 to January 31, 2016

When asked what he wanted as an epitaph, Clem would say that he wanted to be remembered for raising two children, neither of whom were wards of the state. And so he will be remembered for that and for so much more.

Clem will be remembered for being a mild man in the very best sense of that term. He had a wicked sense of humor that if you were not paying attention you could easily miss. He had strongly held beliefs that he could put forth in such a gentle manner. He had an analytical mind that lent itself to deep issues as well as how to fix a cabinet in the Meeting kitchen. Clem was clearly a man of many parts.

Stokes Clement Swisher—Clem—was born and grew up in Glenside PA, and earned a BS in Physics from Guilford College in North Carolina. He arrived in Washington, DC in 1955, to work as a patent examiner for the US Patent and Trademark Office, where he served until his retirement in 1985. He was justly proud of receiving, in 1984, a Department of Commerce Bronze Medal award for professional excellence.

A lifelong Quaker, Clem attended Friends Meeting of Washington (FMW) for six decades. It was there he met another Young Adult Friend, Sue Colman Jones. They married in 1962 under the care of Wilton Friends Meeting in Connecticut, the Meeting in the town in which Sue was raised. Sue, as was the custom of the time, changed her name to Sue C. Swisher, as one Friend noted tongue in cheek, in clever anticipation that they could use SCSwisher on their shared email address years later.

Clem transferred his membership from Abington Monthly Meeting to FMW in March 1963, just before the birth of their first child, Carl. Two short years later, Janet was born.

And what a member he was. He served as Treasurer of the meeting, and as clerk and member of numerous committees for FMW and Baltimore Yearly Meeting. He also served as President of Friends Nonprofit Housing and of the Memorial Society of Metropolitan Washington. He faithfully participated in the Senior Center and the Alzheimer's group each week for many years. He even remembered the Meeting when he traveled, sending postcards along the way as he found interesting places.

When he retired from the Patent Office, Clem became even more involved in the workings of FMW, for many years providing weekly service to the Meeting as a handyman. In 1993, for example, a list of one line descriptions of work he did amounted to twenty pages. He also took the time to list and label the ancient electrical system and plumbing system of the Meeting. Beyond that he provided some handyman help to members of the Meeting in times of difficulty.

But his contributions to the Meeting were not just physical. He participated in countless workshops and worship sharings at the Meeting. He provided thoughtful (and often humorous) analysis in committees and Meetings for business. He was especially concerned about racism—in particular, the cultural racism in which the Meeting members unintentionally excluded people from other races and cultures. In 1997 while on what was then called Overseers (a name later rejected for the Membership Committee because of its linkage with slavery) he wrote a thoughtful letter to an African-American attender who had felt rebuffed, noting that

FMW has had difficulty in making newcomers, regardless of race, feel at home. . . For African Americans there is the additional hurdle that the great majority of our members were raised in a

white culture. . . We need the help of our African American members and attenders to point out what [we] may be doing that is racially insensitive. Even with help, it will not be easy for us to change.”

But clearly, for those who knew Clem best, we knew that Meeting for Worship was the key to his life. He came nearly each First Day of his many years at FMW, even after age and ill health had taken their toll. When he could no longer drive, Sue would drop him off. And when he struggled to walk, Sue came back each week with him.

Clem died on January 31, 2016 at home with family. He is survived by his wife, Sue Swisher; children, Carl Swisher and Janet Swisher, and three grandsons.

His physical presence in Meeting is missed but his Light is remembered.