

# Ruth Lofgren

## 1916 – 2018

When the Esperanza Peace and Justice Center opened its doors in 1987 at 1305 N. Flores, Ruth Lofgren urged the Quakers to become part of the Esperanza Network and she continued to be a presence at the Esperanza until she died on October 31, 2018, just before her 102<sup>nd</sup> birthday.

Ruth, a microbiologist, understood the concept of intersectionality and how groups working together could impact and change a whole organism. She occasionally wrote articles for *La Voz* and often attended community meetings particularly during the time of the Esperanza's lawsuit against the City of San Antonio. Her guidance, her words and indelible presence will continue to serve us as an illustrious example from which to learn from.

Ruth was born November 25, 1916 in Huntsville, Utah, the first of 5 children of Benjamin Franklin and Alice Loise Elder Lofgren. She spent her early years on a small fruit farm in Butlerville, Utah being taught at home by her teacher parents. She learned to explore, study, observe, and assimilate the world around her.

In an interview for *Texas Legacy*, February 14, 2006 she recounted a couple of childhood incidents that revealed her steadfast connection to the natural world that would impact her life:

*When I was a tiny child, probably a year, year and a half old, we had a big rainstorm up in this mountain town in Utah—Huntsville, where I was born—and after the rainstorm, there was a beautiful rainbow and I went out into the yard—and my parents tell me—raised my arms in the sky and I said thank you, thank you because this was my rainbow and I knew that the whole thing was—the whole of the planet was my—my special world to live in.*

*—the marsh behind the house up in Huntsville had what looked like stepping-stones to me. They were little hummocks of grass out into the mud. And I had walked out, step by step, until I was, oh, a few hundred feet out into the marsh and, of course, these hummocks wouldn't support an adult. So when my parents saw that I was out*

*there, my father talked me back to step on this one and this one and this one. He talked me all the way back to sound—or—firm soil. And never any scolding or terror or anything, they just said—took it for granted that I would be able to follow directions and—and come back safely. But it all seemed like a perfectly natural part of my playground.*



In 2007 at Esperanza's 20th anniversary, Ruth was honored as one of 5 elder activists with a lifetime achievement award. Top: Gloria Ramirez presents Ruth with the award.

Ruth's early connection to the natural world served as a foundation for her pioneering work in the field of ecology in the 60s and her work in San Antonio on Mitchell Lake. Instead of the sewage sludge pond that was there—she saw what it ultimately became—the Mitchell Lake Wetlands—one of only 2 large freshwater bodies in south central Texas that forms a critical stop on migration routes for over 270 species of waterfowl, raptors, shore and song birds. She also envisioned a rich learning environment there—the Mitchell Lake Audubon Center that opened in 2004. She worked for years to convince everyone that the vision she had could become reality. It did!

Before coming to San Antonio, Ruth was a pioneer in the field of electron microscopy having earned a B.A. and M.A. in microbiology and chemistry at the University of Utah and a Ph.D. in microbiology in 1944 from the University of Michigan.

She was always clear

about her moral and ethical grounding and believed peace and kindness to be paramount in the treatment of human beings.

Ruth began teaching at the University of Michigan Medical School, in the Department of Bacteriology, in 1948. She had a marvelous time working on rash and fever and then on the study of the finer structures of microorganisms with the electron microscope. But, when the chairman of the department died and was replaced with an individual who believed their focus should be on



A young Ruth

Continued on Page 6

## Ruth, Continued from Page 3

bacteriological warfare research, Ruth declared, “I-I think this is unethical and I can’t be a party to it!” She challenged this policy as dangerous for students and essentially immoral—resigning from the prestigious position in 1956.

This experience contributed to Lofgren’s belief in the importance of popular understanding of science and of the complexity of the global environment.

After resigning from the University of Michigan, she moved to New York City, joined the faculty of Brooklyn College, and shifted her research focus to science education. In 1976, Ruth took early retirement from the City University of New York and came to live in San Antonio. She taught in a Quaker school for emotionally disturbed children until 1978.

