

**DONNAMARIE WEST MEMORIAL SERVICE**  
**January 10, 2016 10:00 AM**

**I. THE PEACE GARDEN**

1. The Gathering with Singing
2. Poem: *When Great Trees Fall*
3. Reading of the Obituary
4. The Scattering of Ashes

**II. THE REMEMBERING THROUGH STORYTELLING**

at Casa de La Cancion de la Mar

1. Readings from What More Could We Ask For
2. Storytelling from family and friends,  
giving praise for Donnamarie's life
3. Ritual of gratitude and thanksgiving

**III. THE MEXICAN PICNIC**

at Casa de La Feliz

1. Feasting
2. Chatting
3. Group photo

## When Great Trees Fall

Maya Angelo

When great trees fall,  
rocks on distant hills shudder,  
lions hunker down  
in tall grasses,  
and even elephants  
lumber after safety.

When great trees fall  
in forests,  
small things recoil into silence,  
their senses  
eroded beyond fear.

When great souls die,  
the air around us becomes  
light, rare, sterile.  
We breathe, briefly.  
Our eyes, briefly,  
see with  
a hurtful clarity.  
Our memory, suddenly  
sharpened,  
examines,  
gnaws on kind words  
unsaid,  
promised walks  
never taken.

Great souls die and  
our reality, bound to  
them, takes leave of us.  
Our souls,  
dependent upon their  
nurture,  
now shrink, wizened.  
Our minds, formed  
and informed by their  
radiance,  
fall away.

And when great souls die,  
after a period peace blooms,  
slowly and always  
irregularly. Spaces fill  
with a kind of  
soothing electric vibration.  
Our senses, restored, never  
to be the same, whisper to us.  
They existed. They existed.  
We can be.  
Be and be  
better.  
For they existed.

## ***The Completed Life of Donnamarie West***

Let there be bells ringing around the earth to celebrate the life force of Donnamarie Walker Wheeler West, who has passed on to a world of pure and eternal spirit.

She was born into this world the 19<sup>th</sup> of January, 1933, in Newton, Iowa, the daughter of Marie Hubbard and Donald Irvine Walker. She completed her life the 15<sup>th</sup> of May, 2015, in Puerto Vallarta, Mexico, accompanied by her husband, granddaughter and caregiver.

Donnamarie grew up in Iowa, Indiana, and Illinois. She graduated from Evanston High School and attended Park College near Kansas City, Missouri, excelling in theatre. She earned her license as a practical nurse and worked in labor and delivery at Evanston Hospital, then later in the office of Drs. Blackwell, Loeff, and Cass. She worked for a time as a fashion model.

For several years she focused on making a home for her family in Evanston. She was wife to Robert C. Wheeler and mother to son Donald and daughter Margaret. During this period she was also active in community service and instrumental in the development of the Child Care Center of Evanston where she volunteered. When asked by one child, "which is your daughter?" she replied, "the one with the pigtails," - Meg was the only white child present. She was politically active in the community marches for open housing with her young son, Don.

Donnamarie sang in the popular Folk Chorale, and took part in ballet lessons with her daughter, Meg. The family delighted in roughing it for camping trips, which perhaps prepared her for the austere conditions of living and working in village-community development. She explored New Orleans, Peru, Russia, Estonia, Costa Rica, and Machu Picchu.

At mid-life, following ten years as a single mother and six years as a real estate agent in Evanston, supporting herself and her children, Donnamarie expanded her commitment to service and joined the Institute of Cultural Affairs, devoting herself to others in Guatemala, Peru, India, Mexico and the USA. After six years in Guatemala community development, she wrote a book titled *Between Two Worlds*. Donnamarie met her second husband there, and they formed a lifelong partnership. In Peru, she designed and implemented a program called "Space Between" for citizens of other nations to visit and experience an in-depth encounter of Peruvians and their culture. In India, she was part of the team to set up an International Exposition of Rural Development in collaboration with the UN, which brought together local people working in community development from sixty nations. In Mexico, she was part of the team that managed the international conference of ICA in Qaxtepec. In the USA, she set up and managed ICA's conference center in Chicago.

Donnamarie maintained close ties with family and friends. She was a mother, a grandmother, a missional colleague, a wife, a friend to many, a vivid writer, an entertainer, a singer, a spirit guru, and an elegant lady. She bore the reputation of being generous, positive, quick with a smile, a laugh, and a song. She has now come full circle and will be deeply missed but never forgotten.

## **STORYTELLING: FROM WHAT MORE COULD WE ASK FOR?**

One of Donnamarie's greatest gifts was her gift of storytelling. And now you and I are going to turn the tables and be the storytellers of her life - giving praise for the great woman that she was. Here are three stories of Donnamarie's years in Guatemala that she shared in this book - to occasion her spirit filling this room by hearing her own words - and then have you share stories about what you are grateful for about her life.

