

Sally J (born Gill) Thompson, ET

1 June 1952 - 19 October 2024

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WCET® is truly saddened to hear about the passing of Sally J Gill Thompson, a pioneer Enterostomal Therapist (ET) in the USA. Since the early days of our specialty, Sally has provided direct care and support to persons with an ostomy, including making sure they could access appropriate ostomy equipment. Sally has been our strong connection between her family - especially

after the passing (25 October 1998) of her mother, Norma N Gill, founder and first WCET® President, and deepen her commitment to our association.

The special relationship that WCET® enjoyed with Sally is especially evident in her writing of some chapters in the different editions of the Festschrift book.¹ Some examples follow to give you a first-hand appreciation of this wonderful woman.

Sally made a grand entrance into our world on 1 June 1952. As written in the Festschrift chapter Living with a Legend:

Finally, on May 31 1952, my water broke, two weeks early, and I was taken to the hospital to have the baby. It is hard to express the next 24 hours, since I was so ill and they did not think I would live. I was left alone except an occasional nurse coming in during the night. I was in labor 18 hours, and to top it off, Doctor Cheek who had taken care of me was out of town. I had predicted he would be, but he had been smart in having another obstetrician see me several months before in case anything did come up. The time came for delivery, and basically all I can remember was them saying the baby was born and my reply was, 'yes, it's a girl and she's a redhead.' They were shocked, for it was true. When they asked me how I knew, I told them I had ordered her. That's my Sally.¹

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Such an incredible bond between mother and daughter.

Sally shared her personal stories of her ET life with her ET colleagues:

My decision to become an ET was in 1971, while I was in college. While Mom had pursued her career at Cleveland Clinic, she also saw patients in Akron hospitals in the evenings. A business developed from the needs of these patients for products, which they asked Mom to provide. People came to our house for ostomy products, evenings, weekends, holidays - you name it - whenever they needed their supplies. When I asked Mom if she could train me as an ET, she said (I'll never forget it), "Honey, you don't know how long I've waited for you to ask me that question." Six weeks of riding to work on that Greyhound bus from Akron to Cleveland and back again darn near killed me at 19 years of age. I'll never know how Mom did it for 21 plus years. So, I became an ET, and Mom's patients in Akron had a hard time adjusting to a young "snot" like me. After several years, instead of being known as "Norma Gill's daughter", I began introducing my patients to Mom, and subsequently (in Akron, Ohio), she became known as "Sally Thompson's Mom"! (I specified "Akron, Ohio", because to this day, Mom is known throughout the world, yet not well known in her own hometown).¹

Sally's path to our specialty was influenced in part by observing and being aware of the surroundings in her life. She grew up in a home that housed early students of our specialty. Here's some of her reflections, a note to all of us that younger persons are watching our actions and how it can make an important (hopefully positive) impression:

I remember the ET school formation at Cleveland Clinic for which Dr. Turnbull and Mom had the vision. Early ET trainees stayed at our home due to lack of funds and housing facilities. It was fun having ladies from other states and countries (Canada was the only "other country" in those days!) come to stay with us, even though we had to get those dreaded water goblets out that later had to be washed by my sister and me!¹

We are grateful that Sally used her knowledge and expertise to help persons with an ostomy in her hometown of Akron,

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Ohio USA. She benefitted from her mothers lived experience with an ileostomy as well as growing up in a home that worked together to create ostomy equipment and make them available to other patients.

Sally has always been a great supporter of WCET®. In order to acknowledge all her contributions, and to thank her for all she has done, Sally was among the first recipients of the WCET® Norma N Gill President's Award. She was so happy and honoured to receive this award, but while WCET® was honoured by her own devotion to providing care to persons with ostomies. Sally was an advocate of the need to have people with knowledge and skills care for persons with an ostomy, which she did for almost 50 years.

Early in 2024, we heard from her about the increasing symptoms she had to face and were concerned about her declining health status. It was WCET®'s turn in our relationship to provide extra support for Sally - to let her know we were there for her and to make sure she knew the high esteem in which our association held her. We had planned to meet with her in person during the June 2024 WOCN® annual conference in Cleveland but she was not able to attend nor were we able to visit her at home due to her ongoing chemotherapy and other treatments. But as always, when there are obstacles, we found a way to move things around. We were able to speak with her on Zoom to again send her our support and love. We sent her a plant to brighten her day.

Afterwards, we corresponded by email and kept in touch to get updates on her health status. We knew she would not be

able to come to Glasgow, nor even do a Zoom call with us. In Glasgow during the Congress, we made a card in which all International Delegates (IDs), Committee members and Executive Board members wrote messages to Sally. We did not know at the time, that it would be our farewell to Sally, as a few days later, we received the sad news of her passing.

In order to honour her and in memory, WCET® has planted three trees, representing our tri-specialty and have contributed to the online guestbook.² We express, once again, to all her family - her two sons, five grandchildren and a great grandchild, her longtime companion, her step siblings and friends our deepest condolences.² Sally will be deeply missed and we will keep carrying her in our heart.

As we wrote in the WCET® commemorative message of the Festschrift book:

There can be no greater tribute to a person than to know that, through their efforts, more than one person's life has been changed for the better.¹

Thank you Sally for all you have done and may you rest in peace, dear ET, WCET® friend and colleague.

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