

Joan E. Gildemeister
1926-2015

Joan Gildemeister died on November 17, 2015, just weeks before what would have been her 89th birthday. Joan was a multi-faceted person, to say the least. She was highly educated with a wide array of professional accomplishments, but was also deeply devoted to her immediate and extended family, and actively involved in Quaker and other social justice causes until the very end of her life. Joan balanced her attention to serious concerns with boundless *joie de vivre*, which manifested itself in her lifelong engagement in the arts, her love of travel and her study of literature and cultures from around the globe. Joan was enriched by her wide circle of family and friends and was much beloved in return.

The former Joan Ely was born in Texas into a military family. Her father and paternal grandfather both had been officers of high rank and responsibility. She grew up on military bases during the Depression and World War II, but in her adult life gravitated away from military life toward pacifism and peace activities.

Joan became an internationalist during her years at Mills College in Oakland, California and then at the University of California in Berkeley, where she earned her Bachelor's Degree at the age of nineteen. Shortly after her graduation in the mid-1940's, Joan married Enrique Gildemeister and they lived in Berkeley for fifteen years. Their sons Enrique ("Rick") and Hanson were born in California. Joan and her family then moved to Peru, where Kathy was born in 1957.

After three years in Peru, Joan and her husband divorced and she moved to Washington, D.C. where her parents were then living. She got her children settled in the area and worked briefly for the federal government. In 1964, she resumed her education at George Washington University where she earned her Master's Degree in Psychology in 1967. Joan began teaching while she pursued a Doctorate in Education at the University of Maryland in College Park.

In 1971, with both boys already away from home, Joan and Kathy moved to upstate New York. Joan began to teach psychology and early childhood development courses at St. Lawrence University while working on her dissertation. She earned her Ph.D. in 1972 and then moved on to teach first at Sarah Lawrence College and then at CUNY Richmond College (now Staten Island Community College). In the fall of 1976, Joan returned to the Washington area as a Professor at Howard University where she made an indelible mark as an educator over 16 years. She integrated peace studies—the psychology of nonviolence and reconciliation—into her curricula whenever possible. After more than two decades of influencing young lives in the classroom, Joan retired from teaching.

Joan's professional career was far from over. She returned to school again in her sixties at the Washington Psychoanalytic Institute to become a psychotherapist, receiving her degree in 1994. As part of her clinical studies requirement, she worked two days each week at the Blue Ridge Community Mental Health Center in Martinsburg, West Virginia. Later, in the late 1990's, she set up her own counseling practice in her home in Washington where she provided child, adolescent and family therapy to private clients. At the same time, she worked as an

independent contractor for the D.C. Public Schools conducting psychological evaluations of students, often in Spanish, and testifying as an expert in court hearings when required. Joan continued this work in support of the welfare and education of children until she moved to the Collington community in 2012.

Joan's spiritual life deepened during her years in Washington. After many conversations with the renowned Quaker Kenneth Boulding, she was led to become a member of Friends Meeting of Washington in 1980. Joan served in a variety of committee roles within FMW. She was especially influential in leading many to a better understanding of same sex relationships and gay rights issues, which ultimately helped FMW to embrace gay and lesbian attendees/members and to approve, first, "ceremonies of commitment" and, later, same-sex marriages under the care of the Meeting. Joan was also dedicated to the Friends Wilderness Center, and regularly attended Friends General Conference and the Friends Conference on Religion and Psychology.

Joan was an active participant in Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Spiritual Formation program within FMW for about 15 years. She attended many retreats and frequently hosted monthly gatherings in her home for a delicious meal and a discussion of spiritual practices or a particular reading. Joan's intellectual approach to spirituality and her deep knowledge of Quaker writers were tremendous assets to the group. Where others might read an article or a pamphlet on the chosen topic, Joan was more likely to come prepared to discuss a treatise she had mastered or another primary source she had read in the original Spanish or German. The participants formed such a deep bond that a small group of Spiritual Formation group members visited Joan at the Collington community and worshiped with her in the week before her death.

Joan's embrace of Quakerism and the peace testimony were reflected in her work as a peace psychologist and an advocate for peace studies throughout her career. She volunteered for both the American Friends Service Committee and the Friends Committee on National Legislation, supported the work of Davis House and William Penn House, participated in Peace Vigils at the Capitol, and was active in the Nuclear Freeze Movement and anti-torture initiatives. Joan also worked with "Peace Child," supported the U.S. Peace Memorial Project for a monument to American peacemakers, and was particularly involved in the post-September 11th era as one of the peace psychologists within the American Psychological Association working to prevent the involvement of psychologists in the use of harsh interrogation techniques.

Joan was a true citizen of the world. Her extensive travels gave her an appreciation of the ways we are all the same, but she also studied our differences. Joan's dedication to universal brotherhood is evident in many ways: her life-long membership and activity with World Federalists, the United Nations, and the Esperanto movement. She read and spoke fluently in German, French, Spanish and Esperanto. She traveled to many countries, relishing what she could learn in each one.

In 2005, when nearly eighty, Joan joined a three week pilgrimage to India where she visited important sites in the life of Gandhi, studied the peaceful coexistence of several very different religions there, and visited the women's micro-enterprise projects in Tamil Nadu supported by

Right Sharing of World Resources, a Quaker non-profit. Her exposure to the projects fostering the empowerment of women and the education of young girls began a decade in which Joan actively supported RSWR as co-clerk of the Working Group for Baltimore Yearly Meeting. She spent long hours helping spread awareness and encourage support for RSWR through her last year of life.

Joan was also passionate about local justice, especially the plight of the poor living on the sidewalks of Washington. She was a member of the Hunger and Homelessness Task Force at FMW and worked at Miriam's Kitchen for years, at S.O.M.E., and "gleaned" at the Takoma Park Sunday Market until her health prevented it.

Joan was well-educated, well-read and a brilliant conversationalist. She was treasured because she knew so much, in depth, about so many things, never limiting herself but allowing her omnivorous intellect and untethered imagination to roam free. Her home was filled with books and art of impressive range. Her art included works from her travels but also of many Washington area artists—even a few of her own copies of works in the National Gallery.

It was there she held gatherings which were akin to an open "salon" where she might invite groups of friends to hear an Orthodox priest discuss the "Prayer of the Heart", or to see someone's slides of South Africa, or her own of China, or perhaps an ethnic meal followed by a poetry reading or musical recital. Joan's special passions for drama and song lead her to join the Thomas Circle Singers and later to create a Balkan folk group, both of which sang at her Memorial. She attended theater and performances abroad, as well as in Washington, DC.

In 2015, FMW recognized Joan among the "elders" of the Meeting. She was so committed to Quaker values and to the peace testimony in particular that during her last period of service on the Membership Committee, Joan lamented that new members rarely cited peacemaking as a compelling reason for joining the Religious Society of Friends.

Joan's abiding concern for the children of the world and her community was evident in her personal life as well. Joan was a devoted mother to her three children, reveling in their achievements and assisting them when they faced challenges, even as adults. The premature death of her son Rick in 2007 was one of the deep sorrows in her life. Joan maintained a close relationship to her brother, Michael Ely, who was perhaps her most constant companion at the opera and symphony. She also had a special relationship with her niece Caroline and late nephew Douglas Ely. Her legacy will live on through all of them.

Joan Gildemeister was a wise elder indeed. She will be remembered as a good friend and a Good Friend.

"Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God."