

TRIBUTE TO ROSEMARY THURLOW [04/05/16]

It is an honour to stand here this afternoon and give tribute to my colleague and dear friend, Rosemary. I do so on behalf of all those who have served alongside her at the Christian Education Project, the team and committee members both past and present– some of whom are with us today– and of course all of our many supporters

The Christian Education Project was established in 1990 to serve the schools of Redbridge supporting them in their delivery of Christian aspects of the RE syllabus. Rosemary served the Project almost from the beginning. The longest serving member of the team – she worked for the Project for over twenty years – only retiring in December last year. In truth we cannot remember a time before Rosemary at CEP.

Rosemary spoke of how she was invited to take on an administrator role at the Project by Christine Caton. Little did she know that it would turn into such a big part of her life. In recognition of her many gifts the role grew – she crossed all our t's and dotted all our i's – quite literally by hand in the very beginning. We have beautifully handwritten ledgers in the office that detail the Project's membership – Rosemary was meticulous in her work. It was more than a job to Rosemary – she felt it was her calling and she devoted herself to it. Whether it was producing the figures for our treasurer Mike, finishing off our mailshots at home or even opening up her home to host prayer meetings – Rosemary demonstrated an incredible commitment to the work of CEP.

She worked from home and borrowed offices in the time before CEP had the office space we enjoy now. But in time she joined the schools workers in our Clayhall office as an integral part of the team. We were an unlikely team, Rosemary, Neil & I – but I like to think effective. I think it would be fair to say that she was sometimes exasperated by mine & Neil's schoolboy antics but it was clearly with a fondness and I hope she knew how fond we were of her. It is often said 'you don't know what you've got til its gone.' And I must say it is the mark of a good administrator that you don't really notice them when they are there but when they are not you really appreciate all that they do! Something my colleague Neil & I would find out on those rare occasions that Rosemary was not in the office and we had to do the admin – not our strongest point!

I didn't want this tribute to turn into one just talking about someone who fulfilled duties – after all we are all more than human doings we are human beings. What I want to remember today is the person who Rosemary was.

The tagline of the Christian Education Project is to serve schools and to share faith. I think serving and faith are two words that sum Rosemary up for me.

Rosemary was someone who served, never one for the limelight she was unassuming but diligent in all she did.

Her service to the Project went beyond the job description, I especially think of all the times she catered for events like our annual supporters' supper. Just last October I incurred her displeasure when I didn't ask her to cater for a particular event – one where we publicly acknowledged her, marking her retirement. I felt it was the only way I could make sure she was in the room – and not in the kitchen! I couldn't let her know – it was supposed to be a surprise. Again, I felt I'd never get her in the room if she knew. She'd probably have run a mile.

Rosemary was also a woman of strong faith. She was more knowledgeable and wiser than she ever gave herself credit for. She had her convictions and when occasion arose was not afraid to speak up.

She loved her church family, running a house group and leading the Luncheon club. She loved her visits to Mulberry House, with fiends Ian Hack and Steve Maclean, to sit under the teaching of Chris Hill.

Rosemary's strong faith was something that remained right to the end. When my colleague Rebecca and I visited her in hospital in March we spoke about a difficult personal situation that I was facing. Even then her answer was to trust God and that He had a plan.

Rosemary was more than a colleague – she was a friend. I knew her before joining CEP through our both attending this church – in fact she was one of the people who really encouraged me to apply when the position as second schools worker became vacant.

Working with her for 10 years we walked through some of life's real ups and downs together, we inevitably laughed together and I'm not embarrassed to say we cried together, on more than one occasion. I particularly appreciated Rosemary's support during some of the harder times and I am sure Neil Poole, my colleague and predecessor would similarly acknowledge her care and encouragement especially through the times when he was the lone schools worker.

In the office I loved listening to stories of the younger Rosemary driving across the world in an old camper van – an adventure that took her all the way to Australia.

I loved listening to stories of how she fell in love with Len, and the fondness with which she spoke of all whom she called family.

I loved that she cared for my family beyond the surface concern - always asking after them and especially remembering my daughters' birthdays. It meant a lot to me.

I enjoyed hearing her talk about her garden, her trips to Wimbledon and I will miss those quieter times in the office when she would give me run for my money on the table tennis table!

Someone recently remarked to me that she was the glue that held it all together – she was our continuity. Always there to share in our triumphs and to offer encouragement when we needed it.

She never did stand at the front of a classroom of children during her time with CEP but there was no one more integral to the work of making Jesus known in our local schools.

I am so sad that Rosemary did not get to enjoy many years of retirement – she deserved to. But I am pleased that she did not suffer long and her strong faith assures me that she is now in a better place. I am in no doubt that upon entering in she would've heard the words 'well done good and faithful servant'.

God Bless You Rosemary and thank you!