

I joined the vigil with an innocent expectation that our regular presence on the streets would open the hearts of authorities and help to simulate changes leading to more caring and just policies. This expectation has not been realized. It is hard not to feel that I have been naive and unrealistic.

Our common cultural stories, like the boy with his finger in the dike, describing small heroic efforts which lead to dramatic changes, contribute to those expectations. So does the oft repeated statement, attributed to Margaret Mead, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world, Indeed it is the only thing that has." These claims have not stood the test of 7 years of vigil keeping.

But not all influences are visible. The impact of a quiet vigil like ours may be real but unseen. That is why our prayer ends with the word "hope." Hope is a virtue which sustains many a heart when evidence and the logic shout, "failure!" That is how I learned to value my presence on the streets as a spiritual rather than a political exercise. And learned to take a spiritual view of its results.

With this insight I began to make a point of smiling and making eye-contact with passers by. Some people

respond warmly, and accept a leaflet, or stop to talk, or simply smile back. But others, stiffly look away and hurry past the silent line, faces blank. I suspect that this chilly response is as important as a warm one. It shows that our message has struck home, even if it is rejected for now.

More recently I have come to see my presence at the vigil as something that I do for myself as much as for others. It is a way in which I can be a witness to truth. I testify in public every day I stand there. In a very small way I join the ranks of the marchers for justice in all times and all places. In many respects it doesn't matter if we do not move mountains, or even influence our city council to do better today. By our testimony and willingness to put ourselves into the public eye, to risk ridicule and the ravages of weather we send a message which inevitably alters the structure of civil society. Spiritual influences are not often dramatic. Sometimes the still small voice only murmurs and murmurs, wearing away its opposition like water running over stone. Thus I take to the streets in hope. \*

*Bert Horwood is a member of Thousand Islands Monthly Meeting.*

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### *A Left handed Life*

*Wrist cocked, a heron's foot.  
Pen drags hand over ink  
smearing words.  
I mark all I touch  
with formless smudges.*

*How dare I  
glory  
in the light?*

*Preposterous.  
Grubby boy,  
smudged stranger.*

*Dare.  
Dare hard.  
Damn right.*

– Michael Phillips is a member  
of Argenta Monthly Meeting.

