

Marjory Melinda Byler

September 6, 1947 - November 1, 2024



Marj became a member of Strawberry Creek Friends Meeting at the same time as her husband David Rutschman.



Marjory Melinda Byler died peacefully at her home in Vallejo, California, on Nov. 1, 2024, at the age of 77, after living with pancreatic cancer for over two years.

Marj was born in Carlos Casares, Argentina, in 1947, the second child of North American Mennonite missionaries Frank Byler and Anna Hallman. After some time living in the towns of Bragado and Trenque Lauquen, the Byler family moved in 1962 from Argentina to Montevideo, Uruguay to be part of the Mennonite Theological Seminary community. Marj attended university in the United States, graduating from Goshen College in 1969.

In 1971, she married her husband, David Rutschman, also a child of Mennonite missionaries, in Montevideo, where they lived together and gave birth to their eldest son in 1974.



Marj and David were active in the underground opposition to the military dictatorship ruling Uruguay at the time, and in 1975 felt the need to self-exile with a wave of other Uruguayans who were fleeing to Argentina.

Their son Mark was born in Argentina in 1976. In 1979, at the height of the Dirty War, they left Argentina with their two young sons. Marj's formative years living under U.S.-sponsored repressive regimes in Uruguay and Argentina, alongside friends and neighbors who would be imprisoned and tortured, were a source of her heartfelt and lifelong passion for the work of defending human rights.



Marj eventually settled with David and their sons in Albuquerque, New Mexico, where they found and built deep community as members of the Albuquerque Friends Meeting. In Albuquerque, Marj obtained an MA in Adult Teacher Education from the University of New Mexico.. She taught English as a Second Language and developed and managed bilingual programs in the Albuquerque Public Schools.

During these years, Marj began to volunteer with Amnesty International, work that eventually blossomed into a decades-long professional career in human rights.

This work led her and David to move in 1988 to Chicago, Illinois, where she served as Director of the Midwest Region of AIUSA and forged many deep and lasting friendships.

After more than a decade with AIUSA, she partially relocated in 2002 to split time between Chicago and London so that she could serve as the Senior Director for International Mobilization at Amnesty's International Secretariat. Over the course of her work with Amnesty, Marj visited dozens of countries, inspiring countless people and mentoring activists throughout the world.

Retiring after over twenty years with Amnesty, Marj moved with David to Vallejo, California, to be nearer to her sons' growing families and her four beloved grandchildren. During that time she took up occasional consulting work and continued her activism by volunteering with organizations like the American Friends Service Committee as a member of the Board.



Marj was a tireless activist, a passionate mentor, a charismatic and engaging speaker and writer, a loyal friend, a lover of mystery novels, black tea, and asado, and a loving, warm and sensible presence in every room she entered. She was tidy and smart. She listened deeply. She delighted in flowers. She was a devoted wife, mother, and grandmother. Her love for the world was fierce and clear, and lives on as an example to those she leaves behind.

She is survived by her husband David Rutschman, her sons, daughters-in-law, four grandchildren, and four dear siblings.

