

---

# Reading Recovery®

---

DEPARTMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

## Tributes to M. Trika Smith-Burke



I met Trika at the Literacy Research Association Conference in 2009 when we sat across from each other in the adult literacy group. Trika and I quickly became "pen pals", and she was a self proclaimed "fairy grandmother" to my son when he was born; knitting him a baby blanket even when she was so ill last spring.

Every time I wrap him in her blanket, I think of her friendship, her kindness, and her humanity. Trika touched my life with her expansive mind, her creativity, and her compassion. She will always be a source of inspiration for me, as she has been to so many young women whose lives she touched.

I wanted to pass along my sincere sadness at her passing.

Trika, I will miss you dearly. Thank you for the gift of your friendship.

**Laura Nimmon, PhD**

University of British Columbia

---

In 1988-1989, Trika and I were in the same cohort of individuals who were preparing as Reading Recovery Trainers and Teachers Leaders at The Ohio State University. The relationships with colleagues in your Reading Recovery cohort are strong and deep, forever. Trika was generous in her listening, her friendships, her interpretations, her commitment to children, teachers, and colleagues, and she was a woman of action.

In the summer of 1993, a group representing diverse facets of Reading Recovery and *Descrubriendo la Lectura* engaged in a Visioning Retreat in Bridgeport, Texas. The heat from the Texas sun, combined with the heat of our discussion, was so intense that employees were hosing water on the metal roof of our meeting space to reduce the temperature. On the last evening, the whole group had dinner offsite at the now-closed Twin Hills Restaurant and Marina. At that dinner, the seed of the idea of forming an umbrella organization took hold. At that moment, Trika declared, "Enough talk. Everyone here get out your checkbooks and write a check." The chatter was rapid. "How much?" "Who to?" "What were we sponsoring?" We quickly came to the agreement that we would be founding members of the North American Reading Recovery Council (revised the next day to *Reading Recovery Council of North America* to put Reading Recovery first) and each of us wrote a check. The individual managing finances of Reading Recovery at the Ohio State University, was flustered as we were passing our checks to him, as we had not yet established a not-for-profit organization in which he could deposit the checks. Trika calmly said, "Just hold onto them until we're ready." The rest, as we say, is history. Trika's bold action at a pivotal moment positioned Reading Recovery in North America as a collaborative partnership across communities, schools, universities, and countries.

**Janet S. Gaffney, PhD**

Professor of Educational Psychology-Literacy  
Reading Recovery Trainer Emerita  
University of Auckland

---

My fondest memory of Trika was when I was teaching the theory class for Teacher Leaders at NYU. Trika invited me to attend a performance of the New York Philharmonic. While listening to the amazing music, I realized that Yo Yo Ma was playing. I am forever grateful to Trika for this experience, and the support she gave me as a fellow trainer throughout the years. Trika was a gem.

**Janet Bufalino, Ed D**

Shippensburg University  
Shippensburg, PA

---

Trika magically appeared in my life in 2000 and taught my daughter how to read. We became friends at first sight.

My daughter spent her first year of life in a Chinese orphanage. So it was not surprising that she struggled a bit in kindergarten. She was not making the connections necessary to read, and her teachers suggested she repeat kindergarten. My partner and I were considering it when over the summer we got a call from her school saying that an NYU professor who provided Reading Recovery training to graduate students, and liked to work with an actual first grader every few years, was looking for a student who needed help with reading. Would we like her to work with our daughter? We were thrilled! Little did we know what a gift we were receiving. Trika tutored our daughter at her school four days a week from 8 to 8:30 a.m. for the entire year. It was amazing. Needless to say, our daughter became a great reader and writer. She is now a freshman at college and doing quite well.

In addition to an interest in turning my daughter into a reader, Trika and I shared a strong interest in Buddhism and meditation. We went to many classes together over the years at the Tibet House and New York Insight Meditation Center. My office was not far from her Soho loft, and we often met for lunch. She was one of the smartest, kindest, most generous people I ever knew. She was so strong during her battle with cancer. As Adlai E. Stevenson said about Eleanor Roosevelt, "She would rather light a candle than curse the darkness, and her glow has warmed the world." I loved Trika and will miss her dearly.

