

RACHEL REEVE HUMAN

1923-2007

The obituary below appeared in the Age on 9 November 2007. Rachel Human was a life member of Graduate Women Victoria, joining the association in April 1944.

Rachel Human, whose character was shaped by an entirely different background from most Australians of any era, has died at Epworth Hospital following complications from a fall at her home in Kew. She was 84.

Rachel was born in Chinju in Korea, and lived there and in Seoul until she was 18 with her parents, Charles and Jessie McLaren, who were Australian missionaries from the Presbyterian Church in Melbourne. They arrived in Korea in 1911. Rachel's grandfather, a former long-serving principal of PLC, worked at a field mission in India.

Rachel was an only child who learnt Korean before English, and later had three Korean siblings whom her parents adopted. She was educated at a school run by missionaries in Seoul; holidays were spent in (now North) Korea's beautiful Diamond Mountains, which inspired her love of the natural environment.

With the Japanese occupation of Korea making life difficult, Rachel and her mother left for Melbourne in 1941, bringing many of their belongings with them. Her father, a medical doctor and the only psychiatrist in the country, remained in Korea for another nine months and spent time under house arrest, imprisoned by the Japanese before being repatriated via Mozambique, then a Portuguese colony in south-eastern Africa.

Rachel's mother had an extensive knowledge of Korean and Asian traditions and language, and she had bought a vast number of books and household goods from the traders who plied their wares along the old city wall where the family home stood in Seoul.

In the 1980's Rachel began sorting these belongings, accumulated over thirty years in Korea, and discovered hidden treasures. These were donated to the National Library and the National Gallery in Canberra as the McLaren-Human Collection, and include some of the library's oldest works.

Rachel inherited her parents' qualities of generosity and selflessness, making a significant impact on all who met her. Possessed of a sharp and non-judgemental mind, she graduated with an honours arts degree from Melbourne University in 1943, followed by a diploma in social work, when she was awarded the inaugural Lady

Huntingfield scholarship.

Rachel began working as a social worker at the Kindergarten Union in Kew, and later in Adelaide. She lived largely in the service of others, including particularly her family and the community of people associated with the mission in Korea. Wise and patient, diplomatic, balanced and discreet, she had a complete absence of airs or graces. Rachel faced many challenges - including cancer in 1974 and 1997 - which she took on with customary grace, dignity and self-deprecating humour.

Her abiding interests as a liberal democrat were political and social justice, the environment, and improved health worldwide. In 1947 she travelled to Prague as part of a world communist youth conference but like many others becoming disenchanted with communism, she ended up a 50-year member of the ALP.

She loved camping in the bush, kayaking and riding a bicycle, as well as reading history and biographies. But her passion was Scottish country dancing, which she did religiously every Monday from the time she learnt it on ship bound for England in 1947.

In 1950, Rachel married Peter Human, whom she met in 1944 at a conference of christian students at Scotch College. Rachel and Peter lived simply, knowing both that others simply live, and that the earth's resources should be used wisely. Their example inspired many people.

Rachel is survived by Peter, her sons Doug and John, and five grandchildren.