

TRIBUTE TO ROSEMARY SANDERCOCK

14 January 2004

We all have our fond memories of Rosemary and her family have remembered her life and what made her the person she was. Her sister Bobbie has written: Rosemary was born at the home of her maternal Grandmother in Dover. She had a brother Roger, two sisters older, and later a sister Bobbie two years younger, then eight years later another sister Ann. Our home was in Egypt due to our father being a Pilot on the Suez Canal. It was a very happy childhood spent at the beach swimming in the Canal. Rosemary and Bobbie spent a term at the local French Convent. Sadly, the “entente cordiale” did not exist between the French and English pupils, so they were not sorry to come to England and boarding school, at the age of ten for Rosemary. She was popular as she was kind and willing to help anyone. Her natural instinct to lead was a slight problem. She was never at a loss to organise a game of rounders or a little mischief if her friends were bored. When she became ill with rheumatic fever she had to move to a smaller school for nursing care. There, the Head Mistress recognised her as a born leader and gave her the reins. Rosemary flourished from then on.

We travelled to Egypt for the summer holidays on the P&O school ships, ten days each way. Rosemary was a poor sailor so she had to be kept busy playing deck games at which she excelled. They were happy times and she was the best sister in the world.

Ann has remembered: Rosemary had a natural ability for sport. At school she was in the teams for swimming, tennis and hockey, playing hockey for Kent schools. Later, an accomplished golfer when time permitted from her work. At the London School of Economics, she rowed for the college team which led to sitting on a boat on a float in the Lord Mayor’s Show in singlet and shorts, not the happiest experience in November. She also received two certificates from the Royal Humane Society for lifesaving having rescued a fellow rower from the Thames in January, and some years later while having her lunch sandwich on the beach at Ramsgate she rescued a boy playing truant and in difficulties in the sea.

At the outbreak of the war, Rosemary with her school, evacuated from Sandwich to Wiltshire, at the same time, I, her younger sister was just joining, and as the family were separated with our parents in Egypt, Rosemary as the loving and caring elder sister decided to stay at school with me and took on teaching the juniors and games throughout the school.

In 1944, Rosemary left to start her further education taking a new diploma in Public Health and Hygiene, then to LSE to read Social Science and following that, was selected for a new Home Office course at Liverpool University in Child Probation and Welfare. She first worked as a Child Care Officer in Croydon, moving to Ramsgate after her parents retired to Kent from Egypt.

It was in the office in Ramsgate that Robbie would visit as a Health Visitor from the Margate area, one day mentioning that her flatmate was immigrating to New Zealand and she would have to look for new accommodation. Rosemary offered her the spare room in the house she shared with her Mother and as her Mother was in poor health a nurse in residence was a great comfort. After her Mother’s death and fifteen years in

child care, Rosemary felt it was time for a change and work in the Third World was a challenge. Nurses were wanted and the King George VII Fund was setting up a new two-year crash course for graduates. At 40, this found Rosemary at St. Thomas's and the start of a new chapter in her life.

Robbie has 40 years of these memories and has been thinking about some from their years in Africa which shows the very special person Rosemary was. Going to Africa as VSOs and being slightly older than the average VSO Rosemary always gave time, care and counsel to the youngsters experiencing for the first time homesickness and the third world.

Rosemary never missed an opportunity of furthering her knowledge of medical matters relating to conditions and diseases not seen in the UK. On her day off she would spend time at the Government hospital in Nairobi to do this.

Whilst working in Khartoum, when Friday was the Muslim Day of Prayer, Rosemary arranged the help of a Christian Doctor who spoke Arabic, and got together a small medical team to help 5,000 people who had fled from the civil war in south and were suffering from severe malnutrition and malaria and had been given the town rubbish dump to live on.

In Uganda—following the war in N. West Uganda, our aim was to encourage families to return to their burnt out villages and neglected gardens. We found many of the refugees were medically trained personnel and teachers who spoke English ready to return, but their clothing was almost nil. With aid from the Catholic Church, Rosemary managed to fit the male nurses and teachers with shirts and trousers, and the female staff quickly made themselves a dress from material which Rosemary obtained. This enabled them to face their pupils and patients with some self-esteem, and help to restore some semblance of normal life.

