The Reverend Maurice McCrackin

by Harold Gordon Porter
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Over the years, the Reverend Maurice McCrackin gained a title of respect as the conscience of Cincinnati. All across social lines he became a symbol of goodness, civility, and fairness. His life clearly demonstrated what he believed: God loved all - Justice is for all - Compassion is for all. It was as simple as that. I found a scribbled prayer by him that depicts the completeness of his embrace:

O loving and caring God,
We pray that through the strength of your Spirit,
We may know the unity that is ours--
Sisters and brothers of a common family,
Sharing a single home on this our earth,
All children of your one Being.

But Mac never thought he was anyone's conscience. He only claimed his own. When convinced in his own conscience, however, he was unyielding. Of course, a sincere adherence to one's conscience does not necessarily lead to right behavior. Fortunately, as it surely seemed to me, what ultimately informed his conscience was that same quality of compassion which is inherent in God's own being.

We served in the same Presbyterian denomination. No other clergy that I knew worked harder than Mac. He truly felt called to the ministry, but unlike many, he never allowed the church to take the place of God or forget that Jesus was its head. Sadly, as this book clearly describes, our church did not treat him well. We deposed him from the ministry. I believe his behavior embarrassed us. In general churches are conservative in nature and supportive of current conventions. They don't easily paddle against the stream. Not so McCrackin. To him the church was salt, leaven, light, the revolutionary means of making possible the reign of God on earth--the beloved community. As Jesus taught, Mac sought first the Kingdom of God and God would take care of the rest. Ironically for doing so, he was convicted and expelled by the church. He was found guilty for "resisting the ordinance of God"! Of course, it was the church that was doing the resisting. But throughout his entire ministry, McCrackin knew that the fundamental religious work was justice enlarged by love, the overcoming of evil with good.

Many, of course, in and out of the church, saw him as a law breaker. In truth he was. Arrested over twenty times, jailed and imprisoned, he did break the law, but only those laws he considered unjust, not binding on all. Further, he did so openly with no attempt to avoid the consequences. Actually he held to the highest standard of civil order.

Meeting him for the first time, you would be touched by his gentleness, personal concern, good manners, easy laughter, and good humor. He wanted to be liked and to get along with
everyone, but he didn't seek popularity. If he thought God's goodness would be compromised, he would not be moved by anyone, friend or foe. He had the strength to "walk that lonely valley." Yes, all alone as Jesus had done.

After all, it was Jesus who incarnated to Mac what ethical behavior was. "What would Jesus do?" was the last authority he would examine before he acted. But he was a Christian, in the similar way Gandhi was a Hindu, accepting all persons of good will as being acceptable to God.

Mac was also loyal to his immediate family and they were proud of him but, again, as Jesus taught, Mac's true family was all who sought to do the will of God. He was especially a friend of the outcasts, the underprivileged, the lonely and despairing--the family members that most of us overlook. At his memorial service at Mount Auburn Presbyterian Church, over 800 persons crammed into the sanctuary from literally every walk of life.

Most such prophets of God are despised and rejected in the own lifetime. So, too, was McCrackin. Gratefully, he lived ninety-two fruitful years and finally received some recognition for his consistently caring faith. It was a high point in the church for me when the General Assembly, our Presbyterian Church's national body, gathered in Biloxi, Mississippi, in 1987. That assembly asked for McCrackin's forgiveness and unanimously stood in applause for his life. How healthy that was for our denomination! But all in society are better off because he lived and served among us. Yes, he touched and inspired many but the void his death leaves needs to be filled more actively by others. Hopefully, in our tardy affirmation of Mac, we will move more boldly in our own efforts to serve God's beloved community.

A Golden Mirror

by Ed Ritchy

Mac was a golden mirror. Unlike the silvered mirror that shows each detail in harsh white light, the golden mirror reflects only a warm, glowing image. Mac only reflected you in the best of light. A golden mirror gives you hope and raises your spirits that you can be more than you imagine. I miss my golden mirror.

I first met the Rev. Maurice McCrackin on Bastille Day 1988. Mitch Schneider asks homeless advocates nationwide to do a demonstration in each city on Bastille Day. Homeless advocates here in Cincinnati decided to take back a boarded-up building from the city of Cincinnati.

