

Barbara Brouse

Mother, grandmother, author, poet. Born Jan. 1, 1932, in Indore, India. Died Feb. 23, of a heart attack, in Toronto, aged 73.

Barbara was born in British India in 1932 to missionary parents. Barbara's father, a respected doctor, would eventually become Chief Surgeon to Lord Louis Mountbatten (the last Viceroy and first Governor-General of independent India). Barbara adored her father, but lived in constant fear of her abusive mother. While Barbara's childhood was traumatic, it enabled her to master unique survival skills that became the basis of her talents as a writer -- a finely tuned memory and a love of language.

Sent to boarding school in Ireland when she was 6, she became the school's youngest-ever recipient of the "student of the year" award. Barbara came to Canada two years later, went to Brown School, Bishop Strachan School and University of Toronto. Her first job was as an advertising copywriter for Simpson's department store.

Like many women in the early Sixties, Barbara was not expected to return to the office after she had children. She stayed connected to the world of work by taking freelance assignments, and in volunteering with the Art Gallery of Ontario where she dreamt up some outlandish promotions, including a tribute to the psychedelic Sixties that the gallery director hosted in his bare feet.

Barbara was later a creative force in the advertising company she ran with her husband, Lionel. Among several award-winning collaborations at the time, she wrote the lyrics for the jingles "It's hard not to think of the Bay," and "Nobody knows noses, like Kleenex knows noses." In the late Seventies, she took up a second career as romance novelist and, with more than a dozen titles, under the pen names Abra Taylor and Araby Scott, she supported her family. Barbara wrote Harlequin's first "SuperRomance," a longer and steamier format that became a huge success for the company.

Her own marriage ended in the mid-Eighties. Although she and Lionel grew apart, there was no enduring animosity and Barbara kept the surname that had been hers for almost 30 years.

In her later years, Barbara began to recover memories of her traumatic childhood and worked tirelessly on corroborating and completing her as-yet-unpublished memoirs, *The Drumming*, *Lion in the Drawer*, and *Dolly*. All three manuscripts tell a story of survival and hope.

In 1997, Barbara had a major stroke and temporarily lost her ability to communicate, her gift for words. It was a profound loss.

As Barbara worked hard to regain her precious language, there were some surprisingly hilarious and beautiful moments. Barbara was moved to Riverdale Hospital for lengthy speech therapy and physiotherapy. Having just been reduced to one or two syllables, she was assigned Dr. Ochterlony. Many a sidesplitting tear was shed as she tried to pronounce that name -- and pronounce it she would.

A year later, with her family gathered around her, Barbara pointed to each of her four children in turn and, with still-limited language, declared, "Imperfect, imperfect, imperfect, imperfect," and then gesturing again to each, she emphasized, "PERFECT!" With two simple words, she boiled down to its essence one of her basic philosophies; the foibles and frailties of her children were an integral part of the complete people she loved. She wanted her children to know that she felt this way and hoped that they could see each other in the same way.

Of star we come; returned to star We change - and changing, changeless are.

-- From *Peace*, by Barbara Brouse.

Andrew, Gillian, Susan and Terance are Barbara's four grown children.