

Della Walker Memorial Minute (October 23, 1925 - December 2, 2017)

Born in 1925 and raised in MacArthur, Idaho and Spokane, Washington, Della Mae (Winchell) Walker was the only child of loving parents who were both profoundly deaf. This fact, and her resulting childhood spent in the Spokane deaf community defined Della's comfort in—and empathy for— minority cultures throughout the world. As a teenager witnessing Japanese American friends from her own high school taken off to internment camps, her sense of outrage and concern, prompted her to visit them in the local, temporary camps. As a college student at the University of Washington, she became aware and supportive of the local Native American Indian tribes—the Nez Perce and Spokane—and began life-long connections and friendships with many Native people, including Leonard Peltier, the Native American activist who was imprisoned in 1977.

So it was no surprise that Della was drawn to the Religious Society of Friends, which she first encountered, along with her new husband, David Walker, at the University Friends Meeting near the UW campus in Seattle. IT was here she became a Friend in 1947. Convinced by Quakers' concern for social justice and seeing "that of God" in all individuals and cultures, she chose to study anthropology and sociology, eventually becoming a university professor. But this was after another profoundly important choice in Della's life: her decision in 1947 (along with David), to serve in Gaza as part of the American Friends Service Committee, who assisted the thousands of Palestinian refugees who had lost their homes with partitioning of Palestine. Trained for some months at Pendle Hill, in Wallingford, PA, (under the supervision of Howard and Anna Brinton), she arrived in Gaza and immediately began work with Palestinian mothers and children in the nutrition and education programs she helped create. Her sympathies for these displaced people were life-long and deeply held. She spoke with sorrow about the art classes she held for very young Palestinian schoolchildren, where the pictures they drew were predominantly of bombers and scenes of death and destruction.

After their year in Gaza, Della and David and their new son, Jeff, spent a year in the Philippines where David's took a job in public health. When they returned to the states, she completed graduate work and a masters from Washington State University, in Pullman. It was also in these interim years (1950-60), that Della gave birth to daughter Robin and another son Roy. In 1960, the entire family moved to Puerto Rico, settling first in Mayaguez, where David took a professorship at the university. Soon after, they moved to San German, where Della became involved in an English-speaking school for the children of their College community, including her own three youngsters. Located within the nearby InterAmerican University, this work eventually led to Della taking a position there as a professor of anthropology. During these years, she reveled in taking her students on field trips to the many surrounding islands and northern regions of South America. It was one such field trip— traveling by canoe up the river WHAT? that separated Surinam and French Guyana, to study the Wayana Indians tribe—that she had what may have been one of the most spiritually-profound experiences of her life. Traveling by canoe deep into the Rain FOREST? with a small group of students, she encountered a native man whom she described as totally untouched by Western culture. "As we watched him walk past us, I was struck by his connection with to the forest and, even, the ground he walked on. It was sacred...like he walked in a great cathedral."

Back in San German, where there was no Quaker community to be a part of, Della and David's home was a meeting place for the island's social activists. They were hosts to a large group of friends, professors and artists, and entertained frequently. "Their house, designed by Della and built by David and Roy, was open and

welcoming to all. People were always warmly received, strangers welcomed," remembers their son, Jeff. During these years they even housed the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., on his visit Puerto Rico. "Strangers, Peace Corp travelers, and other civil liberty activists made Della and David's home their base. It was because of her stand in support of the Puerto Rican Independentista Movement that Della was punished by her university for a number of years, sent to teach on the other end of the island on a tiny satellite campus.

She and David both retired from teaching in 1980 and the two of them returned to the Pacific Northwest, settling in Marysville, Washington and resuming their membership in University Friends Meeting. It was here that Della became very active in the national Quaker lobby, the Friends Committee on National Legislation. From 1982 to 1984 she served as FCNL's Field Secretary for the west coast. She was a member of FCNL's General Committee for many years, serving on the Policy Committee from 1989-1994 and on the Nominating Committee from 2002-2005. Her gifts as a trained anthropologist were valuable in this work. Throughout the 1980's she also supported the work that her husband and others did in the Sanctuary Movement for many Salvadoran political refugees. Della became well known among many Friends as a quiet activist whose beliefs were deeply held and personally lived.

In the early 1990s, Della and David both became interested in the co-housing movement, which ultimately inspired their 1995 move to Port Townsend, WA, to join the fledgling Rosewind Cohousing Community. As part of the Port Townsend Worship Group, Della was appreciated as a weighty Friend, whose wisdom ultimately helped the group to transition into a formal Monthly Meeting. In 2002 she served as PTFM's first Meeting Clerk and continued Meeting committee service for the next decade. Port Townsend Friends remember her leadership with gratitude and affection.

It must be said that Della had a wide range of other interests in her "retirement," including being a part of the Port Townsend Historic Preservation commission for many years and taking a job as a U.S. Census supervisor in Eastern Washington. Most important, though, were her grandchildren, who individually and altogether, lived with her and David over the course of many summers and even college semesters. Family was important to her, and she loved them dearly.

Another joy was seeing the world with David, and they were adventurous travelers throughout their retirement, visiting such far-flung places as India, Egypt, South America, Tibet, and China. Frugal and relaxed about their trips, it wasn't uncommon for their children to phone home and discover that someone was house-sitting and she and David had gone off to Fiji. Della's joy in visiting these other cultures was evident in the many and colorful stories she often told of the people and places she encountered. After David's death in 2011, Della remained in her beloved Port Townsend until 2014, when her health necessitated her relocating with her daughter Robin to her old home in San German. She was happy until the end, even as she lost much of her short-term memory to dementia. She is survived by her children, seven grandchildren three great-grandchildren, and many, many friends who loved her dearly.

A Memorial Meeting for Worship was held by the Port Townsend Friends Meeting on March 23, 2018. Her ashes will be buried with David's in the family cemetery next to her parents, in MacArthur, Idaho, later this summer.