

## Velda Brotherton



**Velda Brotherton**

On March 9, 2023, Velda Brotherton left this earth and entered a new adventure. She was a storyteller, historian, and mentor to hundreds of writers.

In 1936, Velda Goodgion was born in a log cabin in the Ozark Mountains. Velda once said her father was a storyteller who started her journey into the world of story. Her passion was historical writing, both nonfiction, and fiction. However, while these stories took root in her mind and soul, it wasn't until she turned fifty that they were given life on paper. Before then she expressed her creativity in painting and music. Along with her husband, Don Brotherton whom she married when she was seventeen, she raised two children, she gardened, canned her produce, milked cows, and made cheese and butter, like the women before her. All the while, her appreciation, curiosity, and desire for preserving history grew within her. Someone had to write them down, stories that needed to be told.

When Velda turned fifty, she began writing in earnest. Her first six books were western historicals, which she had to make into romances at the request of her publisher. Then she turned to writing regional nonfiction and worked as a feature writer for a small rural newspaper. This led her on great adventures in the Boston Mountains chasing stories, and interviewing long-time locals, no matter how rough the road or bad the weather. Velda was relentless and fearless when chasing a story, much to her husband's chagrin. Her drive came from her strong belief generational stories must be recorded and passed on before they were lost. She wanted them to be woven in time. Velda was a master weaver.

Writing was a way of life for her. The author of forty-three books, she won many awards. She was most proud that her book, *Fly With the Mourning Dove*, was a 2008 WILLA Literary Award Finalist (Creative Nonfiction). Velda joined Women Writing the West in January of 1995.

## Founding Member Jann Arrington-Wolcott



Jann Arrington-Wolcott

Jann Arrington-Wolcott passed away peacefully on June 2, 2023 leaving behind a legacy of love and creativity. Jann was born on November 22, 1943, in Deming, NM to Jack and Katherine Arrington and raised on a cattle ranch near Las Cruces.

As a teacher, Jann inspired countless students to follow their dreams and leave the world a better place. As a model and actress, she brought a unique blend of grace and vitality to every performance, even traveling abroad with a USO tour of *Annie Get Your Gun*, playing the part of Annie. As a spiritual seeker, she delved deep into the mysteries of the different belief systems and the universe, always seeking to understand the secrets of existence.

And as a writer, she poured her heart and soul onto the page, creating works that will continue to touch lives for generations to come. Her first novel, *Brujo, Seduced by Evil*, was even made into a movie before the book's publication.

Jann was a devoted wife to her husband, John, who is retired from a 35-year career with the Los Alamos National Laboratory. Jann was an immensely loving mother, grandmother, daughter, friend, and animal lover. She gave of herself selflessly, always ready with a kind word or a comforting embrace. Her generous heart knew no bounds, and she spread love and joy wherever she went.

Jann's life was not without hardship and heartache. She suffered the great loss of her father, Jack Arrington, her mother, Katherine Arrington, her brother, Jack E. Arrington, and her sons, Jeffery Szalay and David Szalay. Jann is survived by her devoted husband of almost 50 years, Dr. John H. Wolcott, her daughter, Janna K. (Szalay) Dame, stepchildren Anne King and Dr. Ted Wolcott. 12 beloved grandchildren, and many cherished friends, and cousins.

## Women Writing the West ~ In Memoriam 2023

### Vicky Ramakka



**Vicky Ramakka**

Valorie (Vicky) Ramakka, 74, unexpectedly passed from this life on July 22, 2023, at the University of New Mexico Hospital in Albuquerque after treatment for an aggressive brain tumor.

Born on Jan. 2, 1949, Vicky grew up on a small farm near Clayton, New York. She was the youngest daughter of Harold Bovee, a dairy farmer and carpenter, and Evelyn Constance Bovee, a primary school teacher. After graduating from Clayton High School in 1966, she graduated from Cornell University in 1970 with a BS in Conservation Education. Her marriage in 1970 to her

best friend at Cornell, Jim Ramakka, began a 53-year life adventure as they worked to balance two professional careers. Vicky completed a M.Ed. at Oklahoma State University in 1978 and earned a Doctorate in Educational Leadership from the University of Nevada at Reno in 1995.

