

Eulogy for Merlyn Kinrade, 1935 – October 06/12

Given Oct 11/12

by Mark Vandermaas

My name is Mark Vandermaas. Together with some other people here today, I worked closely with Merlyn for the past 5 years to confront the terrible rule of law failures and racial policing that ripped his beloved town apart, a community in which he lived for 60 years.

Like him I am a former member of the Canadian Forces and a former UN peacekeeper. Merlyn was in the navy, serving on one of Canada's most famous ships the HMCS Haida. He served with the United Nations Emergency Force #1 during the 1956 Suez Crisis. I served my peacekeeping tour in 1978. He used to joke with me that he must not have done a very good job so they needed to send me. That's how he was – making people around him feel good while minimizing his own contributions.

Merlyn was a master plumber and he had an incredible work ethic. One day he drove up to London to help me rough in the plumbing for a basement bathroom. He worked me into the ground and I was so glad when the day was over!

I first met Merlyn on a cold January 20th in 2007 when he charged up a hill to answer my call for someone in the crowd to hold my Canadian flag so I could read a speech at a protest organized in support of 3 people who had been arrested for trying to raise a flag across from the occupation site. I was standing on the hill near Canadian Tire where the police had blocked our way from walking down the road with our flags. It was Merlyn who clambered up the hill and said, "I'll hold your flag!"

He held onto the metal flagpole with bare hands in the freezing cold while I spoke. In the middle of my speech we were interrupted by an OPP helicopter flying overhead and the silliness of what was transpiring overcame us and we – unknown to one another just minutes before -- both broke down in riotous laughter over the reality of hundreds of officers, and the OPP commissioner flying around Caledonia to make sure some non-native people couldn't put up a Canadian flag.

This incident would later be recounted in Christie Blatchford's 2010 book, *Helpless: Caledonia's Nightmare of Fear and Anarchy, And How The Law Failed All of Us* in which Christie described Merlyn as a "tough SOB." Which he was. Merlyn and I became fast friends and over the next 5 years he would become our rock inside Caledonia.

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The Canadian flag was finally raised across from the occupation site in July 2009 after numerous protests in which a total of 4 people were arrested for the dastardly crime of offending the occupiers with our country's flag. When they wouldn't let us put up a flag in Caledonia we went to OPP Commissioner Julian Fantino's home where Merlyn and Doug Fleming attached flags to two hydro poles to remind the commissioner that while he enjoyed policing at his cozy Woodbridge home there were children in Caledonia living in fear on the Sixth Line without it.

Merlyn was everywhere and did everything: He was a co-founder of CANACE – Canadian Advocates for Charter Equality – along with Gary McHale, Jeff Parkinson, Mary Lou LaPratte of Ipperwash, and me. He appeared on radio and TV and was a regular writer of letters to the editor using what he called his 'poison pen.' He travelled to Ottawa with other Caledonia residents (including former Mayor Trainer) where they shared their pain at a premier event sponsored by the Free Thinking Film Society and the International Free Press Society. It was called 'Caledonia: No More Nightmares.' Two executives from the International Free Press Society are here today who have shared a meal at Pat and Merlyn's table after witnessing the vulgarity of racial policing with their own eyes.

Merlyn was one of three CANACE founders portrayed in Barb Patterson-Tuck's 2008 painting of the Caledonia crisis entitled 'Caught in the Middle,' and he was nominated as 2009 'Caledonia Citizen of the Year' by the Caledonia Chamber of Commerce.

He worked behind the scenes to raise money for the cause, and facilitate support in a town where many were convinced by the police, politicians and media that the 'outsiders' who had come to help fight injustice and state-sanctioned violence had to have some kind of personal 'agenda' else why would they be there? It was an uphill battle that Merlyn fought on our behalf every day.

I eventually became a Christian as a result of my work in Caledonia watching the example set by other Christians, one of whom was Merlyn who inspired me to pray after he told me he got down on his knees every day to thank God for the good things in his life and in our struggle.

In the last year of his life, he kept up his commitment to the struggle to the best of his ability. In December 2011 he was one of eight people who

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volunteered to be arrested one-by-one for “trespassing” on the county-owned road through the occupation site in order to dramatize, yet again, the continuing disgrace of racialized policing in Caledonia. I was put in the van after Merlyn and I had trouble maneuvering through the door with my hands cuffed behind me. Poor Merlyn was terrified that my 330 pounds would suddenly pop through the door like a cork and crush him!

SUN TV dubbed us the ‘Caledonia 8’ and Merlyn was so proud to have been part of it. Pat said, “I suppose you can die happy now that you’ve been arrested!” Merlyn’s smile said it all. All charges were dropped by the Crown, of course, as we knew they would be, because police had no business charging anyone with trespassing on a county road. In total 14 people have volunteered to be arrested for non-crimes at our protests over the years: Gary, Christine, Jack, Hettie, Bonnie, Larry, Jeff, Doug, Randy, Ted, Stuart, Peter, Mark and, of course, Merlyn.

On February 18th 2012, after the charges were dropped, the Caledonia 8 and supporters were the first non-natives in six years to walk uninvited down the road through the Douglas Creek Estates. Merlyn was there. The stunning portrait of Merlyn in his UN blue beret with the UN flag behind him was taken that very day on DCE by a professional photographer friend of ours named David Strutt who knew we would need something to remember him as he was.

Now, you might be forgiven for thinking Merlyn hated police, but exactly the opposite was true. Merlyn LOVED police officers because they are the guardians of our rule of law which is the social contract we all make to settle our differences in the courts, not with violence and vandalism. Merlyn wanted Olivia to grow up respecting police even as he worked tirelessly to expose their awful failures in his town. So it was a comfort to have someone in the OPP that he did respect, someone who shared his dismay at the conduct of his force: Officer Jeff Bird who will later help us fold the Canadian flag in honour of Merlyn.

