

place to be alone and try this contemplative prayer. They were faltering steps in seeking an authentic prayer life and the steps still falter but they were encouraged by Merton's life.

Gerry Williams
September 4th 1924 - June 8th 2001

A reflection by Tony Pannett

Gerry Williams and I joined the TMS soon after it was formed in 1993 and a mutual love and respect for Merton and his writings was our common ground. But there was more to it than that. Gerry had been associated with a Buddhist tradition for a very long time and I had been profoundly influenced by the tradition stemming from Thailand and the Meditation Master Ajahn Chah whose disciples in the UK lived at Amaravati, Chithurst, Harnham and Devon monasteries.

Gerry and I met not only at TMS Conferences and days but at the Christian/Buddhist Forum held in London twice a year. We first met at Amaravati on the TMS weekend retreat in 1994 and it was there that we really became friends. We had rooms opposite each other and we used to go to the early morning meditation together.

As far as I can recollect Gerry never missed a day meeting or an Annual Conference of the TMS. At annual conferences we would frequently sit at meals together and share long conversations. Although he never mentioned it, I began to be aware that his health was not good but it never became a topic of conversation except once when his health threatened to prevent him from coming to a day meeting at Winchester. He wrote to ask me if I was going and we planned to meet at Waterloo station so we could travel down by train together. Despite having had a fall recently he turned up at Waterloo limping but determined to enjoy the day. It was a crisp and sunny day in December and we all shared a wonderful day together . . .

Gerry was born in Melbourne, Australia and after serving in the Second World War in the Royal Australian Air Force, trained as a teacher. He came to England in 1954 and lived here for the rest of his life. At first he taught in one of the few progressive schools in England

at the time, New Sherwood in Epsom, Surrey. He moved on to the Henderson Hospital where he worked with psychiatric patients in the therapeutic community. Moving to south London in 1969 he started the work that would occupy his interests and talents for over 30 years, up to and even after his retirement. Based at the Cambridge House Community Centre in Camberwell he worked with and supported many groups including housing projects, adventure playgrounds, community schemes and tenants with all their various needs and problems.

In his quiet and unobtrusive way Gerry taught me a lot. He had a Zen-like wisdom and insight. Words of compassion and of clear seeing, often spiced with a pungent wit, illuminated discussions in which we shared ideas about books, especially books by or about Thomas Merton on which Gerry was something of an authority. There weren't many books he hadn't read about Merton and his knowledge was immense. It was a similar story at the Christian/Buddhist Forum. At these meetings a common theme would be examined from both a Buddhist and a Christian perspective in the context of a Meditation and a shared meal. Gerry and I would often walk out during the lunch break or afterwards and explore Watkins bookshop in central London, all the time talking about the things that interested us.

At his funeral, listening to the heartfelt tributes from his fellow workers and the moving testimonies from his daughter Zoe and his son Luke, I came to realise the wider aspects of Gerry's life that had mostly been unknown to me. There are certain people you meet during life whom you feel you're better off for knowing. For me, Gerry was one of those people.

I think it's appropriate to end this piece by quoting a Zen Buddhist text from the *Ten Oxherding Pictures*: 'Entering the Market Place with Helping Hands' which was read at Gerry's Funeral:

We love with acceptance
We do not help only people we like but also people who are difficult.
We do not force our ideas, our opinions, what works for us, on others,
We try to bring lightness into other people's lives,
We do not take it all too seriously

Gerry epitomised these sentiments and I am glad I knew him.