

TRIBUTE TO RUTH McCANCE

Written by Trent Goldsack

and read by Roanna McClelland
at the Memorial Service for Ruth
held on Monday 1 July 2019
at St James' Church, King Street, Sydney

You did not meet Ruth - you entered into a relationship with her. She saw the potential in everyone she met and could see who we all could be - her greatest reward was to see us be true to ourselves. She believed that everyone had, at their core, a beautiful essence that could not be destroyed...only dimmed...and she believed by honouring that core that people, communities and the world could be healed.

She had endless hope for people, humanity and our planet. Many people share this belief, but few actually do anything about it. Ruth showed us daily how it could be done, through both her microscopic and macroscopic interactions with people and communities.

The cornerstone of Ruth's philosophy was to honour who you are, and the gifts that you have been given - even though it may be hard to accept what these are. She did the best to honour hers within the many communities that loved her and are represented here today.

Her wisdom and intellect shone and, although it may be a cliché, I think that most of you here today would agree that she had an old soul.

During times like this, people like to share their stories, and I would like to share a beautiful story from one of Ruth's friends that really sums her up:

I remember in particular one day...we had just finished a few days of offsite team meetings. She suggested that she and I spend a day together one-on-one. We took a trip to a place for a 2-3 hour hike. Throughout the day, I went on and on (as I am likely to do)...I was blathering about my life philosophy, probably trying to sound very impressive, sharing with Ruth all the people I had been reading and such. Ruth walked alongside me, occasionally asking a question, occasionally encouraging us to stop for a drink or to look at the views (most of which I had missed because I was stomping along in my own little world).

Near the end of the day, when we were about to get to a local place for dinner, she found a moment when I took a breath and paused in my monologue and she did the most remarkable thing...I can still see it in my mind like it was happening right now. She smiled at me in that arresting, 'I am really seeing you' way and reached out, put her hand on the middle of my chest. She didn't say anything at first and honestly it caught me off guard. After a moment or two, she asked 'what's going

on in here?'. At this point, I had worked with Ruth for 7+ years and was getting used to her style...less business and more spiritual. But this time, I wasn't ready and I think I wrinkled my nose and looked down at her and gave her this sort of snort and an annoyed look...like 'what the heck are you talking about and why are you interrupting my deep and meaningful thoughts about myself!'. She continued to smile, put a bit more pressure on her hand so it almost rocked me back on my heels and asked again 'what's going on in here?'

I can't say exactly why Ruth's gesture or question worked on me so brilliantly. I know what happened next...I got really angry and stormed off. I was filled with this intense sense of frustration, embarrassment and confusion.

For some reason, that gesture broke through. Of all the conversations and hours of coaching, this was the moment that really broke through. It started a 3 year long revival of my spiritual life and perhaps more importantly closed a door on a chapter of my life leading up to that moment that was defined by arrogance and self-absorption (I honestly don't know how she put up with me for all those years before). 'What's going on in here?'...stop living from your mind and your ego and start to live from your heart and your soul...start to live an embodied life. Become truly part of this miraculous, messy, animated world around you...Ruth conveyed all that in a simple gesture and question!

This story is just one example of the gifts that Ruth gave to the people around her. She was generous with her gifts, and for many of us, they were the greatest gifts that we had received.

Gifts like this are free, and whilst they can sometimes be very hard to give – and receive - they are incredibly meaningful. I remember on many occasions when I brushed one of her gifts off, she would say “that's OK - keep it and unwrap it when you are ready”.

I know I still have a few left to unwrap and I treasure those that I already have. Ruth had her demons as we all do and she, like us all, battled them daily. However, she did not let them define her. For as long as I had known her, she was trying to expose her beautiful core - and that journey and her generosity is what allowed her to be the special person that we all knew. The path that made her who she was is available to us all if we choose to follow it. A hard road, but the rewards are great.

I never really understood Ruth's desire for nature, however what I did understand was that being in those wild natural places energised her soul. It was a core part of her being, and a part of the whole that I loved. Although I did not understand it, I was happy to encourage it - the delight when she came back was enough for me.

Ruth had such a deep respect for nature. Nature awed her and nourished her. Being in the mountains for her was being true to herself.

I called Ruth “The Bride” and initially this had annoyed her. Then one day a couple of years after our big day, she asked me why I called her that. My answer was that our wedding day represented the happiest and most significant day of my life. The day when we both got up in public and declared our deep and undying love for each other. So, every time I called her Bride, it connected me to that promise. After that, she enjoyed the name.

I was looking forward to growing old with her, and now get to carry her in my heart, and hear her living on in my memories and our stories. My marriage to her has not ended, and I know that in some way I will always be married to her. I will miss her.

I have been asked what I loved about Ruth and a very long list started to form. In the end I realised that I cannot articulate the reasons - I just loved all that she had to offer. This room is filled with people who also loved Ruth and connected with her on their own personal level. Her life was filled with her relationships and loves, adventures and passions. However, no matter how busy she was, Ruth made time in the midst of it all for pausing - for contemplation, and connection.

Ruth summarised the importance of this in her own words. As we move forward, we can take these words with us:

“The only moment we can ever influence in our lives is this moment....and the next....and the next. My capacity to live life well therefore rests in being as alive and present as I can be moment to moment. If I am lost in anxiety about the future or regrets about the past, I squander the present. With all my senses and awareness present and with all the gifts and love I have to share, I can shape my life and positively affect the lives of those around me”

Ruth also had profound thoughts on the importance of finishing our journey through life. As she wrote:

“On November 8 2017 my father died, not before his time, but very quickly, without warning and alone. And this is indeed the heart of it all. As mortals we know there is a final moment in our lives: a conclusion to the innumerable moments we have lived and the moment when I most hope we can be present to the fullness of what it means to be human”

I hope she found this place.

Ruth the singer, mountaineer, sailor, the corporate woman, my wife and my best friend is now gone, but her mark on the world will endure through the positive effect she had on all our lives. Let us treasure the presents that we already have open and keep safe those we have not opened until the time is right.

How best to remember her? Keep trying to be the person that she could see we could be.