

## **Ruth Konig: a Rotary reflection**

PDG David Anderson, Rotary Club of Yea  
*St Luke's Anglican Church, Yea, 10 March 2016*

Just over 6 years ago, a group of Business Studies students at North Western University in the United States took on Rotary International as a case study. Their research and findings came to the conclusion that “Rotary International was a worldwide network of inspired individuals who translate their passions into relevant social causes to change lives in communities”

I know that Ruth was **not** interviewed as a part of their study but she certainly fitted every single aspect of that powerful conclusion: she was one of that worldwide network of 1.2 million ordinary people doing extraordinary things. Yet Ruth was no ordinary person, no ordinary Rotarian.

She was both and an inspired and inspiring individual who believed in the networking of those individuals who could achieve so much more when they worked together.

She was passionate – about so many things in the rich smorgasbord that is the menu of opportunity for Rotarians

She identified relevant and immediate social causes which needed addressing and in which Rotary and Rotarians – either as a team or as individuals – could make a difference.

And she changed lives – not just through her service as a Rotarian – for Ruth was a teacher, an inspired and passionate teacher who, long before she was a Rotarian, was changing lives through the many young people she taught.

Ruth joined the Rotary Club of Yea, officially, on 28 June 2001.

One evening the previous month, John Sinclair and I visited Ruth at her then home in Melbourne Road, to explain to Ruth the obligations and requirements of being a member of the Rotary Club of Yea in 2001 [those requirements and obligations have changed since, and continue to change.]

As we walked from Ruth's place, up her drive, John remarked “we haven't failed yet to get one” and then added “I think we have cracked the jackpot”. And he was right and it didn't take other members long to realise we had.

From the very beginning she threw herself into the life of the Club and its service to the community.

She became Club President in 2004-2005, the centenary of Rotary, the first of the new breed of Rotarians inducted into the Club at the start of this century, this millennium, and the Clubs first female President.

In her Presidential year, membership increased to almost 40, everyone was given a voice, members Noel and Kerry Ryan were married (although I am not sure she had a lot to do with that), the Club changed its meeting venue to the Golf Club benefitting the community groups who became the caterers, the Club completed its BBQ shelter adjacent to what is now the Y Water Discovery Centre as a centenary of Rotary community project and the tsunami hit on Boxing Day. Of that event Ruth wrote in her Presidential Report: "I am proud and humbled by the response of the club, of individual members and of the local community"

In reflecting on her year, Ruth wrote: "my favourite event was the digging out and concreting of the goat shed in the Recreation Reserve." No matter what the job or the project, Ruth in her service to the Club and the community was hands on. She got down and she got dirty.

As a final event of her year as a Centennial President, Ruth attended the Rotary International Convention in Chicago – the first of five she was to attend. It opened her eyes to what the international meant in Rotary International. As one of the almost 40,000 attending the Convention, she met and engaged with a wide variety of those passionate and inspired individuals she was to herself become.

Ruth's service to District 9790 commenced a year after her Presidency when she became the District Literacy Coordinator, coordinating Club literacy programs and encouraging Clubs to do more to improve both young and adult literacy. The following year, in 2007/08, she began a three year term as the District Vocational Service Committee Chair. In so many ways, Ruth used her own vocational skills – learnt as a teacher – to improve the lives of others and to encourage the implementation of vocational programs by Clubs in the District.

She was the Conference Committee Chair for the 2012 District Conference at Moonee Valley where she had such an influence on a District Conference which tried new things - most noticeably a new and untried location with a new format. And she delivered!

As a Club member, Ruth was a part of the team which travelled to Mando Village on the outskirts of Goroka in the Eastern Highlands of Papua New Guinea in September 2010 – delivering a water project to the village school and using the members’ skills in the classrooms for two weeks. For Ruth it was an opportunity to use her vocation as a teacher in the classroom where she captured the hearts of the students.

Over the past six years this inspired Rotarian has had two great passions: one was Donations-in-Kind. Every Thursday she would travel the 270 kilometre round trip to the District store at Essendon sorting through donated goods and preparing containers for shipment to developing countries. Her books and bargains at the Yea Market as well as others markets she attended over this period was to raise money for the store to enable them to ship even more containers. Her great skill as recognised by David Meller was to take her teaching experience and decide what books were most suitable for whom and be shipped where. And when our Essendon store closed, she travelled even further to the combined bigger and larger store at Footscray.

