

Vale

Ruth Marguerite Watson

(22 February 1936 – 18 July 2014)

Ruth Watson, who passed away on Friday 18 July, was a truly remarkable woman who touched countless lives in a profound way.

A devoted wife and mother, she was also a most beloved colleague and mentor to the hundreds of occupational therapists who passed through her gentle, nurturing and inspiring hands in her career which spanned almost 60 years. She was always fascinated by people and children held a special place in her heart. Ruth engaged intimately with everyone she met, conveying to each a deep interest in their story and well-being. Her influence was felt far and wide.

Emeritus Professor Watson was a pioneer of note. One of the first graduates of the first South African occupational therapy programme (at the University of the Witwatersrand), she was also among the first occupational therapists in South Africa to obtain a doctorate.

Ruth was always one step ahead, identifying and creatively addressing academic, service related and socio-political issues of critical relevance to the profession in a developing society. She laid foundations for innovative practice within and beyond traditional medical interventions, guided the development of contextually relevant undergraduate curricula, spearheaded the implementation of occupational therapy Masters and Doctoral programmes, mentored numerous practitioners and postgraduate students towards the fulfilment of their potential and influenced South African disability policy and rehabilitation services through research and publications.

Her leadership helped steer the profession into a new interpretation of occupational therapy practice, an interpretation embedded in the context of occupational justice and the belief that meaningful occupation is a basic right for all people. She provided visionary leadership during challenging political transi-

tions, and was instrumental in the transformation process of the South African Occupational Therapy Association (SAAOT) into the present Occupational Therapy Association of South Africa (OTASA).

As a researcher, she made an outstanding contribution to the body of knowledge of occupational therapy nationally and internationally, especially in theorising the dynamics between chronic poverty, disability and human occupation. She was always deeply concerned about the plight of the less privileged, the poor and the marginalised. After retiring from academia, understanding how such influences impacted people their occupations, their aspirations and their well-being became her focus.

While occupational therapy was a central passion throughout her life, Ruth led a full and active life outside of the profession. She enjoyed classical music, travelling, hiking, gardening, hand work of various kinds and was an avid reader. She was actively involved in her church and many other humanitarian projects.

A person of profound integrity, Ruth will be remembered as an exceptional occupational therapist who contributed substantially to the growth and development of the profession, and therapists, both locally and internationally.



Compiled by:

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