

Spiritan Magazine

Volume 33
Number 1 *February*

Article 8

2-2009

Requiem for a Heavyweight

Gerald Fitzgerald

Kathleen Lichti

Follow this and additional works at: <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-tc>

Recommended Citation

Fitzgerald, G., & Lichti, K. (2009). Requiem for a Heavyweight. *Spiritan Magazine*, 33 (1). Retrieved from <https://dsc.duq.edu/spiritan-tc/vol33/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Spiritan Collection at Duquesne Scholarship Collection. It has been accepted for inclusion in Spiritan Magazine by an authorized editor of Duquesne Scholarship Collection.

Requiem for a Heavyweight

Homily at the funeral of Garry McCarthy CSSp

Gerald FitzGerald CSSp

It is not easy for me to perform this final service for someone who has been such a close friend for so many years. When I arrived in Canada as a young priest, straight out of the seminary, the holy oils scarcely dry on my hands, he was the Vice-Principal and Dean of Neil McNeil School.

He was a father and mentor to me. I admired him. I laughed at his ways behind his back. Like all the other rookies in the school, the Grade Nine students, I feared him. I cannot say I liked him.

But time passed and I grew in age and wisdom and now Garry was a colleague, a companion, and true confrere. And that condition of mutual friendship lasted for the next forty years.

In his final years of his life when his memory was decaying, the relationship evolved into one of father and son. He would sit in my office for hours as business continued to be done around him. Visitors to the office would make a fuss of him. When he finally moved to the House of Providence he had reverted even more into childhood and I would bring him an ice-cream cone and tell him jokes, just as if he was five years old again.

Final farewell

And so it is with a mixture of sadness and happiness that I make this contribution to our final farewell to this wonderful man. Your presence in such large numbers today for the funeral of an old man who has been out of circulation for three years speaks far more eloquently of his character than any words of mine.

My words are not by way of biography or eulogy. All of you here present knew Garry personally and benefited from his service and friendship. Each of you has a eulogy of personal memories which I cannot embellish.

The gift of Garry

No, my words are to express thanks to God for the gift of Garry to us and for the

unique blessings each of us got from our relationship with him. God enabled Garry to grow into a very spiritual person and we all benefited spiritually from our relationship with him.

From his earliest years until his death, Garry was a very simple man. He was absolutely transparent. He had no guile. What you saw was exactly what you got. He had no hidden agenda. He had nothing cooking on the back burner. He was absolutely and ever child-like. For this reason he attracted people who could recognize his spiritual qualities as well as people who saw him as the soft touch, which he was all his life long.

