

RM #7 – Memorial Minute: Fred Franklin

TESTIMONY TO THE GRACE OF GOD

FRED FRANKLIN

6 August 1921 – 19 September 2016

Fred Franklin was born in on 6 August 1921 in Bochum, which was then a small town in western Germany. What he described as a normal happy childhood came to an end in 1933 when Hitler came to power. Fred, was bullied, chased, and threatened almost daily because his mother Elsa was Jewish. His family was fortunate to be able to send him to a boarding school in Sussex, England, but it was not an easy time: Fred recalled being caned for speaking to his cousin in German, and beatings or slapping of students' hands were routine.

When he left school in 1939, he stayed in England, employed in war work in the Birmingham factories amid the air raids and bombings. The British government considered Fred to be a "friendly alien" but his parents, who had joined him in England, were classified as "enemy aliens" and were sent – as were many German refugees – to an internment camp on the Isle of Wight. After some time, most of the refugees were released. Eventually Fred's parents were able to join him, his sister Lola, and her family.

In 1948 Fred – who by this time had become a trained civil engineer crossed the Atlantic Ocean working in the engine room of the Queen Mary. They arrived in Newfoundland and hitchhiked across Canada. Fred lived in Vancouver for about three years, working on boats that carried supplies to communities up and down the British Columbia coast. In 1951 he was recruited by A.V. Rowe for an engineering job in Toronto, working on the Avro Arrow. In Toronto he also met another German refugee, Ursula Martius, over a shared interest in music and social activism. Fred and Ursula were married in May 1952. Ursula's parents had also immigrated to Canada.

Fred had some exposure to Quakers in England through the Cadbury family, who had invited stranded refugees to stay at Woodbrooke. Fred and Ursula began to attend Quaker Meeting for Worship in the late 1950s, and in 1964 they joined the Toronto Meeting. They both became actively involved in the Meeting and in the wider Quaker community, and their two children, Martin and Monica, grew up in this meeting.

When Ursula returned to work (first at the Ontario Research Foundation and then at the University of Toronto) Fred became a full-time volunteer on behalf of Quakers and Quaker concerns. He was involved in the Friends Daycare from its inception in July 1971. Fred had a deep concern about issues regarding imprisonment and social justice, serving on Quaker committees and also making regular visits to prisoners in a number of institutions. Following the 1973 coup in Chile, Fred shifted his focus to immigration and refugee concerns, with continued emphasis on detention. In addition to the Quaker Committee for Refugees, he was active in provincial, national and international bodies. He remained interested and concerned until the end, even when he could no longer be personally involved.

Ursula and Fred were partners in each other's lives and activities. They supported, encouraged, and helped one another. Fred's report writing benefitted from Ursula's editorial hand and clear thinking, and her endeavours were the better for his insight and compassion. Both were guided and strengthened by their Quaker faith. They believed we all have the responsibility to help build a society that treats everyone, especially the most vulnerable, with fairness and compassion.

Fred (like Ursula) received many awards. His – from the Don Jail, from Toronto West Detention Centre, from the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture, Ontario Council of Agencies Welcoming Immigrants (OCASI) and on behalf of the refugee community – spoke to his dedication as a volunteer. He received the YMCA Peace medal in 1979. He graciously received all these accolades with Ursula proudly at this side.

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Fred was an adventurer and a tinkerer: he enjoyed fixing things. He loved music, and was an amateur musician playing cello and recorders. For a while, when the children were young, he ran a home business building Orff instruments – xylophones and glockenspiels – that he sold to school music programs. He loved growing things, especially flowers, and when he came to Christie Gardens at age 91 he was active in the community garden. He liked talking and exchanging ideas. He had a good sense of humour and a sharp wit. Ruth Morris, a fellow participant in the Quaker prison/jails and justice committee remembered Fred telling her he felt he had truly “arrived” and been accepted when a prisoner at the Milton Jail casually said to him, “So, what are you in for, pops?”

Fred genuinely enjoyed people. He had an ability to connect with individuals and to believe in the best in everyone. He was truly interested, caring, and concerned about the person in front of him – whether that person was a detainee, a prisoner, a guard, an official, an academic, a refugee, a caregiver, a fellow committee member, or a resident at Christie Gardens. The special care available at Christie Gardens was appreciated when Fred suffered cognitive disabilities in his final two years. When Ursula died, cards addressed to Fred came from some of the volunteers and staff who had worked with him in the detention facilities. His children remember a young woman that Fred befriended years ago, panhandling on the street close to where they lived. He would go out of his way to talk to her and find out how she was doing. Their backyard had a corner for the bottles she collected to sell. She remembered the kindness of Fred and Ursula and for many years would bring them a special flower at Christmas.

On 19 September 2016, just weeks after Ursula’s death, Fred Franklin died, having lived an extraordinary life to the fullest.