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Promoting well-being by valuing people's memories

News Update

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## A Special Tribute to Faith Gibson

It was with genuine sadness that the staff of RNNI and her wide circle of friends bade farewell to Faith Gibson, following the death of her beloved husband Norman, as she returned to her native Australia at the end of last year.



Faith has played such a huge role in the foundation and development of RNNI and still is its President, so we would like to pay tribute to her in this special edition of our ebulletin. RNNI would not exist without Faith's foresight and determination that brought together so many people from health and social care, social work, museums and libraries to lay the foundation of the Reminiscence Network.

Her vision was to promote well-being by valuing people's memories to enhance the lives of people of all ages and this was to become the mission statement of RNNI. It was her ability however to connect on a personal level with us all which made her genuinely loved and this is what we will miss just as much as her remarkable intelligence and strategic thinking.

**Marian Ferguson, Manager RNNI**



## Another Honour for Faith

Faith was awarded an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Stirling in 2015 just before she left for Australia. This was in recognition of her outstanding contribution to social work and dementia care, especially dementia care in Northern Ireland and for her contribution to the establishment of the Dementia Services Development Centre in Northern Ireland in 2007.

Faith is a graduate of the universities of Sydney, Queensland and Chicago and holds degrees in psychology, education and social work. Although her early career was in the child care field, her interests soon extended to social work practice, policy, research and teaching concerned with social work, social gerontology, dementia care and reminiscence theory and practice. Her approach to reminiscence work is recognised and emulated internationally for its use of communication techniques and relationship building to enhance the lives of people of all ages, especially older people and those with dementia and their carers. She was awarded the Order of the British Empire in 1987.

## Founding the Reminiscence Network

I first met Faith in 1983/84 when members of the library service were invited to participate in a competition for primary school children to design a Christmas card to cheer up an old person. The Belfast Telegraph sponsored the prizes and the DHSS were also involved. The cards contained information from Age Concern which would be useful to older people. That was the beginning of a long collaboration and friendship.

1985 was International Youth Year and this time we had a project which encouraged young people to record the memories of older people. This project again had sponsorship from the DHSS and the Belfast Telegraph and

was Provenance wide and involved both primary and secondary school children. The book *Rooms of Time* was produced after this project by Faith and Cathal Dallat. Over the years I then met Faith on many occasions at conferences in which the Special Services librarians were present.

In 1998 the first meeting to set up the Reminiscence Network took place in Mount Alexander in Comber. The Network was launched in 1999. The early days of developing the Network were exciting and stimulating as we all worked together. Now that Faith has left for Australia and I have left the Network I am sure it will continue go from strength to strength. **Hilary Glenn, Past Honorary Secretary, RNNI**

## A Powerful Impact

I was fortunate to meet Faith in the early 1990s when she was speaking at a conference on the benefits of reminiscence work for older people. Later we were privileged to have Faith deliver reminiscence training to social workers, residential and day care staff in the South-East Health and Social Care Trust. Staff were seen to embrace this person-centred training enthusiastically and implement it in their respective work situations. Faith's knowledge, experience, commitment and sensitivity made a very powerful and positive impact on us all.

Subsequently I looked forward to meeting Faith from time to time and she shared with me that she was in contact with staff from other Health and Social Care Trusts, Museums, Libraries and Community Groups – all of whom were doing reminiscence work. We concluded that it would be most effective to facilitate the sharing of reminiscence practice through a 'network meeting'!

I remember the exploratory meeting in Mount Alexander Residential Care Home when the Reminiscence Network was born and Faith was the 'Consultant gynaecologist'!! All of us in the Reminiscence Network have greatly valued the wise guidance and unstinting support which Faith has given to us over the years. Thank you, Faith.

**Audrey Lockhart, Past Chairperson RNNI**

## A Giant at my Shoulder

Remembering Faith brings a smile to my face and three words spring to mind – strength, determination, and dignity.

We met in 2006 through work with the Changing Ageing Partnership at Queen's University Belfast. Faith came to an early meeting and recognising her exceptional abilities I persuaded her to become involved. This softly spoken, petite little woman was soon to become a giant at my shoulder. Over the years Faith generously provided, me and others, with guidance, solace and encouragement. Her passion and enthusiasm for the power of reminiscence was infectious.

Life with Faith could never be all work and we shared many fun times. Together with Professor Pam Arnsberger from University of Hawaii, we explored the North Antrim Coast and the Boyne Valley. On these trips we learnt about the young Australian who took the leap of faith and came to Ireland when she fell in love with an Ulster man. Watching the dignity with which Faith cared for her beloved Norman these past years has been inspirational.

Faith gave me some planters from her beautiful garden in Jordanstown and the bulbs I planted are already sprouting up. The promise of bright yellow daffodils seems a fitting tribute to Faith.

