

Tribute for Gerald Plowman, aged 81

Gerald,
Gerry as he was known to his family,
loved his journeys.
Tootling around in his car
going here and there with his Phyllis;
a coach tour to Torquay;
by North Sea Ferries
to see the tulips of Amsterdam.
Talking of journeys,
the Israeli airline, El Al,
has a custom where the Hebrew stewardess
greet you as you enter the plane
with the word Shalom,
Hebrew for Peace.
Peace for your journey,

a reassuring greeting for all those
troubled by the prospect of their journey,
especially one by air.

Shalom, peace,
it calms your fears,
puts you at your ease.

And the word Shalom

Peace

seems just the word for today

as we bid Gerry farewell

as passes from life on earth to life with God.

And we can think of the word peace

in three ways.

We can thank God

for the peace which Gerry's life brought.

He was a gentle man and his was a gentle life.

Born in nearby Stonegrave

in 1927,

raised by his elderly grandparents,

his grandad a farm-worker,

passing on his skills to Gerry.

After schooling at Hovingham,

Gerry worked at Wath Quarry,

and then for Mr Harrison at his farm at Gilling

and Mr Murray Wells at his farm at West Ness,

living in tied-houses there with his young wife.

Phyllis had been a maid at Ampleforth Abbey

and had met Gerry when both were watching

a cricket match there.

Gerry had invited Phyllis to have a ride on his motor bike;

Phyllis declined, fearful what Matron would think.

Way back in the 1940s matrons

whether in charge of hospitals or schools

would put the fear of God into God!

Despite Matron,

their friendship and love blossomed,

they married,

and with the arrival of Pauline

and then Stephen

a side car was added to the motorbike,

and then as toddlers grew into children,

the motor bike became a Reliant Robin,

and finally a proper car.

When work at West Ness came to an end,

there was a move house to Kirkbymoorside

and a change of job,

with Gerry working as a sort of free-lance

with the Water Board,

clearing ditches and making sure all the folk
in the Ampleforth valley and further afield
kept their feet on dry land.

He was a hard worker,
He didn't really retire
until vertigo forced him to when he was 69.

All creatures great and small,
a line from our first hymn,
sums up Gerry well.

There was a greatness about him,
he could hurl a bail as well as any other farmer.

But his gentleness meant he took care
with the small things:

his corn dollies were legendary,
with an international reputation –
one was even shipped to America.

His patience made him an expert knitter.

Though definitely a countryman,
he hated cruelty to animals,
swerving to avoid road-kill,
admiring the pageantry of the hunt
cut secretly hoping they would be unsuccessful
in catching their quarry.

He could be great and small with his family,
an adult with the adults
yet as tender as a child with the tiniest baby.

He gave love and received love,

Phyllis his wife,

Pauline and Stephen his children,

Wendy and Sharon his grand-daughters,

Chloe, Caitlyn and baby Megan his great-granddaughters,
fond and grateful too to Rob and Tim.

For all that peace we give thanks today.

Secondly, we can give thanks that he is at peace now.

His suffering,

the confusion of the last few years,

the difficulties with mobility:

all that pain and frustration is over now for Gerry.

He's at peace.

We give thanks for those who kept him going,

obviously Phyllis and the family,

as well as the staff at Omega Barn and

finally Beechwood.

No one suffers in isolation:

there is always one watching beside them,

caring for them,

aching for them.

For the peace brought by those who cared for Gerry,

we give thanks this day.

Finally we pass Gerry on to the peace of God,

peace so marvellous that we can hardly fathom it.

How great Thou art

is our final hymn,

which Gerry used to enjoy so much

on Songs of Praise,

especially when his beloved Phyllis

sang it to him afterwards,

almost as a lullaby.

The hymn really draws on the beauty of nature,

with which Gerry was so familiar,

and lifts the soul to adore God.

And that's a parable of life really,

Gerry's life and the life of each and every one of us.

A life of tremendous joy and tremendous sorrow,
a life surrounded by blessings and love,
finally to be lifted up to adore God for ever
in a heaven where Gerry will be restored
to fullness of life.

We can imagine a heaven's whose ditches will be clear,
where even the angels learn to make corn dollies,
warm with the jumpers that
gentle Gerry will knit for them.

Dream on!

But God has given us an imagination,
and dares us to dream that he,
the God of all peace,
will never let us go.

So to that loving God
we boldly commend Gerry
and each of every one of us as we miss him so.