

Elin and David Chadwick
60-A Clark Street
San Rafael, CA, 94901
voice/fax:415-453-1402
dchad@well.sf.ca.us

LA SMITH

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Hi Amrita and Barry!

Lois Ann Smith was my English teacher in High School - for two of the three years anyway. She was, and is at ninety, an exceptionally compassionate person. She was not an attractive woman in the conventional sense - she was plain, overweight and wore unimaginative soft cotton patterned dresses that revealed no trace of vanity. She was the spinster daughter of the minister of one of the two biggest Baptist churches in town and she lived alone in a neat red brick house with an attractive but small lawn and garden around the dwelling. LA, as we called her, demonstrated that self-acceptance, acceptance of others, composure in the world and faith in a higher power could all fit together in an admirable and inspiring way. She would tell us that a writer was a homosexual or an alcoholic or experimented with drugs or was an atheist and she would say so without judgement or malice. She was a good person.

LA taught many years and says our class was the brightest. She in turn was our brightest memory. We all remember her when we get together. The experience of studying with her was the high point of public education for many of us. She made the boring textbooks bearable - of course she had a lot of help from the subject matter when we were studying literature, but even grammar was a pleasure to study with her. She never tried to coddle us and was never condescending. She was dignified and proper but open minded and easy going - and it wasn't so hard to make her laugh. She fostered creativity and original thinking and treated her students with respect. I think of her and I get a big bundle of memory - her smile, the way she would stand around the room and talk directly with us, the dynamic energy in her classroom that was fed by her humility and skill in means. It's hard to understand how someone who seems so ordinary could be so special and how someone so unopinionated and gentle could teach so much. She had qualities that we all organically appreciate but whose names have faded from the popular vocabulary if they were ever there. She tapped into something deeper than being a teacher, or a Baptist or a woman. She lifted us all with her a bit into being a little more godly and a lot more human in its best sense.

David