In Kenya – following a few years working with the nomadic Masai tribe in an area the size of Norfolk, Rosemary became aware of many post-polio children unable to use their lower limbs and therefore were crawling on hands and knees through the dust and dirt. Working alongside a missionary organisation, African Inland Mission, Rosemary was instrumental in setting up a Child Care Centre in Masailand. This meant children could be brought to that centre whilst waiting for surgery to strengthen their limbs, followed by a rehabilitation period at the Child Care Centre with the fitting of callipers, etc. and including schooling. That same Centre is still functioning today.

In retirement while looking after Robbie's sister, Mary, there was time for WEA courses, NADFAS, Church Recording, Oxborough Hall volunteers and collecting for Charities, swimming, walking, golf and gardening. Rosemary so often said, "I have been so lucky, I have had a wonderful life." She made it so with her courage, her caring, her interest in everyone she met and every thing around her. She retained her zest for life to the end.

This is a card written to Rosemary in the last week by her great niece, which says it all for us: Dearest Rosemary, You are my inspiration. Such goodness and charity comes so easily to you. You have made the most of every opportunity whilst acting

completely selflessly, always putting others before yourself, and caring far beyond the call of duty. So generous and so kind. You are my inspiration; I will miss you dearly and will love you always.

Dr. Paul Zuckerman, Board member of both AMREF (African Medical Research and Education Foundation), Nairobi, and AMREF U.K.

Firstly, may I say what an honour it is for me to represent AMREF at Sister Rosemary Sandercock's Memorial service. I am here on behalf of the Board of AMREF in Nairobi, on behalf of Professor Miriam Were, the chair, Dr Michael Smalley, Director General, and on the behalf of AMREF UK and its Director Alexander Heroys.

AMREF is Africa's largest health NGO and I have the privilege of serving on its main board in Nairobi.

Sister Rosemary Sandercock former staff member of the AMREF Mobile Medical Unit, died at home in England on December 17th. She was in her early 80s and had been ill for some time.

Rosemary and Robbie (Sister Winifred Robinson) became a legend with the Maasai community throughout Kenya and parts of Tanzania, through their remarkable teamwork over twenty years.

MM II, as it was known focussed on prophylactic work. In a single year R and R, as they were affectionately known, and their team administered almost 30,000 immunizations against measles, DPT, and polio. This team was made up of the late Danieli Lomini, Ishmael Ngenyiki, and later Samson Ntore and Peter Kibiru (still with AMREF Kenya). Covering up to 20,000 kilometres annually, Mobile II would spend two weeks out of every four under canvas, the third week being devoted to Flight Clinics, and the fourth to rest and refitting.

Rosemary had qualified as a nurse and Robbie as a health visitor. During their work together they were faced with patients suffering from TB, leprosy, kwashiorkor and many other diseases such as cholera outbreaks; Rosemary performed minor operations in a canvas-walled operating theatre; health education was given to all those attending the clinics.

Nicky Blundell Brown, an old friend and long time member of the staff in Nairobi writes:

“R and R had a great capacity for hospitality in their canvas home. Many of us visitors from National Offices – I was working with AMREF UK when I first met them in 1973 - were fortunate enough to spend time with them. My experiences with Mobile II made a lasting impression on me, and encouraged me so much in my fundraising work; watching two women, and their team, work steadily through the day on the long lines of Maasai people waiting patiently for attention, mostly in incredible heat and dust, was a real inspiration. I could only help make tea and other minor tasks, such as counting syringes, whilst they were busy at work. When the sun had set and the last patient had left, we would sit under the stars round the campfire, discussing their work and their plans. They were to me the ‘fingers’ of AMREF

really touching and making impact on the people of East Africa. No wonder their names throughout this region generated such affection and respect.

R and R retired in 1985 and returned to England. They undertook two health promotive consultancies with Oxfam in Sudan and Eritrea, for these and their work with AMREF, Rosemary and Robbie were honoured by Queen Elizabeth with the MBE.

Still active until recently, Rosemary would give her time to the elderly and supporting the local church in Norfolk, the eastern part of England.

Thank you Rosemary for all you did in the service of others.”

As some of you know Nicky has organised a tree planting ceremony in Nairobi that is taking place as we gather together here, linking South Norfolk and Nairobi in this special way. The tree is being planted next to the tree planted in memory of Sir Michael Wood, the late founder of AMREF.

Thank you.