



Esther Oswalt

June 29, 1922 - April 26, 2020

Esther Oswalt, née Esther Mary Smith, born June 29, 1922 in Cincinnati, Ohio, passed away on April 26, 2020.

Esther enjoyed writing poetry and playing basketball in her youth. Thinking it would be the best path to helping society, she majored in Sociology at the University of Cincinnati and came to Berkeley for a Masters in Economics. She met her husband Robert while both were living at the International House in Berkeley. She worked for The Heller Committee for Research in Economics and organized programs at the YWCA before leaving to devote herself to family life.

She was active in the Kensington PTA, including work with the Carnival and hot dog days, and a long time member of the Unitarian Church and the AAUW.

Amid racial strife in the summer of 1969, she organized KPEG, a day camp for the primarily white graduating sixth graders of Kensington Hilltop, and the primarily black students of Pullman Elementary (now King) who would be mixed together in Middle School the following year. Near the bottom of Rifle Range Road in what is now Wildcat Canyon Park, the kids got to know each other in activities including music, nature walks, and native culture. Esther considered this her greatest achievement.

Once her younger child was a teenager, she felt she could return to her efforts to help the world at large, and became a high school teacher for 14 years, primarily teaching math at Pinole Valley High School. Upon her retirement she became a docent at the U.C. Botanical Gardens, leading school groups through the wonders of its flora.

She was a pioneer of Kensington's unique neighborhood on Purdue Avenue, and helped finish the house, built in 1954. Up until the end of her time

there in 2008, she slept on a back porch to be close to the owls and all of nature. She spent her final years at Piedmont Gardens in Oakland.

She is survived by sons John of Sebastopol and Edward of Kensington, granddaughter Ariel who is attending the University of Washington, and more distant relatives in Cincinnati. She was predeceased by her husband Robert in 2007.