

MEMORIAL MINUTE FOR MARY AGNES HODGES WELCH

Mary Agnes Hodges Welch, 91, died from natural causes on February 18, 2006, in her own home in Sequim, Washington, attended by her daughter Nancy Rowan.

Mary was born in Los Angeles, California, March 27, 1914. She was raised in the First Christian Church, Highland Park, Los Angeles, and liked to remember that she was the first child baptized in the new church building. Mary attended Chapman College, a private liberal arts college established by the Christian Church, and received a bachelor's degree in 1935. In 1936 Mary married Charles Luis Welch; they had four children, Laurel, Nancy, Daniel, and Jean, born in 1937, 1940, 1942, and 1944. Charles died in January 2000. They were married for 63 years and 63 days.

Shortly after they were married, Charles and Mary sought out and attended Orange Grove Friends Meeting because they were committed pacifists. Charles declared his Conscientious Objector status at the outset of World War II and was fired from his teaching job in Blythe, CA. Mary, with two children and one on the way, lived with families from Orange Grove Meeting while Charles worked with other CO's managing groups of teenage boys from the cities sent to harvest beet crops in Hemet, CA. In 1942 Charles and Mary and their three children with other C.O's and their families found refuge on Ruth and Bob Boyd's farm in Tracy, CA. They lived in this rural, grass roots, pacifist Quaker community for 14 years. During this time Mary got her teacher's certification from the University of the Pacific and began teaching elementary school in 1953 at French Camp, CA. Charles began teaching again. Together they taught for 18 years in the San Joaquin Valley and the Sierra foothills, making their home first in Stockton, CA (for 10 years), and later in Sutter Creek, CA (for 33 years), and centering their lives in the Delta Monthly Meeting. In the summer of 1965 they led an AFSC workcamp of college students at Farmersville, CA, living in the Linnell migrant farm-workers' camp and bringing early education to the children of the camp.

Mary's commitment to care-giving and nurturing led to her teaching career in special education. She pioneered the first class of handicapped children at the new Morada Davis Grammar School. Later in her retirement this same commitment led Mary to become active in the beginning of Hospice of Amador County where she was a respite worker.

Also in retirement Mary was able to develop her great talent for story telling. For 18 years she participated in writing classes in Stockton and Jackson. When she was 70, she studied writing and poetry for a semester at Sacramento State College. She taught creative writing at the Senior Centers in Jackson, CA, and Sequim, WA. She left her family a treasure of her stories and poems.

Over the years Mary worked for peace by bringing the world into her home. She mothered international students from the Philippines, Japan, and Kenya, and most recently Jetmir Bakija and Leart Zherka from Kosovo. Jet and Leart came into Mary's life after she moved from Sutter Creek to Sequim, WA, in 2000. The Kosovar students

had come to Sequim as Rotary scholarship students for their last year of high school and were about to be sent back to Kosovo when Mary spearheaded the fund raising project which ensured that they could remain in the U.S. and continue their educations. Jet lived with Mary for two and a half years and Leart lived with her for almost a year. Mary said that having these two young men from Kosovo in her life was an amazing, revitalizing experience for her in her late 80's. She lived to see them mature and excel in their college careers. Leart graduated from the University of Washington Bothell in June 2005 and Jet graduated from Texas A&M University-Commerce in December 2005.

In 2002 Mary transferred her membership in the Religious Society of Friends from Delta Monthly Meeting to Port Townsend Friends Meeting, Port Townsend, WA, where she became the first of its founding members. On Feb. 24, 2006, the Port Townsend Meeting held a memorial service to celebrate Mary's life. In the preparation of this minute, Delta Friends shared their many memories of Mary with Port Townsend Friends: "The decades Mary was active in Delta Friends saw many of us mature from young parents to grandparents, our own children now loving parents nurturing children in ways learned at Mary's feet and in her garden. Her home in Sutter Creek was more than a place to worship; it was the oasis where we filled our souls and hearts with each visit."

Mary loved gardening, travel, telling and writing stories, music, and most of all people. She will be remembered by many for her wonder and enthusiasm for life, as well as her open-hearted encouragement of those around her. For many she became "Our Lady of the Flowers," because of her remarkable gardens and the generous bouquets she always shared with her communities. The seeds from her life of gardening wherever she lived are flowering in many lives around the world.

Mary is survived by her daughters Laurel Ann Norman of Sequim, WA, and Nancy Rowan of Santa Barbara, CA ; by her son Daniel Welch of Crestone, CO ; by two granddaughters, Nina Koftinow of Talent, OR, and Johanna Rahilly, of Sacramento, CA; and by one great-granddaughter, Isabelle Rahilly, of Sacramento, CA. She was preceded in death by her daughter Jean Campbell and by her husband Charles.