

Memorial Minute

William Sims, born 9/6/1933, died 6/26/2015

Poplar Ridge Friends Meeting, Poplar Ridge, NY



Bill led a rich and fruitful life in spite of his long confinement in maximum security prisons. His acceptance, and welcome into membership by Poplar Ridge Meeting was a special source of joy: for Bill, for Poplar Ridge Friends Meeting and for Friends everywhere.

On the day he died he had served 43 years of a life sentence in maximum security prisons in New York State.

It is unusual to provide a memorial minute for a prisoner, and it is unusual for a prisoner to be a full member of a Friends Meeting. He was a special man.

Life in a maximum security prison is very restricted. You do not get to do what you would like to do, to go where you would like to go, or to see people you would like to see. This is true, every hour of every single day and in Bill's case for 43 years.

Bill attended Friends Meeting for Worship for the first time in 1975 inside Auburn Prison. This meeting was the first-ever Friends Meeting for worship held in any New York State Prison. He became a faithful attender and supporter of the Friends worship group in Auburn Prison, and served as clerk for many years. In 1978, the group became the Auburn Prison Preparative Meeting through acceptance by the Farmington-Scipio Regional Meeting.

In the years that followed Bill developed close friendships with many outside Friends in the region.

He liked to send artistic handmade greeting cards to his friends. However, he was always careful not to write on the card, so the friend could use it as new. You would find his friendly message on a separate insert with the card.

Bill attended the second-ever Alternatives to Violence Workshop in a New York State prison at Auburn in 1978. In subsequent years he facilitated workshops, and provided the communication and trust-building essential to the program's success. Prison administrators and guards, prisoners, and Quaker/AVP volunteers, all trusted Bill.

Bill was a pioneer. There are active AVP programs in 18 New York State prisons today. There are Quaker worship groups in 11 New York State prisons today

In prison he completed college, obtaining a Syracuse University degree. He completed a Master's degree from the University of Buffalo. He developed remarkable artistic skill. He met, courted and married Dorothy Gowin, a member of Syracuse Friends Meeting.

He was in prison, maximum security prison. He had no power, no resources, limited contacts and telephone calls.

He did have the resources of a thoroughly good man, and it was enough.

He had the power suggested by the Quaker quote, "Let us see what Love can do".