

## **Lea Adonis Keeble**

**8 September 1959 – 23 August 2019**

Lea Adonis was the second of five children of Hans and Christina Adonis, who lived and worked on a farm in Wellington, South Africa. The family was warm and loving, but poor. Their home had no electric lights or sockets, no running water, and the air smelled of burning wood from the cooking range. There were two bedrooms, but no doors or ceiling, so as well as lacking privacy it was unbearably hot in summer and freezing in winter. Lea's mother Christina always ensured that all her children were well fed, helped by a small veg patch, free range chicken and fishing in the Berg river.

Under the apartheid regime, Lea was denied many of the opportunities that should have been hers. But she flourished at school, and helped the teacher with younger children. She also helped the farmer's wife, who as a thank-you bought 12-year-old Lea her first shoes.

Aged 14, Lea moved away from home to Cape Town to start work as a nanny. As an Afrikaans speaker, she had to learn English to communicate with the children.

Lea was a teenager when her first son, Hein, was born. It wasn't an easy time, and she took the difficult decision to return to Cape Town for work, leaving him with her family on the farm.

As a young woman, Lea loved a good night out. She met Robert Keeble in a nightclub, saying later that she'd really been interested in his motorbike. Robert was a British Friend, doing Quaker work in Cape Town. At the time, laws in South Africa made it difficult to live as a couple, and in 1989 they travelled to Britain, where they married at Come-to-Good Meeting.

Robert and Lea came to Leeds to work as wardens at Carlton Hill Meeting House in April 1990, with their infant son Eli. Tamar was born five years later.

Together, Lea and Robert brought love to the heart of our meeting. Certainly, they maintained and cleaned the building thoroughly, but most importantly they were welcoming, caring and inclusive. Lea looked out for newcomers and knew who needed an extra hug. She listened and encouraged, and helped us laugh. She was also honest – complaining, teasing, cajoling and rebuking when we needed it. But when she rolled her eyes in exasperation, it was always done with love.

Lea shared her gifts generously. As well as becoming a Quaker member, she was active in the local Methodist church. She was a person whose faith shone through her actions. She was a Quaker overseer, and a Friend described this service as 'God-like'.

She was involved with the Swarthmore education centre, and was amused to be the 'poster girl' on their brochure. She was a volunteer and trustee for Caring Together, a local project supporting people over 60. She was a great support to those living in the Quaker flats behind the meeting house – especially the older and infirm. Lea became 'auntie' to her children's friends.

Her big, warm personality made her a well known and loved face in many places, and she could often be found holding court in one of the local supermarkets. Chance encounters became close friendships.

Lea embraced life. She enjoyed walking, camping holidays (especially Quaker Camp), trips with the family, parties and Quaker gatherings. She was so proud to vote in the first South African free elections in 1994, and delighted in gaining British citizenship. She was fond of telling inappropriate jokes.

Things weren't always easy for Lea. Bringing up two children in a tiny flat, perched above a busy public building, was sometimes challenging. She missed her family in South Africa, and visited several times, although she found it increasingly difficult to go back. It was particularly painful when her son Hein was fatally stabbed and died as a young man.

Lea was a complex person. At her funeral, people who loved her described her as kind, brave and inspiring; honest, funny and beautiful; outrageous, infuriating and annoying. She was open, but guarded her privacy and independence. Even her husband wasn't sure whether her 'real' name was Lee, Lea or Leah.

As her health deteriorated, Lea resisted asking for help until the end. Even her family and closest friends hadn't understood how ill she was. She made friends with hospital staff and secretly ordered supplies of Kentucky Fried Chicken. In her last weeks she celebrated Tamar's graduation as a teacher and made plans to visit Eli in London on her 60th birthday – which she missed by only a few days.

Most Quaker 'testimonies' are made up of words, but sometimes words aren't enough. Lea's mother-tongue was Afrikaans, but she spent most of her life living among English-speakers. So, unusually this testimony includes a beautiful portrait by Lea's brother-in-law. It shows a young woman, looking to the future.

At the time of her death, one friend wrote: "I will miss her greatly, as will all her friends, also the bus drivers and the shopkeepers and the coffee bar attendants and the strangers she talks to in the street." Nobody who knew Lea could forget her. Our lives were much richer for knowing her, and she leaves a huge gap.

Signed on behalf of Leeds Area Meeting

Held on 19 January 2020

Martin Ford, Clerk