

## Ruth Masters-A Personal Memoir

Ruth Masters and I were not close friends but our lives would come together numerous times over the years and each coming together was, for me at least, memorable.

A dozen years ago after my wife and I came to live in the valley we decided to get involved in a number of environmental issues. We began working with a few others to organize a group. An acquaintance said to me, "You should get Ruth Masters involved with you." I said, "Who is Ruth Masters?" He rolled his eyes and said, "Boy, have you got a lot to learn. Ruth has been involved in every environmental struggle in this valley over the last fifty years." So I gave Ruth a call.

I told her my name, what we wanted to do, and asked her to help us. She asked me a single question. "Are you in it for the long haul?" I told her I was. Then she said to me, "Michael, I should tell you that I'm no longer a spear-carrier. But I can still throw my worthless body in front of machinery." So she joined us. She was well into her eighties.

We often had meetings in our house. I remember one pleasant summer evening, helping to walk her across our driveway to the car that would take her home. Suddenly she stopped, looked up at me and said, "Michael, if anyone tries to tell you that these are your 'golden years' you tell them they are full of shit." That colourful language was part of her wicked sense of humour.

When we had demonstrations we looked forward to her arrival. She would show up proudly wearing a sign that hung down from a chord around her neck. It said, "SENIOR CITIZEN SHIT DISTURBER."

In her later years when she couldn't make it to meetings anymore I would visit her at her house to bring her up to date with what was happening. She would listen carefully, share some observations, and toward the end of the meeting she would ask me if we needed some money. I assured her we were doing just fine. Then she would give me one of her leather book marks she made and would often say, "...and here's another one for your wife."

But I remember well one particular meeting. It was on one of those occasions when things were not going well. She got up and went to her cupboard and came back with a large metal soup ladle. She handed it to me and said, "I don't give one of these to everyone, you know." I felt very privileged. I took it home and hung it up over the desk in my office.

One of my favourite memories was Ruth's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday Celebration. She mentioned to me several times that she had never been arrested—and she was disappointed. She said, "I was in the police car a couple of times but they chickened out. They didn't know

what to do with an old lady.” So a few of us decided to get her arrested during the celebration.

I went over to the RCMP office and asked them to come over and arrest her. The guy in charge said to me, “We can’t do that. It would be in all the papers”—which of course was the whole point. So I asked a friend in a theatre group if they had an RCMP uniform. They did—and it was a big one. I phoned up a large-sized friend and well known environmentalist and asked him if he would put on the uniform and come and arrest her. He said, “I’d love to.” So he walked down the aisle between 200 people and arrested her on trumped up charges—harassing politicians, leading demonstrations, etc.



One day a friend of mine told me a story about Ruth’s humorous and wry personality. My friend and his wife had a profoundly handicapped daughter. One year they took her to a Remembrance Day service. As they went through the front doors of the facility they found Ruth sitting in a chair welcoming the folks coming in. She was dressed in her military uniform with its brightly coloured ribbons and some shiny medals. The young woman spotted her, walked over to her and asked, “Are you the Queen?” And Ruth answered, “Almost.”

As I was writing this I looked up at the soup ladle and wondered how Ruth would like to be remembered. She was unique--a woman short in stature with a very big heart, a

wicked sense of humour, and a total commitment to her mission of protecting the environment in this valley. I know how I will remember her.

I thought of that scene in the 50's movie with Spencer Tracey and Catherine Hepburn. Tracey and a friend were sitting together having a drink. Then Catherine Hepburn entered the room. The two men looked at her for a long moment and then Tracey said... "Well there's not much meat on her but what's there is "cherce".

I think Ruth would have loved that.

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