

VERA MAE DUERKSEN
March 15, 1933 - December 28, 1993

Vera Mae Duerksen is remembered by many Friends as our folk dance leader who managed to get everyone out on the floor no matter how inexperienced, young or old. Although she was expert herself, she accepted everyone in a non-judgmental way, not only in dance but also in other ways. Her simple, quiet ways covered a very complex person with many skills and talents.

Vera Mae became a member of Friends Meeting of Washington in 1962. Although she was a native of Washington, D.C., she had been in nurses' training at Mennonite Bethel College and Bethel Deaconess Hospital in Kansas. It was in peace meetings there that she first met Quakers and became interested in Friends' ways. Vera Mae had long been involved with Fellowship House in Washington, D.C. and in time became more active in peace demonstrations. This surprised colleagues at Group Health Association, where she worked as a nurse, who thought of her as non-confrontational, gentle and quiet.

Her service to the Meeting was primarily with First Day School and in building community through folk dancing. She is remembered as an effective teacher, providing active learning for children through music, dance and art. She developed curriculum with folk music to illuminate both adult and children's versions of the Queries. She found songs which addressed Quaker testimonies. She also found music and Queries to accompany the words and pictures from Prayers From an Island by Richard Wong. She prepared a set of tapes demonstrating "Musical Instruments Around the World" just as she found folk dances from countries around the world. All of these were accompanied by descriptive papers and bibliographies in a very scholarly fashion.

Vera Mae was not able to attend Friends Meeting very often the last few years because of her illness, but her sister brought her to Meeting just two weeks before her death on December 28, 1993.