

## Elizabeth Freeman

CHAPEL HILL — Elizabeth Freeman died peacefully, surrounded by friends, on January 11th in Chapel Hill, NC. She was



born on September 4, 1919, in Binghamton, NY, the fourth child of five to parents John F. and Blanche Bishop Freeman. She was named for her aunt Elisabeth Freeman, a noted suffragette, civil rights worker, and pacifist. She attended Cortland Teachers' College, now Cortland University.

Elizabeth taught elementary school in Paramus, NJ, and then volunteered for the Women's Army Corp in 1943. After the war she returned to Paramus to teach and eventually was the Director of Guidance in the new Paramus High School until her retirement in the early '70s. She earned her Master's Degree at NYU. She was particularly attuned to young people who were alienated from the mainstream.

Her life changed dramatically when she retired to Wolf Creek, Oregon, where her nephew Carl Wittman and his partner Allan Troxler built her a house on their land. Locally, she embraced women's, lesbian, and environmental causes, notably the Oregon Women's Land Trust. Nationally, Freeman joined in the formation of the Older Women's League.

In the '80s, Elizabeth and Elaine Mikels, Carl Wittman and Allan Troxler moved to Durham, NC, where they were active in the lesbian and gay communities,

as well as in peace efforts and anti-racism work. She was a devoted volunteer for The Independent Weekly and a long-time board member of the Fund for Southern Communities.

She was a national spokeswoman on the problem of housing for the elderly and eventually created the Molly Hare Cooperative, an apartment building in Durham owned by its residents, mostly older women who provided each other support and community. She founded Crone's Own Press and published numerous volumes of older women's writings. When her health declined and she needed help with daily tasks, she lived with Mab Segrest, Barbara Culbertson and their daughter Annie for three years and then moved to Carolina House in Chapel Hill, where she promptly made many friends among residents and staff.

She is survived by her older sister, Ruth Freeman Johnston of Binghamton; her nieces, Jane VanDeBogart of Woodstock, NY, Peg Johnston of Binghamton, NY, and Lynn Page of Tempe, Arizona; her nephew, Danny Shipley, of Virginia Beach, VA; and by Allan Troxler, of Durham, her adopted nephew. She is predeceased by her nephews Carl Wittman, Bill and John Johnston, and Jan Meredith, her niece. Her siblings Jeannette Wittman, John Freeman, and Helen Shipley also died before her.

Donations in her memory can be sent to OLOC — Old Lesbians Organizing for Change — PO Box 5853, Athens OH 45701 ([www.OLOC.org](http://www.OLOC.org)), or the Fund for Southern Communities, 315 West Ponce De Leon Ave, Suite 1061, Decatur, GA 30030 ([fsc@fundforsouth.org](mailto:fsc@fundforsouth.org)).

**From:** Margaret Johnston <PegJohnston@stny.rr.com>  
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Hi-- Sorry I have not gotten to writing up my thoughts about Elizabeth's Memorial, but it was a lovely event and I'll try to recount now.

There were about 60 people in a large circle. Mab and Barb, with whom E. lived for a while, started out talking about the many things they learned from Elizabeth, and the many changes they went through with her. Another woman talked about how E. had inspired her to tackle a cooperative housing project, built from scratch. Many many people said that when Elizabeth greeted them, "I felt like I was the only person in the world for that moment" and how welcoming and accepting she was to them.

I told some stories about Elizabeth growing up that I had heard and reflected that Elizabeth was consistent throughout her life--great sense of humor, but wounded easily, but also recovered quickly, and was generous with all that she had.

One woman told the story of how they were trying to buy a house but they needed money in the bank as "show money". They approached Elizabeth without really knowing her that well, and they expected her to say, "I'll think about it" but she whipped out her checkbook and wrote them the full amount that they needed! It turns out these were the founders of LadySlipper Music.

One of her housemates in the cooperative housing Elizabeth founded, acknowledged that she could "let you have it" at times and another said simply, "Elizabeth saved my life."

Annie, whose middle name is Elizabeth, after our Elizabeth, spoke eloquently as someone who knew Elizabeth as a child. She recalled wanting to play with Elizabeth's pots and pans but being too scared to ask for such a thing. But E read her mind, and pulled all the pots and pans out and said, "go ahead, play with them." Annie, now a college freshman, talked about how much it meant to have her give permission to play and how she has tried to do the same for kids in her life.

Many people spoke of her loyalty to them and how much her friendship meant to them.

Allan told us how well Elizabeth adjusted to change, in Oregon, where she initially retired: though at first depressed, she quickly made many friends and became "the belle of the Ball" ; and in Durham when they all moved back, where she jumped into many causes and organizations and became a magnet for activism, and finally, at the nursing home where her smile lit up many a face. One woman attended the memorial in gratitude for all that E had done to make her mother, a fellow resident at the nursing home, comfortable and welcomed.

Steve, who founded The Independent newspaper, talked about how Elizabeth organized the "old women" to label and mail the paper. Elizabeth took to putting little hearts on the labels of friends, a practice that gradually encompassed much of the list. He also spoke of how Elizabeth "visualized" good things for them as organizations and as people, and when they were done, "sent" the thoughts into the universe.

We ended the ceremony with a visualization that Elizabeth kept in her wallet, as everyone wafted it

heavenward:

"I am a clear channel though which healing energy of the universe is pouring. This energy does not come from me personally; it comes from a higher source and I serve to focus it and direct it.

I now picture you as clearly as I can. I ask, 'Is there anything in particular you would like me to do for you in my meditation?' I would like to work on healing a particular problem. I see all problems dissolved, everything being healed and functioning perfectly. I see you surrounded in golden, healing light--looking radiantly healthy and happy. I say to you; 'You are actually a perfect being and no illness or affliction need have any power over you. I support you in being totally healthy and happy. I will continue to send you loving support and energy.

From now on in my meditations I see you as perfectly well. I see you completely healed.

This, or something better, is now manifest for you."

After the remembering circle we had a great potluck, we showed slides of Elizabeth's life, and then did some wonderful English Country Dance in Elizabeth's honor, led by Allan.

Glad I went!

Peg

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"Happiness consists in the full employment of our faculties in some pursuit."

---Harriet Martineau

Peg Johnston

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