**Una Lynch**

# Challenging Others

I am one of the many people that Faith taught at the University of Ulster, meeting her way back in the late '70s. Until then I had only experience in residential childcare and so Faith's area of care of the elderly was new to me. Her knowledge and enthusiasm captivated us and seminars in her office were the highlight of our time at college. I seriously considered a career in that area, but my commitment to childcare was strong. My life's path had a few curves and twists before a chance meeting about seven or eight years ago in a hotel in Dublin brought us together and began for me the privilege of working together.

One of Faith's many strengths is identifying people who could be challenged to do something they probably hadn't considered. She introduced me again to the world of reminiscence and life review, and gave me the encouragement and support I needed to get involved. So that meeting in Dublin is a major branching point in my life. I guess many others reading this will identify a similar branching point in their lives which Faith influenced.

So Faith, my one time teacher and mentor, has encouraged and guided me, linked me with people and situations that have been immensely important for me, and been responsible for my interest and development in the fascinating area of reminiscence and life review. I would never have had the many opportunities I have had in recent years without her. I am happy to say she is a very dear friend, and although I miss her, I am happy she has returned to Australia to .... retire? Let's watch this space!!  
**Daphne Stevenson, trainer with RNNI**

## A Wise Counsel

In 2004 when I first joined the Health Promotion Service of the then Homefirst Community Trust I wanted to ensure that staff who worked with older people in the community, particularly day and residential care staff, had the opportunity to avail of training to enhance their skills and knowledge in reminiscence. In my previous role as a nurse I had facilitated reminiscence sessions with older people within a hospital setting and observed its many benefits.

It was at that point I came into contact with the Reminiscence Network and over the next few years organised a

number of courses facilitated by Faith. I feel extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to work alongside Faith and to learn from her expert knowledge and wise counsel and as time went past, to consider her a friend as well as a work colleague. She is a very warm, kind and sincere person who is also extraordinarily humble given the successes of her career and the high esteem everyone holds her in.

I am particularly grateful for Faith's input into the Northern Trust Life Story Book produced in 2009. Her expertise and guidance mean we now have a resource which is an extremely useful tool to use

with older people. Although we all will miss her I feel honoured to have worked alongside Faith and wish her all the best as she settles back into life in her native Australia.

**Yvonne Carson, Senior Health Promotion Officer, Northern Health and Social Care Trust**

## Reminiscence and Museums

Faith has made a huge contribution to the development of reminiscence practice in many museums in Northern Ireland. She personally delivered training in good practice for staff at the Ulster Museum and then contributed her life-long collection of objects when the museum was developing its loan box service. She worked tirelessly on securing funding from the Heritage Lottery fund and then on the delivery of the Valuing Heritage by Valuing Memories project which developed reminiscence services in the Tower Museum in Derry, the Ulster American Folk Park, Craigavon Museum Services and Newry and Mourne Museum. Faith has been an inspiration on how museums can work with older people, and she has had a significant impact on National Museums' Live and Learn and Treasure House projects, generously sharing her time and her expertise.

**Jane Williams, Education Office  
National Museums NI**



## The Road to Sydney

Last October, Faith and I set off on an adventure which would see us travel from Inverness to Sydney via Dubai! It was with a mixture of sadness and pride that I accompanied my mentor, colleague and dear friend half way across the globe to Dubai on her journey back to her beloved Australia.

The first stop was Inverness where Faith collected an Honorary Doctorate for her outstanding contribution to social work and dementia care. We then headed back for a day of rest then onward to Dubai where we enjoyed a 2- day stopover sightseeing, resting, shopping and people watching which enabled Faith to undertake more life story work with the locals!

We parted at the Emirates Terminal with Faith heading to Sydney and me heading back to Belfast. It will always be a wonderful memory and on my seven hour journey home, I had plenty of time to reflect on our enduring friendship, the fun we shared for over 20 years and the inspiration she has been to me and countless others.

So what do I miss? I miss the weekly catch-up in Glenbroome, listening to someone who really made a difference. But I know the guidance and support which has been invaluable to me both in my career and in my life, which I treasure, is now on the end of the phone. I also miss the weekly takeaway or Sandy Row scones and Faith's best efforts to get me to eat salad or even a piece of fruit!

**Lynda Robinson, Chief Executive,  
AGENI**

## A Lovely Lady

I first met Faith in the late 1990s when I approached her about work I was involved in regarding older people with communication difficulty. She was immediately interested and generously gave her skills and expertise.

From that time on I came to know Faith as a person, apart from her academic and research achievements and her countless contributions to the world of caring, enriching many lives. I found that she has a deep and broad interest in life and living and, whilst not suffering fools gladly, a sensitivity to her fellow human beings. A person who is never afraid to challenge and persevere with the will to progress knowledge and understanding.

She is someone who values family and friends and who is supportive, and an excellent and attentive listener. Within her diminutive stature there is an indomitable spirit, enormous kindness and huge sense of fun.

To sum up how I know Faith as the person, I quote my grandson Matthew's comment after he, Faith and I had shared a picnic at the Giant's Ring, "A lovely lady."

**Rosemary Hamill**