Con-artists

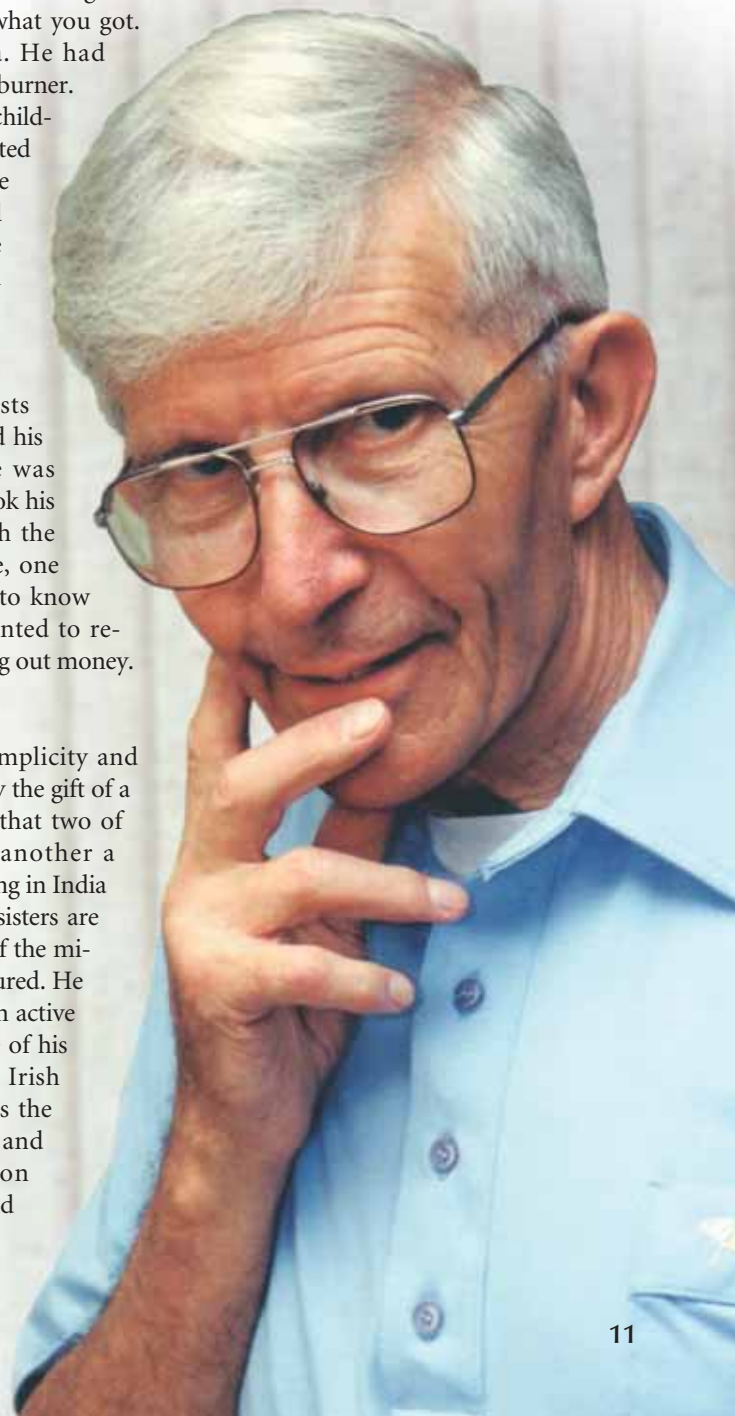
A collection of con-artists called him day and night and his monthly living allowance was quickly depleted. After we took his cheque book from him with the onset of Alzheimer's disease, one indignant caller demanded to know what priest had been appointed to replace Garry in his job of giving out money.

His family

As well as the gifts of simplicity and transparency, God gave Garry the gift of a wonderful family. The fact that two of the boys became priests, another a Christian Brother now working in India and the fact that two of his sisters are nuns gives some indication of the milieu in which Garry was nurtured. He developed a deep faith and an active prayer life under the tutelage of his parents, his parish and the Irish Christian Brothers. This was the spirituality of the twenties and thirties in Ireland, heavy on obedience to rules, on sin and guilt; light however on God's mercy, love and forgiveness.

Discipline

This spirituality was strengthened and reinforced in his seminary training. It was this life and vision he brought to Neil McNeil, the school he co-founded with Fr. Michael Troy and of which he was the Dean of Discipline. And discipline was at



the core of Catholic spirituality in that era. He had the unpleasant role of reprimanding and punishing everyone, student or staff, who was out of line. And yet he retained the respect of both groups because of his inherent fairness and honesty and the fact that he pushed himself harder to higher levels in the areas of obedience and performance than he demanded of others.

He often explained to the boys the meaning of the motto he had chosen for the school, 'Fidelitas in Arduis.' He translated it

as 'sticking with it when the going gets tough.' The student body bought into this ideal. It was the philosophy which drove all the school programs. It marked those early years when resources and facilities were lacking, excuses were not accepted, and performance had to be first-rate in everything.

Looking back it was a very fascist model and yet the alumni of that era never cease to amaze me by remembering those years with great fondness and Garry McCarthy with kind memories.

