

THE VOICE OF THE PAST -

LITTLE HISTORIES

BY CHARLEY KEMPTHORNE, FELLOWSHIP HISTORIAN

Dorothy Miller died January 1, 2000, almost 89. David Norton, a longtime UU friend and her caregiver in the last years of her life, came to the UU next day and announced her death. Most of the people there that day had not known her.

I met Dorothy in 1953 when I was a high school student. I probably had known her longer than anyone. She was my high school student English teacher. Yes, student--at 42, Dorothy Miller went back to college. In the 1950s, long before the age of the "non-traditional" student, that was quite unusual.

Dorothy was a little lady of great strength. In most ways she was a perfect example of a Unitarian Universalist, and she was an active member and builder of this Fellowship from its beginning in 1957 to the day of her death on that first day of the last year of our previous century. She, her husband Cecil and their four children—Lauren, Basia, Kerry and Tybel—were a bulwark of this Fellowship for close to half a century.

As a student teacher in training Dorothy graded one of my themes. I was a smart kid (weren't we all?) and I was used to getting A's from the regular teacher. Dorothy gave me a B. In the margin next to the word "obviously" that I'd used, she wrote, "If it's so obvious, why say it?"

Years later at the Fellowship I read a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins and after the program Dorothy corrected my mispronunciation of the word "windhover." (Don't I have an excellent memory!)

Is it a characteristic of Unitarians to be critical? Yes, it is. We're that way from birth, perhaps. Critical thinking is part of our toolkit, but in the case of Dorothy it was far from the only tool. She was always exceptionally gracious, warm, and thoughtful. When I joined the Fellowship in 1983 she was quick to come up to me and renew old acquaintance with her bright smile and warm touch. I might add that graciousness and genuine warmth beneath the criticalness is also a characteristic--often--of Unitarians. We're pretty nice people. We just want to get things right.

But my point here, today, is not so much to write an encomium of Dorothy Miller as to remind all of you, especially those of you who are older than I--not too many of you anymore--that you may have stories about Dorothy or other members, some gone and some still here, that you harbor in your own memory

and, but for the tedious job of writing it up, might share with the rest of us.

History is made up of just such little stories. Glimpses. If you have one or more about your life in the Fellowship, why don't you call me and I'll be happy to listen to you and record it and write it up? Or just email the story to me and I'll make sure it becomes part of our historical record.

Oh, and sooner is better than later. Obviously.

Contact Charley to record and share your "little histories" at 564-1118 or charleykempthorne@dishmail.net



DOROTHY MILLER IN THE FELLOWSHIP'S "OLD SANCTUARY," CA 1990

Check your newsletter each month for future installments of Fellowship Historian Charley Kempthorne's "VOICE OF THE PAST" column, highlighting the people and events that have shaped our congregation through time.

"VOICE OF THE PAST" will also be posted on the UUFM website at www.uufm.net. Click the "Documents" button, then look for the links under "UUFM History."