

## Memorial Minute for Agnes Woodstock

We remember her gentleness, her mischievous sense of humor, her wise counsel, her love of children, her drive to be of service, and the many, many ways she ministered to others during her lifetime. We grieve over her suicide, which took the life of a person we love. We miss her; we struggle to understand. We experienced, through her experience, the phenomenon we call "mental illness" -- how it could take hold and shut doors to hope. We ask if we could have done more to support her in her struggle. In meetings since her death we have been led to honor her life with words from our hearts, to form a mental health working group, and seek to discern ways we can support one another better in our weaknesses, our blindness, our mental illnesses, while also respecting the fundamental responsibility of each of us for our own lives.

Agnes was born August 10, 1936, in Ayr, Scotland, the daughter of Thomas and Agnes Smith. Education was highly valued in her family; the day she was born, her father enrolled her in Ayr Academy, the best school in town. When she was 18 months old, her mother died; Agnes was later told it was from "a cold in the liver" and very little else was said. She got a welcome reprieve from her largely cheerless household in the summers when she spent time with her aunts, uncles and cousins on their farms. A loving "nanny" came after the war and stayed until her own death in the mid-'90s.

Agnes received her undergraduate degree from the University of Edinburgh and then she worked abroad. She taught French in Germany and German and English in France, enjoying these experiences enormously and making lifelong friends there.

When she returned to the University of Edinburgh to study for her Master's degree, she met and subsequently married a visiting American Ph.D., Lowell Woodstock. After their wedding in Ayr on December 27, 1961, they went to the U.S. and lived briefly in Illinois and then moved to their house on Royal Road in Silver Spring, Maryland. Their daughter Elizabeth was born in 1962; daughter Louise in 1969.

The family spent a year in Corvallis, Oregon, where Agnes learned photography, and then from 1976-78, they lived in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, where Lowell had an assignment with the Department of Agriculture. Upon returning to the U.S., Agnes worked for several years in the office of Alan Cranston, Senator from California, and then she taught French for several years at Sandy Spring Friends School.

For some years prior to Lowell's death in 1994, he needed considerable care, which Agnes provided unstintingly. She also provided home-based day care for a number of children over the years. And she was a very proud grandmother to three beloved grandchildren.

Agnes and Lowell had begun attending Adelphi Friends Meeting in the late 1960s and became members in the early 1970s. When her children were growing up, Agnes was active in religious education and served as an adult leader of workcamps and Catoctin weekends for Young Friends. Later she was active in ministry at Patuxent Prison and, in the course of almost 30 years at Adelphi, she served on most of the Meeting's committees. Her strong sense of duty and responsibility, her

understanding of Quaker process and her sensitivity to unmet needs often led her to serve in multiple positions. She served as Clerk of the Meeting from 1995 through 1996.

During the time she served as clerk, she began to show signs of serious distress and paranoia, suddenly in some moments seeming very much not herself, and then soon after, she would seem herself again: practical, wise, humorous, sensitive, loving. She generally refused offers of help for herself, while continuing to be generous with her time in helping others. She died in a one-car accident on September 22, 1997, leaving a suicide note.