In 2007 at Esperanza’s 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Ruth was honored as one of 5 elder activists with a lifetime achievement award. At 91, she was selected as San Antonio’s first peace laureate in 2008 initiated by the peaceCENTER. At the ceremony, Ruth expressed a concern about today’s children noting that children had become passive learners with the demands of institutionalized learning and needed to be more connected to the natural world. Ruth also received the 2017 Terry Hershey Award of the Texas Audubon Society, having worked to restore the wetlands of Mitchell Lake and establish the Audubon society there, and having served as a docent. And, she was inducted into the San Antonio Women’s Hall of Fame in 2017.

When in her nineties Ruth focused more on issues of

consciousness and one’s inner life raising questions of how we as humans can be our best selves amidst “the social disease of exploitation” that seems to be threatening this planet and all



Ruth participated in many community discussions at the Esperanza.

living beings. Her personal journey to “know thyself” led her to write an article for La Voz in October of 2014 entitled, Confessions of an American Liberal where remarkably she arrives at a conclusion about herself stating: *Over the years I have been aware of discrimination, profiling and prejudice. But, my life has been comfortable until now. The “white privilege”*

*I have enjoyed is no longer invisible to me!*

At 101 years young in a letter to the Editor of La Voz (March 2018) Ruth expressed dismay with our government saying, *When I think what a great country USA was in 7th grade Civics, I’m saddened by the truth. Our government and big business have had their fingers in most of the country’s business and the people have suffered—migrants and the promise of the statue of liberty. Now, millions suffer. I’m glad the fight continues for the dreamers. I don’t understand our politicians... lots of us are waiting for humane change... God bless all who work with vision for a world of peace and justice.*

The Esperanza staff and buena gente extend our deepest condolences to Ruth’s vast family of activists and global citizens. Her life has, indeed, been an example of a life well led.

## Chi Chis Out!

*With my chi chis out*

*You criticize me for not attending college*

*Belittle me for not fitting into a size 0*

*With my chi chis out*

*She whispers “Why hasn’t she gotten married yet?”*

*“She’s got 3 kids born out of wedlock, you know?”*

*And now*

*With my chi chis out you point and holler*

*“Cover up!”*

*This time,*

*While I am nursing my baby from my breast*

*With my chi chis out*

*Liquid gold drips out of my daisy shaped nipples*

*And covers the corner of my son’s mouth*

*Only to heal his body inside and out*

*With my chi chis out*

*It smells of vanilla ice cream, it reduces the risk of cancer*

*And it soothes my little brown warrior to melt in my arms*

*With my chi chis out*

*My fist in the air and my crown on my head*

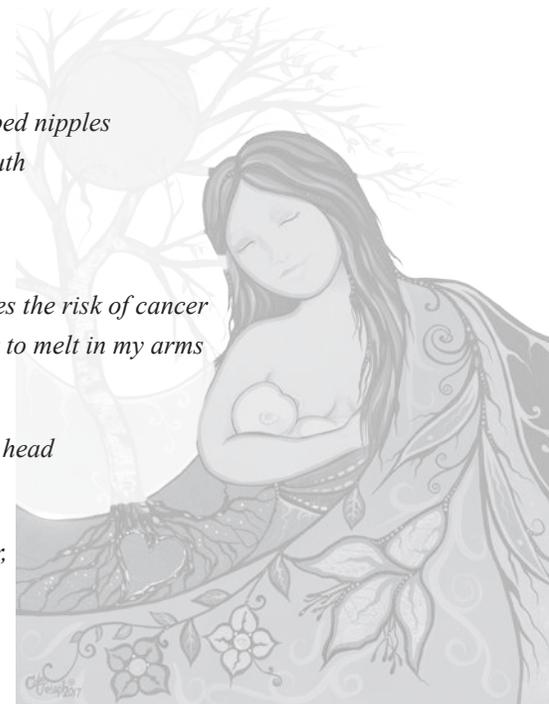
*I will no longer hide to comfort you*

*I become a dancer, a singer, a hummer,*

*and I stand for this revolution*

*with my chi chis out!*

—Dolores Moreno-Valles



—Cree-Métis Artist, Carla Joseph