

Memorial minute for Jean “Rusty” Sweitzer
1923 – June 14, 2018

Born Jean Childs Atwell, in Cairo, Egypt, in 1923, Rusty died early the morning of June 14, 2018. She was the daughter of the late Donald B. and Helen Lockhart Atwell, and the sister of the late Donald L. Atwell. Alexandria, Egypt, where her father helped found the YMCA, was her home until her high school years, when the family moved to Sewickley, Pennsylvania, and she attended Northfield School in Massachusetts. She was a graduate of Denison University in Granville, Ohio.

At Denison, her dark red hair earned her the nickname Rusty, and she began a lifetime of social action: rather than joining a sorority, she lived in a communal house, became a vegetarian, and attended dances and activities with World War II conscientious objectors from a nearby camp. She met John Sweitzer (deceased) at one such event and they were married on June 1, 1948.

After the war she worked at the American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. She continued to volunteer with AFSC and other Quaker organizations throughout her life and eventually served as a board member for the organization.

Following his release from CO Service, searching for something “an engineer concerned with the race problem” could do, John took a job with the historically black Fisk University in Nashville, Tennessee. While there, he and Rusty became friends with Georgia O’Keeffe, who teamed up with John to install the Alfred Stieglitz collection. Inspired by Quakers they met during WWII, John and Rusty helped found, and became members of, Nashville Friends Meeting.

In 1952, the growing family moved to Richmond, Indiana, where John worked at Earlham College as the Manager of Physical Plant and Purchasing, and they became members of Clear Creek Monthly Meeting of Friends. Rusty gave birth using “natural childbirth” to six children: Steve, Sue, Sally, Pat, Penny (deceased), and Sandy.

Rusty’s academic training was in early childhood education, which she applied while helping found the cooperative nursery at Earlham and the precursor to the Head Start program at Townsend Center. She earned her Master’s in Education and taught kindergarten for many years at Park-view Elementary School in Richmond.

In the 40 years they lived in Richmond, Rusty and John shared their love, energy, altruism, and home with hundreds of Earlham students, many of whom lived at their home on College Avenue and/or joined them for Sunday dinners and holidays. They also hosted the annual College Avenue Christmas Caroling and participated in a Fellowship group, while Rusty was Den Mother for a Cub Scout Troop when Steve was young.

After she and John retired, in 1985, they became the Resident Couple at Honolulu Friends Meeting for four years, hosting countless travelers and supporting the AFSC offices in the Friends Meetinghouse.

Rusty moved to Sherwood Oaks in Cranberry Township, Pennsylvania, in 1993, where she volunteered at a local elementary school, served on the Sherwood Oaks landscaping committee, became a member of the Pittsburgh Friends Meeting, and remained actively involved with Friends Committee on National Legislation. She continued to travel internationally and spent a month many winters volunteering at Honolulu Friends Meeting. She was also active at PFM in various capacities.

She is survived by five children, Steven Sweitzer (Indianapolis, Indiana), Susan Sweitzer (North Bend, Washington), Sally Sweitzer Taylor (Mt. Lebanon, Pennsylvania), Pat Sweitzer (Morrisville, Pennsylvania), and Sandy Sweitzer (Durham, North Carolina); nine grandchildren; two great-grandchildren; and her sister-in-law, Corrian Atwell.

A memorial service was held at Sherwood Oaks, Cranberry Township, on Saturday, July 28. A memorial service was also being planned at Earlham College the weekend of September 22–23.

In lieu of flowers, donations in Rusty’s memory may be made to: Earlham College, John and Jean Sweitzer Family Scholarship Fund, <http://earlham.edu/giving/>, or to Friends Committee on National Legislation, <https://www.fcnl.org/action/donate>, or to Sherwood Oaks Resident Assoc. – Landscape Fund, 100 Norman Drive, Cranberry Twp., PA 16066.