Memorial to Ruth Todd
1913–1984

MARTIN A. BUZAS
National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC 20560

DORIS LOW
U.S. Geological Survey, Woods Hole, Massachusetts 02543

Ruth Todd died of a heart attack on August 19, 1984, on her beloved island of Martha's Vineyard. She had lived and worked there for the last ten years since her "retirement" from the United States Geological Survey. She was one of the world's leading authorities on foraminifera and had studied both fossil and modern faunas from a wide geographic range. Shy and quiet by nature, she was at the same time very purposeful with an ability to get the job done on time. The contributions Ruth made to her science were formally recognized in 1980 when she was awarded the first Joseph A. Cushman Award for Excellence in Foraminiferal Research. No award, however, can express the feelings of her colleagues and friends who knew her as a warm and caring individual.

The eldest of five children, Ruth was born on October 22, 1913, in Seattle, Washington. The family lived on Mercer Island in Lake Washington until 1925 when Ruth's father moved the family to Gering Valley in Nebraska. This migration took place because Ruth's father wished to help his father homestead a farm on some 160 acres of land. In a nine-page letter to her nieces and nephews in 1964, Ruth documented the family's travel and difficult (yet rewarding) times on the farm. After the death of her grandfather in 1928, the family once again returned to Mercer Island.

Ruth received her B.S. degree in 1936 and her M.S. in 1939 from the University of Washington. She was a teaching fellow at Mt. Holyoke College (1938–39) where she worked with Christina Lochman. After writing about 30 fruitless letters as job applications, mostly to oil companies, she contacted Joseph A. Cushman in Sharon, Massachusetts, for further training, and he, in turn, offered her a position as his assistant. This association with the Cushman Laboratory began in 1940. Most of her early papers were published as a junior author with Cushman. Although she lived with the Cushman family for 10 years, throughout her life she always referred to her employer and colleague as Dr. Cushman.

After his death in 1949, the Cushman Collection, consisting of an enormous amount of identified specimens and 12,000 types, came to what was then called the U.S. National Museum to be combined with the foraminiferal collection already there.

Ruth had joined the U.S. Geological Survey in 1942 as a research assistant and had become a research geologist by the time the collections were transferred to Washington, D.C., in 1950. As a member of the Survey's Branch of Paleontology and Stratigraphy, she moved to an office that also served as the Cushman Library in the U.S. National Museum and was located adjacent to the foram collections. Although the primary responsibility for all this came under the Museum's curator of foraminifera, she continued to oversee the library and gave many hours through the years of helpful cooperation in the maintenance of the collections.
When the Cushman Foundation for Foraminiferal Research was incorporated in 1950, Ruth was one of seven trustees and its first secretary-treasurer, an office she held through 1954. Even after she became an honorary director of the foundation she continued to be of service.

While continuing her work for the U. S. Geological Survey, Ruth further developed her research talent under the guidance of her branch chief, Preston E. Cloud, Jr. She worked on fossil and Recent foraminifera from all over the world, and in addition to systematics, she expanded her research into ecology-paleoecology and stratigraphy. Her immediate undertaking in Washington was to complete work started by Cushman on the Marshall Islands forams. From 1954 to 1964 she published four chapters in the Survey's outstanding Professional Paper 260, an encompassing study instigated and directed by Harry S. Ladd whose work in the Pacific is famous for its excellence. This led to Ruth's becoming the Survey's acknowledged expert on the Pacific area smaller foraminifera, as evidenced by her publication record.

Ruth Todd was elected a Fellow of the Geological Society of America in 1955, and she was also a Fellow of the Cushman Foundation. The journals she subscribed to were all donated to the Cushman Library which has now been renamed the Todd Library.

In 1959 Ruth Todd and Paul Blackmon were awarded the Society of Economic Paleontologists and Mineralogists Best Paper Award in the Journal of Paleontology. This classic work was a culmination of their research on the mineralogy of foraminiferal tests. For more than 25 years it has been required reading for most students.

Although she loved to do research, she also responded to the needs of the scientific community. After Cushman's death, she authored "Recent Literature on Foraminifera" in what is now known as the Journal of Foraminiferal Research. This task included preparing lists of current publications and writing thoughtful annotations. Because the number of papers published on foraminifera has increased greatly over the years, Ruth's task became a formidable one. Fortunately for us, she loved to take the ferry to Woods Hole and spend her time in the library of the Marine Biological Laboratory. She continued this service until her death (the last manuscript was mailed by her the day before she died). Present and future researchers will always be thankful for this valuable service.

That Ruth was raised on an island and retired to one tells us how fond she was of islands. It is unclear, however, if she realized how much of her research was also concentrated on islands. She worked on faunas from Bikini, Saipan, Yap, Eniwetok, Onotoa, Guam, Fiji, Amchitka, Trinidad, Jamaica, Puerto Rico, Tonga, St. Croix, and Martha's Vineyard. The faunas were fossil and modern, and very few people have had the experience of viewing such an array of assemblages.

A short paper "Joseph A. Cushman and the Study of Foraminifera" (1985) was published by the Geological Society of America. Ruth was using all of Cushman's files to write a much longer version, but unfortunately, this important piece of history may never be completed.

On behalf of the scientific community, we express our deepest sympathy to Ruth's surviving sisters, Ella May Haar of Long Beach, Washington, and Harriet Wood of Seoul, Korea.
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