

Testimony to the Grace of God in the life of Joyce Tod (9.4.1922-16.9.2018)

On hearing of Joyce's death a young man, who had grown up in Waterford Meeting, wrote, 'Joyce was kind, inclusive, encouraging, loving and just fun. She showed me the real values of Quaker life. I always looked forward to spending time with her and missed her dearly when they moved back to England'.

Joyce (Ellis) was born in 1922 in Kings Lynn, Norfolk to Katy (born Edmunds) and John Ellis. Her grandfather had an ironmongers shop and grandparents on both sides were Quakers giving her a grounding in the ways of Friends. Her paternal grandparents were from Manchester and she often recalled how they had become Quakers through engagement with the Adult School Movement, an initiative in which many Friends were involved during the mid 19th and early 20th Century.

Joyce didn't care much for school preferring to spend time outdoors. She enjoyed her holidays on the North Norfolk coast. After leaving school she attended Cheshire School of Agriculture where she achieved a First Class Certificate in Poultry Keeping and this led to her working for a while at a relative's poultry farm in Essex. Whilst studying at the Agricultural College, she met John Tod who in 1944 she married at Ashton-on-Mersey Meeting House. Following their marriage she joined John on a small-holding in the Cheshire village of Over Peover. It was here that their daughters were born, Mary in 1945 and Jane in 1951. Joyce's parents had bought the Post Office in Over Peover and Joyce's mother, Katy, became the village shopkeeper and postmistress. It came with a five acre field on which Joyce and John built a house 'Cherry Cottage' and moved the nursery from just down the lane.

As well as maintaining a full life on the nursery and worshipping at Wilmslow Meeting, John and Joyce found time to support Knutsford UNA group and Macclesfield CND. The nursery business grew, developing many innovative ideas, employing staff and building a team who stayed together over many years. When John and Joyce left the business to move to Ireland, they ensured that none of the staff lost their jobs.

Joyce lived her life adventurously and with spontaneity. She and John felt drawn to Ireland, and typically in 1970 when John's health led them to seek a change in lifestyle, she embraced a new life in Ireland, with her usual enthusiasm. They bought a field in the fishing village of Dunmore East, County Waterford. They enjoyed working with the architect that Joyce had found and built their house 'Foilakippeen' (on the 'land of the little sticks'). Eventually they completed their move by sailing their small boat, Bella, over the Irish Sea, to begin their new adventure in Ireland.

Joyce, John and Joyce's father, John Ellis, quickly settled into worshipping with Waterford and Tramore Quaker Meetings and they became active in the wider circle of Friends in Ireland Yearly Meeting. Joyce with her ideas, and John with his organising skills, accomplished much. Joyce, together with the support of Friends, originated regular 'Gatherings' throughout the island of Ireland fostering friendship and understanding during challenging times, which were particularly appreciated by Friends both north and south of the border. Another initiative which Joyce was central in establishing was 'Twinning' arrangements between Meetings from north and south of the border.

In Meeting Joyce was described as a people person, as was seen in her frequent help in children's meeting and in introducing teas/coffees on Sundays. Welcoming people to Foilakippeen was important to both John and Joyce. She is remembered by Irish Friends as "always cheerful and above all full of encouragement, with an open mind, not afraid to speak out." Joyce by example sought to find that of God in everyone she met. She and John "ruffled the waters in Waterford Meeting with love!"

John and Joyce were also very active in village life particularly, for John, in supporting the RNLI where his experience as a small boat sailor became invaluable. At home John kept bees and Joyce goats and hens, often sharing milk from the goats with a local child with an intolerance to cow's milk.

Following 26 happy years in Ireland and thinking about their future needs they decided to move to Yorkshire. Sadly, just before leaving, John suffered a major stroke and Joyce took on the role of carer until John died in 2003. They felt fortunate to be able to purchase the caretaker's cottage next to Malton Meeting which they extensively renovated and where Joyce lived for 21 years, (6 years with John). There she provided a welcoming Quaker presence to local people, helping and befriending many. Joyce played a full and active part in the life of Malton Meeting, which she loved, serving faithfully in many roles. She served on the committee involved in renovating and reinvigorating Worfolk Cottage, an Area Meeting property. She was truly an enlivening presence in Meeting demonstrating an interest and care for all. Forthright, and willing to share her thoughts through her regular Ministry, she would often be seen engaging passionately with Friends over tea and coffee after Meeting. Joyce read widely, relishing sharing what had inspired her during the week and she especially loved sharing work by her favourite poets. She began a creative writing course which met in the cottage. She enjoyed talking about politics and current affairs. Joyce, even in her declining years, maintained a sparkle and twinkle in her eyes and demonstrated a deep sense of concern especially when engaging with issues of injustice and inequality in the world. When she became frail she moved to Lamel Beeches, a care home in York. Visitors to her room were often pried with questions about how Malton Meeting, along with other Meetings where she had worshipped, were progressing. Joyce seemed able to hold so many Friends, who she had known during her very full life, in her thoughts and prayers, often writing encouraging and stimulating letters. She found much enjoyment in knowing and supporting her four grand children and four great grandchildren. Joyce especially loved the writings and example of James Naylor and Isaac Pennington sharing their thoughts and inspiration with Friends, "Give over thine own willing, give over thy own running, give over thine own desiring to know or be anything and sink down to the seed which God sows in the heart", had become one of her favourite quotations. QFP 26:70

Joyce died aged 96 and, after a woodland burial alongside John at Terrington, many local people gathered at her Memorial Meeting at Malton Friends Meeting House. At the same time Friends in Waterford also met together and reported, 'Saturday was a beautiful autumnal day and 15 Waterford Friends met to celebrate the life of Joyce, in particular, and also John. All but one of those present knew and remembered Joyce' - even after more than 20 years her presence and service were remembered and celebrated.

We thank God for the lovely, straightforward, adventurous and caring life of our Friend Joyce Tod.

Chris Newsam
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