

## **Record of Remembrance: Deborah Filgate 31/05/1926 – 12/05/2020**

Deborah was born Deborah De Falco Dresser in Washington Square, New York City in May 1926 to Dorothy De Falco and Ivan Chandler Dresser. Her beloved father Ivan Dresser had been an Olympic gold medal-winning relay racer, and became a Vice President of General Motors. As a result of his profession, the family moved a good deal, and Deborah remembered a childhood punctuated by having to leave friends and schools, and move to a different country. This had many advantages, but also occasioned much loss and sadness. Later in life she chose to live in Britain, and rarely travelled outside it.

The first move in her life was to Belgium in the 1930s, where Deborah learned to speak French and Flemish, and where she was much affected by two experiences: one was in having a Jewish best friend, with whom she later lost touch as a result of the Nazi occupation; the other was in seeing many disabled and maimed people begging in the streets – they had been injured during the First World War, and Deborah longed to help them but was unable to. To make matters worse, there was talk of another war coming, which appalled her.

The next move was to Mexico, where Deborah learned to speak Spanish. While her family was posted there, she spent part of the year in a girls' boarding school in the south of the USA. Jon Brown remembers her recounting another formative experience there: black waiters served the food in the hall. One day, a waiter tripped and the dish he was carrying crashed to the ground. Deborah, newly arrived, jumped up to help him clear away the mess. Then she saw how frightened he was, as he waved her away. No association between the races, let alone a white girl helping a black man in a menial role could be countenanced. He would have been sacked, she learned.

Later Deborah attended a more congenial school when she boarded at George School, a coeducational and liberal, Quaker-run school in Pennsylvania. This was her introduction to Quakers, and she was very happy there, joining the Society of Friends as a teenager.

Deborah married Patrick Macartney-Filgate after the end of the second world war, and they had two children, Michael and Anne. As in her childhood, her husband's job took them to many different places, and she lived in Australia, Canada, the UK and the USA at different times. After her marriage ended and when Michael went to Earlham, a Quaker college in Richmond, Indiana, Deborah and Anne emigrated to the UK and lived first in Goring and then in Oxford, where Deborah stayed for the rest of her life. Anne attended Friends schools, first at Wigtown and then Saffron Walden. When Anne had a child she was unable to look after, Deborah adopted her grandson Michael, and brought him up. Thanks to Deborah, Quaker values played a very important part in her grandson Michael's childhood – as part of Oxford Meeting, as well as with regular visits to Woodbrooke in the 1980s for their summer and Christmas gatherings – and he continues to be thankful for these values which have stayed with him.

All through her adult life, the experiences of her childhood years remained with her and continued to motivate and guide her. She had a special affinity for teaching and working with children, and she was committed to working for racial justice and full equality. She had volunteered with the civil rights movement in 1940s and 1950s America, working on voter registration and combatting racism.

While in the UK she was a concerned opponent of all forms of racism, an active supporter of Greenham women's peace camp, a committed feminist, and a self-taught expert in immigration and refugee issues; she always had a special concern for those uprooted from their homes. She assumed equal rights included lesbian and gay people long before it became a legal reality and offered personal support accordingly. Her study in her flat in Woodstock Close has box file after file cataloguing developments, listing facts and figures, and scrutinising arguments. Any Meeting study group that Deborah helped convene including during her many years as an Elder - for instance the one about the secret state in the early nineties - was always well resourced.

Deborah was a native New Yorker, frank, well-educated, widely read, sure of her place in the world, but who completely understood that others had a more tenuous position in society. She worked tirelessly in support of causes she valued, especially those concerned with gender, race and refugees. The stateless and dispossessed had a fierce friend and advocate in Deborah. She had an enquiring mind, a wry sense of humour and a firm, decisive manner. She was not always the most comfortable person, she spoke her mind fearlessly and frankly; compromise was not part of her world view. In her time with the Civil Rights movement she had had a cross burned in her lawn by the Ku Klux Klan, and she had no intention of suffering fools gladly.

As sometimes happens with people who devote themselves tirelessly and selflessly to the rights and diversity of others, Deborah had, at times, a difficult relationship with members of her own family, and with Friends. However, her son testifies that she drew on her life experiences in how she brought up her children, giving them a lasting legacy of resilience, love for others and an understanding of how people could and should be treated, along with an educated and witty sense of humour.

Judith Atkinson recalls that Deborah "was one of the first Oxford Friends to introduce herself to me when I arrived in 1994 and I have fond memories of her.

"A 'Philadelphia Quaker', Deborah ... was steeped in Quaker traditions and not slow to point out what she saw as any divergence ...

"... the last time we met stays in my memory. We met by chance in Summertown and she asked how I was. When I told her that my darling husband had just been diagnosed with a particularly drug-resistant cancer, her face and voice changed and she truly radiated compassion. I treasure that encounter.

"Deborah was a Character, witty, cultured – and strong-minded."

I will only add that she was also a loved mother and grandmother, a loyal and affectionate friend, fearless, exacting, plain speaking, and her own woman firmly to the end.

We give thanks for the grace of God as shown in the life and service of Deborah Filgate.