

Testimony to the Grace of God in the life of Billy Johnstone

13 April 1951 - 9th July 2013.

Billy Johnstone came into contact with the Society of Friends when he was considering how he might bring the whole of his life into unity with his strong Christian belief. His work in retail was not enough for him and he decided to make a plan, with his wife Gwen, to undertake a four year degree course to enable him to become a social worker. She would work to support him, then he in turn would support her to do what was her choice. They had been true partners since their early twenties, and when they made a serious commitment to something important, it was a commitment for life. Billy had made such a commitment to Alcoholics Anonymous (A.A.), which he had joined when young, and to Loaves and Fishes, a small Glasgow charity which gave food and support to the homeless in the city, becoming a strong core member in both organisations, and being willing always to respond to demands at any times in day or night to do what was needed.

Billy was also a member of the Scottish National Party, and in taking his part in their work he met and talked to his Labour supporting neighbour at the election in East Kilbride. She introduced him to the local Meeting for Worship, which he soon joined. Although he had been an Elder in the local Church of Scotland, he really believed that "Thou shall not kill" meant exactly what it said and could no longer support the churches' belief in the possibility of a "just war". Billy could not be part of anything without doing his bit, and, through time, he was an overseer, Clerk to Overseers and often in charge of many one off jobs in the Society of Friends. East Kilbride Friends remember his organisation of trips to Cumbria to visit the Quaker Tapestry and Swarthmoor Hall, among other interesting places, particularly the time Billy organised the "Baillieston Dementia Bus" one Saturday when it was not needed elsewhere, to take us on an outing. When it broke down on the motorway the police response to our call was remarkably swift.

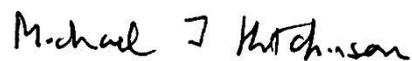
After Billy had qualified in his new career, and after Gwen had finished her degree, they went to live and work in Argyll and had probably the happiest time in their lives there. Argyll Friends remember him as a much loved member of their Meeting, who would arrive at "Bring your own lunch" Meetings with an extra packed lunch for anyone who had come without. They also remember wonderful Meetings with him in various lovely places in Argyll. As always with Billy, there are many individual reminiscences from the many who loved him and remembered him, including his clients, fellow members of A.A., those who worked with him and were helped by him in Loaves and Fishes. His many friends from childhood and from work, as well as Friends from all levels of the Society of Friends from local to national, have expressed their sorrow at losing him, but more importantly, their joy of having known him. He was, at different times, a key member of East Kilbride, then Glasgow, then Argyll and finally Glasgow Meeting again, and we all, as Argyll Friends wrote, "feel truly blessed to have had the privilege of having shared times together"

and will miss "Billy`s lovely warm manner, his skill, his compassion and his dedication".

Billy was born and brought up within the Glasgow conurbation, a place very divided socially in the "old days". Efforts have been made by many people to encourage reconciliation within the city, and Billy was a key member of this movement, due to his contacts across all sections of society. This was demonstrated at his funeral, a funeral being held at far too young an age. While Glasgow still holds the Fair Holiday in July, most Glaswegians who are able to, take a holiday in June, before the English school holidays start. Many F/friends were booked to be away at the time of Billy`s funeral. In spite of this the large Crematorium was full, with 3 or 4 rows of people having to stand at the back. Many were anxious to speak of what he had meant to them and what he had done for and with them, and the Meeting for Worship there was a profound experience.

Later, there were many requests for a further, Memorial Meeting, so that absentees from the first could come. We had to hire a large hall to hold everyone. This was also filled with those who had known Billy well. Gwen had chosen Billy`s favourite Beatles` song to be played as we left. The song was "All you Need is Love". No-one moved, and it became part of the Meeting, encapsulating as it did the gift that Billy personified for those who knew him.

Signed in and on behalf of West Scotland Area Meeting held at Tarbert, Argyll
23 August 2014



Michael J Hutchinson
Clerk