Neil McNeil boys

Let me digress for a moment at this time to address the Neil McNeil boys gathered here in the transept in their school uniforms. I am so glad that you have been invited to form a guard of honor at the procession. The Spiritans, their friends, benefactors, the members of the community at large are so impressed by the standards of excellence you manifest in the areas of academics, athletics, community service and race relations. Your good name has spread so far that the school no longer has room to accept all new applicants. The

way you look after each other, especially those among you with special needs, is exemplary. And what you have by way of spirit and service was implanted in the school fifty years ago by Garry McCarthy.

A disastrous appointment

But God did not leave Garry very long in Neil McNeil, the environment which he loved. In 1963 he was appointed superior of the Spiritans in Ontario. It was a disastrous appointment. It began nine sad and painful years for him.

Garry did not have the leadership skills, the talents or the desire for this office. He begged to be relieved of the position but his standards of obedience, like that of Jesus in Gethsemane, lead him to say, 'Not my will but thine be done'.

He had to leave the community and boys of Neil McNeil, both of which he loved. He was trapped in an office job for which he had no aptitude or inclination. He took upon himself the responsibility for the lives of all the Spiritans in Ontario. He wanted all to live the religious life in the manner in which he did. He redoubled his



Garry blesses his father on the day of his ordination.

Fr. Mac

Sister Kathleen Lichti CSJ

I write this as one who has known Fr. Mac since he came to Canada in 1954, when the original band, with Fr. Brolly as their leader, arrived in Woodstock, Ontario.

Our mother, Kay Lichti, was one of the first housekeepers for the priests who then lived at 904 Dundas Street. Fr. Mac, being the youngest of the group, was literally "the new kid on the block" and it was both humorous and a privilege to see him understand and become acclimatized to the "Canadian" culture of that day.

Mom was a big help to him as he struggled to find his way in this new land and way of life. He too would often be the one to help her with some of the household tasks of 904. I knew that she found in him a faithful confidant. Although Mom was only a year older than him, Fr. Garry always called her "Mom" when he spoke of her to us. It did not take too long for him to endear himself to our family, the "Lichtis".

Piano lessons

In establishing the new church (now the small K of C hall at the back of the present church) many preparations were made. As the first organist of the new church, it was an honour to have this position and to work closely with Fr. Mac who became the interim choir leader. His love of music and determination to learn how to read music to play the piano was most inspiring. Although I had only a few years more in music education than he did, he asked me to give him piano lessons. One of the beautiful memories I have is of his very gifted singing ability when he would sing The Holy City.

prayers and mortifications. The scruples which had troubled him from his youth intensified. He was unfulfilled and unhappy.

The inevitable happened. He had a series of nervous breakdowns. God was leading him through the dark night of the soul. And then, as suddenly as had happened to his great model St. Paul, he was knocked off his horse. He told me the story soon afterwards.

'I cannot carry the burden anymore'

"It was about midday. I was kneeling at my bedside in a rehabilitation centre for religious. I was in the darkest despair. I looked up at the figure of the crucified Jesus on the wall above the bed. I said, from the depths of my sorrow and despair 'Jesus I have done everything you have asked of me since I was a little boy. I have burned myself out in your service. I have nothing to show for it except mental illness and failure. I cannot carry the burden anymore. I am handing it over to you'.

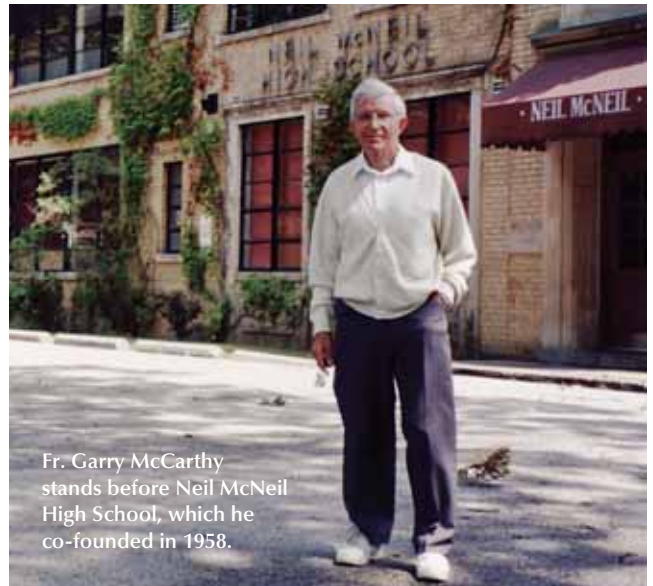
"And the minute these words were out of my mouth a wonderful calmness descended on me. For the first time in

