

ELEANOR TRUITT WEEKES
(1920-2018)

Eleanor Weekes, a resident of Vinson Hall Retirement Community in McLean, VA, died peacefully in Washington, DC on November 24, 2018. She was 98 years old.

Her life was one of travel and adventure, teaching and service, and her extended family. She was a spirited woman of words, who was not shy about sharing her experiences and was known to her students, friends and family for her ability to tell a good story.

Her stories began with her birth on November 11, 1920, in the former house of Napoleon's sister at Cape Haitien, Haiti, where her father was serving as a chaplain with the Marines during the U.S. occupation of Haiti. Her parents were Rev. Razzie Washington Truitt and Nannie Potts Truitt, who were from Virginia and Maryland and of whom she was the eldest of three children. Throughout her childhood the Navy moved her family many times, up and down the East coast, from South Caroline to Maine, and at several locations along the California coast.

Her introduction to the school world, which would later become her professional environment, was itself an adventure. On her first day of kindergarten she came home saying "School is better than a party!" As she later observed, "That has always been true for me – people and books coming together." The following year she attended first grade in three different locations.

In 1930-1932, the Marines sent her family to Shanghai, China. While there, she broke her leg while playing with friends, and spent three months in a hospital with her leg in traction. The Marines looked after her in combat attire and brought her American junk food. Soon, the Japanese invaded and bombed the hospital. Glass shattered all around her, but she was untouched. The Truitt home became a refuge for American and Chinese families.

Back in the U.S., having completed a circumnavigation of the globe through the Suez Canal and with stops in Europe, she lived in Philadelphia, Norfolk and then Coronado, CA. She graduated from Point Loma High School in San Diego and then headed east to Randolph-Macon Women's College in Virginia. Graduating in 1942, she returned to California to live near her family and to serve as a librarian at the San Diego Naval Air Station for the duration of World War II.

As the war drew to a close, she married Dr. Don J. Weekes, a Navy flight surgeon, in Honolulu. First, they lived at the Marine Corps Air Station in Ewa, Hawaii; life was good in Hawaii until one day when their house burned down in eight minutes. Shortly afterwards, they moved to Baltimore while he did his residency at Johns Hopkins Hospital and then to Newton, MA in 1950 when he got a job at Peter Bent Brigham Hospital.

While caring for two daughters, Mrs. Weekes earned her master's degree in reading from Boston University before beginning her teaching career in Newton. In 1960 she moved with her daughters to Needham, where she joined the Needham schools in 1963 and taught English until she retired in 1990. She first taught at Weeks JHS and then at Pollard JHS and Needham HS. She chaired the English Departments at Pollard and Needham for many years. As she described it, it

was a “labor of love and pleasure.” She enjoyed her students both while they were in school and for many years afterwards when she saw them around town and in many places around the country.

Retired but still wanting to be of service, she headed to Izmir, Turkey, where she taught English at the American Collegiate Institute for three years. When she returned to Needham, she volunteered at the Needham Public Library, the Needham HS Library, proctored College Board exams, tutored at the Needham Community Center, led and participated in numerous book groups (at one point she was part of eight groups) and volunteered at the polls. She was an active member of the Needham Congregational Church and then First Parish, Unitarian Universalist. She travelled to visit her daughters and grandchildren in Washington and Italy and with family members to the Maritime Provinces, the Pacific Northwest and every summer to the beach in Chincoteague, VA.

Reflecting on her life at age 85 for an interviewer from First Parish, she observed that “All in all, the journey has been better than a birthday party. And it is not over yet!”

In 2010 she turned 90. First Parish awarded her a “Doctor of Durability.” After two weeks of celebrations, she decided she would like to live closer to her daughter and several of her grandchildren in Washington, DC, and so the following year she moved to Vinson Hall Retirement Community in McLean, VA. Once again, she dove right in and soon was leading the Vinson Hall book group, serving on several committees, and attending the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, VA. She was thrilled, and her friends were impressed when a still handsome former wartime beau, who had been a Navy aviator and a reader at the San Diego Naval Air Station library, sought her out after more than 70 years. Now a widower, he flew from Chicago to visit her at Vinson Hall.

Soon after moving she became a great grandmother and it was her great pleasure to participate in regular gatherings of four generations. She continued going to the beach with all the younger generations, including this past summer. She was hospitalized later in the summer and again in the autumn after two falls. When she broke the same leg that she had in Shanghai she told her doctors and nurses about that experience. Fortunately, orthopedics had advanced 85 years. This time her hospital stay was peaceful, and she was attended by platoons of family who occasionally brought her American junk food. Four generations kept gathering in the hospital as she weakened with cardiovascular disease, celebrating her 98th birthday and recounting stories and reading to her even on the day she died.

Mrs. Weekes is survived by two daughters, Margaret Weekes of Washington, DC, and Julia Weekes of Penzance, England, plus a son-in-law, eight grandchildren, four grandchildren-in-law and four great grandchildren. A memorial service will be held at Vinson Hall Retirement Community on January 5 at 2:00 PM. Memorial gifts may be made to any social justice organization or educational institution. Her specific interests included Partners in Health, Rosie’s Place and the Arbor Day Foundation.