

Jessamyn West dies of stroke at age 81

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"Yorba Linda was not the land we had dreamed of back on the banks of the Hoosier Muskatatuck. It was more beautiful."

Jessamyn West

Best-selling author Jessamyn West, who spent her childhood and early adulthood in Yorba Linda, died Wednesday, Feb. 21, of a stroke in Napa, Calif. She was 81.

Best known for her book, "Friendly Persuasion," a story later made into a motion picture that starred Gary Cooper, West attended elementary school in Yorba Linda, Fullerton High School and graduated from Whittier College.

The Eldo West family moved to Yorba Linda in 1910 when it was still a bare tract of semi-arid land, and planted a lemon grove north of Yorba Linda Boulevard near Club Terrace in the eastern part of the tract.

The family was of Quaker belief, from Indiana. "Friendly Persuasion" is a story about tales she heard relatives tell of the people and times in Indiana.

A cousin of former President Richard Nixon, also a past Yorba Linda resident, West's first inclination toward writing was expressed when she wrote nonsense skits that were dramatized while on Campfire Girls outings.

After graduating from Whittier College, West married Harry McPherson, a now-retired Napa school superintendent who survives her. They were married in the Yorba Linda Friends Church. The couple moved to Hemet and operated an apricot orchard. West worked as a school secretary for a while in Hemet, and at one time taught in a country school where she handled all eight grades in one room. Later she went to Europe and studied at Oxford University, doing post graduate work in English.

It was then discovered she had tuberculosis. She was confined to a sanitarium for two years. It was when West was sent home to die with family and friends that she wrote a series of short stories that later launched her into a career that led her to national acclaim.

She also wrote "South of the Angels," which contains some of her early impressions of early Yorba Linda life as well as "Cress Delahanty," "The Massacre of Fall Creek," "Except for Me and Thee," and "The Life I Really Lived." Many of her manuscripts are in the Jessamyn West Room at Whittier College.

West was to have appeared last September in Yorba Linda at a program put on by the Associates of the Yorba Linda Heritage Museum and at the Library's 70-anniversary party, but did not show because of illness.