

Jack Shepherd
December 14, 1937-December 26, 2022

“Make visible what, without you, might perhaps never have been seen.”

These words of Robert Bresson’s encapsulate so much of our dear Friend Jack Shepherd’s inner and outer life: his deep and lifelong commitment to the power of writing, his intense curiosity and desire to educate, and his rich and private spiritual life. Jack, 85, passed away at his home in Norwich, Vermont with his family at his side. Jack loved his family, friends, colleagues, Africa, life in Vermont, and every element of his varied career as journalist, author, and professor.

Jack first became acquainted with the Quaker faith as an undergraduate at Haverford College, where he admired the values and ethics of the professors and administration, as well as the college’s overall moral atmosphere and the personal support that he received. He carried these influences into many aspects of his life in the years that followed. Not inconsequentially his first date with Kathleen, his wife of 63 years, was to attend a Meeting for Worship.

After leaving Haverford Jack received a degree at Columbia University’s School of Journalism. His assignments for Look Magazine took him to cover famine in Ethiopia and war in Nigeria and the civil rights movement in Watts, Los Angeles and Lowndes County, Alabama, where, to get closer to the story, he chose to live with Black families. These experiences exposed Jack to some danger and, although he had a keen sense of justice, he did not consider them acts of moral courage (some might disagree) but attributed his successful recording of those tumultuous times to “good luck and smarts” and being “drawn to a good scoop”.

These experiences engendered in Jack a deep and lifelong concern for the issues of food insecurity, chronic hunger, and poverty that permeated his subsequent writing and research. A central organizing principle for him became how we are called to live on this earth—how we manage our personal resources (e.g. fitness, healthy food) and the right sharing of resources on a world-wide scale.

When Jack and his family moved from New York City to Norwich VT in 1977, his outreach to Haverford alumni in the area brought them to Hanover Meeting, where they soon became members. Jack’s involvement with Friends influenced his interest in mediation and peacemaking at many levels from interpersonal to international. His great interest in Africa, plus timely encouragement from a Dartmouth professor and member of Hanover Meeting, led Jack to advanced study at Boston University and on to teaching Dartmouth undergraduates as the Director of the War and Peace Studies Program and in the Environmental Studies Program. He had a loyal following of students and relished teaching and mentoring both undergraduates and graduates.

Beginning in 1993 Jack became the Director of the Global Security Fellows Initiative (GFSI) at the University of Cambridge, England. There he brought together mid-career professionals from East-Central Europe and southern Africa to address common environmental, political, and economic issues. Although his good spirit, sense of humor, and eagerness to address conflict (which was inevitable) served him well, he admitted to his secretary at the time to having “un-Quakerly thoughts” about the actions of some individuals who were undermining the program. Returning to Dartmouth’s Environmental Studies Program in 2000, he directed its Africa Foreign Studies Program for 8 years. He and Kathleen took great joy in guiding groups of Dartmouth undergraduates as they traveled and worked together on southern African environmental issues.

Jack cared deeply about Hanover Meeting. He regularly attended Meeting for Worship and was often at Meeting for Worship for Business. He served as clerk of the Meeting, on the Board of Trustees, and was clerk and a member of the Finance Committee for several years. He was a steady, quiet presence. Jack had a way of sitting with the quieter folks at the rise of Meeting, finding the light in their companionship. He took a keen interest in the young adults in the Meeting with whom he shared his wide knowledge and experience and connections, pairing these with their individual interests. One of his great gifts to the Meeting was mentoring a member in a significant writing endeavor, which enriched them both.

The Monthly Meeting, however, was not the central force in Jack’s life, as he gave his energy to a number of other important and demanding pursuits: teaching and mentoring students, developing programs at Dartmouth and beyond, work and travel in Africa, and to a wide variety of research and writing projects. Jack’s first thoughts were always for his family – wife, daughter and son and their life partners, and three beloved granddaughters who came together each summer for a family camp created by their grandparents.

Jack’s spiritual life was foundational to him, and it was also private. During worship he was content to be in his own space. Messages based in Scripture had particular meaning to him as Biblical texts did in his inward spiritual life. Writing, as a driving force in Jack’s life, was a sacred mystery. He once said, “Writing is almost like being in a Friends Meeting. What I want to say, what is most interesting, will emerge if I am in that listening place.”

Passed by Hanover Meeting June 2024

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