

## **Vassalboro Friends Meeting**

### **Memorial Minute for**

#### **James Ramsey**

**November 23, 1946 - October 10, 2020**

Jim Ramsey lived a life in deep alignment with Quaker values. While he was not born a Friend, his early life was surrounded by echoes of Quakerism. That, combined with his own inclinations, drew him deeper and deeper into the community of Friends throughout his life. Jim's life was dedicated to service, peace, learning, teaching, and living with the earth. He was an educator, a writer, a father and husband, a part-time farmer and a low-key mystic. His principles of egalitarianism, creativity, and cross-cultural communication gave him a life of deep meaning. He also loved the Boston Celtics.

Jim was born in 1946 in Wilmington, Ohio. His parents James and Rosa were students at Wilmington College, a Quaker school. Though neither of Jim's parents were Quakers at that time, Rosa came from a family of Friends. Much later in life his father James, would return to Wilmington, attending the unprogrammed Meeting regularly.

Jim grew up mostly in Oxford, Ohio, a small college town that is home to Miami University. Jim always had an orientation toward teaching and education. He was also a passionate athlete, playing football, baseball, golf, and basketball. Throughout his life Jim assessed people not by society's educational, economic, or racial strata, but by the quality of their behavior. The same qualities of kindness and respect that cemented friendships with black playmates and teammates would lead him later in life to embrace people in rural Maine that others might have avoided or judged as beneath them.

A student of the humanities, throughout his life he was interested in literature, philosophy, religion, language, and history. Informed by these studies, and by his own sense of morality, he refused to participate in military training exercises, a requirement at the university. After an extensive application and interview process the university allowed him to take alternatives to the military classes. Three years later, he was classified as a Conscientious Objector by the draft board.

In the turbulent late 1960/70s, when busing was a controversial practice, he supported students of color in Dayton, OH who were subjected to aggression from white students. His efforts to connect in compassionate ways, and to speak out against overt racism, was not easy, and got him fired from teaching in one school.

Jim and his wife Liz, moved to central Maine in 1971. Jim took a job at Skowhegan Junior High as an English teacher, where he would stay for 40 years in various positions. He and

Liz bought a dilapidated, uninsulated farmhouse on 39 acres for \$14,000, where he spent the rest of his life, growing gardens, cutting wood, raising their two children, Caitlin and Ian, and working on the house.

Jim thrived as a teacher, ultimately achieving a master's degree in gifted and talented education. His influence in mentoring students was profound and lifelong, and many former students point to his teaching and high standards as having transformative effects on their lives. They remember him not just for his creative teaching style but because he always took an interest in their mental health and personal lives, riding in an ambulance with a student in crisis, or quietly visiting those who had been institutionalized or incarcerated.

Jim and Liz became members of the Vassalboro Friends Meeting in 1986. He appreciated the unprogrammed and unpretentious nature of the Meeting and found deepening value in Friends principals. He became a trusted mentor, an accepting friend and a supportive presence to many in the Meeting. Among other committees and services to the Meeting, Jim served on Ministry and Counsel, and as Clerk of the Meeting for several years. His kindness and steadfast good-humor, and his impish love of puns was a balm for any stress.

In later years he lived his values by taking part in a peace delegation to the Soviet Union. It changed his life and led to more international travel and activism, for international peace, food support for Africa, and other global concerns. Jim believed fervently that Americans needed to travel more, to appreciate the rest of the world and its differences in more nuanced ways, and to understand how we, as Americans are perceived by other nations. He sought to understand various cultures through their cinema, literature, history and art. He truly believed that there is something beautiful in every country and every culture.

Jim Ramsey's legacy is one of peace, compassion, activism, wacky humor and creative learning. He leaves behind a beautiful family that shares his values, legions of transformed former students, a well-loved acreage, and countless more people whose lives have been touched by his trips, his teaching, and his example.

*This memorial minute was read and approved by Vassalboro Friends Meeting at its Meeting for Business on November 17<sup>th</sup> 2024*

*And*

*Accepted by Vassalboro Quarterly Meeting on February 1, 2025*

VFM Clerk Joann C Austin

VQM Clerk Holly Weedner