

TOM FOX MEMORIAL: Youth of Frederick Friends Meeting, 19-3-2006

The attached statement was written by Tom Fox on the third day of his final trip to Iraq in November. Tom, like all of us who went to Iraq with Christian Peacemaker teams faced the possibility (accept is as more than 50-50) that we could be captured and killed. The significant thing about Tom is that he was very ordinary. He was a musician who had served a full hitch in the Marine Band (often used at the White House) before deciding that war was futile and dedicating himself to work actively and positively for peace. Tom had worked a great deal with Young Friends. He was a favorite of theirs at Quaker summer camps and in his home Meeting.

We who work for peace no longer use Pacifist because it sounds too much like passivist. We are life-long *active* peace workers. The many young people who came into contact with Tom Fox at the Cotocin Quaker camp (very near Camp David) felt his total dedication yet joy in living.

The Christian Peacemaker Teams (supported by Brethren, Mennonites and Quakers but accepting all sorts of sincere peace volunteers) send people (usually supported by their home worship groups) to witness for peace in half a dozen areas of the world--Hebron, West Bank, Columbia, with Indians in Canada in Africa and in Iraq. We try to keep a few people on the ground for long periods. But we also send small groups (less than ten) for short periods (less than two weeks home to home) to see the problems and report to their support groups at home.

CPT went to Iraq two years before Saddam fell and stayed on, until now, with short periods of evacuation to Amman (to protect their Iraqi contacts), longer than any other NGO (non-governmental organization). At first they stayed in a cheap hotel on the east bank of the Tigris, near the Palestine Hotel. For about a year they have had two flats in a building on the Tigris in that area, mostly Christian, and near the Communist headquarters. They keep as low a profile as possible. The CPT have not left Iraq, despite the capture of three and the death of Tom Fox.

Tom had been two or three times to Iraq, first with a brief visit, then after a three week training program, for longer visits. He had been back in Iraq less than four days when captured with two Canadians and a British citizen. He had been in Iraq for the fall of 2004 with only one or two others. He had been back again after I was there last February, 2005.

The main work of the CPT in Iraq has been helping families of prisoners--first of Saddam and later of the Coalition or Iraqi government. They were instrumental in blowing the whistle on the Al Graib prison atrocities. CPT got a US soldier to put in an official complaint which CPT and Red Cross then publicized, forcing the Defense Department to hold an official investigation.

Four CPTers had been to Kerbala (second holiest city for Shi'as) before the January elections to hold a "peaceful conflict resolution" workshop with the Kerbala Human Rights Group (many of whom had been in prison under Saddam). A group of students who attended that workshop formed a "Muslim Peacemaker Team"! Two of those CPTers and one other long-termer (a Catholic nun in her late 70s) joined three of us short-termers in Kerbala in February., 2005.

One of those long-termers, Cliff Kindi, deserves description. He and another son of a Brethren Minister decided in college NOT to become ministers but to earn their own living in a way to leave them free to work for peace. They and their wives bought a small farm together near a city in Indiana. They work it as a market garden with no livestock. They are then free to volunteer four or five months a year to go to areas that need peace workers. They are now in their fifties with grown children who do similar work--full time. With almost NO Arabic, Cliff communicated so well that the people of Kerbala understood his message and deeply respected him as he them! Amazingly, the Kerbala Human Rights Group made us welcome and let us into their daily lives.

Another of the long-term workers with me was Peggy Gish, with grown children, who lives with her husband (who was in Hebron while she was in Iraq) in a farm commune in southeastern Ohio. She has been back and forth to Iraq since Saddam days and wrote a book about her experiences: IRAQ, A JOURNEY OF HOPE AND PEACE; Herald Press, Scottsdale PA 1998.

CPT is NOT an aid group and does not feel "pity" for the oppressed. Instead we show love and solidarity with people suffering from wars, whether of their own making or imposed on them. The work is not earth shaking or expectant of huge results. Rather our work is a combination of individual humans caring for other humans in distress due to conflicts. Small people showing care for small people across cultural differences. CPT is not dogmatic or even verbal about beliefs. Rather, we are motivated by our faith in many different manifestations. One of our small group of six in Kerbala was a practicing Buddhist, another a Catholic, one a Mennonite, two Brethren and I a Quaker. We spoke as much about Islam in our daily worship together as about Christianity. We all had faith that there is a moral force in the universe that abhors violence and dehumanization.

In Kerbala, because there are no foreign troops there and it is almost entirely Shi'a (one sect, not mixed), we were able to walk safely along the streets alone. We even took pictures and videos and I spoke in Arabic to many people on the streets and in shops. In Baghdad, because of the great dangers and our refusal to wear bullet proof vests or helmets or carry guns, we had to be very cautious. Two of us, one who has been there some time, were able to walk around the CPT neighborhood in the evening with only careful precautions. But there was always the danger of kidnapping. During the early chaos of the Occupation hundreds of Iraqis were kidnapped for ransom. Over 20 Iraqis are still being kidnapped on a daily basis in Baghdad. This is done for money or family vengeance. Most of the foreigners taken have been captured by bandits who sell them to Insurgents. It is not just a matter of knowing the language and culture. That may help very little. I was fortunate a year ago, unaware that I was ever in any serious danger.

The Christian Peacemaker Teams have not begged to be released and have asked that no retaliation be done to those who took Tom Fox and the others. They are a group, presumed to be Sunnis, not previously heard of.

Witnessing for peace is something than anyone can do, with enough faith and training—anywhere and at any time. Tom would be the first to say that he was an ordinary Quaker. That may be his message to all Quakers, especially Young Friends. Each life counts. Every witness to peace counts. The results are not the purpose but the witness itself!

Graham Leonard 17-3-06