

In a north eastern corner of a North Eastern burial site my grave marker is as I instructed: Ann Moss, 1938-2018, Scholar, Mother, Friend of Christ.

I am a Scholar. 'Oxbridge is out of your social class, girls.' But in 1956 I walk into Newham College, Cambridge on a Major Scholarship and the universe opens up. I'm studying Languages but I go lectures by F.R Leavis and C.S Lewis. I am in my element. I get a double first, and want to work in the media. The Careers Adviser asks me *who* I know. So I fall back on *what* I know and start a PhD.

I marry. We go to Wales. The PhD goes nowhere. The marriage is going very badly. I leave, with two daughters under three. I am unqualified. I am scared. Two jobs take a gamble on me. I am junior lecturer in Durham University's French Department *and* resident tutor at a women's college, Trevelyan ... which isn't yet built. I live in temporary accommodation and my 3-month-old baby and scared 2-year-old daughter are in foster care, for a year. I am alone.

But I am rescued by Durham, by being a teacher, by our tiny college house now built, by a revolving door of homesick students, by Mo Mowlam our babysitter, by bluebells and tennis courts, by Scottie who answers my ad for a nanny in-situ.

After 13 years my PhD is finished ... and almost immediately published! I write and speak on Latin hymns, ethics, theology, myth, allegory, pedagogy and ... how they *connect*. One of my books is about humble notebooks called *Commonplace Books*, which underlay how people of the time argued, wrote, developed thought in the fields of morals, politics, religion. It is quite a hit.

I become Senior Lecturer, Reader, Professor, a Fellow of the British Academy. I lead Durham's School of Modern Languages into the top tier. Before I die, my daughter reads me a message from an erstwhile colleague: 'Ann, although you're so clever, erudite, imaginative and original, I've never once felt you said or wrote anything to show that you're clever, erudite, imaginative and original. With you it's always been a question at getting at truths that have eluded us.' I am ill, bashful, pleased.

I am a Mother. I write to a friend: 'I am in awe of your parenting; it contrasts with my own fragmented experience.' I see *my* childhood bathed in sunlight, until a yellow telegram announces my father is ... missing – dot - presumed dead – dot - sabotage on

Lake Como - dot. So I try to bathe my daughters' childhoods in sunlight, on a shoestring. We take three trains, a bus, a taxi from Durham to Devon and I teach them to swim in Hope Cove Bay, and pull them from a killer wave, and we eat rainbow ice cream. Other summers I watch them leave to adventure across Europe with their father, and I am alone, and I am fearful, and I am thankful.

I am in hospital, temporarily paralysed. There is nobody to look after us, so I get up, and the girls get used to me falling in the street and falling off buses and getting up and walking again. I read everything they read, and I give them words to quell their nerves: 'Prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet.'

I am intrepid ... I take my grandsons to St James Park and the Stadium of Light. I find a Jewish guide to tell us about Krakow's ghetto. I follow the Silk Road across China, Iran, Turkey, Romania, and encounters between Christendom and Islam across Egypt, Lebanon, Israel/Palestine. I sleep in the Syrian desert. I am so enraptured by the Goharshad mosque in Persia that I sneak inside, and I am caught. And when I am 75 and ill, I ride a huge Naxos sea. I am alone on the stern, drenched by the gigantic waves and in thrall again to the Greek gods of my teenage years.

I am a Friend of Christ. I retire and retrain. I am reinvented again. The bus takes me to an ex-mining town where I am Lay Reader. I am welcomed with amazing generosity. I embrace Durham Cathedral and it embraces me, and on the 18<sup>th</sup> September 2018 I am taken to lie under its Rose Window and a blue pall and my prayer book are placed on my coffin. And the next day, in a glorious Requiem Eucharist, I tell them, through my choice of reading, my truth - that 'if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge ... but do not have love, I am nothing.'

I am Ann Moss. I was Scholar, Mother, Friend of Christ. I was brilliant and I was brave, and now I rest awhile, with love.

**Ann Moss, Scholar, Mother, Friend of Christ 1938 – 2018**

© Abigail Moss, 17.02.21

*A detailed biography was written by Professor Ingrid de Smet for the British Academy:*  
<https://www.thebritishacademy.ac.uk/publishing/memoirs/19/moss-ann-1938-2018/>

