

Anne Willoughby DiMase
February 12, 1933 - October 11, 2023

On October 11, 2023, Providence Monthly Meeting of Friends lost a cherished member, Anne Willoughby DiMase, who passed away at the age of 90 years. Anne became a member of Meeting upon turning 70 years. She reflected with her membership Clearness Committee that she still had “a lot to offer” and wished to belong to our community. Indeed, over the last two decades, Anne has graced our Meeting with her kindness, warm embrace, and enduring optimism of humanity.

Anne had a presence, a warm smile and, as one member described it, “eyes that danced.” She would often sit on the back bench of the meeting room, welcoming and, in her role as Membership Recorder, tallying those who entered the Meeting room. Another member recollected feeling a great sense of comfort seeing her in this familiar role, thinking “Anne is here. All is well. All she greets will be made to feel welcome.” Her presence lent a steadiness, a valued constancy to Meeting for Worship and to the broader life of the Meeting.

Anne had Light. Quakers speak of “Inner Light” which Anne had in abundance. She also manifested “outer light,” a smile that lit up and enlivened a conversation. Her genuine interest and concern for others served to lighten whatever burdens they might be carrying. One felt listened to, heartened, and affirmed in Anne’s presence with her gentle approach and acceptance of all people. She could also be funny and was known for her witty quips. She was sought out for her natural gift of bringing meaningful life experiences to bear that offered guidance and reassurance to others. She was approachable and inviting during coffee hour, and balanced matters of a serious nature with a light touch.

Anne believed deeply in justice, compassion, and equality for all people, values informed by her deep faith and studies of Christianity, Buddhism, and Vedanta Hinduism. In keeping with her eclectic prism of perspectives and practices, Anne was a pacifist and supporter of the civil rights movement. For many years Anne served on the Peace and Social Concerns Committee making valuable contributions and staying abreast of current social justice issues.

Anne was often accompanied at Meeting on Mother’s Day by her beloved daughter Sherrie and grandson Shane. They made a family tradition of attending the annual Christmas Eve candlelight service at Saylesville Meeting House. Anne enjoyed the fellowship and cookies afterwards- and she was always eager to catch up with young people home for Christmas holiday. One of her favorite holidays was Valentine’s Day and she extended a warm invitation to her friends at Meeting to join at her home for cookies and hot chocolate. She wasn’t a fussy entertainer, insisting that “store bought cookies are just fine.” She placed the emphasis on connecting with people and relationships, rather than formalities, creating a home that was appreciated as a lively hub of joy in times of celebration, and a welcoming place of comfort in times of difficulty.

Born in Worcester, Massachusetts on February 12, 1933, Anne lived most of her life in New England. She graduated from the University of Rhode Island with a degree in Early Childhood Education. She then won a fellowship for graduate studies in Human Development and Human Relations at Merrill Palmer Institute in Michigan. A lifelong learner, Anne also studied Anthropology at Brown University and Social Work at Rhode Island College.

Anne's life spoke with her good works devoted to children. She was passionate about early childhood education and as one member noted, "she never seemed to age...she was forever young." True to her ideals, Anne spent years advocating for higher standards in this field, especially for disadvantaged students and those with special needs. During her early years she served as director of a school for disabled children in Springfield, MA and taught third grade in Dedham, MA and later in Cincinnati, OH. After returning to Rhode Island, she taught at Meeting Street School in Providence. She went on to found and teach at the East Greenwich Cooperative Nursery School. Anne served on the East Greenwich School Committee, where she advocated for individualized educational programs for students. Later, she taught at the John Hope Day Care Center, where she began a parents' group and practiced social work at the John Hope Settlement House. She also directed several Head Start programs and day care centers in Lima, OH and Glendale, CA. With remarkable energy, she established and directed a new infant-toddler center and preschool in Middletown, RI while directing day care programs at Child and Family Services of Newport County. Anne was a visionary and gifted educator who improved the lives of many.

When Anne reached standard retirement age, not one to be idle, she took a position at the American Automobile Association. There she continued in her diligent, calm, and cheerful manner to assist travelers in Providence. She finally (and reluctantly) settled into her well-deserved retirement at the age of 80. Wherever Anne worked and lived, she was a source of support and guidance, and she stayed in touch with many of her mentees throughout her life.

Anne loved poetry and history, particularly hearing the stories of those who came before her. She also loved music, particularly the jazz of her youth and the folk music of the 50s and 60s. Spending time in nature brought a special joy to her.

Anne is survived by one son, Daniel, three daughters, Debora, Laura, and Sherrie, and nine grandchildren. She was also blessed with dear friends that she cherished, many of whom spoke at her memorial service. Anne's good works and relationships live on, and our lives are enriched for having known her.

Approved on June 9, 2024, by Providence Monthly Meeting, Ariana Steele, clerk

Endorsed on June 16, 2024, by Southeast Quarterly Meeting, Elizabeth (Beth) Hansen, clerk

