

## Memorial Minute for Marilee Wheeler

Marilee Wheeler, a member of Friends Meeting at Cambridge since 1988, died on June 10, 2020. Marilee was, in the words of one friend, “an extraordinary woman – independent, intellectually curious, cultured, courageous, caring and generous.” Marilee grew up in nearby Wellesley, MA and graduated from Wellesley College in 1955. She earned a law degree at University of California San Francisco College of Law and lived in California before returning to the Boston Area. Marilee lived on Park Street in Brookline for many years, until she moved to Lasell Village in Auburndale (Newton), a retirement community that focuses on lifelong learning and wellness.

As another friend wrote, “Beneath a quiet, kind, pacific and Quakerly exterior, Marilee was a woman with an exciting past and a strong will.” Marilee enjoyed traveling, and lived for some time in Istanbul, Turkey, where she taught English at an American private school. She was always eager to share her knowledge about Turkish culture and customs. Marilee’s parents had a passion for and collected nineteenth-century American art and shared this passion with Marilee. After Marilee's mother died, Marilee organized a gallery showing of her parents’ collection at Vose Galleries. Above all, Marilee was a great lover of music. A regular at the Symphony and Jordan Hall in Boston, she traveled far and wide for the joy that music brought her, from the Metropolitan Opera in New York, to the London Handel Festival, to the New Mexico Summer Music Festival. And one friend remembers “she was always beautifully turned out, with hat, when she came to Cambridge Meeting.”

At FMC, Marilee attended meeting for worship faithfully on Sundays and on Wednesday mornings during the late fall, winter and early spring. While at her home on the Cape during the rest of the year, she attended West Falmouth Preparatory Meeting. At FMC, she served on the Living with Dying group in 1988-9, the Search Committee for Facilities Manager in 1998, and the support group for that Facilities Manager. She served on Trustees, where she joined a subcommittee that worked on the issue of boundary lines with neighbors. In Brookline, she is on record as hosting the Brookline-Brighton Worship Group several times in the late 1980’s. More recently, a friend remembers visiting with Marilee for worship in her apartment while they both lived at Lasell Village. Others remember Marilee’s presence at many holiday potlucks and simple lunches in the Friends Room.

From one family’s story, we get a sense of Marilee’s caring and attention, her gift for life and for friendship. Betsy Hewitt remembers getting to know Marilee through many years at Wednesday morning worship, where Betsy brought her daughter Lydia as a baby. Betsy recalls, “Marilee took an interest in Lydia. When Lydia graduated from U Maine Orono in Marine Biology, Marilee donated to support Lydia's trip to Costa Rica to rescue endangered sea turtles and kept abreast of her progress and trip. When Lydia got an internship at Woods Hole oceanographic Institute one summer, Marilee offered Lydia a place to stay overnight so Lydia would not need to drive from Newton to Woods Hole and back each workday. During her summers on the Cape, Marilee loved to swim at Old Silver Beach in Falmouth, MA, swimming purposefully a half-mile along the coast every day that the water was warm enough. Betsy also remembers that Marilee had a close relationship with her sister’s son Paul, who taught Physics and Astronomy at Newton North High School. At times she spent holidays with Paul and his family.

Friend Jo Ellen Hillyer remembers Marilee's "gentle generosity...when Nancy Cirillo and I lost our precious husbands within a few months of each other in 2012. Marilee invited the two of us to her home on the Cape the following summer. Her bringing us to her place of much natural beauty and her treating us like honored guests soothed my aching heart for a day. She did not know me well, but she extended herself to someone who was hurting. I continue to be grateful."

After her death, Marilee surprised, awed and inspired the meeting community by leaving us a large bequest. We are seeking Spirit's guidance on how to use this gift, reflecting on all that it means about what FMC meant to Marilee and what her witness to love meant – and means– to us.