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In Memoriam-Meta Nissley

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In Memoriam — Meta Nisley

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Grace, beauty, charm, wonderful husband, beautiful son, tons of friends, great career — Meta Nisley 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 1959 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, no, I can do it. I saw her at nearly every conference. She was always in the front row, and I always appreciated her presence.

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 ALAISIG Conference. Meta convinced her to visit them with the conference so we could see each other. Perhaps she knew it was 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 come. I knew it was not going to happen.

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

Meta Nisley had unforgettable brilliant eyes. And her smile blossomed joy in those who were lucky to witness them. Talking or listening to Meta was a delight. And I go back to the days before Acq. Net 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 unknowns, sometimes celebrating the joy she found in traveling with her husband, Bob, or having the strength simply to take a walk on their farm land. 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 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 ways, 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 her presence is gone. I feel her presence often, more sharply now. We worked together in the context of ACQ 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 to what I really thinking, not what I was saying I was thinking. She just drilled her intense blue eyes into 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 ACQ 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 what the 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 after 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 the snowfield and Meta exhibited a well-ordered sense of priorities in which the people right there, on Cano 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 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 Boissinatas

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