

Testimony to the Grace of God as shown in the life of Wilf Fenten

23 February 1945 – 7 August 2023

Wilf Fenten was born in Germany towards the end of the Second World War. His mother gave birth, during an air-raid, in a crowded bunker without a doctor as none was available. His father had been conscripted into the German army and was stationed at the eastern front and then spent two years in a Soviet prisoner of war camp. So Wilf's early years were in the aftermath of the war and living in a devastated environment and in a society scarred by conflict. He was christened Wilfried, which in German means 'wills peace'. This name turned out to be prophetic as he was soon imbued with a strong desire to promote peace and a strong commitment to serving society.

Wilf was attracted to Britain and all things British. In the early 1960's he moved to London and trained as a translator. He became a much valued expert in German/English translations and was renowned for a high ability in the use of English. He was a stickler for the proper and clear use of the language.

When he was called-up to serve in the German Bundeswehr, Wilf chose to stay in Britain and avoid conscription. This led to him to acquiring British citizenship. In 1968 Wilf married Hilary and within a few years they had two sons, Aidan and Frank. His job as a freelance translator allowed him to work from home and help raise the family. It also meant that he could be selective in who he worked for and could avoid doing translations for arms manufacturers.

Wilf and Hilary were active in the peace movement and it was this that led them to start attending Quaker meetings, first in London and then in Yorkshire, where they found their spiritual home and became members in the early 1990's. He believed strongly in helping others and was renowned for his generosity – often putting himself out to assist those in need. For instance, he would befriend homeless men in London and help them with alcohol addictions.

It was whilst raising his family that he found a love of nature, taking his young sons hiking around the country. He developed an affection for the north of England, walking both summer and winter in the Yorkshire Dales and Lake District, and twice walking the long-distance Pennine Way.

In 1989 the family moved to Selside in Upper Ribblesdale surrounded by the Yorkshire Three Peaks. It was here that his passion for peace was extended to embrace environmental sustainability and community development. He was a parish councillor and chair of planning for the Yorkshire Dales National Park Authority. He worked to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the area. He was outspoken against unsympathetic planning applications which he felt would not benefit local people and might harm the landscape. He felt that the unique geography of the Yorkshire Dales spoke to him like no other and this led him to have deep connections with the local community. He used his skills and experience to actively help the conservation charity, Friends of the Dales.

Wilf's work for peace and sustainability found its spiritual basis in the local Quaker community. He was active in local meetings and served as Clerk of two meetings. It was at Airtton Meeting that he found his spiritual home. He was part of the small group which revived the meeting after decades of inactivity. His enthusiasm and drive helped to put the meeting house and bunk-barn accommodation on a more sustainable footing, although occasionally this enthusiasm led to isolation from others. He and Hilary were often at the meeting house to give a warm welcome to visitors and make them feel at home.

Wilf showed through his life how Quaker worship and witness are inter-related so feed off each other; and can be promoted and sustained by practical action. This found expression in his love for the natural environment. He used his skills with language to promote European wide sustainability. His influence on national parks across Europe has been significant. His strong belief in the European community of peoples led him to champion sustainable tourism and advocate the joys that natural areas can bring to both tourists and residents. He travelled throughout Europe advising national parks on sustainable tourism. He contributed extensively to the European Charter for Sustainable Tourism in Protected Areas.

Wilf was generous with his time in helping those with difficulties or in need of care. His warm smile and positive outlook on life helped them feel lovingly supported. He also had a strong belief in the value of fairness. He supported those who he felt were being treated unfairly, believing that fair treatment was ethically and morally right and was a fundamental outcome of the Quaker testimony to equality.

Wilf died suddenly whilst out walking with his family in the Yorkshire Dales. It was a great shock to everyone, but he was surrounded by a family that meant so much to him and in an environment that he loved and cherished.

Signed on behalf of Craven & Keighley AM, 10 February 2024