



# Testimony to the Grace of God in the Life of John McKendy

*August 1949 - October 2008*

The quality for which we will most remember John was his remarkable ability to quickly embrace others as friends. For years John honed his skills of careful listening and empathy, reinforced by his discipline of prayer and faithfulness in holding others in the Light. In this way John extended his friendly embrace to a very large diverse circle. John befriended the young, old, children, and the middle aged. He befriended the poor, the imprisoned, and victims of crime. His friends included men and women, gay and straight, as well as people of every colour and culture that he encountered.

John grew up in Bathurst, New Brunswick, one of seven children. His father Arthur was a civil servant, and his mother Bernadette was a school teacher and librarian. Upon graduating from LeBlanc High School in 1967 he attended St. Francis Xavier University. He pursued postgraduate studies in sociology at the University of Toronto, obtaining a PhD in 1981. His dissertation was titled, "Max Weber and the Sociology of Roman Catholicism". John was first introduced to Friends in Toronto in the 1970s while doing his Master's degree. John married Carol Wakeham in 1977. They met at his brother Mike's wedding. (Carol's sister Judy, married John's brother Mike.)

Although John was associated with Friends for much of his life, his abiding Quaker faith and perspective was built on the bedrock of Roman Catholicism. Catholic monastic, mystical, and social justice traditions continued to inspire. They led him to attend occasional weekend prayer retreats at the Monastery of Our Lady of Calvary (Rogersville NB). John also attended several meetings of the Friends Association for Higher Education, where Quaker educators gathered to talk about their vocations.

In 1989, while John was on the St. Thomas University faculty, he helped to establish the Fredericton Friends Worship Group. For years he faithfully hosted New Brunswick Monthly Meeting in

the university faculty lounge. He also convened a mid-week Meeting on campus for many years. John had a special relationship with the children in the Quaker Meeting. His face would light up whenever he'd meet them and he'd get down on one knee to say "Hi", ask them how they were, and maybe give them a hug or a playful tickle.

John listened deeply and was skilled at helping people voice their deep concerns. He often shared this exceptional ability at our monthly Meeting for Worship for Business, facilitating our communication with one another as we struggled to find a way forward.

John was among the group of Friends who began the Alternatives to Violence Project at Dorchester Institution (New Brunswick) in 1993. In addition to his AVP activism, John stood faithfully in solidarity against violence to women at the annual 'Take Back the Night' event. He spent the summers of 2007 and 2008 with the African Great Lakes Initiative of the Friends Peace Teams, helping to build a women's HIV-AIDS clinic. These were the first times in John's life that he had traveled outside North America. He had planned to return in January 2009 for a longer sojourn of peace-building in Kenya.

He was an avid hiker and camper. His favourite hiking destination was Baxter State Park near Millinocket Maine. His favourite company on these trips were Carol and daughters Colleen and Laura. For forty years he was also an amateur radio operator using the call sign VE9JM.

John befriended many students through his energetic teaching and personal attention. With practical assignments he challenged his students to be social justice advocates and leaders in their communities.

John did not seek balance in his life in the way most of us understand it. He would rarely indulge himself, choosing instead to focus on the well-being of others. Rather, the balance John sought in life was cosmic and universal. He wanted to cultivate and grow the greater good in counterbalance to the world's weight of suffering, poverty, and despair. While at times he was deeply saddened by life's problems, our lasting memory of John is of the energetic, effervescent, and smiling man.

The irony of the violent manner of John's death reminds us of stories of other peacemakers whose lives were cut short, and that the work of peacemakers involves risk.  
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