

In Memoriam ~ MELBA (Micki) LENE SMITH

Melba had a keen interest in people and their communities. She got to know us on airplane flights, on dirt roads, at the United Nations, in our churches, in nursing homes, at lectures, at parties, at farmers' markets, in our countries, in our kitchens, at schools, at universities, at cemeteries, just everywhere. And, we are children, youth, adults and the elderly of every walk of life and culture that she encountered.

Melba Lene Smith was born in Kansas City, Missouri on January 15, 1945 to Minerva Rachel Hoover (Morgan) and Edgar Smith and moved home to Fayetteville, Arkansas with her mother very soon afterward. She attended Lincoln School through the ninth grade in segregated conditions of the time, and then received her diploma from Fayetteville High School before entering Arkansas AM&N College (University of Arkansas, Pine Bluff) where she graduated in 1967. Her Aunt Theresa Hoover encouraged her to come to New York City where Melba found her professional calling as a fierce humanitarian and advocate for justice around the world. Melba was based at the United Methodist Office for the United Nations for 35 years as liaison with African delegations and United Nations staff. In 1985 Melba traveled to Nairobi, Kenya as a delegate to the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace. In 1994 she went to Cairo, Egypt as a delegate to the Preparatory Committee for the International Conference on Population and Development; in 1995 to Beijing, China for the Fourth World Conference on Women; in 2000 to Winnipeg, Canada for the International Conference on War Affected Children; in 2001 to Durban, South Africa as delegate to the World Conference against Racism and in 2002, at home in New York City as the delegate to the United Nations Special Session on Children.

Melba also served as Seminar Designer for the Women's Division of the United Methodist Church and Resource Coordinator for Southern Africa for United Methodist Women at the United Nations. Her work for human rights encompassed deep understanding of the political spectrum at home and across the world, placing her in the sphere of world leaders and great thinkers from President Nelson Mandela and President Bill Clinton to the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. Following retirement, Melba continued to advocate for human rights, especially for women and children. She was a founding member of the United Nations African Mothers Association, which raises support for women and children in Africa, the Campaign for U.S. Ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Northwest Arkansas African American Heritage Association, which documents and preserves African American history as American history for current and future generations.

Melba will also be missed by the close, dedicated family she created for herself throughout her life, beginning as a little girl on South Willow street in Fayetteville to the world traveler who lived her last days in her apartment overlooking the Hudson River in Harlem, New York. A memorial service was held at Sequoyah United Methodist Church in Fayetteville on Thursday, April 3, 2014.

Donations may be made in Melba's memory to NWA African American Heritage Assn, [a 501(c) 3 tax-exempt org.] c/o Arkansas Archeological Survey, 2475 N Hatch Ave, Fayetteville, AR 72704 or the United Nations African Mothers Association, 777 UN Plaza, New York, NY 10017