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In Memoriam — Meta Nissley

Edited by **Joyce L. Ogburn** (Associate Director of Libraries Resources and Collection Management Services, University of Washington) <jlogburn@u.washington.edu>

Grace, beauty, charm, wonderful husband, beautiful son, tons of friends, great career - Meta Nissley had it all. She also had cancer. It did not define Meta - it never could have. It was too small, too insidious to be a part of such a beautiful woman. Nevertheless it was there. And it took away her life, but not her spirit.

I became fast friends with Meta at the 1989 Charleston Conference. We were on the same panel on licensing electronic resources. I sat on the stage at the Mills House next to her and said, I'm not feeling well - if I have to make a run for the bathroom, will you take over reading my paper? And she replied, me too, will you do the same for me? A strange way to start a bonding process, but it worked.

Over time we became as sisters and I was privileged to share the world of her family on several occasions as I traveled to or from the Feather River Institute in California. I met the cats, and goats, and various other animals on the farm. I met her mother and sister in Boulder at the N_YASIG Conference. Meta coincided her trip to visit them with the conference so we could see each other. Perhaps she knew it would be the last time - I didn't - but it was. When I moved to Seattle this year we talked about her coming to see me or me going down there, but there wasn't a time when she felt up to it. She said she would let me know. In reality all we had left was the phone.

Meta meant more to me than mere words can express. When I heard she had cancer I composed a prayer song for her and sent it to her to give her strength. I hummed or played it often hoping it would keep her alive. She's still alive in me and in many others and I hope this tribute will in some small way express how she impacted others through her life.

✿ Joyce Ogburn,
University of Washington

To me, Meta was a sparkling light of inspiration in both her professional and personal lives. Her keen insight and obvious intelligence blessed her with an ability to see issues from a unique perspective that was a real contribution to the profession. She was never afraid to question assumptions or calmly disagree with you, all the while respecting those with whom she differed. I'm so glad she had the courage to walk away from the

work and the colleagues she loved in order to make the very best of the precious time she had left. Sorry it was so short.

✿ Trisha Davis, Ohio State

Meta Nissley and I worked side by side from 1986, when she first became Head of Acquisitions at California State University, Chico, until she retired in 1998 as Librarian Emeritus. We were often travel companions and roommates at various conferences. Meta was an outstanding librarian and a valued colleague. She had a very inquisitive and bright mind. We shared our professional lives as well as our personal lives. We laughed and cried together, shared our dreams and fears, our successes and failures, and our love of nature, reading, travel and family. Meta was my dear friend, brave and courageous throughout her illness. I will try not to miss her too much. Some people may not know that Meta loved to bird watch and she could name most any bird she saw. When somebody dies, it is said, a bird gives the message to the world, and sings a silent prayer that makes the rain cry. It rained the day Meta died.

✿ Julie Rankin, Cal State Chico

Meta Nissley had unforgettably brilliant eyes. And her smile blossomed joy in synch with them. Talking or listening to Meta was a light show. She and I go back to the days before AcqNet, back before the first Feather River Conference (which she was one of the inspirations behind). Without her enthusiasm, many important things we enjoy would never have come to fruition. In recent years, our communications centered around her cancer. Sometimes coping with unknowables, sometimes celebrating the joy she found in traveling with her husband, Bob, or having the strength simply to take a walk on their farmland. I am greatly relieved to know she died in her wonderful husband's arms. She was worried in our last communication a few weeks ago about it being too soon to leave her 9-year-old son Max. In her same thought about leaving, Meta also said that spiritual and philosophical things gave her something to hold onto. In some way, she may not have left. I can still feel the love those eyes and smile could radiate!

✿ Joe Barker, UC Berkeley

Meta was a good friend and a good colleague. I write "was" but feel that I should have written "is" because I can't believe that she is gone and I feel her presence often, more sharply now. We worked together in the context of ALA and Charleston, but it was because of ACQNET that we became friends. She was one of the original twenty or so people who pushed me into creating it and was a member of its first editorial board. I valued her advice which was always measured and sensible. But, as we became friends, I valued even more her critical assessments of my beliefs and positions. In the nicest, non-threatening way she forced me to peel off the layers that were covering my ideas to get at what I was really thinking, not what I was saying I was thinking. She just drilled her intense blue eyes in me, but with an ever-present smile, until I got it right.

We shared experiences and friends as librarians, but we also shared other personal experiences. It started one of the years when ALA was meeting in San Antonio. I had rented a car and Meta accompanied me on a drive to a wildlife ranch out of town. That is when I learned about her attachment to, and involvement in, Latin America. I also began to learn about other parts of her life, especially when Max, her son, joined the family. I saw her soon before Max arrived and her joy and excitement were palpable. On subsequent visits there was always time reserved for an update on Max, which led to my learning about Bob and the farm in Chico. I was fortunate to be able to visit Meta at home and see the farm first-hand. It was a hot day and I was there for lunch, a cool lunch taken in the wonderful shade of the big trees next to the house. The feeling of peace was overwhelming and it was easy to understand why Meta loved this place. Librarianship, and the rest of the world, for that matter, were very distant. This was after she fell sick and Meta exhibited a well-ordered sense of priorities in which the people right there, on Cana Pine Road, had the absolutely top spot. She knew she was in the fight of her life and she did not know whether she would win, but there was no doubt whatever about who she was fighting for. I did not see Meta again after that although we did talk a few times over the phone. I miss her.

✿ Christian Boissonnas