Passionate about education, Vicky served in various capacities at San Juan College in Farmington, New Mexico. Assignments included Community Services Coordinator and Dean of the Division of Math, Science, and Health Careers. As Development Projects Coordinator, she helped expand and improve adult literacy and the GED preparation programs by initiating Project Read, the first volunteer literacy program in San Juan County. She also organized the first GED graduation ceremony. As Director of University Programs, she wrote a proposal that obtained the state's approval to implement an Alternative Teacher Licensure Program for elementary and secondary teacher licensing.

Her writing accomplishments include award-winning articles, short stories, and two mystery novels. *The Cactus Plot*, an Amazon best seller, won state awards. Her second novel, *The Pearl Plot*, was released the week of her death. Writer friends will remember Vicky for her quick wit, unique sense of humor, no-nonsense approach, and generous assistance to writers in honing their craft. Vicky joined Women Writing the West in 2014.

## Mary Peace Finley



**Mary Peace Finley and husband, Wally**

Mary Peace Finley (1938-2023) was author of several titles in the Filter Press catalog and winner of numerous literary awards, including Colorado Humanities' Colorado Book Award. Her books appeared in many lists of recommended books for children and were widely reviewed.

Best known for her Santa Fe Trail Trilogy for upper elementary and middle school students, Mary knew the Santa Fe Trail well having grown up in Fowler, Colorado. Her life began on the Plains and some of her heart remained there throughout her life. In a 2019 essay, she wrote, "The dust of Colorado prairies runs in my veins. Through words, it reshapes into a landscape of roiling black dust clouds, parched petroglyphs, pictographs, and wind-polished pottery shards, . . . Prairie dust evokes its own tight-lipped humor, its own stifled speech, its own context, content, and becomes itself a major character in my writing."

Mary was mother to three adopted children, who became her own upon her marriage to Rev. Wallace Finley in 1968. She was a full partner in Wally's varied ministries. They were married 51 years before Wally's death in 2019.

Mary enjoyed fishing in mountain streams, camping in a small RV with Wally, taking many trips to Mexico and Hawaii, wandering trails looking for minerals, and playing Native American flute, which she did beautifully without any formal instruction. She lived a life full to the brim and is sorely missed by her many friends in the book world.

She joined Women Writing the West in 1996. Mary's book, *Meadowlark*, was a 2004 WILLA Literary Award Finalist in the Children's/Young Adult category.

## Founding Member Dee Marvine



Dee Marvine

Dee Marvine died December 12, 2023, three days after her 95th birthday. She was born Helen Deloise Hall on December 9, 1928.

Dee is survived by her daughter, Jane (Jim Olin), son, Paul (Kim Larson) Marvine; six grandchildren, John (Becky) Olin, Chad Olin, Hannah (Manoli Georganas) Olin, Ian (Merissa) Larson, Ryan (Kate) Larson, and Reed Marvine (and his partner, Stefanie Kljucaric); six great grandchildren, Claire and Olivia Olin, Sophia and Elena Larson, Anthony Larson, and Leonidas Georganas; two sisters Marilyn (Bob) Burns and Lynn Hall, and eleven nieces and nephews. Preceding her in death was husband Don, infant son Greg, father Gerald Hall, mother Edna Stromquist Hall, and two brothers Roland (Rosa) Hall and Jerry (Phyllis) Hall.

Born on a farm near Tekamah, NE, Dee attended Tekamah High School for two years before moving with her family to Omaha, where she graduated from North High School in 1946. At age 18, she married her high-school sweetheart, artist Don Marvine, and they moved to Los Angeles where she worked as a secretary while he attended Art Center College to prepare for his career in graphic design. After art school, they settled in Chicago in 1952. While working with Don in his graphic design business and raising two children, she enrolled in Elmhurst College and graduated in 1968 with honors in English and psychology. Dee and Don moved to Big Timber, MT after their children were through college to devote full time to writing and painting. Dee applied her passion for music by playing keyboard and singing with the combo they organized and played locally. Their years from 2013 were spent near their extended family in Baltimore, MD.

A Founding Member of WWW, Dee was an original Board Member. *The Lady Rode Bucking Horses* received the 2006 WILLA Literary Award (Biography/Memoir).