He once owned the Riverview Dairy in Caledonia and was a steadfast contributor to the community through sponsorship of various sports teams and significant financial generosity that made construction of the original arena possible for the town. He coached hockey and baseball teams, and he made a special effort to include needy children from the nearby Six Nations Reserve by providing transportation to and from practices and games,

purchasing skates and other equipment for them and ensuring they were well fed during their time with the team. Unfortunately, Merlyn's friends from Six Nations turned their backs on him. The betrayal of his Six Nations friends was a source of pain to him that he always hoped would be corrected one day.

Still, Merlyn believed that those who terrorized his town did not speak for the majority of the people on Six Nations. Over the years he personally reached out to various Six Nations people including three community leaders, one a former friend, seeking their help in confronting the lawlessness and healing their communities – without success, unfortunately.

In March Merlyn and other CANACE founders travelled with our friends from the Never Again Group to the Israel Consulate in Toronto to stand with the Jewish Defence League in a protest against those who would destroy Israel. In honour of Merlyn's effort despite his sickness they purchased a tree for him in the Toronto Community Forest at Yatir, Israel. Zaza Villi from the JDL called yesterday to tell me how excited Merlyn was knowing that his name would live on in Israel. Zaza said, 'Merlyn was more excited about his tree in Israel than a 16 year old kid getting a Lamborghini on his birthday.'

Before I close with some words to Merlyn's daughter, I'd like to take a few minutes to talk about Merlyn's desire for those he left behind. We talked about this in the months before his death and it was his specific wish that I share some thoughts about this with you.

In September 2008 Merlyn and I gave a presentation called, 'Reconciliation: the CANACE Path' to the City of Brantford Public Forum Committee during the height of the lawlessness there when Six Nations militants threatened to turn the city into 'Caledonia, Part Two.' Our message was not to take the demoralizing, dead-end road of appeasing those who use violence, but rather to take a path leading to healing via truth, justice and apologies from those responsible for the lawlessness.

As I said earlier, Merlyn reached out to various Six Nations people for their help in achieving this worthwhile goal – without success. With his help we also reached out to religious leaders, politicians, business leaders, OPP leaders and government lawyers – with very limited success.

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Some fearful residents would say, “I have kids so I can’t get involved,” but Merlyn believed that those who use their children as an excuse to remain silent in the face of evil were teaching them that there is nothing worth fighting for. Merlyn said, “I MUST get involved...for my child and for all the other children in Caledonia.”

The failure of so many of his neighbours, friends and community leaders to come together to help him defeat the darkness in his town was Merlyn’s single greatest disappointment. Other than wanting his girls to be OK, Merlyn’s great hope that more people from his community and Six Nations would join the struggle to end racial policing in our province. During one of the greatest rule of law failures in modern Canadian history a great man fought a great fight to help keep our rights safe and to keep us from descending into anarchy. He was part of the first civil rights campaign in Canada modelled after the teachings of Dr. King to confront landclaim lawlessness and the appeasement of it. You have a unique opportunity to follow in his footsteps, to carry on his noble mission. And I hope you will consider taking up Merlyn’s torch.

In April this year Merlyn and Olivia travelled with us to the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa for the National Holocaust Remembrance Day ceremony on a bus provided by the Canadian Society for Yad Vashem. There, Olivia was able to meet the Prime Minister of Canada, diplomats, and Holocaust survivors who all signed her book about Anne Frank. Merlyn purchased Israel-Canada flag lapel pins for everyone on the bus and Olivia handed them out. I received compliments from other passengers about what a joy it was to have had Olivia on the trip. Merlyn couldn’t have been prouder.

I think it was then that I realized Merlyn and Pat were raising a bright, poised young lady destined for great things, someone who would be ready, willing and able to confront life head-on without the fear that paralyzes so many of us.

OLIVIA: Your father was the best friend I ever had and he was the greatest Canadian patriot I ever knew. And he loved you and your mom SO much. I want you to know and believe with all your heart that every minute your dad took from his time with you to be with us...that he did it because he loved

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you more than anything. He did it because he loved his town. Because he loved his country. Because he cared deeply about all the other children who were afraid in your town. You should have seen the tears in his eyes when he talked about them. Your dad was really a big softie at heart. But you know that already; I saw how he was with you and your friends.

Why did it have to be YOUR dad to help us? Because that's who Merlyn Kinrade was; a man who didn't wait for others to do the right thing. He promised, long before you were born, to defend his country and that's what he did when it needed him most. He did it because he knew that if HE didn't do it no one else would. He didn't wait for anyone else's approval to do or say what he thought was right. He just did it. And he did it well.

Before he left I was able to thank your dad one last time for all he had done for us. Now, on behalf of those who worked with your dad I want to thank you and your mom for helping him do the work that was so important to him. I know how hard he worked to manage his time to spend as much of it as possible with you. It was really, really hard for him to be away from you.

Your dad told me, after the bus trip to the Holocaust ceremony, that you wondered how people could be so mean to one another like they were to Anne Frank. Please know your father used every ounce of strength he had to make sure there would be no more Anne Franks, to make sure there were no more scared children in Caledonia. The struggle to do that isn't over yet, but Caledonia is a better town; Canada is a better country; and those of us who worked with him are better people because your dad lived.

Thank you Olivia. Thank you Pat...for sharing Merlyn with us.

Protecting the values represented by the Canadian flag was everything to Merlyn. I would like to call up six of the 14 people who have been arrested with him defending those values to fold the flag, following which OPP Officer Jeff Bird will hand it over to Merlyn's girls.

Flag party, take your positions please.