

Ruth Jane Laessle

1923-2016

### Memorial Minute for (Ruth) Jane Laessle

Ruth Jane Laessle, artist, teacher, political activist and life-long Quaker, died December 4, 2016 at her home in Austin, Texas. She was 93.

Jane was born in 1923 in Moorestown, New Jersey, a quiet town ten miles east of Philadelphia where her parents were also born. She lived a bike ride away from her grandparents and great aunt and attended Moorestown Friends School for 12 years, graduating in 1941.

Jane attended Hood College in Frederick, Maryland, and graduated from Philadelphia University of the Arts in 1946. She worked as a fashion illustrator in New York for Women's Wear Daily and in Dallas for Neiman Marcus and A. Harris. She was an accomplished painter, sculptor, potter and quilter.

While Jane worked for an ad agency in New York in 1948 she attended a party in Greenwich Village where she met Edward Alexander Butts. Jane and Ed were married in 1949 and later moved to Dallas and had four children: Nina, Michael, David and Sarah (Sally) Butts. While raising her family in Dallas, Jane eventually returned to fashion illustration work. The family attended the Dallas Unitarian Church, which served as the center of its social life.

After her divorce from Ed in 1978, Jane moved to Fredericksburg, Texas, in 1981 to start a new life. She liked the Texas hill country town because it reminded her of her hometown in New Jersey. She reconnected with the Quakers (the Religious Society of Friends) and worked as a member of the Friends World Committee and the Quaker UN Office, traveling all over the world. As a clerk for Right Sharing of World Resources, another Quaker organization, she attended triennial meetings in Kenya, Mexico and Tokyo. She also began monthly meetings of Hill Country Democrats, helped establish the Fredericksburg Peace Coalition, and helped to organize a Peace Garden behind the Nimitz Museum in Fredericksburg.

Jane moved to Austin in 1986 where she made quilts, read extensively and spent hours at work in her tidy backyard landscape garden. She joined the Friends Meeting of Austin, and was deeply involved in the life of the meeting for many years, faithfully attending business meeting, and serving on the Oversight Committee and on numerous clearness committees. Quakerism was an integral part of Jane's life. She identified deeply with Friends' testimonies, and relished the silent worship of Friends, and that business was conducted within the context of worship. She brought people together. When people spoke, she gave her quivery, rapt, respectful attention. When she was upset with you, you would know about it. But as strong as her feelings might be, she rarely judged or criticized. Jane deeply cherished family members and friends, nurturing relationships over many years.

Jane was an artist at her core. She had skill, persistence, curiosity and an exacting nature which led to creations that were not only beautiful, but meaningful and expertly

done. Jane's sense of humor, wit and storytelling ability made her fun and insightful to be with. She brought people together. When people spoke, she gave her quivery, rapt, respectful attention. When she was upset with you, you would know about it. But as strong as her feelings might be, she rarely judged or criticized.

Jane loved to write, and in 2003 she published her autobiography, "A Builder's Daughter". Jane will also be remembered for her inquiring mind. She read extensively, and was curious about literature, politics and culture. She never stopped learning and opening her mind to new ideas. When she moved to The Summit senior living facility (now Brookdale Westlake Hills) in 2007, Jane embraced getting to know the residents, and sharing their stories. She took pictures for and later edited the monthly newsletter, The Focus, for several years. When Jane reached her 90's, and people would inquire about her health, she'd cheerfully say, "I'm deteriorating right on schedule!" Throughout her life, she faced changes with curiosity and an openness to what this new experience would bring. Living fully in the here and now, she was vivacious, demanding, elegant, creative, and loving. Her spirit will continue to inspire those who loved her!

Jane was preceded in death by her mother, Alice May Roberts, her father, Charles Laessle Jr., and her older brother James Roberts Laessle. In addition to her four children, Jane is survived by two daughters-in-law Kazuyo Takagi and Amelia Marie Butts, Paul Percy, Brian East, four grandchildren: Christopher Takagi Butts, Chloe Noelle East, Erik Takagi Butts and Meredith Jordan Butts, and her two great granddaughters Maya Takagi Butts and Sun Takagi Butts. She was fiercely loyal to her family, and relished time with her children and grandchildren. She was delighted to meet her great-granddaughters.

Jane deeply cherished family members and friends, nurturing relationships over many years. She said, "As an artist, I thought there was nothing as creative as making a person.