**Nancy Murray**

Production Director  
Artisan Books

---

Trika and I first met sometime in the early 1970s, at one of the Anaheim-based conferences of IRA. At that time, she was just finishing her doctorate at Rutgers and I was a brand new professor at University of Minnesota. We were both freeloading at a publisher's reception, taking advantage of yummy treats and free wine (good food and good wine were common themes in our life-long friendship). We were also close colleagues throughout her professional years. We worked together on many projects for the National Reading Conference (now the Literacy Research Association), and the International Reading Association. Trika was president of NRC in between me and Jim Hoffman in the late 1980s, so the three of us worked together very closely on programs and selecting a management service for the then small but growing organization. Both of these efforts took place in pre-digital days with lots of paper, envelopes, and stamps to drive the efforts. It was in these seemingly daunting challenges that we truly bonded as life-long colleagues.

She also became a personal friend and visited our home in Urbana, IL, becoming friends with my wife Mary Alyce and our children, Matthew and Susan. Susan even stayed at Trika's loft when she was visiting the Barnard

and New School campuses in her quest to find a college to attend in the early 90s.

Trika last visited Mary Alyce and me in Berkeley in the winter of 2012, mainly to make sure she visited Mary Alyce before Mary Alyce's Alzheimer's became so severe that communication would be difficult. They had a wonderful 2-day visit. Trika even talked about the possibility of relocating to the balmy climes of the Bay Area after she finally beat this cancer she had been fighting for so many years. She was optimistic that the treatment she expected to start sometime in late 2013 would deal that cancer its final blow.

I'll remember Trika as the consummate professional she was in everything she did—teaching at NYU, directing the Reading Recovery site, making sure that NRC was both financially and collegially viable, and mentoring new scholars, especially young women, into the field of literacy research. I'll also remember her as the consummate friend—inviting my family into her life, telling stories of past NRC meetings late into the night at the current NRC, celebrating birthdays and births, and being available to talk through a difficult patch in one's life journey.

I'll remember her humanity as a professional, her serenity in the face of chaos, her outrage at professional injustice, her warmth as a friend, and, more than anything else, the radiant smile that invited all of us into her personal space. We shall not soon see the likes of Trika Smith-Burke. Even so, we are blessed to have such fond memories and vivid images to keep her spirit alive in our minds and hearts.

---

**P. David Pearson**

Professor

University of California, Berkeley

---

Trika has impacted my thinking and my understandings on so many occasions over the years. My first experience with her clarity of thought and respectfulness for children came when I read *Observing the Language Learner*, which she co-edited with Angela Jaggard, for a master's-level language arts course twenty-six years ago. That book contributed greatly to my understanding of sensitive observation of the work of young children. Over the years, she contributed to my understandings in sessions she presented when I was a teacher leader. Later, I got to know her much better during the year that I trained to be a Reading Recovery trainer, particularly while I visited the NYU Reading Recovery site for several days. She was particularly supportive of new trainers, and gladly shared information and materials to help us get underway in our new role. She was especially generous with her knowledge about literacy. Up until the past few weeks, she was still sharing information on the trainer listserv about publication opportunities or grant applications. My fondest memory of her was when she volunteered to assist me when Marie Clay and Billie Askew made an implementation visit to Iowa. As the lone trainer at the university training center in the state, I so appreciated her willingness to help me make it a successful visit, including taking copious notes, which she sent me immediately after the visit. I will definitely miss her generous spirit.

---

**Salli Forbes**

The Reading Recovery Center of Iowa

The University of Northern Iowa

---

Trika was a very special person in my life and stayed with my husband and I in Sydney several times.

I first met Trika in 1986 when I went to NYU on a sabbatical/Study Abroad program for six months. We immediately became close friends and colleagues, finding within a very few hours that we shared many ideas about literacy and children's literature. She was a wonderful mentor and always willing to share ideas and thoughts. We spent many hours in the evenings talking about issues.

I remember once visiting a very rough and underprivileged school with her. The students came from so many diverse backgrounds. The school was said to be 'dangerous' and we were escorted by security, but we sat with students and staff and talked about key issues relating to language and culture. Trika was so empathetic, and followed by setting up a detailed program for the school.

She was an extremely generous friend in so many ways both personally and professionally. Her love of the arts is known to many, and I have many very fond memories of the plays, theatre, opera, and galleries that we attended together in different parts of the world.

She was a real friend and I, with many others, will really miss her

**Valerie Hoogstad**

Sydney, Australia

---

The Reading Recovery world has lost a passionate, tireless supporter with Trika's passing. Trika threw herself into everything she did with such enormous energy and commitment. On behalf of the New Zealand Reading Recovery community, I want to particularly acknowledge the kindness and generosity she showed to so many Trainers and Tutors visiting New York for work or play.

