



Evelyn (Smith) Munro

February 16, 2007

Lagniappe—a small gift of appreciation from seller to customer—is one of the traditions in New Orleans. Evelyn Munro, who died on Friday, February 16, 2007 in her Bluebird Canyon Drive home in California, loved this custom and idea. She believed that her life was an expression of lagniappe; she was a giver and a receiver. She often would remark how lucky she was. And she believed in the goodness of people. Evelyn died surrounded by her daughters, one month short of her 93rd birthday. Her bed was strewn with flowers and photographs, and the sun was shining brilliantly into her room and outside on the colorful flowers in her garden. She is survived by her three daughters, Hannah Margaret Flom, Rebecca Bradley Ferguson Munro, and Abigail Carpenter Munro-Proulx and their families. She is also survived by her 12 grandchildren and 11 great grandchildren. Her husband of 50 years, David Munro, preceded her in death. Evelyn Tottenham Smith was born in New Orleans, Louisiana, on March 15th, 1914, to Josie and Edward Smith. She grew up in the colorful, diverse milieu of the French Quarter. The French Creole influences never left her. Throughout her life, Evelyn made the most of her many talents: intelligence, creativity, courage, and a strong sense of social justice. Evelyn's jobs and experiences were diverse. As a young woman a meeting with Norman Thomas, head of America's Socialist Party and six time campaigner for president, inspired Evelyn to join the Socialist party. She took an office job with the fledgling Southern Tenant Farmers' Union, with headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee. Evelyn signed on for one month, and

stayed four years. According to the late founder of the union, H.L. Mitchell, Evelyn was more than a clerk: “Evelyn rode the back country roads with me,” Mitchell writes in his book, *Roll the Union On*, “contacting union members at night, dodging the Night Riders on the prowl.” Once Evelyn was set upon by Night Riders and threatened with lynching. She and others fled by truck to the Arkansas border and safety. Another time she and a fellow worker came across a plantation stockade where 13 union workers were being held as slaves. Evidence gained by Evelyn and her friend led to the conviction of the plantation owner on a charge of “peonage,” slavery—some 70 years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Evelyn’s adventurous spirit and interest in social issues impelled her to involvement in other causes. One example is her work for the International Ladies Garment Worker’s Union in Los Angeles where she was involved in organizing a strike. Also in the early 1940s she moved to New York City where she was hired as a secretary for the Manhattan Project. She didn’t know it at the time, but she was working on the atomic bomb. During this time, via her brother Bradley Smith, a photographer, she met David Munro. They married, and in 1947, they moved to California. The couple fell in love with Laguna Beach and moved to the village in 1953. In the more than 50 years that Evelyn has been a local citizen, she has been a tireless activist, artist, and community member. Evelyn volunteered with the Friendship Shelter from its founding, helping and feeding the homeless; she was a founding member of Village Laguna; she fought against the toll road; she fought for green space, to preserve open land in the area. She was a local artist and photographer, selling and displaying her photos and paintings in private shows, local businesses, and the Laguna Art Museum; she wrote articles and performed public relations work for local businesses and causes as well. Due to her interest in the disenfranchised, she walked a picket line with Cesar Chavez to help migrant farm workers. Evelyn found like-minded friends among the Quakers and was a long time member of the Orange County Friend’s Meeting. The Munros moved to Cuba for a one year stint in 1956; the Revolution started up shortly after they arrived, but that didn’t

diminish their enjoyment of the country. However, when American expatriates were required to leave, the family returned to the states. They settled in Chicago where Evelyn worked at the University of Chicago. But California was in their blood, so they packed up the car with their three children and one dog, which had also traveled with them to Cuba, and headed west. The Munros resettled in Laguna in 1959 and stayed until 1964 when Evelyn and two of her daughters traveled to Africa, joining her husband who held a temporary teaching position at the University of Nigeria. They lived in the small university town of Nsukka, and Evelyn loved it. The university community was peopled with folk from all over the globe. In Nsukka Evelyn organized a cooperative nursery school modeled after one she had organized in California. After this visit to Africa, she and her family returned to their beloved Laguna. Evelyn loved literature, poetry, music, art, people, and all things French, not necessarily in that order. She introduced her children to books at an early age and instilled in them a love of learning and the written word. She taught them the words to her union songs such as, "Oh you can't scare me, I'm stickin' to the union," and "We shall not, we shall not be moved." She also believed in the importance of education. During her eleven year tenure at the University of California Irvine where she worked as editor and writer for the University Extension department, she herself went to college and earned her bachelor's degree at the age of 63. When Evelyn retired in 1979, her life became even busier. She discovered that she had a photographic knack, learned to develop her own film, and spent hours in the darkroom built in her home. Evelyn and her husband also traveled frequently to Europe and regularly visited their children and grandchildren, journeying from California to Washington State to Wisconsin to Alaska. She enrolled in a French class at a local junior college, and a group of like-minded Francophiles gathered each week in her home to read Proust or Sartre, in French of course. The "French Group" continued to meet in the Munro home for over twenty years. Evelyn also became an accomplished watercolorist, taking classes from a local artist. After her

