

Memorial Minute for Al Connor (Ann Arbor)

January 15, 1927 – September 7, 2024

Alan Norris Connor was born in Camden, NJ on January 15, 1927, to Ethelbert “Bill” and Marion Connor, the first of their eight children. He grew up in Glassboro, NJ, attending the local high school, and served in the U.S. Army Air Corps, 1945–47, stationed mostly in the Philippines. He said, “In some ways, the Army was the best thing that ever happened to me – it was only by rejecting it that I learned to think for myself.”

Following his discharge, he attended Guilford College, majoring in English. He married Polly Lynnette Edgerton in 1952 and then worked as a journalist for a few years, but his growing interest in social justice led him, with Polly, to direct student community service projects with the AFSC in Berkeley, CA. He attended the University of Michigan School of Social Work in Ann Arbor, receiving his Master’s degree in 1961 and later a Ph.D. In the 1960s, he was a clinical social worker at Longview State Hospital in Cincinnati for two years before moving to Kabwe (then Broken Hill), Zambia, to do community development work for the AFSC.

In 1966, he returned to Ann Arbor and joined the faculty of the School of Social Work, where he taught until 1981. He served as director of the Ann Arbor Human Rights Commission in the 1970s and later as a community organizer in agricultural communities in Minnesota. Returning to Michigan, he became chair of the Department of Social Work at Siena Heights University, in Adrian, where he taught until his retirement. He was a dedicated and enthusiastic organic gardener, and for a time had a farm near Adrian, where he loved to bring his grandchildren.

Al became a member of Ann Arbor Friends Meeting in 1977, transferring his membership from Community Meeting of Cincinnati. He served briefly in a wide variety of roles, and for longer periods on the Committee on Ministry and Counsel and Friends Center Committee, notably in the mid- to late 80s, when the Meeting housed a family of Salvadoran refugees, and again in the 90s, after the Meeting established a residential community. Al was the driving force behind the establishment of the Meeting’s Environment and Social Concerns Committee (later Earthcare Committee) in 1999, and remained active on it for the rest of his life. For both Ann Arbor Meeting and Lake Erie Yearly Meeting, Al was a representative to Quaker Earthcare Witness (which he helped to found) and to FCNL. He also served on LEYM’s Earthcare Committee and was the named visitor to Wilmington Yearly Meeting for many years.

Ann Arbor Friends remember the integrity with which Al merged his beliefs and his actions; his persistent concern about global warming and environmental degradation; his encyclopedic depth of knowledge and remarkable range of personal acquaintances among environmental representatives and activists, both local and national; his frequent reminders to consider the importance of farmers, agriculture, and food; his leadership and compassion as a committee clerk; and his readiness to loan his pickup truck and his own manual labor in support of a good cause. One Friend recalled that, “no matter what issue we were scheduled to lobby [with FCNL],

Al always found an easy entry into the topic of the latest farm bill.” And another wrote that “he embodied walking cheerfully and addressing God in everyone.”

Athletically gifted, Al played three sports in high school and at Guilford, and remained active in sports throughout his life. When the Meeting established a softball team in a recreational league in the early 1990s, Al played joyfully and well, even though he was some 20 years senior to the next oldest player. He was an integral part of a gold medal-winning Senior Olympics basketball team in 2003 and 2004 and continued to play basketball weekly until he was 88.

Al passed away peacefully at the age of 97 on September 7, 2024, following a long period of declining health. He is survived by Polly, his wife of 72 years, three children, seven grandchildren, four great-grandchildren, and five siblings.