On Bastille Day 1988 we tore the boards off of an old building the city of Cincinnati owned and we occupied the building. When the police did not show up to arrest us, some of us marched on City Hall and literally took over Mayor Luken’s office. Mayor Luken came into the office and after listening to the reason we had taken over the building, the mayor said he would not only give us the building to fix up, but he would come up with some of the money to fix it up. It turned out that Luken did not actually have the power to give us the building, but City Council later voted to give us the building. But we never got a penny to fix the building up.

Feeling high on our success, we decided to take another boarded-up building that the city owned as well. Mac stayed in the abandoned building with about ten other people for several days until the police came and surrounded the building. While the police were carting everyone
that refused to leave the building off to jail, a wrecking crew began tearing down that second building.

I got an opportunity to become acquainted with Mac while we began to rehab the first building. Each Saturday we would work on the house. Mac would show up to give us moral support and encouragement. We needed moral support, as it was ninety-five degrees for several Saturdays in a row.

My relationship with Mac started out very slowly. We began sharing information with each other each Saturday and we started talking about what we thought needed to be done. Eventually we started talking about what we could do together to change things that needed to be changed. Although we had some differences, we shared a passion for the work, and that was the linchpin between us.

I was very surprised that Mac almost never mentioned religion, but often referred to Gandhi. Mac was a true devotee of Gandhi and knew a great deal about the life and work of Gandhi. Mac and I went to the Housing Now March in Washington, D.C., and I wound up pushing Mac’s wheelchair over the four miles of the parade route. It seems that we actually bonded during that four miles, for some reason that I never quite understood. From that point on, it seems we were doing much of our work together. Somehow we had become working partners.

The first big project we worked on was setting up the Save Rollman Campaign, an attempt to stop the state of Ohio from closing down Rollman Psychiatric Institute. During the Save Rollman Campaign, we did dozens of protests and candle light vigils.

There were several times during the four-year campaign that Mac went to jail. When Mac was put in jail, he would immediately go on a hunger strike. When Mac was in jail over some issue or another, his friends would do whatever we could to support him and keep the issue alive in the press.

Whenever Mac was released from jail, his friends would meet him at the jail exit door and take him to Frisch’s Restaurant for a celebration feast. Mac’s celebration meal was always a bowl of Frische’s vegetable soup with as many crackers as he could gather from those around him. After one celebration dinner I took Mac back to his apartment and put him to bed. He called to me as I was leaving and told me that he wanted a hug. I bent over the bed and Mac hugged me as if he were a child that desperately needed comfort from a parent. That experience and many similar ones over the years showed that there were times when Mac desperately needed love.

I think that most people saw Mac as a source of unending love, but forgot sometimes that he was human and also needed love just as much or perhaps more because of the work he did.

During the last three years before his passing, Mac lived in a nursing home. I would visit him at least once a week, and there were also many phone calls back and forth. These were more than mere visits; they were full-blown working Homeless Hotline Board meetings. Mac would ask me to bring him up to date about whatever lawsuits we had going at the Homeless Hotline, and we would talk and share our ideas and feelings on dozens of issues. I think being able to continue to do advocacy work was essential for Mac, as it was his life.

The last time I saw Mac, I was dressed up like Santa Clause. It was the day before he died. I had put on my Santa Claus suit and played Santa for the residents of the nursing home. I had hoped to surprise Mac at dinnertime, but he got home late that night from attending a memorial service in Washington Park for homeless people who had died that year. After I played Santa to most of the residents in the dining area, I went to Mac’s room. When I caught up with him, he was in the process of dialing his phone. We talked only briefly and shook hands. I
always enjoyed shaking hands with Mac. His hands were large, extremely smooth, and he had a loving grip. The one thing I noticed when he took your hand was you knew hereally wanted it so he could make contact with you on a very personal level. His handshake was an intimate handshake.

Mac was a thousand people to the thousands he had met. Everyone seemed to have their own personal impression of Mac, and he reacted to each of them in that context. I know it sounds strange, but Mac was always what his friends expected him to be.

Many times in the later years when Mac and I had had a very good meeting or were sharing some success of the day, he would struggle in pain to stand and ask me for a hug.

