

MEMORIAL MINUTE FOR MARY LOU GOERTZEN

“Kind, True, and Necessary”

Mary Lou Goertzen was born Aug. 2, 1929, in Newton, Kansas to Willis Rich and Hulda Penner Rich, the oldest of four siblings, along with James, Carol and Martha Suzanne (known as Mardy).

Her father Willis Rich was Bethel College's director of public relations so Mary Lou grew up as a "campus kid." Mary Lou married Ernie Goertzen, whom she met when they were students at Bethel College, on July 3, 1951. They were the parents of three children, David, Anya and Jonevan.

Ernie was severely injured in a car accident in 1961. He described this as "a turning point" and "a wake-up call," after which he and Mary Lou decided to "move forward with artwork" full time.

In 1965, the family moved to Berkeley, Calif., where both Ernie and Mary Lou took art classes and began to create paintings and drawings. They sold these in art markets in Berkeley and Mill Valley and developed a local following.

During the Berkeley years, Ernie and Mary Lou were committed to the Viet Nam Protest movement, including hiding soldiers in their home who had decided to become conscientious objectors. They joined the Religious Society of Friends in Berkeley and were active for many years in Pacific Yearly Meeting.

In 1975, Ernie and Mary Lou decided to move their family to the country and bought an old schoolhouse in Deadwood, Oregon near the Quaker-inspired intentional community of Alpha Farm. They formed a Deadwood Worship Group, which later merged with the Florence Worship Group. Fifth Sunday meetings were held at their home, Blue School House, and were always followed by potluck and singing. Many Quakers from Eugene and other Meetings in the Northwest would join those special Sundays.

Mary Lou shared her love of singing with the Deadwood and Greenleaf communities, co-founding the Greenwood Singers. She also began quilting and sharing her work -- every new baby received a quilt, and many folks worked alongside her at the quilting group she formed with others from the Deadwood Community. She even made “quilt images” of Deadwood folks.

After 2012 Mary Lou began making quilts in response to poems and other events in her life, including Ernie's death. The quilts were all "made by hand with every stitch a prayer".

In the larger world community Mary Lou is most widely known for her delicate pen-and-ink drawings with splashes of watercolor, of flowers, fruit and plants. In the mid-'70s, some of her art cards and prints sold at the New York Botanical Garden and caught the attention of Jay Block, CEO of his family's company, Block China. Block came himself from New York to Deadwood to persuade Mary Lou to put her designs on a Block China porcelain dishware series, in production from 1980-90.

Mary Lou was preceded in death by her parents; her husband of 53 years, Ernie; and her siblings Carol and Jim. She is survived by her children David Goertzen, Deadwood, Anya Goertzen Lecuyer, Eugene, Ore., and Jonevan Goertzen, northern California; her grandson Colins Goertzen; and her sister Suzanne "Mardy" Rich Osborn, Fairbanks, Alaska; along with nieces, nephews, cousins (including Zona Galle and Dwight Platt, North Newton) and countless friends.

Mary Lou died Oct. 20, 2020, at home in "the blue schoolhouse" in Deadwood, Ore. She was 91. She was buried next to Ernie on their Deadwood property, in a grave dug by neighbors (as was his), in a shroud she made herself, as she also did for him.

Friends in both Pacific Yearly Meeting and North Pacific Yearly Meeting will always remember Mary Lou and Ernie leading the group singing and sharing their voices at Community Nights.

Mary Lou shared an experience that led her to deepening her creative connection with life: "When I was fifteen, I had a kind of an epiphany at 4 o'clock one morning -not asleep but not really awake- of an utter void and nothingness, realizing I would never understand what life was, it would always be a mystery. But as long as I was in this world I would have projects." She further shared that [creative work] "connects me to the human family, what I have always wanted to do with my art--bring the human family closer."

A Celebration of Life was held via Zoom on March 6, 2021 by Eugene Meeting.