

Memorial Minute for Gracia Elizabeth Hobson Hiatt

Approved at a meeting for business held 2/10/2019

Gracia Elizabeth Hobson Hiatt was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma on Eleventh Day, Eleventh Month, 1941. She died in Jefferson City, Missouri on Thirteenth Day, Tenth Month, 2018 of secondary complications from her recently diagnosed acute myeloid leukemia. She was courageous, confident and cheerful even as death approached. She was surrounded by her children and loving family and friends in her last days and at her passing into eternity. Over her life she was a member of Montclair Friends Meeting in Montclair, New Jersey, Pima Meeting in Tucson, Arizona, Claremont Friends Meeting in Claremont, California and finally Tempe Monthly Meeting in Tempe, Arizona.

Gracia was the firstborn child of Arthur and Arline Hobson, newlyweds who started their marriage as youth pastors, sponsored by Indiana Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers), in pastoral service for a year at Hominy Friends Church in Hominy, Oklahoma on the Osage Nation. The family returned east for a year when her father took a position as a teacher at the Dalton School in New York City. Art and Arline were then hired by the War Relocation Authority (WRA) to work as teachers at the Minidoka Japanese Internment Camp in Idaho from 1943 to 1945. Gracia remembered they lived inside the wire with Japanese detainees. She shared that she and her younger brother, Arthur, were the only two non-Japanese children invited to attend a nursery school run by Nisei detainee teachers and attended by Nisei and Sansei children. Gracia surmised that she and her brother spoke as much Japanese as English for their ages.

In the fall of 1945 after the end of the war as the WRA wound down its mission, Art took a position as the boys' advisor managing the two boys' dormitories at a Bureau of Indian Affairs Boarding School in Ft. Defiance, Arizona, a tiny oasis of a town more than 33 miles from where the pavement ended on Route 66 in Gallup, New Mexico. Gracia's curly blond hair was unusual in Ft. Defiance and she quickly acquired the Navajo nickname *Tlizi ba gaa* (goat hair). She shared a story that reflected her confidence as a child. Before the Navajo Tribal Council building existed in Window Rock, the council used to meet in the large assembly room in one of the boys' buildings managed by her father where the family lived in an apartment. She remembered walking into a council meeting and, to the great amusement of all, wandering from councilman to councilman asking "Where's my daddy? Where's my daddy?" She was known to all as "Hobson's girl." Gracia's Ft. Defiance friends were children of the Navajo, Japanese-American and Oklahoma Indian colleagues of her parents. A friend of Gracia remained a friend for life. She stayed in touch with all even into the last few weeks of her life.

Secondary schooling for children of non-Navajo's was limited in the 1950s on reservations. When Gracia was only 12 years old, she applied to Wasatch Academy, a Presbyterian boarding school in Mt. Pleasant, Utah. She recalled her careful monitoring of the daily mail in Ft. Defiance, and her joy and delight to find an envelope with a letter admitting her. She remembered running home and shouting to her mother, "I'm going to Wasatch! I'm going to Wasatch!" The perspective of years brought to her the memory of her mother's crestfallen look and the sad question "Do you really want to go?" to which Gracia remembers saying "Yes! Yes! Walter [Stepp] and Russ [Shimizu] will be there and I will too."

Wasatch years were good ones for Gracia and she developed other friends which she carried through her life. Her hope, even with her leukemia diagnosis this past summer, had been to attend the next gathering with surviving classmates. One of her achievements while at Wasatch was as a vocalist. Her brothers remember hearing her sing the soprano aria from Handel's Messiah "I Know That My Redeemer Liveth" in the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City where Utah music competitions were held. She was frequently invited to sing at local churches in the Mt. Pleasant area and was always pleased to do so.

