



Betty Jo Gross

February 27, 1938 - April 17, 2011

Betty Jo Gross, interpretive naturalist, poet, painter and teacher, died April 17, at home with family. She was 73.

A coal miner's daughter, born in Virginia to Roy Hammons and Ida Belle Holbrook, Betty graduated from Akron Central High School, married her high school sweetheart, John Allen Gross, and earned a B.S., Education and an M.A., Business Administration & Management. Her husband completed a residency in psychiatry at University of Florida and was an academic neurologist at Medical University of South Carolina. They kept homes in Gainesville and Charleston.

A prolific writer, Betty authored two poetry books, *Visions from Within* and *Poetry in the Park: Interpreting the Environment Through Poetry* and was published in anthologies, newspapers and journals. *Visions* was heralded by award-winning author Jim Haskins as poetry that should be "required reading" as it reminds us "that every once in awhile things like fog and sunshine and poppies in the prairies are not to be taken for granted. They are inextricably connected to things like nuclear energy and the ozone layer and the toxic winds of war. Poems like Betty Gross's stimulate our memories." (Gainesville Sun, 11/18/79)

She delighted in her friendships and correspondence with Pulitzer Prize

winning U.S. Poet Laureate Richard Eberhardt, who resided at her home when visiting Gainesville, and Roy Ivan Johnson, Ph.D., a Missouri writer whose poem became the official song of that state before he retired to Gainesville. She read her poetry throughout the southeast and at Bread Loaf Writers' Conference at Middlebury College in Vermont, Piccolo Spoleto Festival in Charleston and National Interpretive Institute at Michigan State University. She founded Gainesville Poetry Association which put poets in schools and held a Penny Press Poetry Contest in conjunction with the Spring Arts Festival. She was an artist-in-residence in Gainesville's Tench Building Artist Studios.

In Gainesville, Betty was a Soil and Water Conservation Supervisor, teacher, preschool director and Past President of Envirotemp, Inc. which she founded with her son Allen Gross. In Charleston, she was a Soil and Water Conservation District Commissioner and, for Charleston County Parks & Recreation, she managed Palmetto Islands County Park and coordinated nature park programs. In both cities, she founded children's performing arts theaters and was a community activist in support of arts, cultural affairs, recreation, children, and the environment. Many years, she was a Gainesville Sun Community Service Award nominee. With her enthusiastic and positive outlook, Betty encouraged others to "do all that you can do to be the person you are to be in this life, leaving traces for the better behind you."

Diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 1995, Betty was cared for by her husband, until he was unable, and daughter Laura Gross and son-in-law Paul Donnelly. Since 2005, she resided at the Tallahassee home of daughter Rachel Gross and son-in-law Jeremy Floyd, who cared for her with help from Big Bend Hospice and Tallahassee Memorial Adult Day Care. Betty and her husband's affairs were managed for years by daughter Beth Gross of Austin.

Betty was predeceased by her husband on Sept. 1, 2009, and four siblings,

Carlos Hammons, Ruth Selman, Faye Hart, and Georgia Russe. She leaves four children, Beth Gross (David Wolfe), Allen Gross (Stacy), Laura Gross (Paul Donnelly), and Rachel Gross (Jeremy Floyd); six grandchildren, Allisun, Andrew, Emma Jo, Lindsey, James and Chloe Belle; three siblings, Brenda Hupfer, Donna Shaffer and Eddie Hammons; and family and friends.

A celebration of life memorial service for family and friends will be held Saturday, May 14, 2011, 4-7 pm, at Rachel Gross' Tallahassee home. In Betty's memory, contributions in support of arts and the environment may be sent to Betty Gross Memorial Fund, c/o Laura Gross, P.O. Box 358866, Gainesville, FL 32635.