

A Note from your Field Secretary

by David McKay

It seems like a lifetime since I last wrote something in *The Canadian Friend*. And perhaps it has been. My life has been turned upside down several times since last some of you have heard from me here and I'd like to share something of what I've been through.

Let's begin with my visit to Kingston, Ontario and Thousand Islands Meeting which meets there on the campus of Queen's University. It was September so the weather was still nice. Students everywhere. Thousand Islands meets in the campus women's centre in a room filled with student artwork the featured artist at the time had an interest in frogs.

The hospitality was exceptional. I was billeted with Hans Brunner who has a corner apartment overlooking the harbour. I met with a small number of Friends at his place on the Saturday night. It was there I learned, from a call from my wife Colleen, that my Dad was in Scarborough Centenary Hospital again. As in the past he was in the Cardiac Intensive Care Unit.

As strange as it now seems I carried on with my program. There was little I could do in Kingston. The rail service back towards Toronto left few options before my scheduled return Sunday afternoon anyway. Most importantly, this was not the first time.

Dad had a congenital heart murmur. It never gave him any troubles until autumn 1982 when a heart valve got an infection in it. He had two heart valves replaced. He seemed fine from there (other than a growing regimen of drugs to monitor the transplant). In the mid-nineties the valves were replaced with mechanical ones and the aorta was replaced as well.

His health was never quite the same. Periodically fluid would build up in his lungs which would in turn lead to pneumonia and a stay in the Cardiac ICU until it was brought under control. Shortly after I took on the position of Field Secretary these times started to become more common. One of the valves was leaking slightly. But the doctors did not feel that Dad's health was strong enough for yet another open heart surgery. So they treated him with more drugs and more periodic stays in the hospital. After a while it seemed he would just keep beating the odds. When I heard the news this time my first thought wasn't for him but for my Mom and my sister.

In the following month, I visited Dad in the hospital, planned my next Field Secretary visitation to Simcoe-Muskoka Meeting, and got a job offer. The new job would mean an increase in pay and responsibility doing a job I had done before and I knew I enjoyed. It also meant moving to Chatham, Ontario. Chatham is a city of 43,900 about two hours (by Greyhound bus) from my previous home base of

London. It was also further away from Toronto where most of my family, including my Dad and Mom, lived. I gave my notice and hopped on the bus to visit Friends at Simcoe-Muskoka.

Simcoe-Muskoka meets in Orillia, Ontario. It has its own meetinghouse which is one of the oldest buildings in town. I was billeted there. This was a combination Meeting visit and Half-Yearly Meeting visit. We discussed the Peace Testimony a matter of some concern to a number of Friends present.

On the way back home I phoned Colleen from the bus station to let her know I had arrived back early. She told me something had happened but she didn't want to tell me until I got home. I remember staring out the window of the taxi. I could tell the news wasn't good. I figured it had to be about Dad.

My Dad passed away that weekend, still in hospital. He was only seventy-one. People ask me if it was expected. I never know what to answer. He's been living with this for nearly two decades. He was in hospital being treated for congestive heart failure due to his condition. But he was recovering. They had transferred him out of ICU and into a rehab unit in preparation for him to go home. While in Orillia I recall talking at length with a Friend about the modern medical system, the pains and trials it puts people through, and how treatment often feels like you're a slab of meat being worked on and not a human being. And I did so without any real sense of irony or concern about my father and his condition.

Over the next two weeks I attended the funeral, returned home, and began preparations for my move to Chatham. I began work the first week of November even though we didn't actually move until the middle of the month. I went home on weekends to help with more packing. And through it all I tried to keep in touch with Mom. I learned late in November that Mom has cancer. As of this writing (February 3rd) she has had her first dose of chemotherapy just this last week. She discovered a lump under her armpit the day of Dad's funeral. She decided to wait to tell us.

I am telling you all of this because it is important to me to do so, and at this time. In the course of the Field Secretary project I have received much warmth and hospitality from Friends. I wish to publicly thank all Friends who have supported me through this time and especially those who have supported me through the last few months. This is one of our strengths as Friends. In times such as these we can turn to one another.

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