

Barbara Worl

February 27, 1927 – September 12, 2017

Barbara Worl, eminent California gardener and rosarian, died peacefully after a brief illness on September 12, 2017, at her home in Menlo Park, California. She was 90 years of age.

The youngest child of Russell and Hazel Worl, Barbara was born in Cambridge City, Indiana, on February 27, 1927, and educated at Westtown, a Quaker school in Pennsylvania where her brothers John and James had gone before her. In 1945 she came to California to study at Stanford University, graduating Phi Beta Kappa in 1950 with a degree in English history and a minor in English literature.

That same year she began a 55-year career at Bell's Books, an independent bookstore in Palo Alto founded by Herbert Bell in 1935, and carried on by his wife Valeria and now their daughter Faith. There Barbara built up a superb horticultural section, perhaps the best on the West Coast. Her deep knowledge of, and enthusiasm for, literature, horticulture, and children's books became indispensable to hundreds of customers and her grateful colleagues.

Barbara was also a photographer, professional seamstress, Sunday school teacher, and master of ecclesiastical embroidery and flower arranging. Loving flowers from childhood, she became a remarkable gardener, although her Pennsylvania Dutch ancestors for generations were farmers. One of the enchanting gardens she created was on a 2-acre piece of land lent to her on Cowper Street in Palo Alto, where she began a tradition of Open Garden Days. The other surrounded the home she bought in Menlo Park in 1954. It was so magical that British nurseryman Peter Beales featured it in his 1996 book *Visions of Roses*.

Barbara welcomed people and animals to her garden, and worked with joy in it until a month before she died. The former English major delighted in growing the ornamental plants of which the poets spoke. She began giving slide talks on gardens and old-fashioned

roses, became a regular speaker on them at The Huntington, and was among the first to import historic old roses from France. Founding Sweetbrier Press in 1979, she published a line of handmade cards and calendars featuring her own photos. Her facsimile edition of Henry Curtis's *Beauties of the Rose* won high praise from Graham Stuart Thomas, then the head of Great Britain's National Trust. In the 1970s Barbara helped found the Heritage Roses Group Bay Area and remained its staunch supporter to the end of her life. In 2007 she was honored by the Heritage Rose Foundation and also received the Founders Award from the Western Horticultural Society.

Known for her warm and gentle Quaker ways, Barbara made friends wherever she went. One of the greatest of those friendships began during the 1960s when a young East Palo Alto civil rights activist wandered into Bell's to buy a book and argue with Barbara. "It was a few years," she later wrote, "before I realized that Israel Washington Harris and I were to be partners for life." The two were to "remain loyal and true friends and lovers" for 38 years until the WWII Purple Heart veteran's death in 2006.

In a 2009 letter to her Westtown classmates, Barbara wrote of the cultural shock she experienced on coming to California in 1945 "from a serene, honorable, intelligent, simple Quaker environment." She went on to say, however, that she "came very quickly to feel at home here and to do my bit to build peace between the differences...I look back on my life with joy and wish the same to all of you."

Barbara is survived by the children of Israel Harris and by her Indiana family: sister-in-law, Mary Worl; nieces Laura, Sally, Alison, and Diane; and her nephew, John. She was a beloved godmother and a loyal friend to countless others. A memorial will be held on March 4, 2018, at 2:00 p.m. at Christ Church in Portola Valley. Please come and share stories of Barbara.

