

Testimony to the Grace of God in the Life of Martin Ludwig Cohnstaedt 12 October 1917 to 13 November 2002

Martin Cohnstaedt was born in Frankfurt am Main, Germany, the third and youngest child of Wilhelm Cohnstaedt and Else Göbel. Theirs was a humanist and intellectual family, and from his earliest days, Martin witnessed others' commitment to social justice. When Hitler came to power in 1933, members of the Cohnstaedt family adhered to their beliefs, which resulted in the scattering of the family across two continents and personal tragedy. In 1934, Martin was enrolled in Leighton Park Friends boarding school in Reading, England. He later emigrated to the U.S., where he earned his undergraduate degree in agriculture at Rutgers University in New Jersey. During subsequent graduate study at the University of North Carolina and the University of Wisconsin, Martin's academic interest turned to sociology, which he taught at several colleges in the U.S. before coming to Canada in 1967 for a position within the University of Regina sociology department.

Martin's strong spirit came to voice during the war years as he began speaking truth to power. Questions of conscience arose on numerous occasions, and Martin consistently "walked the extra mile" to clearly and unequivocally state his deeply-rooted convictions to pacifism, and the empowerment of minority groups. Committed to actually living his beliefs, Martin's activist stance not only exercised the conscience of those around him, but also meant that his own path, frequently a challenging one, led more than once to personal sacrifice. On matters of principle, a radical in the truest sense, he was in the unique, and unenviable, position of being the subject of Supreme Court hearings in both the U.S. and Canada. In each instance the court agreed with him.

Early in his academic career Martin married Becky Boone. They had two sons, William and John, and later divorced. Soon after his arrival in Saskatchewan Martin met and married Joy Rowe. They made their home in Lumsden and were joined by children Robert, Dolores, and Nicci. Their shared love of the land and commitment to environmental concerns was expressed in tangible ways, which ranged from their large organic

gardens, to being founding members, and trustees, of the New Roots Community Land Trust near Wynyard, Saskatchewan.

Martin held memberships with the Religious Society of Friends in meetings in New Jersey and Wisconsin prior to becoming a member of Prairie Monthly Meeting. His unstinting, regular participation in Prairie Monthly Meeting and worship groups in Regina and Winnipeg played a pivotal role in the continuing lives of our meetings. On more than one occasion he was the only one in attendance. Martin generously shared his gifts, for a time serving as clerk, and often stepping in to assist others during times of need. Although Martin and Joy eventually moved to Toronto, Martin continued to regard Prairie Monthly Meeting as his spiritual home.

Martin is memorable for many things: the pleasure he derived from being a father and his devotion to Joy and their family; his loving concern for, and encouragement of, those around him; and the personal stances he took on large issues. Martin often engaged others in dialogue pertaining to questions of conscience. These included an ongoing search for ways in which one could be instrumental in improving living conditions for marginalized peoples, and his testimony against the Cluff Lake uranium mine. "I hear what you're saying" was Martin's tactful way of indicating that he was of a different mind. Martin brought with him an aura of the "old world". Culture was important in his life. His somewhat formal mode of dress, suits often worn with a turtleneck, spoke of his inherent respect for human dignity.

Alzheimer's disease eventually claimed Martin's memory, though his strong spirit remained. And this is how we remember our Friend Martin Cohnstaedt — a quiet man with enormous inner strengths whose actions always reflected that there is that of God in everyone.

Martin Cohnstaedt has touched many lives with his faithful witness to truth. We will remember him for his generosity of spirit, for his constancy and humble sincerity, and for his courageous stands on important issues. We are grateful to have shared some of his time. ✨