

## **Christine Johnson Ricks**

August 17, 1924-August 1, 2025

A Thanksgiving Memorial

(Born in Roanoke Rapids, NC. Died in Fort Mill, SC. Lived most of her life in Southampton County, Virginia. In 2001, she and her husband moved to Charlotte, NC to be near their son and daughter. In her last years she lived with her daughter, Ann (Vivian) in Ft. Mill.)

Ten years ago, when Martha Blythe died at age ninety-six, turning over to Christine the distinction of being the oldest member of Bethel Friends Meeting, Christine said, "We think there is another rose in the garden." And, now, our lovely Christine, having lived within two weeks of being 101, has passed that honor to another and the words she said of her old Friend certainly apply to her as well: "We think there is another rose in the garden."

A native Tar Heel, she was born to James Frank Johnson and Olia Winton Blythe Johnson in 1924. She buried her beloved husband, Link, and also lived through the loss of her son, Lynn, who preceded her in death by three years to the day. Ann said that Lynn came calling for her. Christine loved her family, speaking often and fondly not only of those whom she had buried but also of those who still lived, loved and cared for her, Ann and Vivian, and her grand-dog, Bogie, who returned her unconditional love and gave her much pleasure. She also cherished her calls from her niece, Loretta, who remained a faithful and loving niece until the end.

Christine always looked like she had just stepped out of a bandbox, but that was not only a reflection of the precise way she dressed and kept her hair; it also had to do with her countenance. More than one person has remarked at how happy and pleasant she was. We always felt that she lit up a room; even over the telephone we could feel her encouraging presence. Alice White Burgess put it best in traditional Quaker terms: "Her Inner Light shone brightly."

Alice also mentioned what an encouraging person Christine was; having macular degeneration herself, she could empathize with others who had eye trouble, including Alice and my own mother, about whom she never failed to ask. In earlier years, Christine was good to visit people, sometimes bringing a small gift, such as a woven placemat. She was a cheerful presence no matter whether in one's home or when working with others at Bethel, preparing suppers for the Ruritan Club. Her cooking was legendary.

Nancy Joyner Snidow called her a special friend to her parents and to Nancy herself, as Christine would call several times a week to see if she was OK during the time of Vince's illness and after his death. During those calls, she was not only supportive but also informative about days gone by. Nancy called her a "Family Encyclopedia," as she filled in the gaps of knowledge which would otherwise have been lost.

At Bethel, Christine served as Elder of the Meeting, Treasurer of the Friendly Guild, and Sunday School teacher to children. She never forgot her Bethel Friends and asked me frequently about what we were doing. When she was a mere ninety-seven, she still cherished memories of her pupils in Sunday School and even told me then that she remembered Donnie Joyner giving her a boxed set of handkerchiefs one year at Christmas. She still had them nine decades later.

More than once, Christine quoted to me the old Quaker belief *That of God in every man*. Of course, if George Fox had been writing that today, he would certainly have used inclusive language and Christine, as well, understood that concept to include men, women, and children. Even so, she didn't believe that our possessing the Seed of Christ meant any of us was perfect. She didn't believe it of herself, knowing that she, like all of us, was a sinner saved by grace. And she also didn't suppose that being famous and powerful meant one was exempted from the failings of other mortals. Even as she approached her 101<sup>st</sup> year, and was a bit fuzzy about the month and day of the week, she would still make an incisive comment about politicians and their usefulness or uselessness.

We celebrate Christine's life today in a small way, but Ann saw to it that her 100<sup>th</sup> birthday was recognized in a grand party that Christine so appreciated. She was cared for by her family and we, her friends, owe them special thanks for taking such good care of her. And now we commend her to that house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Ann honored her with the words of William Penn, as do we: "Life is eternal and love is immortal, and death is only a horizon, and a horizon is nothing more than the limit of our sight." Thanks be to God for his inexpressible gift.

Wayne T Blythe, Clerk of Bethel Friends Meeting, Franklin, Virginia