

Appendix 2017/7

Testimony to the grace of God in the life of Malcolm Whalan: 18.04.1945-08.11.2016

Hold yourself and others in the Light, knowing that all are cherished by God. (Advice 3)

As you learn from others, can you in turn give freely from what you have gained. (Advice 5)

Malcolm's service to The Religious Society of Friends is encapsulated in his tenacious adherence to these Advices. Many Friends, in their recent tributes in Facebook and other places, remember him offering to 'hold them in the Light' and recall that ministry he had given still speaks to them.

A Yorkshire conference which Malcolm supported on the creation of Testimonies to the grace of God in the lives of deceased Friends recognised how Friends' lives often finish in places where they are not well known. This was eventually true of Malcolm. He had been a member in three Yorkshire Monthly or Area Meetings, then moved to Quaker accommodation in Welwyn Garden City and died among the care of Friends in Devon. Memorial meetings were held in Devon and Hertford & Hitchin Area Meetings where the creation of a testimony to the grace of God in Malcolm's life was asked for. But each group which had known Malcolm felt that they only knew a little about him. This testimony has now been completed in Leeds Area Meeting with contributions from across Britain Yearly Meeting.

Malcolm had a difficult start in life. Apart from a broken family life, early on he suffered a brain injury after a fall from a horse which left him dyspraxic and with a tendency to get words the wrong way round. Among friends he was quick to see the funny side of that. His early experiences led him into a career as a social worker with brain injured people. Fairness and doing the right thing were prime values that he lived by. He was not afraid to stand up to bureaucratic and organisational nonsense wherever he found it. In his work he fought to secure the rights of his clients, making sure that they got the best chance they could.

Malcolm was always interested in exploring spirituality and, early on, was drawn to the mystical and Eastern traditions. He began to practice Transcendental Meditation, a practice he continued throughout his life. Even in the hospice he continued it, saying that he could still manage one of the TM stages. This was typical of Malcolm, focussing on the positive.

His journey into Quakers was a natural progression combining as it does the primacy of inner experience of the divine with service in the outer world. Malcolm came into formal membership in 1991 around the beginning of the new meeting at Hebden Bridge. He was always keen to serve Friends in business responsibilities in Monthly Meeting or as a Trustee locally or centrally in a wide variety of Quaker organisations.

In most of this service he was a stickler for Quaker procedure and 'right ordering' and would research things thoroughly; this made him unpopular with some already settled Friends. At times in a meeting community he felt like 'the grit in the oyster'. But he also enjoyed a welcoming and helpful role as resident Friend at Gildersome Meeting and Woodbrooke; and sharing laughter and inspiration with young people in Yorkshire and at BYM.

Malcolm was always 'a powerful advocate for the inclusion of young people in our Society'. One of his first suggestions after he came into membership was to set up a Yorkshire Link Group (12 to 18 year olds), which ran successfully for several years. He was very much a guiding light for many young Friends, both in this group and later with the Yearly Meeting Young People's programme. He recognised and spoke to a spiritual hunger among young Friends. The residential Yorkshire Link group that he suggested and co-facilitated on 'ways of accessing the inner light' had a waiting list, which was unknown for any other Link group event. 'His love and support will endure way beyond the passing of his 'material' form' said one young Friend.

His close friends knew him to have a lack of confidence in his own worth. He was always offering to help, and it was typical that Malcolm, after helping friends out, made it seem that they were doing him a service! With most adult Friends he did not socialise easily or talk about his personal life; he sometimes came across as reserved and remote. After his death a Friend was surprised to discover on his bookshelf pictures of him as a playful happy father with his children; she had been totally unaware of this part of his life.

Malcolm was a practical Quaker with a wicked sense of humour and had the gift of 'speaking simply and humbly about his faith'. One friend with whom he shared meals, walked through the bluebell woods and talked about pain and illness treasured a quote from Pierre Lacout which Malcolm had given him

"We must accept ourselves as we are, seizing the passing moment with its glory or its wretchedness, live with what we are and what we have, in loving self-giving'.

The loving self-giving was still seen in the difficult last days of Malcolm's life, when 'in no way did cancer and the nearness of death diminish him... in some way he became more and more himself'.

Prepared by Susan Robson, with the assistance of Ruth Hustler of Devon AM (formerly of Brighouse AM), with contributions from Friends in Brighouse, Leeds, and Hertford and Hitchin AMs.

Signed in and on behalf of Leeds Area Meeting July 9th 2017

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