months, I was at peace. My own personal failures and those of the Spiritans in my care were no longer a heavy burden to be borne. I had only to work in the vineyard. I suddenly realized that it is God who produces the results."

After his conversion

Garry returned to us a new man with a new relationship to God and a new relationship with others. No longer judgmental, no longer fearful, he followed this wonderful conversion of 1972 with thirty-one years of service in the Lord's vineyard across Canada and in Nigeria. His ministry won for him a large number of admirers and friends of whom those here present are but a fraction. Garry retired to a life of prayer and community in 2003.

So we gather here to celebrate God's goodness to Garry as shown by the road on



Fr. Garry McCarthy stands before Neil McNeil High School, which he co-founded in 1958.

which He led him, a road that each one here walked along with him for short or long distances. For the privilege of this experience, we give thanks to God.

Another link with our history is gone. Rest in peace, Garry. You never were one to make a fuss. All the Olympians are heading for the exit. ■

His involvement with families added so much to the life of the parish. He established a scout group and was able to really connect with the young boys of the parish in a meaningful way, and leave them with lasting values to cherish. I do remember on one occasion when he visited our home, that my brother Gary (then only about 13 and a new scout) played a trick on him with a loaded cigar!

Support in trauma

When our brother Bud (16) was killed in a car accident in 1957, it was Fr. Mac who was the one to identify Bud's body, as my parents, in their shock and grief, were unable to do so. The very next day, probably having been up all night with mom and dad, my two sisters, Mary and Eileen, and my brother, Gary, he came to Mount St. Joseph in London to tell me of Bud's very sudden and tragic death. I was in the Novitiate of the Sisters of St. Joseph of London at the time. His continued support in that trauma and the years thereafter were indeed a treasured gift.

It was he who encouraged me to pursue the call that I was experiencing to enter the community and he was there to preside at my reception into the community and years later at the temporary and final vows ceremonies. Not only did he bury my brother Bud, he was also very instrumental in the sacramental life of my siblings: First Communion, Penance, Confirmation, Marriages.

He became a true and loyal friend to the community as well. The Sisters of St. Joseph of London owe much to him for the ways in which he was available for retreats, spiritual direction and as an ongoing source of support to so many of the Sisters.

"You may be scarred, but you still go to HIM, scars and all and are totally accepted that way."

A year with the St. Joseph Sisters

When he had to return from Nigeria, it was only fitting that he was able to spend a year with us at Holy Rosary Convent in Windsor in the early 70s where he was able to rest, read, pray. He felt he had to "justify" his presence there and offered to paint the wrought iron fence surrounding the property ... not a job that was completed in just a few days! Because of declining health, many of the Sisters who would have loved to be present at his wake and funeral were unable to make the trip. We are very present to you, the Spiritan community, and to you, Fr. Garry's family.

A loyal and true friend

His friendship over the years has been loyal, true and an inspiration and it was very difficult to see his mental diminishment creep up and take away the Fr. Mac we used to know. His presence continues to be felt and the memories of his unwavering perseverance to be faithful to his commitment to God in the midst of his own personal weaknesses is an encouragement to us all to continue in the spirit of optimism and hope. One of his expressions was, "You may be scarred, but you still go to HIM, scars and all and are totally accepted that way." He truly believed this and lived it.

Thank you, Fr. Mac, Fr. Garry, for a life well lived so that we too can learn from our experience and love of you how to "carry on" and bring joy and hope to our lives and to those whom we touch. ■