I could go on for hours and write about my experiences with Mac. Unfortunately I think the only way anyone can truly understand what the Mac experience was all about was to have experienced it first-hand. Even though we may not be able to explain or quantify what the Mac experience was, it did in fact exist in a concrete form.

Remarkable people all seem to have the ability to affect those around them in a profound way. Some people may simply call the effect charisma, but I think that is just too simple an explanation for the quasi-magical phenomenon. Someone such as Mac only comes along on rare occasions. I feel quite fortunate that I was able to spend eight and one-half years working with Mac.

Mac had an expression that I found to be altruism, if such a thing exists in the cosmos. When you cast your bread on the waters, sometimes it comes back with jam on it. I cannot begin to tell you how many times my bread came back to me with jam on it when I was working side-by-side with Mac. The bread still comes back with jam on it, but not as often nor as sweet now since Mac is gone.

Letter to Mac

By Bonnie Neumeier

(This statement was read at Mac's Memorial Service and subsequently published in Streetvibes: The Tri-State's Homeless Grapevine, January 1998.)

Dear Mac,

On the celebration of your 90th birthday we knew that each day you were here with us it was a gift we treasured. Over the years, we slowly witnessed your body, legs, eyes and heart giving you troubles. But you would not let these troubles trouble you. Your determined will reached out even to befriend the pain so that it would not control your life. It was not going to stop you. The energy you mustered up to put your ailing body at places your spirit wanted to be amazed us. We won't forget the day you shocked us at buddy's memorial march. We were not expecting you, for you were so sick and flat on your back the night before, letting us know your regrets you could not make it. When you wheeled into the park in your chair, covered with a blanket, with face pale and thin, your presence was a healing, soothing salve which moved us deeply.

I remember the night just after Easter in '93 we carried you up the dark staircase, to keep watch through the chilly night, getting a few winks of sleep, to be awakened by the sound of the bulldozer, already spraying forceful water hoses up to the second floor where we were holding
out to make our last attempt to save the housing owned by Phillipus Church from being turned into a parking lot. Mac, you so much understood our fight to save low-income housing. You believed what happened in Over-the-Rhine was a thermometer of what could happen in other low-income communities. You held up our effort as a lightening rod, wanting it to spark the hearts and minds of citywide people, preservationists and politicians to do the just and right thing for the poor and oppressed. In the midst of sound, principled actions we would risk together, there were always those moments of sweet support. On that day when we were carried off to jail, the sexes were held in separate holding cells: four men and one woman. I won't forget how I called out to you, buddy, Wilbur, and Berta, and you responded in kind with singing voices. That sweet support lifted me.

Mac, you gave our effort such consistent support over the years. Your friendship felt very special. We knew you held us in a special place in your heart. You were with us at City Hall time and time again. Your voice for the homeless and ill housed was relentless. You fasted so that we might win negotiations with the city in regards to replacement housing when we lost the Milner. You helped us evict the Governor's furniture from his office in Columbus so that we might make a point about the mean-spirited cut-off of General Assistance. You always stood with us when the Drop Inn Center and ReSTOC were under political attacks. The list is long. You were always there with us. Your presence was powerful. You possessed a gentle strength. We listened to your stories and learned from your long life. We marveled at your memory and how you could pull up so many quotable quotes. Your mind so sharp, taking every opportunity in circles you encountered to put the challenge out there that we need to work for a kinder, gentler nation where all people could live free and with dignity. You humbly accepted the St. Francis Xavier medal on December 7th at Xavier University and spoke so eloquently and challengingly on so many of the issues that were dear to your heart and life. We from Over-the-Rhine were so happy to celebrate with you that day. We felt proud of you, but somehow you made us feel proud of ourselves, too. For when you speak you call up the long history of struggle and freedom which connects us to a spiritual source that deepens our conviction that someday justice will roll down like a river.

When many of us last saw you, on December 21st in Washington Park for the annual remembering of those persons dying homeless on the street, we were not thinking that you, Mac, so soon would be joining your sisters and brothers whose names we called out that day. Thank you for being with us around the fire barrel. I shall not forget that hug. And I know that when you went from this world to the spirit world on December 30th, our Over-the-Rhine effort embraced you with welcoming arms with a hug from buddy. We trust you are resting in peace, but be assured your spirit is in our hearts. And we know our lives and our neighborhood of Over-the-Rhine benefited a hundredfold from having you sojourn with us. We shall not forget you. Many of us are graced with poems that you wrote on occasions of our birthdays or special anniversaries. We enjoyed singing and partying with you. And thanks, too, for all the phone calls and visits you made to check in about our health and our families' lives. Most of all, Mac, thanks for your years of friendship, personally and communally. You were always there for us.

