

A testimony to the Grace of God as shown in the life of Maretta Stark

1935 – 2012

In Maretta's own words she "had a great deal of good fortune in her life, chiefly in having two Quaker parents who loved her and a husband who loved her". She joined London's Festival Ballet when she was 19 and that was her life for the next few years – a life of hard work, travel and fun. She met and married Peter, then a geologist working for BP, and followed him to Trinidad, Greece and Libya where she first started to teach ballet. After their children, Tim and Nicky, came into their lives they settled in Oxford. Soon after that she started her ballet school – the Maretta Grace School of Dancing. By the time she sold it in 2001 it had grown to be a North Oxford institution with 3 teachers, several pianists and about 180 pupils.

Peter died in 2001 after several years' struggle with cancer. True to her nature and philosophy, Maretta made the most of every day. As Khalil Gibran puts it "The more that sorrow carves into my being, the more joy I can contain" – a line chosen by Maretta in her autobiographical sketch. For her the chief joy in her life thereafter were her children and grandchildren of whom she was so proud. There also was art, pottery, singing, and for 3 years, studying for a degree in Metanoia counselling. Maretta said "It was Meeting and pottery that helped me through those years of bereavement". She became a stalwart of Oxford Meeting as overseer, running enquirer's groups in her home, singing with the Leaveners and so much more.

A friend said at her funeral that Maretta had told her that she had felt lovable in the last years fighting cancer. And she was right- she was loved. She remained positive, outgoing and cheerful. She never spoke ill of anyone. In one of her clever Christmas letters she says "Dear Friends, it's so important to live life to the full". She made us laugh when she wrote about life on an oncology ward. Her lifelong love of travel ("When I'm feeling droopy, I've found my salvation: I get up and go – more peregrination) she shared with many friends. As her granddaughter Josie said in her poem about Maretta-Bushka was "an awesome friend". Her last years were like her earlier ones, full of travel as an international ballet examiner and with friends and most notably the annual visit to her 99 year old aunt in Peru.

After a short time in Mareta's company, one came to realise that here is someone with natural warmth, easy manner and a genuine spirit of life's adventures. We will always treasure the memory of Mareta at a meeting party dancing in fishnet stockings and top hat while singing one of her funny songs. It was the love of life that surrounded her. A great travelling companion, Mareta lived for every moment, thankful for the past yet making the most of the present.

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