



# Rosemary Matson – A Woman without Fear

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## *Important Highlights of Rosemary Matson's Life*

*On the occasion of her receiving an Honorary Doctorate of Humane Letters  
bestowed by Starr King School for the Ministry  
For over five decades Rosemary has served as both a professional and volunteer  
within Unitarian Universalist organizations.*

Created, designed and produced by Liz and Bob Fisher

## Rosemary Matson's Values

Living by a set of principles is something most Unitarian Universalists respect. Throughout her life, Rosemary has championed social positions which reflect her cherished values. These include:

- ✚ supporting the formation of liberal religious communities;
- ✚ securing an institutional voice for women as ministers and lay leaders;
- ✚ exercising our personal freedom of expression;
- ✚ demonstrating world peace is possible;
- ✚ putting a face on the enemy to increase empathy and relationship;
- ✚ insisting on equal opportunity for women;
- ✚ modeling equal status between women and men in partnerships;
- ✚ standing with workers demanding fair treatment by employers.



**Rebecca Parker and Rosemary**  
At the retired UU Minister's Retreat,  
Marianist Center, Redwood City, CA in 1994



**Liz Fisher, Rosemary, Bob Fisher**  
General Assembly, Ft. Worth, TX, 1994

## Unitarian Universalist Involvements

In the early 1950s, Rosemary became one of two co-founders and first president of the First Unitarian Fellowship (now Church) of Honolulu. When Rosemary got involved there was a small group of about 10 people starting the Fellowship.

In the spring of 1955 Rosemary returned to Berkeley to accept employment from the Pacific Coast Unitarian Council organizing Unitarian groups and raising funds for legal expenses needed to fight the California loyalty oath. During this time she traveled the entire coast, giving workshops and meeting with churches and fellowships.

In the course of her travels, she met Rev. Howard Matson. In 1957 they married, beginning a long and fruitful partnership of activism for UU principles within the denomination and the wider society.

By 1960 Rosemary and Howard had moved to Boston where she became the administrator at the Arlington Street Church and he worked at UUA Headquarters assisting Fellowship formation. At this time, Rosemary was also a Board member of Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. In 1962 Rosemary and Howard returned to the SF Bay Area when Howard became associate minister of the San Francisco Unitarian Universalist Society, working with Rev. Harry Schofield. Rosemary and Howard focused on social justice work at the Society. (See partnership section below.)

In 1962, at the request of Jo Bartlett, then President of Starr King, Rosemary began working part-time raising funds for Starr King School. In 1964 she accepted the full-time position of Associate for Development and Communications to the President at Starr King School for the Ministry where she worked until 1978 creating publicity and raising funds for Starr King School for the Ministry.

At the same time she became a ministerial settlement representative for the district (the region had now become a district) supporting and guiding seminary students seeking church placements, matching groups with future ministers. In 1971, four women applied to Starr King and were admitted. Prior to that date, there had only been two women in the school in the 1960s.



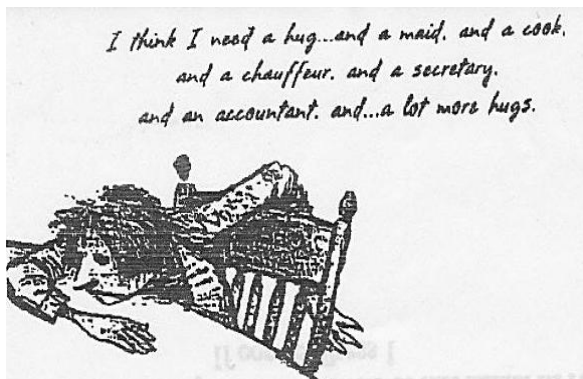
Rosemary proudly wearing the T-shirt bearing her quote (shirt and bookmark created in 2005 by Gretchen Ohmann UUW&R co-convenor)

As part of her placement duties, Rosemary began to advocate to congregations that they consider women candidates. She also began revising the school's promotional materials to be more gender inclusive. She demanded, along with several Board members, their own first names be used in the school catalog (i.e. Rosemary Matson, rather than Mrs. Howard Matson). Rosemary also helped raise funds to endow the Aurelia Henry Reinhardt Chair, a faculty position to be filled by a woman, another first.



## Women and Religion

In 1977 Rosemary advocated with many other lay women for passage of the *Women and Religion Resolution* at General Assembly. This was the first time she had spoken at G.A. She was soon appointed by UUA President Paul Carnes to co-chair the President's



A notecard developed by Rosemary when she needed it.