But it was her undying commitment and dedication to supporting an orphanage and school near Rustenburg, South Africa, which became Ruth’s guiding light over a similar period. The story by now should be well known but let us briefly remind ourselves of it.



The seed for the project came from the students of Sacred Heart Primary School who had conducted a fundraiser they called “buckets for bores”. They wanted to raise money for a project to provide safe, clean drinking water for a school in South Africa. The Rotary Club of Yea agreed to match the student contribution and following her participation in a Rotary Friendship Exchange to District 9400 in South Africa, Ruth identified the recipient school – Dayspring Childrens’ Village in North Western Province, 70 kilometres from Rustenburg.

The Rotary Club of Rustenburg Kloof already had an association with the school and Ruth soon developed a close friendship with one of their members, Cheryl Phillips, who herself had been a Rotary Youth Exchange student years before hosted in Hamilton, western Victoria.

Once that small but significant project was completed, Ruth returned in 2010 and again used her vocational skills at the school where she became known to the bright eyed students as “Aunty Ruth”. Having attended a School Council meeting whilst there, the need was obvious for a properly plumbed ablution block for all at the school and a waste watered treatment facility where the grey water could be used to water the school’s vegetable plot and employment during the construction phase could be provided to local workers.



Such a project was going to be a costly one and the long road to fundraise began. And a long road it was as Ruth, together with Robyn Kirby, walked the in excess of 900 km of the Camino de Santiago across northern Spain. It was as much a personal journey for Ruth as well as a fund raiser for she discovered her inner self during the pilgrimage and the importance and meaning of family.

Her real success was in encouraging the Club to take on the Dayspring project as a Rotary Foundation project for, through the Foundation, a significant part of the required \$120,000 for the project could be financed. It took over two years for the submission to be written, revised, submitted and reviewed – and just a week ago, the first Global Grant awarded to a Rotary Club in District 9790, was approved.

Ruth could now rest easy. Her work was done. The funding was in place. The project could proceed. Her name will be forever in the hearts and minds of the children of Dayspring (and perhaps on a toilet wall!).

Past District International Service Chair Kevin Hadingham commented: “Your kms of fundraising, your passion for Dayspring and your tenacity in advocating this project has resulted in a great dividend!”

Ruth Konig was many things to a lot of people. One thing for certain is the impact she had on so many people.

Facebook and social media may frighten some – but the post from the Club last Sunday advising of her passing reached 11,855 people. There were comments and condolences from past exchange students, Rotarians from Brazil, the United States, Thailand, Germany, Canada, our partner District in the Mando project in Papua New Guinea and all around our Rotary District and beyond. There were also comments from family in Scotland, past students and their parents, people she inspired, people she helped, people she encouraged and lifted up.

From Thailand, Supattra (Tippy) constantly referred to Ruth as her “super woman”,

Wilma Simmons from Maitland in New South Wales said “I have great memories of Ruth's determination, compassion, generosity and good common sense when she was in Papua New Guinea on [the Mando] project”

Lily Rattray wrote from England: “Ruth was truly one of the most amazing women I have ever met. She was in equal measure kindness, inspiration and grace”

And, from Paul Bannan, “Aw bugga She was a wonderful lady in every sense of the word ... I dips me lid”

The final word comes from Immediate Past President Jim Osborne who just eight months ago, at our Club Changeover spoke directly to Ruth:

“Most importantly, I must say to Ruth, you are an inspiration to us all and to the many clubs and people you come in contact with. Your single minded devotion to the Dayspring project is awe inspiring...The many miles you have walked boggles the mind of many of us but you just go and do it. Terrific, awe inspiring effort Ruth and this club and its members are the richer for your membership and fellowship.”

A Rotarian to the very end, a week before her passing she joined almost 500 other Rotarians at our District Conference in Bendigo and a week ago, she attended what was to become her last meeting at the Rotary Club of Yea.

Ruth Konig, Rotarian and recipient of Paul Harris Fellow recognition, with sapphire:

- Thank you for your unselfish contribution to serving humanity.
- You lived by the Rotary motto of “Service above self”
- You took to heart the motto of the Rotary Foundation “to do good in the world”

You truly were “a gift to the world”.