

Testimony to the Grace of God as shown in the life of Ron Hillier

Born 25.11.47 Died 31.12.12

“Every early morning Meeting I would come into the silence and glance around at who had already arrived. There was Ron, sitting at the back, under the clock, next to the piano. Brown knitted jumper, feet firmly placed, eyes closed and a look of serene calm on his face. The Meeting had begun, Ron had arrived and the silence enveloped us all.

At our gatherings for worship-sharing in OX2 Ron was our “token male” in a sea of elderly ladies, just as I am our “token young person”. Ron was always inquisitive, but his sense of absorbing and really hearing what others had to say was wonderful. He would “hold” your words in his gathered silence. Welcoming him to my home, I can still hear and see him explaining the simplicity of his life, and that was the way he liked it. Cycling to or from work, I am always on the look-out for Friends, and Ron’s eyes were some of the more frequent ones I caught. A nod of the head and a wave of the hand would spur me on to face the day ahead or know that I had a Friend nearby. I miss Ron and the love and life he brought to this, our Quaker community.”

A young member of our Meeting shared these memories at the Memorial Meeting held for Ron in Oxford on 21.09.13 .

Ron first came to Oxford Meeting in 2009 and was received into membership of Oxford and Swindon Area Meeting in 2011. He was never married and lived alone in a tiny rented bed-sit on the Banbury Road between two medical practices. He worked in the City Council’s Archaeological Unit for 20 years, where his commitment and reliability were highly valued.

Almost from his first attendance at Meeting for Worship he took part in many of the varied activities that are part of the life of Oxford Meeting, such as Enquirers evenings, Friendly Eights, and a monthly worship sharing group held in homes of Friends living in his neighbourhood, as well as regularly attending our 9.30am Meeting for Worship on Sundays. He sometimes offered ministry, and often contributed substantially to “afterwords” following Meeting for Worship. We came to appreciate his regular attendance and to recognise in his frugal lifestyle and extensive seeking a man who was truly a Quaker. During his membership visit with Area Meeting Friends he said that in one aspect he remained uncertain, and that was in his lack of any close personal affinities with particular Friends within the meeting. In discussion with his visitors, Ron realised that he might actually develop such personal affinities by involvement with our committees, which he actively carried out, enabling him to participate fully in the life of the meeting and bringing us all great benefit.

Ron undertook responsibility for compiling our weekly notices and carried out this task faithfully for about a year before he rang our Clerk to say that he would not be able to continue as he had been suffering for a short time from acute abdominal pain, had visited his GP and after some medical investigations he had been told that he was suffering from terminal cancer. One of our Friends offered to accompany him to his appointment with his Consultant Oncologist when he was to receive his “treatment plan”. Having worked as a nurse and a social worker during her life she was extremely impressed with his attitude to his impending death, which she described as extraordinary in its dignity and calm acceptance of his condition. The Consultant and palliative care nurse seemed amazed when Ron asked a number of penetrating questions about the point, purpose and likely outcome of any of the treatments they proposed, and then politely rejected them all, saying that he

knew his time had come, that he was comfortable with that and that he had a plan to go and stay with his sister (a trained nurse) in Taunton, where he was confident that she would care for him until the last. Within two weeks he had cleared his flat and packed his meagre belongings into her car, and was gone. His sister told us that, only a few months later, on the day he died, she had heard him singing in his room.

He wrote several articles for our monthly newsletter, (Forty-Three), but it was his final contribution to us in December 2012 that made the most impact:

“As many of you will know, I have recently been diagnosed with a terminal illness and my future life expectancy is not great. There is a saying: we are not human beings on a spiritual journey, we are spiritual beings on a human journey.¹ My own spiritual/human journey began while I was still at school. Over the next 40 years or so, I was almost permanently engaged in reading, discussion, research, experimentation and involvement with a number of religious and quasi-religious groups until finally, last year, all this activity culminated in my becoming a Quaker. After being deluged for years by a great avalanche of words, words, words, I formed the firm conviction that there are only two really important words in the English language: Love and Light.

Love is Unity, or a desire for Unity, Light is Wisdom or Mindfulness. Love alone is not enough - it can be indiscriminating and needs to be informed by Wisdom. Wisdom alone is not enough – it can be cool and detached and needs to be tempered by Love. The two combined are all-conquering, although they cannot conquer, only persuade. To me these two words, properly understood, are more weighty and significant than all the world’s holy books, political manifestos, socioeconomic systems and self-help manuals put together, because they transport us from the world of human language, forms and constructs to another level of knowledge and experience: the Spiritual World. This is what Quakerism is all about.

There is another saying: life is a bridge to be crossed, not built upon.² These buildings can be physical or mental. To me, life is about building structures until we reach the realisation that all these structures get in the way of our free passage across the bridge and have to be removed. I feel very happy that my own spiritual journey has ended with a deeply satisfying denouement and there is only one possible way to end this message,

Love and Light!

Ron Hillier December 2012

Towards the close of his Memorial Meeting his sister June said “His heart was with you.” She then corrected herself to say “No, his heart is with you”.

Written on behalf of Oxford Local Meeting by Jill Green in consultation with other Friends 21.10.13

¹ Teilhard de Chardin

² Indian Proverb