

## **Grbavac, Mary 26 October 1941 - 10 December 2021**

### **Testimony to the Grace of God in the Life of Mary Grbavac**

Mary was born in England into an old Quaker family on 26 October 1941, one of five children. She attended Saffron Walden Quaker school, and on leaving school worked in a jewellery shop. In 1963, at the age of 22, Mary set out alone for Australia. While she was living in Sydney, she met Josip Grbavac, a Croatian immigrant orphaned by the war, whose life story was so different to hers. Despite their differences, they formed an intense attachment that lasted to the end. They married in 1966 and had a son, Marco. They eventually moved to Brisbane for Joe's work. In Brisbane, Mary did clerical work for various companies including the Department of Social Security. But her real interests show in her other activities – active with Ethnic Communities Council, participating in a citizen interview panel for police recruiting, and when Joe developed non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, tirelessly fundraising for the Queensland Cancer Council.

After marriage, Mary dedicated her energies to her family and to the Croatian and other ethnic communities, and was unable to attend Quaker meetings regularly. Later in life she reconnected with the Brisbane meeting, where for the last few decades of her life she attended meetings for worship as often as possible. Mary served as an Elder, on Nominations Committee and Premises Committee, and represented Queensland Quakers on outside bodies such as Drug Arm, Believing Women for a Culture of Peace, and Queensland Faith Communities Council.

While she was an Elder, she felt a concern for those Friends scattered up and down the length of Queensland, and arranged to visit them to learn more about how they were doing, and to encourage them in their small worshipping groups, and especially the tiny meeting on the Gold Coast, which she continued to support until almost the end of her life. Mary was also committed to Friends' Fellowship for Healing, organising meetings for healing every month in Brisbane. She was a constant supporter of Quaker Service Australia, interested in its work, and knitting articles for sale to support it. She was a dedicated supporter of our African Great Lakes Refugee Project, sourcing household goods for new arrivals, constantly checking what support she could offer. And for individual Friends, Mary opened her home to listen to their troubles or celebrate their joys.

Mary knew disappointments in her own life, and was always aware of the obstacles that faced immigrant and refugee people. She responded by always trying to turn a negative into a positive. In every situation, she looked for ways to serve others. When Joe was diagnosed with non-Hodgkin's lymphoma, she responded by supporting cancer research, throwing herself into fundraising for the Cancer Council, and even shaving her head for the cause on one memorable occasion. When a new refugee family in our meeting had a wedding, she used her contacts to arrange a reception venue at a price they could afford.

Mary was proud of her Quaker heritage, and eager to keep Quakers in Australia aware of the traditions she had been brought up in. She was an enthusiastic supporter of the Quaker Tapestry project, which promoted knowledge of this heritage. Her attachment to the traditional Quaker way sometimes led to disagreements about how we move forward in our time and culture. She was not afraid to face conflict, but found it painful and exhausting. In the last years, Mary became increasingly frustrated by her declining mobility, her growing weakness, and the pain caused by a severe conflict among Queensland Friends. That conflict wounded Mary deeply. She sought healing for herself from among Quakers and from outsiders, but was unable to find the resolution she sought. She found herself isolated among Friends. However eventually Mary was able to dig deep into her spiritual resources and find the strength to forgive – truly forgive – those who had hurt her, and let her disappointment go. Would that we can all find the strength to do what Mary did when we are called to forgive.

At the end, in palliative care, Mary was at peace with those around her, at peace with her God. Mary slipped out of this life on 10 December 2021, confident of being reunited with her beloved Joe. She is survived by her son Marco, his wife Tania and their two children Bianca and Daniel, a sister Ruth, and two brothers Roger and Malcolm. Her brother Brian predeceased her by several years.

### **Minute of Record**

We have heard a Testimony to the Grace of God in the Life of our Friend, Mary Grbavac. We accept this testimony and ask that it be sent to the Yearly Meeting Secretary for inclusion in the Dictionary of Australian Quaker Biographies. We ask that it be published for Yearly Meeting 2022.

Queensland Regional Meeting for Worship for Business 1 May 2022, Minute 3.

### **Minute of Record**

Our Friend Mary Grbavac died 10 December 2021. The funeral was 21 December, and memorial meeting 9 Jan 2022. Mary was born a Birthright Friend in England and went to a Friends' School. She was a long-serving member of our community, a regular participant in Yearly Meetings and active in various QRM committees, including more recently Friends in Stitches and the QRM QSA committee. Mary was the contact Friend of the now laid down Gold Coast worshipping group and led the Meeting for Healing for QRM. She was active in the African Great Lakes Project and served for many years in the former Ministry and Oversight Committee.

We have heard a report of the memorial meeting by Jude Pembleton which has been sent to the Friends in Stitches newsletter. We ask that this be included with these minutes and be published in Qletter.

We appoint Duncan Frewin and Helen Webb to commence the composition of a Testimony to the Grace of God in Mary's life and ask them to consult with Marco Grbavac and others in Mary's family.

Queensland Regional Meeting for Worship for Business 6 February 2022, Minute 3.

### **Notice**

QRM received the news from Marco Grbavac that his mother died on 10 December 2021. She passed peacefully in her sleep. The Quaker community has lost a valuable Friend, who breathed and lived her Quaker faith. She will be greatly missed. Mary's funeral will take place on 21 December at Carbrook Queensland. Plans for a Quaker memorial meeting will be made known in due course.

From Queensland Regional Meeting Friends, e-Notices.