

Tove Ruth Robson
20 October 1937 – 15 May 2021

This testimony relies heavily on three sources: Sophia Robson's account of her mother's life, Ruth's own presentation of her spiritual journey, and the memories of those who knew, admired and loved Ruth, mainly though not entirely from Scarborough Local Quaker Meeting.

Ruth was born within hearing distance of Bow Bells, so a true Cockney, and grew up in the Burnt Oak area of North London, with a wartime childhood. Her mother Grace, a convinced Friend, and her father Bill, a lapsed Anglican turned lifelong attender, were among the founder members of Edgware Quaker Meeting. It is here the source of Ruth's spiritual life began, though on the surface not too auspiciously. Ruth writes: "Most of the time I was the only child present (most of the older ones boarding at Ackworth or Saffron Walden) and was expected to sit through meeting... I was an undisciplined, fidgety child, who came over time to loathe going there, and getting out of it as often as possible." However, her parents were sensitive to her needs, and as soon as fuel became available for the car after the war, they took her to the twice-monthly Children and Young People's activities at Golders Green Meeting. Ruth writes: "Friendships made at both these meetings from those days have endured and were a part of shaping the person I became." Making and keeping friendships were an integral part of Ruth's make-up.

After leaving school she began training as a physiotherapist, but had to leave her studies before completion due to a deterioration in her health, with rheumatoid arthritis being a lifelong struggle for her. And yet how many actually knew and really appreciated this struggle? One never heard Ruth complain – she masked the relentless pain, discomfort, disability to the outside world with endearing smiles and cheerfulness, and carried on an active, self-giving life. There is one caveat to that accolade: Ruth knew when and how to say 'no', definitely yet gracefully, when she knew that was the right decision.

Peter was one of, and, as it proved, the most significant of those friendships Ruth made while active in London Young Friends groups. They married in June 1970 in Friends House Meeting, moved to settle in Scarborough at Scalby Nabs, the Robson family home, and transferred membership to Pickering & Hull Monthly (Area) Meeting. Ruth's contribution to the life and work of both the local and area meetings was considerable, both in sensible, practical service and showing by example the qualities arising from her maturing rich spiritual living. She served at various times as both an elder and an overseer (not together), Registering Officer, the first editor of the newly founded 'Eightsome Newsreel', a representative to Meeting for Sufferings, clerk to Area Meeting Nominations Committee and as an administrator for the Acklam Fund.

As a direct follow-on from the diagnosis and treatment for cancer in 2001–02, when she felt "the love and upholding of friends from many parts of the world", she initiated Scarborough Meeting's Healing and Upholding Group, a small but faithful group that met regularly to pray for those in difficulty. Ruth writes: "I give thanks for all these opportunities, which have allowed me to feel I am able to minutely contribute to the ocean of light in the world. Giving service has enriched my life and introduced me to many wonderful people too."

Ruth's interests, concerns and desire to contribute to that "ocean of light" were by no means confined to Quakerism. She played an active role in the E. Robson Charitable Trust over many years and was also heavily involved in charity work for the local Save The Children Fund branch, of which she was the Secretary, Amnesty International, United Nations Association and latterly Survival International, championing the rights of indigenous people, as well as her passion for helping animals, displayed in her support for various animal shelters and anti-vivisection charities. One of her colleagues/ friends in the Save The Children Fund has written: "Ruth was always a driving force, the core of the group, respected and admired and always supportive."

"Live adventurously" was an Advice Ruth took to her heart. She and Peter, and often-times with young Sophia too, spent holidays in Spain, Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey, Ireland and Austria, as well as visiting Sophia when she had flown the nest, wherever she was living and studying or working, in Munich, Vienna, Salamanca, Leon and New York. Ruth and Peter also made extended trips to visit friends and family in Canada, USA, New Zealand and Australia. Deteriorating health and increasing disability did not deter, but with the help of a wheelchair and Peter, her pillar of strength, they carried on adventuring in road trips all over the UK, visiting as many friends as possible on the way. Ruth was indomitable.

Ruth possessed beautiful, clear handwriting, along with a beautifully clear spoken voice. Her less than frequent ministry in meeting for worship was always memorable, deeply sincere and coming from a profound spiritual core and a wide, encompassing perspective on religion. Although her spiritual outlook was grounded in the Christianity of Quakerism, she explained that "I would describe myself as a humble learner in the school of Christ, but I recognise that if my environment had been different, I might well have followed a different path seeking the great 'otherness'." She loved learning about a rich variety of spiritual paths, and in her later years was increasingly drawn to indigenous and earth-based spiritual practices and their cosmovision, drawing her to choose a natural burial and native tree planting in her memory.

Ruth was an encourager of young and old: there are a good many who have cause to thank her for her supportive encouragement to act, speak, attend or serve when uncertainty might otherwise have stopped them. She was kind, reliable and wise and lived a life embodying love and compassion for fellow humans, animals, the environment and creation. A life lived faithfully, lovingly and courageously is her legacy to us all.

Signed on behalf of Pickering & Hull Area Meeting

Held on 13 November 2021

Martin Dickinson, Clerk