husband's death in 1997, Evelyn continued to travel: Texas, Wisconsin, North Dakota, and of course France—her second home. She made her last trip to Europe in 2004 with one of her daughters; they spent time in Germany, Poland, and France. Evelyn loved to be with people. She was happiest when serving up a pot of red beans and rice for guests or having her friends over to celebrate Twelfth Night. She loved Laguna, although she considered herself a “citizen of the world.” Evelyn was Laguna's Renaissance woman. To her family, friends, community, and so many more whose lives were touched by this extraordinary person, this dynamo of energy, enthusiasm, and ability, Evelyn truly was our lagniappe. Interment will take place on Monday, June 18th at 10:30 am at Maplewood Cemetery, Camillus, New York. A celebration of her life will take place in Laguna on July 14th,, Bastille Day, one of her favorite holidays. The time and place has yet to be established and will be announced. In lieu of flowers, Evelyn's family would prefer donations in her name to any of these organizations: The American Friends Service Committee, Village Laguna, The Laguna Art Museum, or the Friendship Shelter in Laguna. Please sign her guestbook at www.BLBUSH.com

Tribute Wall

HB

“ *Evelyn (Smith) Munro*

Halo Bill - July 19, 2008 at 12:00 AM

II

“ *Jonny was here*

Igkiocci Igkiocci - April 27, 2008 at 12:00 AM

MV

“ *I'm very saddened by the news of Evelyn's passing though happy for Evelyn that you took such a good care of her. You made it possible for her to live in the house "that Dave bought for her" with excellent care. She loved the place very much. Mara*

Mara Vivat - May 24, 2007 at 12:00 AM

SV

“ I was saddened to learn from Nick of your mother's death. To my regret, we had been out of touch for quite some time, but on Nick's last visit he sent me a beautiful photo of her. I think of her every March 15 because we had birthdays very close together. I remember spending one with her, bringing her a small pitcher, and cooking together. We each marveled at how the other couldn't get along without certain utensils that the other didn't own: she said she couldn't live without a cheese slicer and I said the same about my nutmeg grater. Funny that such little things remain in memory--- especially when bigger ones seem to escape ever more easily these days! I hope you and Hannah and Becky are able to take solace in the fact of her remarkable, long and full life. She was a woman of extraordinary energy, creativity and enthusiasm. She had an insatiable curiosity and intense humanity that endeared her to people of all sorts. There aren't enough like her. My sympathy goes out to you and your sisters.

Susan Vankleeck - May 24, 2007 at 12:00 AM

KF

“ Evelyn was every bit of the writings. She was an independant,lifelong learner who enjoyed meeting all the exchange students brought to her home..Her eclectic home was a delight of visions nestled in the canyon. She was the youngest senior citizen I have met. Her love of family, food and history delighted me. Her welcoming ways impressed me. She was quite a lady! I am so glad I had the opportunity to meet and know her.

Kathy finlay - May 17, 2007 at 12:00 AM

NM

“ To my sisters and their voluminous families, my sincerest sympathies on your mom, grandmom, greatgrandmom's passing. I didn't know about Evelyn's activism until recently. She was quite a woman. I was so hoping to come out to Syracuse this June to see you all but it happens to fall on the same weekend of my best friend's daughter's wedding! Nothing else going on all summer...wouldn't you know! Anyway, the wedding is on Sat. June 16, is there a chance you will still be in Syracuse on Sunday the 17th? Maybe I could talk Bonnie and Perry to hold off for a day and drive with me on Sunday, staying overnight on Monday. Let me know Love, Nancy

Nancy Munro - May 16, 2007 at 12:00 AM