

Memorial Minute for Linda Brandenburg (Cleveland)

September 8, 1949 – April 4, 2023

Linda Brandenburg lived a life of radical hospitality, mostly without realizing it. Her openness about her own darkness and doubts helped assure many of us that there was a place for us here too, as did her open-hearted curiosity.

She was vulnerable and honest about the things that matter. It's easy for people to speak of the Divine from a safe emotional remove. Linda spoke plainly, even bluntly, about her feelings and doubts and what she wondered about. She recognized

darkness and doubt as important parts of her faith and often said that the lyrics of Leonard Cohen were her Scripture. (“If you are the dealer, I’m out of the game // If you are the healer, it means I’m broken and lame // If thine is the glory, then mine must be the shame // You want it darker// We kill the flame.” And at the same time: “Hineni, hineni. I’m ready, my Lord.”)

She lived with many losses. A divorce left her to raise her son, Christopher, as a single parent. A massive heart attack quickly ate through her savings in middle age, and she lived with disability and on the thin edge of near-poverty the rest of her life. She lost parts of her body as she went on: an eye early in life, then a leg, then her uterus. (Many of us knew that she was secretly a pirate queen.) While she struggled with depression and feared losing her autonomy, she did not embrace bitterness. Seeing that her doctor was distressed that he could not save her leg, she comforted him. She told him it had been a relief to lose an eye which had caused her so much pain and that it would be a similar relief to let the leg go.

Linda welcomed those who were different or marginalized in a way that radiated genuine curiosity, not liberal magnanimity. She asked questions, sat with the answers, then asked more.

Sometimes the answers led her to consider how her own sense of self might have been different in different circumstances.

Many of us recognized that Linda was one of the quiet foundations for Cleveland Friends Meeting, though she had trouble seeing this herself. The author of this minute once wrote to Linda: “You bring weight to the Meeting. And you’re vulnerably honest about things that matter. It’s easy for people to get abstract and intellectual about the Divine. Safer. You just say it like it is, plainly, whether it’s what you’re feeling or your doubts or what you’re wondering about. When you’re at [our small book discussion group], people are more open and more honest. And I do not know how you’ve dealt with some of the losses you’ve gone through. That you can be this open, this at

peace more often than not – it makes me want to get closer to that Light. I think it makes a lot of people want to get closer.”

She had a wry sense of humor. She loved poems about bad girls and women who refused to follow the rules. She adored Christopher, her daughter-in-law, Sarah, and grandson, Logan, and the joy they shared with her. She was a crone who could say anything and did. She was a member of Cleveland Friends Meeting for over 20 years. She is sorely missed.