As one of the recipients of this generosity, I recall a night accompanying Trika to a memorable performance at the Metropolitan Opera House. Never one to miss a productive minute, Trika continued to read a PhD she was marking, both before the performance and during the intervals! Last year I had the immense privilege to attend Trika's 70<sup>th</sup> birthday celebration in New York, organized, as in everything she did, with style and thoughtfulness. I shall treasure those memories all my life.

Aroha nui,

**Christine Boocock**

Reading Recovery Trainer

National Reading Recovery

The University of Auckland, New Zealand

---

Trika will be missed. Whenever she presented at a conference, I was in her audience. She traveled to both South Dakota and Iowa to help us analyze our Reading Recovery data in order to become expert teachers for struggling readers. She was a joy to listen to and learn from.

**Pat Fostvedt-Oxendale**

Reading Recovery® Teacher Leader and CIM Coach

Sioux City, IA

---

In 1979, when Trika hosted NYU's *Sunrise Semester*, I enrolled in the course to learn about content area reading to prepare to develop a research study for my doctoral dissertation. My research interest was "reading mathematics" and with her undergraduate degree in mathematics and her research in reading, she was the perfect member of my doctoral dissertation committee. She mentored, guided, and supported me throughout my study. And, she taught me a lot about writing. Over the years, we became colleagues and I considered her a very dear friend.

We went to museums and concerts together. She loved the arts—the European masters, and classical music, especially opera. As a matter of fact, she was so kind and generous that she always purchased two classical music subscriptions so she could invite her friends to join her. She was always there to listen about professional and personal matters, and offer suggestions. During the past several years as I was searching for my family roots in Italy, she offered advice and encouragement. In 2012, when I shared with her a story of miraculously finding a cousin in a small town in southern Italy who speaks only Italian, she was so happy for me that she sent me a gift—the Rosetta Stone software, so I could learn Italian to communicate with my newly-found cousin.

Trika was a very special, kind, and generous person. She loved helping children to learn to read and improve their reading skills. She loved helping doctoral students prepare their research proposals, conduct their studies, and write their dissertations. She loved helping teachers improve their craft. She loved people. She

loved life.

The world is a much better place because Trika was in it. She gave more than what anyone could have expected. Although she will be extremely sorely missed, her influence will continue to make a difference as we strive to keep her memory alive.

**Frances R. Curcio, PhD**

Professor, Mathematics Education  
Queens College of the City University of New York  
Flushing, NY

My favorite memory of Trika is from almost 15 years ago. It was fall, about October, and several of us, including Marie Clay, were in Vermillion, South Dakota, for the USD Reading Recovery Conference. A dinner honoring Marie was held at the home of the university president, and I was fortunate enough to sit at a table opposite Trika. She was wonderful, sharing so many stories and delighting everyone with her views on a full range of topics, from politics to literacy education and so much more. That evening, no one could match Trika's quick wit! She alone made the evening so memorable. Clearly, Trika was an outstanding researcher, thinker, writer, and friend to Reading Recovery and literacy educators. More importantly, she was a wonderful person who will be greatly missed.

**Mary Lose, Ed D**

Oakland University, Reading Recovery University Training Center  
Rochester, MI

Trika was one of the pioneers who enthusiastically worked to promote Reading Recovery in the US, particularly in the northeast, working with universities, state departments, school districts, administrators, teachers, and students, always focusing on helping the struggling reader become successful. She continued to be a huge support even in retirement.

**Dianne Napolitano**

RR Teacher Leader (Retired) (Illinois and Fairfax, VA)

Twenty-one years ago, Trika took a ride to Nassau BOCES and met with the late Fred Podolski. Fred was the Director of Nassau BOCES at that time.

Fred had told me that he was wowed by Trika's presentation of Reading Recovery. And the rest, as they say, is history. It was Trika who brought Reading Recovery to our site. Currently, there are 106 Reading Recovery teachers who service this site, which is now known as the Nassau BOCES Greater New York Region. We cover Northern New Jersey, Westchester, Putnam, Nassau, and Suffolk counties.

Thank you to a woman who knew about perseverance, steadfastness, and tenacity. Due to these wonderful qualities, we have serviced thousands of children in need of early literacy.

**Laura Brodsky**

Reading Recovery Teacher Leader/ Nassau BOCES  
Garden City, New York

A Tribute to Trika Smith-Burke: A Strong Advocate for Reading Recovery Teachers and Children

I traveled, attended conferences, and had many dinners with Trika over the last twenty years. Our experiences were always full of good conversation as we discussed literacy research, theories of learning and teaching, and Reading Recovery (RR).

