

Memorial Minute for Eloise Piper (Pittsburgh)

December 8, 1939 – July 15, 2019

Artist Eloise “Ellie” Piper, a longtime member of Pittsburgh Friends Meeting and active Friend in La Jolla and Northside Friends Meetings, died on July 15, 2019, after a long battle with cancer.

Ellie was an artist-author and educator. Her paintings, batiks, and dolls were featured in numerous solo and group shows and are in a number of permanent collections, including those of the Library of Congress, museums, and business and residential collections throughout the world. She received numerous awards for her work and taught art in public schools, private art centers, and colleges. She authored and illustrated seven books, including *Sewing and Sculpting Dolls* and *Batik for Artists and Quilters*.

Ellie was born on December 8, 1939, in Ocala, Florida, the second daughter of Martha Buck and James Fort. Her sister, Joyce Elizabeth, had been born 20 months before. Her father, a lawyer, worked for the family’s tobacco business both in the United States and Cuba. Her parents divorced when she was young, and many years later Ellie learned her father had remarried and that she had a brother living in Honolulu, Jay Carvalho.

From the age of three, Ellie saw herself as an artist: “That was what defined me, making art.” She said being creative and artistic was how she survived a peripatetic upbringing. Her family moved frequently, living in various homes, even the YMCA for a time, as her mother worked to support them while earning a Ph.D. in Social Work.

Ellie experienced her own schooling as a “tedium of studies.” An inquisitive and creative child, her questions about God challenged the religious milieu about her. She wasn’t sure there was a God. In an autobiographical story, she described discovering a high school science book in a garbage can at the age of nine:

Now – miracle of miracles – a book that held the answer, and the answer was Molecules! Those shimmering, dancing particles that metamorphosized into shape, and air, and water – Molecules, wiggling through the heavens, through the universe, up to the Big Molecule – then back to earth again to take the shape of cats and

cars, kings and kerchiefs, moles and mountains, why...even my sister was made of molecules.

Ellie married twice: first to Jonathan Piper and then to William “Bill” Zinner. She had three children: Carolyn, Megan, and Aaron. Ellie joined the Pittsburgh Meeting of the Society of Friends in the 1960s, following her mother, who discovered Friends first. Ellie’s children regularly attended First Day School in Pittsburgh Meeting.

Ellie’s art during her early career included elaborate batiks, many of which were framed by her then-husband Bill. One of her paintings remains on the second floor of the Pittsburgh Friends Meetinghouse.

When Ellie’s son Aaron was 10 years old, he died tragically after being hit by a car while in Yellow Springs, Ohio, attending Carolyn’s graduation from Antioch College. A tree was planted in his memory in the front yard of the Meetinghouse, just to the left side of the path by the steps. Ellie never transferred her membership from Pittsburgh Meeting, feeling her tie to Aaron there felt so strong.

Ellie moved to the San Diego area so she could assist her mother, Martha, who was active in La Jolla Friends Meeting well into her 90s. Ellie was very connected to the arts community in San Diego, as a painter and teacher. As she said to friends, “I was put on the earth to do art.” Trips to the desert were a source of deep inspiration.

For over 35 years Ellie found a home in La Jolla Friends Meeting, a source of serenity for her. As a writer and a poet, she served on the Communications Committee, helping to publish the Meeting’s newsletter. Ellie was a well-loved participant in La Jolla Meeting, often ministering to members there, writing notes when people were ill or experiencing difficulties. After she herself became ill, the Meeting supported her through many treatments, until her care became too difficult to manage in her home.

In 2015, Ellie moved to Chicago to live with her daughter Carolyn, son-in-law Dan, and granddaughters Dylan and Hannah. Carolyn connected her with innovative cancer treatment at Northwestern Hospital. Not expecting to survive four years when she came to Chicago, Ellie nonetheless lived an active life around her illness, continuing to paint in small frames, ushering at plays with Carolyn and her family, and traveling to visit friends in Pittsburgh and California, all the while juggling her

treatments. She attended Northside Friends Meeting, where she became a pillar member of a women's coffee group and served on the Care Committee for the Meeting clerk's difficult illness. She used her exceptional writing skills to co-author the annual State of the Meeting Report. Ellie's approach to living creatively and joyfully despite her illness was an inspiration. Just four months before her death, she was able to enjoy her granddaughter Dylan's wedding to John Michael, and in May delight in a visit to Cancún with her daughters, Carolyn and Megan.

In "The Art of Eloise Piper," Ellie talks about a series of paintings she created about loss, documenting the stages of grief through window imagery. "Window is transition ... Window is something that you can go through ... Window cuts you off ... Window is something that brings something in or takes something away ... We can't change our losses. We've all had them. You have to, if not embrace them, at least accept them and not be devastated by them because life has to go on."

Ellie leaves behind her daughter Carolyn, son-in-law Dan, and their children, Dylan and Hannah, and grandson-in-law, John; her daughter Megan, son-in-law Joe, and their children, Addie, Sam, and Max; her sister Joyce Elizabeth and her children, Jennifer, Allison, and James David; brother Jay and sister-in-law April; many nieces, nephews, and cousins; untold numbers of people who have examples of her art in their homes; and friends in many parts of the country. Her smile, her generosity of spirit, her courage, and her warmth will be long remembered.

You can view some of Ellie's painting and batiks at:
www.eloisepiper.com or at [Facebook.com/ArtbyEloisePiper/](https://www.facebook.com/ArtbyEloisePiper/).

You can view a video on The Art of Eloise Piper on youtube at
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ponS6Yk19Rs>

Or watch her lecture on Batik at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HB_05Y8bZo4

[Minute prepared by Northside Friends Meeting, Chicago, Illinois]