

Rusty North Memorial Minute

(Approved 3-20-2011)

Elizabeth Jane "Rusty" North, beloved member of Port Townsend Friends Meeting, died in Port Townsend, WA, her home for 40 years, on September 12 2010.

Born in Buffalo, NY on December 10 1921 she grew up in nearby Rochester. A gifted poet and painter with an energetic and adventurous mind, she met her future husband, John Livingston North, at the Rochester Institute of Technology when both visited the library with the same book in mind: Whitman's Leaves of Grass. This poetic beginning led to marriage after graduation and many years of rich adventures together.

Initially she and John lived a spartan life under canvas and in an old barn in a rural area of New York, but the young couple eventually settled in Fairport, NY where John had his photography studio and Rusty continued to write poetry and paint. Despite the loss of her right hand in a printing press accident Rusty's determination and courage enabled her to learn to write and paint with her left hand and to raise her five children.

Rusty was a dedicated pacifist actively engaged with John in antiwar and civil rights demonstrations during the 1950's and early 1970's. When their convictions led them to apply to emigrate to Canada, their status as self-employed parents of five children denied them entry. Instead, they settled in the small culturally rich town of Port Townsend in 1970. Her devotion to the cause of peace continued into her last decade, when, in her wheelchair, she joined Friends to protest the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. It was Rusty who, on her own initiative, created and had printed bumper stickers reading "WAR IS NOT THE ANSWER" prior to the creation of the FCNL bumper stickers with that same message.

Soon after their arrival the couple had joined the small group of seekers who later became the Port Townsend Worship Group. After John's early death in 1974, Rusty continued her active presence with the group. By the mid seventies she and others were encouraging a formal identity as a Quaker worship group under the care of University Friends Meeting. Rusty was among the first of the group to join University Friends Meeting, being recorded as a member on November 11th, 1983. In February 2002 she was among founding members of the new Port Townsend Friends Meeting who transferred their membership from University Friends Meeting to Port Townsend Friends Meeting.

Rusty served on several Meeting committees through the years, including the Committee for Peace and Social Concerns, where her plainspoken clarity was always helpful. Even in the frailty of her later years, her attendance at Meeting for Worship and midweek Meeting was so dependable that Friends always left a place for her wheelchair in the circle.

Always a gifted and prolific poet, Rusty had nurtured others through the People's Guild, an arts and crafts co-op she had cofounded in the early 70's. Under the name "Sagittarius Press" Rusty also published her own poetry and that of others in small chapbooks on a hand operated letter-set press. This legacy continues: the press is with Port Townsend Quakers who have restored it and are hoping to make it available to the community.

Her love for poetry and her love for the peace and inspiration she found in the silence of Friends' worship came together in "Meetinghouse Poems" - poems written during Rusty's sojourn under the Worship Group's sponsorship at Pendle Hill. The Meeting continues to honor each new member with a gift of this beautiful little volume.

Rusty combined her desire for poetic expression with an intensely pragmatic desire to aid others in any way she could. Her home was long a place of hospitality for those who were new in town and had nowhere to go. There was always an extra plate at the table.

It was this pragmatic approach to caring and her lively energetic mind that led her to further her education in her 50's, receiving a graduate degree in psychology from Antioch University when she was 60. For another decade she worked in a professional capacity coordinating care for the elderly and disabled of Jefferson County through Senior Information and Assistance. Remarkably, it was these same services which, together with her devoted son David, allowed her to remain in her home in the last years of her life. In the last days she was surrounded by the artifacts of her rich life with her son David close by. She died on First Day in the early morning, September 12, 2010.

She is survived by her much loved children, Carole Rose of Port Angeles, Christopher of Rock Hill, S.C, David of Port Townsend, Jonathan of Schenectady, N.Y. and Douglas of Seattle, and several grandchildren, family members and many friends.