



**Esther Jean Arnhold**  
**1898-1963**

Founder of the  
Esther Jean Arnhold Fund in  
The New York Community Trust  
909 Third Avenue  
New York, NY 10022

*In her Will, Esther Jean Arnhold established the Esther Jean Arnhold Fund to be administered by Community Funds, Inc. She asked that the income from the Fund be used to benefit young people and the arts.*

Some of the children came shyly; others bounded boldly up the steps from the street and into the studio. Some came nearly every day, on their way home from school. A few were occasional visitors. Some watched silently, waiting patiently, while the sculptor worked. But some were anxious to get started right away.

"What are you going to show us today, Mrs. Arnhold?"

The slender sculptor, dark hair drawn back in a knot, laid aside her own work and began her informal lesson with the children who gathered attentively around her.

Jean Arnhold always knew when school was out: the clatter on the steps, the noise at the door, the breathless voices. In summer, when there was no school, the interruptions were endless, but her patience was seemingly limitless; she understood that these youngsters needed her guidance. In her soft, low voice, she explained what she was doing, showed them how to use

the tools with which she worked in wood and stone, let them "help" her with the polishing. On Saturdays and school holidays, she often took them to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, expanding the education she had begun in the little studio, with the evergreens outside the door, on East 70th Street in New York City. She had come a long way to be with them.

The middle daughter of David and Mary Ellen Miller, Esther Jean grew up with her sisters, Elsie and Ruth, on a farm near Oregon City, Oregon, where she was born in 1898.

After a girlhood spent in the country, Jean Miller went to study at the University of Washington, where she received a degree in pharmacology. Her main interest was in the medicinal uses of plants. After graduation she moved to California. There she was married, but the marriage ended a few years later.

Following her divorce in the 1930's, Jean decided to take a trip to the Orient. She arrived in Manila with many letters of introduction and made friends easily. Eventually she went on to Shanghai, and soon she was teaching in the department of pharmacology at the University of Shanghai.

While she was there, she met Harry Edward Arnhold, the managing director of the Arnhold Trading Company, Ltd. Born in Hong Kong in 1880 and educated in London, Harry was the son of British parents. His father was the founder of the import-export firm that Harry eventually headed. A well-known figure in the cities of the Orient, Harry enjoyed considerable prestige as chairman of the Shanghai Municipal Council, the governing body of that city's international settlement. Harry, a widower, eighteen years older than Jean, was immediately attracted to her, and eventually they were married.

Harry and Jean Arnhold traveled extensively, meet-

ing people and enjoying the rich and varied life of the Far East.

But in 1941 war came, shattering the comfortable security of their lives. Harry and Jean were imprisoned by the Japanese and held in a Red Cross internment camp in Shanghai. Jean later told friends that it was her knowledge of medicinal herbs that helped them to survive the harrowing years that followed.

Eventually, on a prisoner exchange arrangement for American citizens, Jean was released. Harry, a British subject, was held. Heartsick and frightened, Jean booked passage on the *Gripsholm* to New York, determined to do everything possible to secure the release of her husband. But Harry was kept prisoner for two more long and difficult years.

And then the war was finally over, and the painful separation ended for Jean and Harry. Jean returned to the Orient, and the Arnholds made a home in Hong Kong. But the years in a prison camp had taken their physical toll on a man in his sixties. In 1949 the Arnholds decided to move to New York, and the following year Harry Arnhold died at the age of seventy.

Once again Jean was alone and thrown on her own resources. Although she had always traveled widely and found it easy to meet people and to make friends, it was harder this time. The year after Harry died, Jean and her sister Ruth and Ruth's daughter, Ann, went to Europe. When they returned, Jean tried volunteer work in hospitals for a time, but it was not the engrossing commitment she wanted and needed.

Always interested in art, a fascination that had been nurtured by her travels and life in the Far East, Jean turned to sculpturing. She found a little studio, moved into it with another sculptor, Jean McGrail, and set to work. Wood and stone were her media, and she sought out as her teacher Jose DeCreeft, a Spanish artist who

enjoyed a reputation for being one of the greatest living direct carvers. She also studied wood carving under Lorrie Goulet, and took classes in anatomy at the Art Students League.

She explored a broad range of subjects in her style of abstract realism. One piece was the head of a prophet, carved in granite. Another was a white marble owl. Still a third was a highly stylized carving of an Oriental woman, her flowing garments following the grain of the wood. Her work developed, and with development came recognition. Her sculpture was exhibited—and sold—in leading galleries in New York and Texas.

Jean Arnhold was completely committed to her work, but that work was part of a larger pattern. When in New York, she was in her studio every day, stopping at lunch to read the Psalms and other favorite passages of Scripture aloud with Jean McGrail, and welcoming the afternoon arrival of the children for whom she felt such concern. Occasionally she closed her studio and went on long trips that took her through Europe, Asia, and Africa. In 1962, she and Miss McGrail traveled to Egypt and the Middle East, journeying up the Nile to view the ancient temples of Egypt, and visiting Lebanon, Syria, and Turkey, carried by their interests in ancient art and archaeology to remote areas where female tourists had never been seen before.

As Jean Arnhold investigated the roots of her art, she also began to explore her own roots. A woman who was used to traveling and being on her own, and who had lived an independent life far in advance of her time, Jean had had little interest in family. Although she was deeply interested in children and did much for them in her studio, sometimes at the expense of her own work, she had none of her own. It was not a loss for her; she had felt that her life could not include the responsibility of rearing children.

But she eventually recognized her need to unwind the threads of her own family history. And so, after a lifetime of traveling widely to the farthest parts of the world, she returned to the place of her origins, the northwestern United States, where she visited crumbling graveyards, delved into old records, and sought out distant relatives to learn the story of her own beginnings.

In March of 1963, Jean suffered a heart attack. As soon as she recovered, she began to plan her next trip, this time to Afghanistan to visit the rock-walled valley of Bamian, where cave dwellings line the walls and two gigantic carved statues of Buddhist saints tower more than a hundred feet above the valley floor.

But Jean Arnhold did not make that trip. On October 2, 1963, in her sixty-fifth year, she suffered a second heart attack. She did not live out the day.

The children stopped coming to the studio on East 70th Street, but Jean's interest in them and in other young people survived her death. Through The New York Community Trust she established the Esther Jean Arnhold Fund. At her request, grants from this fund provide financial aid to needy college students.



*The New York Community Trust,  
an aggregate of charitable funds, is the  
metropolitan area's community foundation.  
It serves charitable donors and  
builds an endowment for New York City.  
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