

Grace Vaughan Profile

1922-1984

Roget's Thesaurus lists “grace” synonymously with “probity”, “integrity”, “justice”, “equity” and “candour”. In the memory of those who knew her, Grace Vaughan characterised all of these qualities.

Grace was a social activist dedicated to the improvement of the human condition on international, national, state and local levels. She had a deep commitment to Australia's participation in our local Asian region and to ensuring women's full participation in society.

Born and raised in Sydney, Grace left school at 14 when she worked first as a clerk-typist, then as a trainee nurse before being appointed Assistant Industrial Officer at Australian Consolidated Industries (the Sydney Glassworks).

Between 1954-60, Grace conducted a mail contracting business before being employed as the community liaison officer for Radio 2UE. From there she moved to be administrator of a community service centre in North Sydney. During this time, Grace earned her first academic qualification, a Diploma in Social Work (NSW).

At the beginning of 1969, Grace moved to Western Australia. While working as a family welfare officer with the (then) Department of Community Welfare, she studied part-time for her Bachelor of Arts from the University of Western Australia. After another two years of full-time study, Grace earned a Masters Degree in Social Work, graduating in 1973 and establishing herself as a community planning consultant.

Grace's active involvement in academic and community matters led to her holding office in a number of organisations. These included:

- **University of Western Australia Senate** - Member (1974-84);
- **Australian Association of Social Workers** - National President (1975-82), Vice President (1983-84);
- **Council on the Ageing** - Hon. Secretary (1981-84);
- **International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW)** - President (1983-84, the first Australian to hold this office), IFSW (Asian Pacific region) - Vice President (1978-82);
- **Australian Council of Social Services** - Executive Member (1983);
- **State Government Welfare Review Committee** - Vice Chair (1983-84);
- **Board of Management Royal Perth Hospital** - Member (1983-84);
- **Board of Studies of Social Work and Social Administration, University of Western Australia;**

In 1974 Grace Vaughan was elected to the Legislative Council of the Western Australian Parliament, as a Labor member for South-East Metropolitan Province. Her deep commitment to social justice was never more powerfully demonstrated than by her introduction in 1977 of a homosexual law reform bill which was passed by the Legislative Council before being defeated in the Assembly. It was to be another twelve years before the Parliament allowed full adult rights to the State's homosexual population.

Since her death, Grace Vaughan's life and achievements have been honoured in many ways.

In recognition of her contribution to the Senate and many committees, the University of Western Australia instituted the Grace Vaughan Fund to provide scholarships in areas that promote social justice.

The Grace Vaughan Memorial Lecture which has been funded by the State Government since 1985, brings influential speakers from interstate to present lectures on important social issues in her honour.

A further tribute to Grace's community stature was the naming of a Health Department building after her. Grace Vaughan House accommodates several Health Department services and is a popular venue for health related forums.

The most valuable tribute to this remarkable woman, however, is that by people who knew her and whose memories are of her great energy, commitment, humour, passion, intellect and common sense.

“Keep the fire burning in your belly” was a common encouragement given to colleagues disappointed and frustrated by seemingly overwhelming opposition to social change. This advice is still invoked for support in similar circumstances and demonstrates the strength Grace Vaughan could generate in those around her for the pursuit of long-term social justice objectives.

