

A testimony to the grace of God as shown in the life of Eva Pinthus, 1925-2020

Eva Pinthus, a member of Ilkley Meeting for some sixty years, was born in 1925 to a cultured Jewish family in Berlin. Her father, a lawyer, was a member of the Swiss Alpine Club, and Eva used to say that her first spiritual experience was as a small child at the foot of the Matterhorn.

Eva suffered grievous personal losses at a young age when first her older sister and then her father died unexpectedly. Simultaneously Nazi persecution of Jews was increasing, and Eva escaped to England on the Kindertransport in July 1939. She found it very hard to forgive her grandmother for insisting that her mother had to remain with her in Germany. As Eva was to learn much later, both women perished in concentration camps.

Survivor's guilt, together with her already strong religious interests and early experiences of Judaism and Catholicism, led Eva to a life of prayer, study, peace education, and service to others. Strongly influenced by an inspirational Quaker head teacher, Doris Martin, she joined the Friends Relief Service, returning to Germany in 1949-50 to help build an international peace centre. She became a Quaker in the early 1950s, read Theology at Birmingham University, trained as a teacher, and then worked mainly in higher education, in Manchester, Hull, and Leeds, until her early retirement in 1981. Providing pastoral care for her students was particularly important to her, and found repeated expression many years later when she served as Quaker chaplain to the two Leeds universities.

Eva returned to continental Europe frequently, at first for theological conferences, but later to work with East German Quakers and other churches on peace education and conflict resolution. These became annual summer visits, which included discussions with church leaders of various denominations, but it was her workshops with young people that particularly enthused her. She would travel to Germany alone with a single huge and heavy rucksack packed with books and duplicated work sheets, and very little in the way of personal necessities. She made lasting friendships all over eastern Germany, and many of her German friends were present at her online memorial meeting in February 2021. She kept those on her very extensive mailing list in touch with events in her life through an annual Advent letter, which was pastoral as well as descriptive in nature.

Eva's adult life was rooted in the Society of Friends with a bent towards ecumenical communication and understanding. In later life she was Quaker representative on the West Yorkshire Ecumenical Council, and was its Chair when the Council issued a strong statement denouncing the racism of the British National Party. She served on the Quaker Peace Studies Trust, and wrote and spoke extensively about theological issues and on what it means to live as a Quaker.

From an early age, Eva had the determination and learned the discipline that she later channelled towards giving herself in service. Often putting her personal needs to one side, she did not avoid hard work or intense commitment; she admitted her doubts with humility. Some people found her difficult (holding strong views, she could be impatient and argumentative), and there is little doubt that she carried the scars of her early experiences, privately, throughout her life. She had survived, but at a cost.

However, she was also very kind, supportive and hospitable, and she loved to have fun. Friends from around the world were always welcome to stay at her simple terrace house in Menston. Those who lived nearer benefited regularly from her habit of always buying two tickets for the theatre or opera. To all her friends, in Ilkley Meeting and beyond, she was special, valued for her integrity, wisdom, and spirituality.

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