I also had the privilege of teaching Trika. During her training year, I could always count on Trika to ask the most thought-provoking theoretical and practical questions about teaching children and adults. Trika was an

insightful learner committed to understanding Clay's body of work, and the theoretical and research perspectives of Reading Recovery.

You can learn a lot about a person when you observe their interactions with children. And it was when I first observed Trika teaching Michael, an RR child with "behavior problems", that her strongest attributes, understanding and compassion for others, became evident.

The first time I observed Trika teaching Michael was memorable. After introducing me to Michael, Trika asked him to select a book to begin the lesson. Michael said "NO" and threw the books on the floor. Trika looked horrified but kept her cool and proceeded to pick the books up and replace them on the table. Again she asked Michael what he would like to read. Again, Michael said, "I'm not reading", and proceeded to get off the chair and sit under the table. Trika looked horrified again.

She tried to get Michael out from beneath the table and he attempted to stand up. The table started to tip and all the materials slid off. Michael ran out the door. Trika followed him to his room, and then returned to the RR room. She was more upset with herself than Michael, as she felt she did not help him understand that I came to observe her teaching, not his behavior. Two weeks later I observed Trika again. This time the lesson went smoothly. Michael was well behaved and co-operative.

Trika has accomplished many things during her impressive career, but her love and respect for children and teachers rises above all career successes. Trika was a very special person and advocate for children and teachers. Her contributions to Reading Recovery and the literacy field of learning and teaching will remain with us for many years.

#### **Carol A. Lyons**

Professor Emeritus Ohio State University  
Reading Recovery Trainer Emeritus

I met Trika more than 25 years ago on a visit to Ohio State University to explore entry into Reading Recovery training for myself and my university. Over those years, Trika and I became good friends and colleagues. I treasure the opportunity to have collaborated with Trika to co-author a chapter in *Stirring the Waters*, J. Gaffney, and B. Askew, eds. It was a very comfortable collaboration, an intellectually exhilarating opportunity to explore and expand ideas with Trika, and a great learning experience for me. Trika was very generous with her time, resources, and attention. She made others feel more valued; that's what friendship and collegiality are all about.

#### **Noel K. Jones**

Associate Professor Emeritus and Reading Recovery Trainer Emeritus  
University of North Carolina, Wilmington

I had the privilege and pleasure of working with Trika at NYU from 1998-2000 and again for a short period 2 years later.

I remember the wonderful professional conversations, and working together with her on presentations to school teachers. I recall especially a presentation at the International Reading Association in New Zealand, with Marie Clay in the audience, where we spoke about working with teachers and tutors/teacher leaders across cultures and countries.

We followed this conference with a fishing expedition to a backcountry New Zealand lake. Trika won the hearts of the local fishermen, they still ask after her. And we ate the trout she caught for dinner.

During my time at NYU, Trika introduced me to the heart of New York. We visited the Joyce, the Met and tiny jazz bars.

Her generosity and warmth were unfailing, and her company was such a joy wherever she was in NYC or 'back-blocks' of NZ.

**Jill Stephenson**

Reading Recovery Tutor (Teacher Leader)  
Auckland University, New Zealand

My favorite memory of Trika was her persistence and reflective manner as she taught children who were struggling readers in first grade at Indianola Elementary school in Columbus, Ohio, during her year of study in Reading Recovery. At first, teaching young children was a challenge for Trika. She began by trying to be each child's best friend. And, of course, she tape recorded every lesson for each child and analyzed them every night! She became fully engulfed in mastering the art of teaching. Trika told me that she knew she had made it when one of her students turned to her and said, "You know, you are making me work too hard!"

**Mary Fried**

Trainer at the Reading Recovery Center  
Ohio State University

"Although the time I spent with Trika was brief, it was very powerful. While my trainer was unexpectedly absent, Trika happily stepped in to sub our small Teacher Leader training class. She enthusiastically led our discussion about all of the different things one can learn about literacy processing by analyzing a child's writing samples. I remember walking away from our class amazed at the level of discussion and the amount I learned in that brief period of time. Trika was truly an inspiration, and will always be remembered for her impact on the immense amount of children she has touched by bringing Reading Recovery to NYU."

**Jacquelyn Alfrend**

Reading Recovery Teacher Leader  
Fairfax County Public Schools