Continental Committee on Women and Religion (1977-1980). During this period the activities to rid the denomination of sexist practices were vibrant, including: revisioning theology (thealogy), correcting sexist language in hymns and readings, and exposing and transforming sexist attitudes regarding leadership capabilities. Rosemary was in the thick of it.

The work of the Women and Religion movement within the UUA was very personal as well as political. Rosemary participated in, supported and promoted *The Water Ceremony* written by Lucile Longview and Carolyn McDade which has gone on to become a UU classic. In the original ceremony, Rosemary shared her early sexist home life experiences, modeling the healing process so important to women's liberation efforts.

Over many years Rosemary has been active in every facet of the denominational W&R activities, including the formation of the Women and Religion UUA affiliate in 2001. A publication *Women and Religion: from Sunset to Sunrise* discussing this effort is being developed by Gloria Marvin of Florida with Rosemary. It features the *sunrise logo* (at right) created by Gloria's daughter MJ Broadbent. In 2004 the curriculum co-authored by Barbara Schonborn, Alison Campbell and Rosemary entitled *Unraveling the Gender Knot: Challenging the System that Binds Us* was published.



Rosemary maintained extensive archives for the Women and Religion movement which have been accepted by **Schlesinger Library on the History of Women in America**, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University. In addition to her writings and records, it contains: original writings by those active in the women and religion movement; materials related to grassroots organizing efforts; newsletters from around the country; and courses for small group study among other items. Rosemary also planned a variety of General Assembly programs, many focusing on gender concerns. She delivered numerous talks and workshops on women's issues and the feminist viewpoint at the local, district and continental levels.

## Humanist Activities



Rosemary at her 90th Birthday Party, September, 2007 at the UU Church of Monterey Peninsula, California

Rosemary wrote and edited for the Humanist Magazine, including serving as guest editor for a special issue on the 1985 International Conference on Women in Nairobi, Kenya. She initiated and supported the Feminist Caucus of the American Humanist Association; in 1995 she was awarded The Humanist Heroine Award.

As a humanist minister she performed weddings and memorial services using non-sexist practices and non-theistic inspirational statements. Making numerous presentations to humanist meetings, Rosemary also educated within UU organizations about the religious humanist perspective.

## Advocate for Women's Development and Recognition

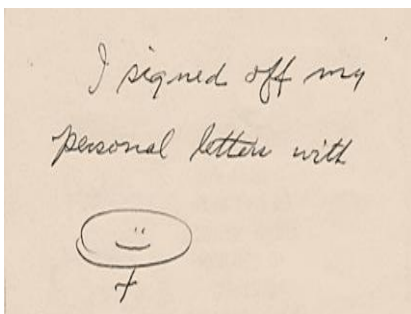
Rosemary has always been keenly aware of the importance of reaching the larger community through supporting women through life transitions and sharing inspiration created by women, past and present. Her educational endeavors included:

**Co-founding Women in Transition (1980)** to help women who were going through a major life transition such as divorce, loss of job, or entering the work force for the first time on how to strategize for the best outcome;

**Befriending May Sarton** which included introducing May Sarton's work to UU circles and community groups;

**Presenting Margaret Fuller** by promoting author Laurie James's books and theatrical productions about Fuller and others, as well as co-leading with James tours of important sites in Fuller's fascinating life.

## Essays, Letters to the Editor and Book Publishing



Rosemary wrote many articles for a variety of publications. These included: *Monterey Herald*; regularly featured in *Demeter*, a newspaper on Women's News of the Monterey Bay Area; the *Women in Transition* newsletter; and on-going letters-to-the-editor campaigns. She also managed the self-publishing of Howard's popular second book of personal observations and reminiscences entitled *A Walk to the Village*.



Zoya Zarubina, Rosemary's *Moscow Twin*, in a Carmel Valley bookstore with her autobiography displayed in conjunction with a presentation Rosemary had arranged for her, 2000



Rosemary with friend Jane Britton displaying their special T-shirts. For the last ten years they celebrated their birthdays with friends.