Gracia was accepted to Earlham College in the Fall of 1959 and delighted in her time there. She studied for a semester in Italy while at Earlham. In her last year at Earlham, the family learned that her father's MS had progressed seriously. They chose to move to Tucson. The reports of her father's imminent demise, while ultimately mistaken by more than 25 years, nevertheless had her transfer to the University of Arizona for her senior year and where she finished her B.A. degree.

Gracia took a position providing services for the blind in Northern Arizona. She regularly travelled across remote areas, much of it on the Navajo Nation to deliver and pick up material aid. Gracia reminisced about showing up at a trading post at Steamboat looking for a client. She chuckled as she recounted when the trader turned around and said, "Oh, you're Hobson's girl." On one occasion, her supervisor was curious about the lack of detail in locating clients and insisted on accompanying her. His awareness was appropriately expanded about clients whose mail is general delivery and who don't have street or rural route addresses. Her reports were never challenged thereafter.

A close friend from the U of A told her about a master's degree program in vocational rehabilitation counseling. She and her friend signed up and after graduation she volunteered for the Peace Corp. She was assigned to Nigeria. Her experiences in Africa were rich and exciting too. She told about a cabin where she lived near Lagos and heard in the early morning a scraping sound that kept recurring. At first light she went to investigate and found a two meter green mamba, one of Africa's

deadliest snakes, undulating up a window screen trying to find a way into her living quarters. The caretaker was called and the snake was dispatched. Her service in a Nigeria coincided with the civil war. She eventually was sent by the Peace Corps to Liberia for the second half of her term and shared the nervous transit she made during the fighting in the company of a number of Roman Catholic nuns from the Yoruba area where she lived, through the Ibo area and then on to Liberia.

Gracia took a position with the California Department of Vocational Rehabilitation where she spent the remainder of her career. She was a counselor initially but eventually became the supervisor of the immense Riverside district, which required her to travel long distances. In 1971 she met Herschel Hiatt. Gracia took an interest and soon they were married at Pima Meeting in Tucson, Arizona on Twenty First Day, Eighth Month, 1971. Gracia undertook to be a mother to her three step-children who were soon joined by three more siblings born to Gracia and Hersch. California years were full ones for this burgeoning family. And there were rich friendships with many others. The Hiatt and Ortega children were in one another's homes frequently. Waldmans, Kriegers and Hiatts shared Jewish, Christian and family celebrations for years in one another's homes. While there were trials that tested them, Gracia and Hersch remained devoted to one another.

Navajo kinship is warm and accepting and, as it turns out, vast. Gracia delighted in eventually having Navajo family when her brother Art married Dottie Francis from Chinle, Arizona in 1967. Over the years, Gracia regularly visited and renewed contacts with Navajo family and held a special place in her heart for Dottie's mother, Ida Francis.

Hersch's dementia was not immediately apparent but eventually was diagnosed as Alzheimer's Disease. After five years in El Paso and Tempe, he and Gracia relocated to Austin to be nearer to family. Gracia's suffering through Hersch's decline was disguised even from those closest to her by her perpetual cheerfulness and joy in life. With his passing, one might have wished for some rest and repose for Gracia in her later years. Sadly, that was not to be.

The month before she was diagnosed with leukemia, Gracia and her family were invited to a month on the beach at Rita and Hank Krieger's place at Dana Point. She spent that month with much of her family in joyful contemplation of their lives. The regrets she shared were always occasioned by a hope for renewal and reconnection. Gracia took special delight in all of her grandchildren as well as many nieces and nephews and their offspring, and she would regularly report their status and opine about how great they were and how much more they were to become.

The great mystery of our lives and the passing over into eternity is ineffable. Gracia's cheerful acceptance of the limits imposed by mortality echoed her insistence that *The Eternal Goodness* (a John Greenleaf Whittier poem she and Hersch treasured) should be included in his memorial minute. It was read during her memorial meeting as well, in contemplation of her remarkable life and her passage.

... I know not what the future hath
Of marvel or surprise,
Assured alone that life and death
His mercy underlies. ...