
Tribute to Ruth Pincoe

Mary Newberry

Before indexing, music was there for Ruth Pincoe, reflected in her degrees, a bachelor of music and a master's in musicology. I knew her first through the Quakers (another of her passions) as I was growing up in the sixties, and remember her always with a guitar in hand, singing Pete Seeger and Joan Baez songs. After graduating she worked in libraries, archives, and cataloguing before realizing she could combine many loves into one career. In 1982 she began editing, indexing, and archiving as a freelancer, and that same year she married David Peebles (who predeceased her in 2016). He soon joined her as an editing colleague. Together they were lovers of hiking, food, and theatre—with Ruth acting as stage manager for as many as 50 productions.

She became hooked on indexing, and on our indexing society (then known as Indexing and Abstracting Society of Canada, or IASC/SCAD), after a full-day course in indexing from Editors Canada—which amounted to the formal aspect of her training. But as well as many mentors and much reading, she credits her mother, Grace, for giving her a leg-up as an indexer. As she explains in a 2003 profile in the *Bulletin*, “I literally inherited it from my mother, a professional librarian who worked as a cataloguer. She lived and breathed classification. The Dewey Decimal system dominated our house. When extra milk wouldn't fit into the fridge, there would be a note attached to the milk jug that read ‘See also back shed.’”

Ruth became a renowned indexer and mentor (she was my first mentor), editor (awarded the Tom Fairley Award for Editorial Excellence in 1994), archivist, and abstractor. As an indexer she could work in almost any field, but her focus was scholarly, in music, history, religion, and literature. She was also a talented cookbook indexer (and cook!). Ruth's favourite early indexing project, which combined many of her skills, was the arrangement and description of the Glenn Gould Papers at the National Library of Canada. It's still available as two volumes, *Glenn Gould: Descriptive Catalogue of the Glenn Gould Papers*, and Ruth is clearly credited.

Ruth was a special person in indexing both in Canada and all around the world. Many things we take for granted in the Society can be traced back to her tenure as president, beginning in 2003, and her too-many-to-name volunteer contributions before and after. As president, Ruth



Ruth Pincoe presenting on the history of the Tamarack Award at the 2015 conference in Winnipeg. (Photo provided by Mary Newberry.)

instituted the Tamarack Award, to be presented annually at the subjective discretion of the president, to a member for their “above and beyond” contributions. The first winner, in 2004, was Beth Macfie; I was given it in 2016; and in 2024, at the most recent AGM, our current co-president, Jolanta Komornicka, presented it to Alexandra Peace. With more to come, as of today there are 22 recipients who can thank Ruth!

Ruth was on the committee led by Christine Jacobs, with Noeline Bridge and Mary Sue Stephenson, that put together the impressive report and planning for the Ewart-Daveluy Indexing Award, with eight recipients to date, beginning with François Trahan in 2015. To my surprise and delight, I was a recipient in 2016, thanks in part to Ruth's mentoring. Ruth's advice to me as my mentor in 2001 was the same advice she gave in her 2003 *Bulletin* profile: “Do really good work, no matter how long it takes you. It is important, right from the beginning . . . You'll pick up speed as you develop your craft, but you need the excellence in order to get the chance to do the second, third, and fourth jobs for your client.”

Ruth was very proud of the impact she made internationally. In 2003 she had been to only two international conferences, but that was about to change. In 2006, as ISC/SCI's international liaison, she chaired the triennial meeting of the international indexers' organization, not yet named ICRIS (International Committee of Representatives of Indexing Societies), in Toronto as an adjunct to the ISC/SCI

co-conference with the American Society of Indexers. In March 2009, at the following triennial meeting, held near Johannesburg, South Africa, she took on the newly created role of international coordinator. During her time as ISC/SCI's representative, Ruth was instrumental in structuring and strengthening international ties and in increasing the exchange of ideas, communication, collegiality, and friendliness among indexers globally.

She immensely enjoyed everything about this role. As Greg Ioannou, a well-known member of Editors Canada and colleague of Ruth's, put it, "Ruth had lots of great anecdotes. My favourite was about the time she was attacked by a monkey while attending an indexing conference in South Africa." He added, "Editors' conferences are so tame in comparison."

Ruth was kind-hearted and generous. She didn't like saying no to something that interested her, and she was interested in almost everything. Christine Jacobs recalls that Ruth "was frantically busy all the time. I don't know how she juggled it!" In an email to Christine in January 2023, Ruth explained to her: "This week I have 9 online (Zoom) meetings, plus three or four scheduled telephone calls. My schedule is very complicated." All this sometimes made Ruth difficult to track down. On one occasion Alex Peace finally gave up emailing and called her. When Ruth answered, which she did promptly, she matter-of-factly explained that she received hundreds of emails daily.

Very little ruffled Ruth. As she aged, she underwent various joint replacements, getting through each recovery with little fuss. Even after David passed on, she carefully

planned each convalescence so she could remain living in their downtown Toronto home with its multiple staircases. She would arrange for minimal help from her large community of friends and managed very well and happily, enjoying her independence. At the 2017 Montreal conference, not too long after a hip replacement (or was it her knee?), in the middle of one night she ended up in the Hôtel-Dieu hospital with a dislocated hip. Other than being annoyed with herself for allowing that to happen, she just carried on, treating it all philosophically and with humour. Ruth had a dry wit and a distinctive laugh when something hit her funny bone, which happened quite frequently.

Ruth Pincoe will be remembered with great warmth and missed by many worldwide, as both a colleague and a friend. She died on the morning of 27 May 2024, at home, where she wanted to be, surrounded by friends.

Notes

Thank you to Christine Jacobs for important edits and additions.

To find the Glenn Gould Papers at the National Library of Canada, go to <https://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.653123/publication.html>.

For the ICRIS story, see Jill Halliday, "A Short History of Matters International," *The Indexer* 30, no. 3 (September 2015): 148–50, <https://www.theindexer.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/ICRIS-history.pdf>.



Former ISC/SCI presidents at the 2019 conference in Ottawa.
Back row, left to right: Noeline Bridge, Margaret de Boer, Heather Ebbs, Gillian Watts.
Front row, left to right: Ruth Pincoe, Mary Newberry, Alexandra Peace, Christine Jacobs.
(Photo provided by Mary Newberry.)