



Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional resources 116.A

Engage

Richard's story



Richard was born in 1934, the eldest of 3 boys. His father was in the Navy and his mother looked after the family. It was a comfortable and conservative sort of family – but there were adventures! When Richard was 5 the family moved to Australia – his father was helping the Australian navy. That meant a long journey by sea. In 1943, during the war, Richard and his mother and brother travelled back to England by sea – across the Atlantic with all the risks of attack. Every night they went to sleep wearing their life jackets, in case the ship was torpedoed.

After school Richard joined the Navy himself. He spent most of his time as a submariner – he says he really enjoyed being part of a team, relying absolutely on a small group of men. Richard was involved in helping people on the island of Zante after an earthquake and felt that was useful. In 1956 the Suez Crisis saw the Navy involved in fighting which disillusioned Richard so much that he left.

Richard has always enjoyed drawing and in 1960 he went to university to train as an architect. University was fun – he rowed in the college boat team and regularly went skiing. Richard earned a bit of extra cash helping a Swiss student with her English conversation. Before she'd gone home, Richard proposed to her – but Sylvia wasn't quite sure. It was when Richard gave up his skiing holiday to visit her family that his father knew he was serious!

Richard and Sylvia went on to have a happy family life together. They had two children, Joanna and Nick. Richard worked as an architect in public authorities – for local councils, Housing Associations and the Housing Corporation. They moved around quite a bit – but they've been in Exeter since 1982.

Richard was brought up an Anglican; he found Quakers by chance. Joanna went to a play group based in a Meeting House and on a Sunday morning wanted to show Daddy where she went. A Friend there invited Richard to come to a talk the next week – and Richard says it felt like coming home when he joined the Quakers.

Quakers is very important to Richard and he has been an important part of Quakers, in Exeter and nationally. He was clerk of Local Meeting, ran courses called 'Quakerism for the Curious' locally and across the country, wrote a booklet called 'Reason, Faith and Experience' introducing Quakers, helped to run Eldership courses all over the country and in Switzerland and Sweden, served on the Yearly Meeting Agenda Committee and was very involved in work with children and young people. Richard often gave important ministry in Meeting for Worship.

Richard noticed he was becoming forgetful around 2010 and in 2012 was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Now Richard forgets things a lot. He's always polite and chats – but often he doesn't really know who he's talking to. He has a lovely sense of humour and can recite lots of poetry – but he needed Sylvia to tell the story of his life. Richard might have a shower and not know what to do next. He doesn't go out alone, can't deal with phone calls, couldn't cook a meal, can't remember what he's just done. Sometimes Richard just can't find the word he's looking for: this makes him frustrated. Sometimes he has a bad dream and gets very upset because it feels so real.

Richard worries a lot. He worries if he can't see Sylvia – he doesn't feel safe. He worries that he's not being useful: a key theme of all of Richard's life was that he wanted to serve people – in the Navy, by building council houses, in his Quaker work. Now Richard feels useless. He agreed that his story should be shared here not because he wants people to know him, but because it might help other people. Richard enjoys coming to Quakers; he feels safe in the Meeting House because he knows it so well and everyone knows him and everyone helps to keep him safe. People in Meeting remind Richard that he is still part of our community. In the silence of Meeting for Worship it doesn't matter if you can't remember names – it matters that you are open to love. We know Richard doesn't remember what he had for breakfast – but we know he loves us and we love him.