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1. In 1979 Donnamarie attended a 2-week community consult in Conacaste, Guatemala, a small village of 800 souls. It changed her life. She was never the same. She went back to Evanston to rent her home and pack her bags to move to the village. She moved there because of this dream she writes about:

*"... We had a dream of training people to train people to train more people - to create demonstrations of possibilities - to change lives so those lives could create a better future for the world."*

Living in and loving Latin America turned out to be a decision Donnamarie made for the next 35+ years - that turned out to be the rest of her life - moving from Guatemala and then to Peru and finally to Mexico.

2. This story is about Donnamarie's fundraising skills. She tells the story this way:

*"My roommate and I were assigned to be in Guatemala City to search for funds and materials three or four times a week. This entailed getting up at 4:30 AM in the dark, fumbling around for our clothes and makeup, grabbing a cup of coffee, and walking or riding 3 km to the highway to get the bus.*

*Starting out in fine shape was no guarantee we would arrive that way! Some of the buses were very dirty so sometimes we would wear our clothes inside out and go into a restaurant to turn them around after we got to the city.*

*Sometimes we had minor accidents when we rode to the highway on the back of a staff members motorcycle. One day the driver came too close to some shrubs and one leg of my panty hose was torn to shreds. I had to appear at an 8:00 AM appointment "as is" since there was no place open to buy a replacement. So I went to the office of a corporate president whose hoped-for contribution was critical to the project looking like I have been attacked by a wildcat.*

*I apologized and explained my appearance as briefly as possible. There was a moment of silence. And then the president leaned across his desk and said,*

*"You came by motorcycle - and bus - from a village?"*

*He was so thunderstruck by the degree of our commitment that he offered to give us money before we asked for it!"*

Doesn't that sound like Donnamarie? Having the commitment to live like others in a village

with enthusiasm and vitality? Having the humility and courage to meet an executive "as is".

3. The third story is about balancing village work with getting ready for her wedding to George.

*A group of lowans had committed to "bring all the transformers, pumps, and pipes) necessary to construct water stations throughout the village of Conacaste. I had returned to the ICA in Chicago to take eight weeks of Academy courses and just incidentally also prepare for my wedding to George.*

*It was assumed that I would help the lowans if they ran into any snags. The Saturday before flying to Guatemala the lowans realized there was no way to pay for the transport of materials they were taking. ... I was told, "Donnamarie we are counting on you to convince Eastern Airlines to take all this for free! We know you can do it!" It was great that they knew I could do it because I sure did not. To make matters worse I realized that the Thanksgiving holiday meant I had little time to find anyone at Eastern.*

*I tried to sit on my hysteria. I didn't know a soul at Eastern at any level. ... To add to my glum various people assured me that the airlines never did anything like that, never made any exceptions, never did any special favors.*

*I called the Eastern reservation desk, asking to talk to someone at Eastern with clout. The reservation clerk read from a handbook the names of executives and selected a name, determined if he wasn't the right person to do the job I could convince him to lead me to the right one.*

*Later meeting the executive I had chosen, Toby Jones, I found he was a quick study and grasped the implications right away. He gasped and began to think it through out loud, "This is just impossible; but we must find a way to do it." After he phoned people in Chicago and Miami, he said, "Okay here's what we do. Everything must go with the people as luggage."*

(DM goes on to describe what it took to make that happen.) She ends saying:

*"And joy of joys there was a ticket for me to Guatemala; but I was not to let George know in advance. When I walked into the customs area, the lowans were are all standing in a semi-circle around George, watching his face. I got about four feet from him before he saw me; then what a smile! We put on a bit of a show for our audience!" (p. 167+)*

On hearing this story, it is a wonder that Donnamarie and George ever had time to get married!?! But they did and came to live in Litibu. What passion, what tenacity, what creative decision making - all qualities Donnamarie embodied in her life - unwilling to take no for an answer and making the impossible possible - as she did 25 years ago standing on Litibu Playa and looking east amidst the boulders and brush that hid the potential. We are grateful today for Donnamarie's vision and actions that helped shape who we are today.

## **GRATITUDE FOR DONNAMARIE WEST**

(After each line, the community responds, "We are grateful")

- For the wonder of Donnamarie West
  - For helping our hearts grow
    - For her nourishing joy
  - For her appreciation and attention to beauty and details
- For the sadness we feel that tells us something wonderful is over
  - For the life force and spirit that continues in us
  - For her deep care and compassion for others
- For demonstrating how to enjoy the pleasures of life and living
- For writing a book that enabled our parents and future generations to understand and appreciate our life's work
  - For helping to find and create the Litibu Ecovillage
  - For raising us up at times so we could see more clearly

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Close with the song "You Raise Me Up" by Josh Groban

