

Janet Elizabeth REAKES

1952–2002

Janet Elizabeth REAKES died in her sleep of a diabetic coma early on Saturday, November 9, 2002.

To her many friends, Janet and genealogy were inseparable. She did have a life apart from genealogy – as a member of a close-knit, loving family; as a wonderful and innovative youth leader and teacher at church; as a dedicated Scrabble player; as a net surfer; as a talented artist and writer. And those are only some of the facets of the personality of this warm, funny, clever, enthusiastic and generous person. Her most recent role in life, and one that fulfilled a lifelong desire, was that of mother to twelve year old Sarah. As is the way of life, things both good and bad, happy and sad are often inextricably mixed. The day last June when Janet's leg was amputated in a Brisbane hospital was also the day a court in Brisbane officially granted her custody of Sarah.

But it was as a genealogist that she was widely known throughout Australia and, indeed, in genealogical circles in England, Ireland, the USA and New Zealand. Janet never tired of telling how her interest in genealogy was aroused – by her employment in greyhound racing, recording the pedigrees of prize dogs. She moved to the Australian Jockey Club doing the same thing for horses, and joked that it was a natural progression to people after she joined the LDS Church and learned of its interest in family history.

Janet was born in Bristol, England in 1952. The family emigrated to Australia in 1961 for the sake of Janet's health after she suffered rheumatic fever as a small child. She grew up in Sydney.

Janet was one who sought the best in life. Thirty years ago, she and a friend felt a need in their lives and decided to join a church – any church. Tossing up which to visit, Janet, an ardent fan of the OSMONDS, decided that the values they stood for were worthwhile, and decided to attend their church. She soon felt at home in the LDS (Mormon) Church and never wavered in her devotion to her religious duties and church attendance.

After several years working for ITP as a full time tax consultant, and a period with Otis Elevators, Janet worked at the LDS



Janet, the professional Professional Genealogist.

Church offices, at first in the records department and later as assistant to the Church's Public Affairs Director. She left in 1983 to start her own business as a Professional Genealogist, working from her Bass Hill home and wholeheartedly assisted by her parents, Tom (Cyril) and Margaret. Over the years Janet passed exams and became the most highly-accredited genealogist in Australia. For six years, she had a regular spot on the nationally-televised Ray Martin Midday Show. She made guest appearances on numerous TV and radio shows, and wrote columns for local and state newspapers.

The author of twenty-six "how to" books and five videos on genealogy and family history, Janet travelled widely teaching classes and giving seminar papers. Talking and joking at express speed, Janet captivated her audiences. Afterwards, she was seldom too tired or too busy to answer individual questions and give advice to struggling researchers. Her research in public libraries, for herself or her clients, was often interrupted as she was recognised and surrounded by people seeking her help. Her enthusiasm was contagious and her knowledge of family history research prodigious.

Margaret, Tom and Janet moved to Hervey Bay in 1989 and loved the Queensland lifestyle from the first moment. The addition of Sarah to the family early this year was the crowning joy of Janet's life. Even the ordeal of losing her leg could not dampen her joy in Sarah or daunt her courageous spirit. She was counting the days till November 25th when she was to be fitted with her artificial leg.

Janet became ill the day before her death. Two minutes before midnight, she sent an email to a few friends, detailing her sudden illness and telling us that if she had not improved in the morning, she would have to be hospitalised. She ended the email by writing prophetically "You never know what a day will bring." As we were opening and reading our emails next morning, Janet passed peacefully from this life to the next.

"God's finger touched her, and she slept."
(Tennyson).

Dr Marjorie NEWTON