

Reflections on the Death of Ronald Huber - (1944-2016)

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By Fr. Ray Douziech, C.Ss.R.

I walked into the bank on Thursday, September 8 and noticed that one of the teller stations had been converted into a little shrine. On the counter was a small bouquet of flowers, a picture and a sign that read, "In memory of Lily." I was shocked to read that Lily had passed away. She was a lively little woman who always had a smile and a ready greeting, "Good morning, Father." I found myself tearing at her loss. Crying over a stranger's death, how unusual. I then realized that her passing was a catalyst for the sadness and tears I was feeling over the loss of my friend Ron Huber.

Although many in the old Toronto province would not have known Ron, he was better known in our Edmonton province. He and I were among the first students to enter Holy Redeemer College in Edmonton some 56 years ago. Ron had already been with the minor seminary in Moose Jaw and was now entering into grade eleven in our new college.

Ron was a bright, capable student who loved reading and exploring the world of ideas. I have never known Ron, over the years, not to have several books on the go. One of his biggest sufferings at the end of his life was his inability to focus and concentrate enough to read.

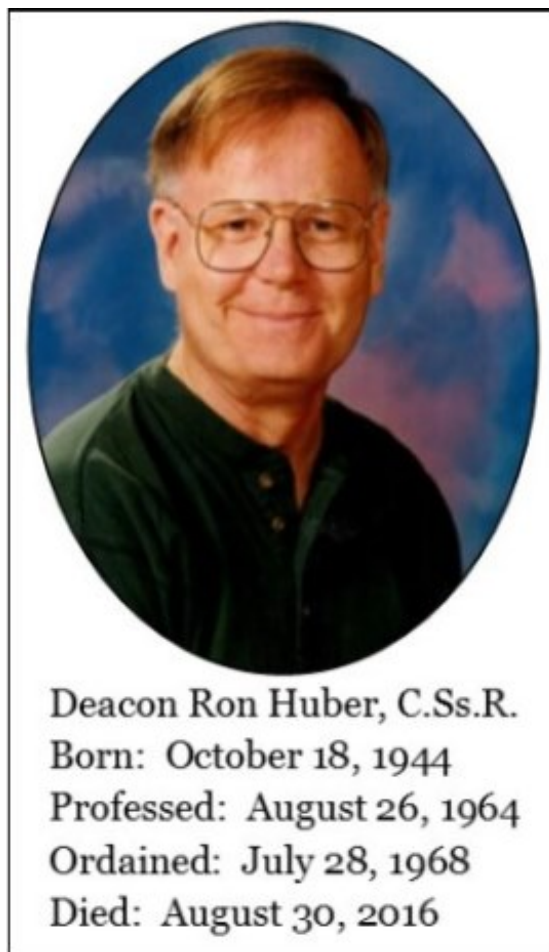
His range of interest was varied. He could plunge into a text of Hans Kung as eagerly as reading a travelogue about the Himalayas. He was a great patron of the public library and constantly suggested titles for acquisition. Many of the current books on theology and philosophy at the Edmonton Public Library were likely due to Ron's initiative. He told me that he had a number of scribblers filled with titles of the books he had read.

Ron also liked to cut out articles or photocopy commentaries that caught his interest. He was a bit of a pack rat. When the prospect of moving from Edmonton to Saskatoon became a closer reality, he realized he needed to cull his shelves. He was overwhelmed at the thought of having to throw out books and papers from high school days.

Ron and I were stationed together at St. Alphonsus. Along with Ed Kennedy and Sister Agnes Quirk, we were a little team that enjoyed the heady days after the Council. It was a time of change, a time when the Archbishop of Canterbury and Dom Helder Camara were guests at our table, when Ed Kennedy was running for an elected position on city council. It was the time of guitar Masses and a new sensitivity of what it meant to be an inner city parish.

It was also a time when Ron realized that preaching was too anxiety provoking for him. He could not see himself being ordained a priest and decided to remain a deacon. His ministry would be working with young people in the schools as a teacher. He remained a teacher with the Edmonton Catholic Schools for 32 years.

It was through the schools that he formed a network of friends. He also enjoyed being a member of the city bridge club. Whenever he visited Edmonton, he would look up his friends and go for a game of bridge. He was a loyal friend.



Ron was shy, yet one-on-one he was a fascinating conversationalist. We would often go from Edmonton to Calgary to visit a mutual friend. These two and a half hour trips would be filled with Ron chatting about his readings and the questions or ideas coming from them.

Ron had a wonderful sense of humour and a great laugh. He could remember countless funny incidents with his students and would regale us at table with school stories.

He loved to travel and was able to see many countries over the course of the years. He had a particular liking for Thailand where he got to know a few people. He was taken aback when he returned from one of his trips to have the immigration officers insist on reading his private journal. Ron would laugh and say that if they were looking for anything spicy the only thing they would find was a menu from his favourite restaurant.

Ron was very sensitive and had a huge heart. He had a great love for his family. He never quite recovered from the death of his brother Stanley in 1961. When his parents died, he felt a deep responsibility as the eldest to support his sister Arlene, to care for his brother Rick, and to be there for the other members of his family.

One can never do justice to the life of a person in a few sentences. However, we can get a glimpse of the rich tapestry of a person and a hint at the beauty of a soul. Ron had a rich inner life and the beauty of his soul was fashioned through a lifetime of experiences and friendships. We also know that it was fashioned by inner struggles with melancholy, anxiety, fatigue and low energy. Ron asked to be on a leave of absence because of these. However, he always felt connected as a Redemptorist even though he was out of community.

After Ron retired and moved to Saskatoon, it was thanks to Fr Mark Miller that Ron came to St Mary's for the occasional visit. This allowed the members of the community to get to know Ron and appreciate him as a confrere. He was a confrere who lived on the periphery of community, yet those of us, who knew him, will miss him. Ron's death is the departure of a kind, loving, generous and steadfast friend. May he rest in peace!