

Rosemary Matson — A Woman Without Fear

Rosemary Matson passed away peacefully on September 27, 2014 at her long-time home in Carmel Valley, California. Born on September 20, 1917 as Rosemary Ann Thompson at her family farm in Geneva, Iowa, she was 97 years old. She modeled living by a set of values that included: insisting on equal opportunity and an institutional voice for women; putting a face on the enemy; demonstrating world peace is possible; and standing with workers demanding fair treatment by employers. And, she deeply loved cats, having many close furry friends during her long life.



Rosemary at her 90th Birthday Party, September, 2007 at the UU Church of the Monterey Peninsula, California

Rosemary adored grassroots organizing. Over many years she was active in every facet of the Unitarian Universalist denominational Women & Religion activities, from advocating for passage of the 1977 *Women and Religion Resolution* at General Assembly (she was appointed co-chair of the Continental Committee on Women and Religion) to the 2001 formation of the UUA Women and Religion affiliate. During this period the activities to rid the denomination of sexist practices were vibrant, including: revisioning theology (theology), correcting sexist language in hymns and readings, and exposing and transforming sexist attitudes regarding leadership capabilities.

Rosemary was in the thick of it.

Traveling with a purpose, she attended United Nations International Women's Conferences in Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985) as well as conducted educational forums following the Beijing Conference (1995). She co-founded *Continuing the Peace Dialogue* in 1980; and over the next dozen years organized twenty-five citizen diplomacy trips to the Soviet Union focused on women and world peace.

Rosemary co-authored in 2004 the curriculum *Unraveling the Gender Knot: Challenging the System that Binds Us*. Based on Allan Johnson's book, it does a great job of describing patriarchy and the hold it has on our society. Along with collecting her extensive library of anti-patriarchy books, Rosemary encouraged the study of feminism, seeing history and philosophy as crucial to achieving gender equality. She maintained comprehensive archives of the Women and Religion Movement which have been accepted by the Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. In addition, Rosemary is honored in the collection *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975*.

Rosemary married Reverend Howard Matson in 1957. Among his many accomplishments, Howard was associate minister of the San Francisco Unitarian Universalist Society, and after retiring maintained a ten year voluntary ministry with farmworkers, collaborating with Cesar Chavez on many occasions. He also was a stalwart supporter of the Women and Religion movement. Partnership was the hallmark of their lives together. Howard died in 1993.

Rosemary's organizing efforts took off when she was thirty something. In the early 1950s, she co-founded the UU Honolulu Fellowship. A few years later she moved back to Northern California, and became a ministerial settlement representative for the District. From 1959-62, she lived in the Boston area and served as administrator of the Arlington Street Church and as a Board member of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee while Howard worked at the UUA Headquarters. In 1962, Rosemary began raising funds for Starr King School in Berkeley, California. In 1964 she accepted the position of Associate for Development and Communications to the President where she worked until 1978 creating publicity, raising funds and advising students. In 1980, she co-founded Women in Transition to help women strategize solutions after going through a life transition such as divorce, loss of job, or first entrance into the work force.

Promoting what she believed was the center of Rosemary's life and her dining room table. She was a great admirer of Eleanor Roosevelt, and presented programs about ER's shepherding of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to its adoption. Befriending May Sarton, she introduced her literary work to UU circles and community groups. She sponsored the Unitarian minstrel Ric Masten. Educating about Margaret Fuller, Rosemary supported books and theatrical productions about Fuller (and other feminists), as well as co-led tours in New York state and Massachusetts of important sites in Fuller's fascinating life.

Wide-ranging affiliations and numerous awards are both hallmarks of her long and active life. For many years, Rosemary was a stalwart member of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) and the National Organization for Women (NOW) — doing outreach, serving on committees and creating programming. As a humanist minister Rosemary performed weddings and memorial services using non-sexist practices and non-theistic inspirational statements. Some of her many awards for decades of leadership in peace and social justice movements on behalf of women, farmworkers, civil and human rights for all, and U.S.–Soviet relations include:

- 1984 ACLU Ralph B. Atkinson Civil Liberties Award
- 1985 Baha'i Human Rights Award for Human Rights
- 1986 UUA Holmes Weatherly Award for Social Justice
- 1988 Outstanding Woman of the Year, Monterey County Commission on Women
- 1995 Humanist Heroine Award
- 1998 UUWF Ministry to Women Award as implementor of the 1977 UUA Women and Religion Resolution (with Lucile Longview, initiator of the Resolution)
- 2000 United Nations Assoc of Monterey Bay Pearl Ross Feminist Activist Award
- 2010 The UU Peace Fellowship Adin Ballou Award (with Howard Matson)
- 2011 Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters, Starr King School for the Ministry

Her personal achievements during her elder years involved overcoming breast cancer and accompanying Howard on his end-of-life-journey. She became a mentor for many people from the diverse, yet interrelated, strands of her life. Rosemary was an “outrageous older woman” who was often heard to say, “We do not want a piece of the pie. It is still a patriarchal pie. We want to change the recipe.”

Liz and Bob Fisher, erfisher@lmi.net, longtime friends and colleagues of Rosemary Matson, and archivists for the W&R Movement, created this testament to the productive life Rosemary lived.