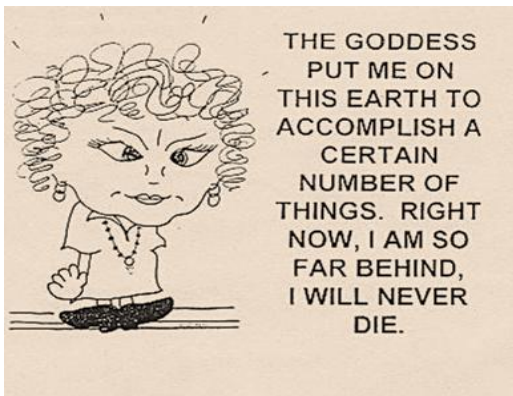
## International Organizing Efforts around Women

International peace and justice work is a passion Rosemary pursues to the present. Over many years she has:

Participated in **UN International Conferences on Women** which included attending conferences in Copenhagen (1980) and Nairobi (1985) as well as supporting educational forums following the Beijing Conference (1995);

Presented programs about **Eleanor Roosevelt's** shepherding of the **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** to its adoption in 1948;

Served as **board member of the Monterey Peninsula United Nations Association** for many years as well as educating about the United Nations in the larger community;



Co-founded ***Continuing the Peace Dialogue* (1980)** with Patricia Schroeder of Santa Cruz, together organizing 25+ citizen diplomacy trips to the Soviet Union; these trips focused on women and putting a face on the enemy;

Convened with Liz Fisher, a **workshop on feminist spirituality** at the International Association for Religious Freedom meeting at Stanford in 1987.

## Partnership with Howard Matson

Howard and Rosemary were well-known as a formidable team, leaving an impressive legacy of joint efforts. Howard's involvements were always ones that were close to Rosemary's heart; Rosemary's involvements were equally important to Howard. In a phrase, their accomplishments were always collaborative.

Examples of Howard's activities which Rosemary supported included:

- ✚ working with Planned Parenthood in 1961–62 to undertake abortion counseling;
- ✚ encouraging the Mental Health Association to reclassify homosexuality as a lifestyle instead of a mental illness;
- ✚ supporting Social Concerns effort in the San Francisco Church to raise money to buy a generator for Native Americans occupying Alcatraz Island;
- ✚ joining Martin Luther King's march in Selma which included staying during the following week after everyone had left to help the people who were becoming targets for the Ku Klux Klan;
- ✚ maintaining a ten year volunteer ministry with United Farmworkers, collaborating with Cesar Chavez on many occasions;
- ✚ together they aided the Black Affairs Council with fund raising.



Howard, Cesar Chavez and Rosemary

Rosemary's activities Howard supported included:

- ✚ following the publication of the *Feminine Mystique*, Rosemary began doing workshops on feminism; Howard spearheaded groups dealing with the Masculine Mystique, demonstrating his early commitment to feminism which he maintained throughout his later years.
- ✚ Rosemary takes on projects with multiple women's groups while Howard performs supportive duties.
- ✚ Rosemary becomes a powerhouse citizen diplomat; Howard joins over a dozen trips to the Soviet Union as part of the groups lead by Rosemary and Patricia Schroeder.

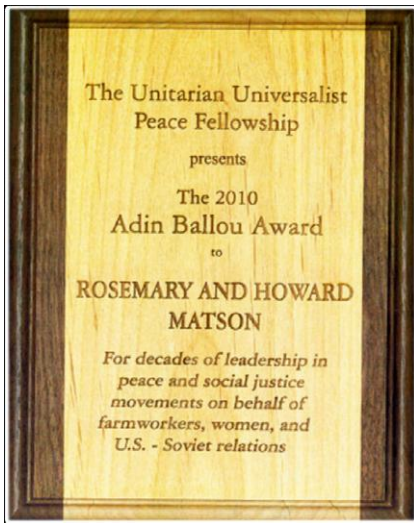


Liz Fisher, Rosemary and Howard  
General Assembly, June 1986,  
Rochester, New York, when Rosemary  
received the Holmes Weatherly Award  
for Social Justice

## Community Groups

Over many years Rosemary has done outreach, served on Boards and created programming for several prominent organizations advocating for international peace efforts and civil and human rights for all. These include:

- United Nations Association
- American Civil Liberties Association
- American Humanist Association
- Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)



## Awards

- 1984 ACLU Ralph B. Atkinson Civil Liberties Award
- 1985 Baha'i Human Rights Award for Human Rights
- 1986 UUA Holmes Weatherly Award for Social Justice
- 1988 Outstanding Woman of the Year Monterey County Commission on Status of Women
- 1995 Humanist Heroine Award
- 2000 United Nations Association of Monterey Bay Pearl Ross Feminist Activist Award
- 2010 The UU Peace Fellowship Adin Ballou Award (with Howard)

Rosemary is honored in the collection *Feminists Who Changed America, 1963-1975*

## Personal Achievements during Senior Elder Years



Birthday card from Rosemary's nephew on her 90th birthday

- ✚ Being an Outrageous Old Woman
- ✚ Overcoming Breast Cancer
- ✚ Accompanying Howard on his end-of- life journey
- ✚ Becoming a mentor for many people from the diverse, yet interrelated, strands of her life