With love,
Bonnie Neumeier
For Over-the-Rhine People's Movement

**Serious Peacemaking is Seriously Illegal**
In addition to Mac's support of providing food for the hungry, shelter for the homeless, medical service for the sick, prison visits to the incarcerated, Mac was a SERIOUS PEACEMAKER, and, as such, often found himself in prison or jail. Serious peacemaking set him and a few others apart from the great number of wonderful supporters of social justice and human rights. It seems that property lines were often involved in Mac's arrests: he was arrested for going onto forbidden property (land usually either directly or indirectly involved in the promotion of war) or for refusing to get off of forbidden property. The charge would be for trespassing; however, when he fell limp while being arrested, he was also charged with resisting arrest.

A typical example occurred at Fernald (a nuclear-bomb-producing facility near Cincinnati). When Mac rolled his wheelchair across the property line he was arrested. At the trial the judge asked if Mac pleaded guilty, to which Mac replied that he would be guilty if he had not acted as he did and suggested that those responsible for operating the facility, which killed local people, should be charged with murder. The judge replied, "That's enough of that!" and found Mac guilty. Because of a neighborhood class action jury trial, the government was later found guilty [for what had been done at Fernald] and forced to pay damages costing 80 million dollars, eventually spending 5 billion to partially clean up the toxic waste.

Governments, internationally, do not take lightly efforts of serious peacemaking, especially by individuals. After all, such activity may bring about too much peace at a time when some governments have plans for violence. Some years ago Mac was on a national TV program as a witness to police brutality. For failure to cooperate he had had a finger fractured (while being finger printed), had been shot with a stun gun, and he had serious back problems that he said may have been the result of rough treatment. When he was arrested at a White House action to protest the Iraqi War, I suggested to the arresting official, because of his age (85) and bad health, that he be treated with consideration. The arresting officer asked the sergeant in charge if anyone should be carried. The reply was "no" and Mac was dragged more than a block. In the hospital section of the jail I saw numerous black and blue areas on his body.

Some might wonder if the price of peaceful protest is worth it; however, as an example, we might consider the Vietnam War that the U.S. Supreme Court Associate Justice William O. Douglas insisted was illegal because the Constitution gives only Congress power to declare war. Serious peacemakers paid a high price (at Kent State, etc) to help stop the war that took more than a million lives. Some years after the Vietnam War had ended, Robert McNamara, the former Secretary of Defense, admitted that in approving and promoting the war "he had made a mistake, a terrible mistake."

Most of the people like to recall Mac's many successes; however, I consider his failures very significant: failure to pay war taxes, to walk when ordered; to vote for a President (Commander-in-Chief), etc. One important thing he never failed to do was to follow his conscience--often quoting John Braxton: "I would rather be called a criminal by my government than a traitor by my conscience." David Mann, while he was mayor [of Cincinnati], referred to Mac as "the conscience of Cincinnati." Mac enjoyed support, although somewhat limited, from governors on down.

Governor Gilligan was a very dear friend, but Governor Voinovich had him arrested (after eviction from the Governor's office) and sent five police officers from Columbus and two
from Cincinnati to pick him up two days after he had been released from a life-threatening stay in the hospital. The seven policemen disturbed the elderly residents of the assisted living facility when they entered the front door, walked through the building, and found Mac and me sitting on a bench eating freshly picked black raspberries on a beautiful early summer day. The sergeant questioned if Mac was going to walk or be carried, to which Mac replied, "I am not going to walk." As they loaded him onto the stretcher and placed him in a station wagon, I asked them, "Why are you doing this?" One policeman said he had spent time in the army and learned how to take orders. Another said he had seven children to feed.

At a Pentagon protest I asked a guard what he thought of the talk, to which he replied, "I agree with the speaker. When asked why he did not join up, he said, "It does not pay." The police and guards, for the most part, were sympathetic and supported Mac with such comments as "Don't give an inch" or "Hang in there!" One policeman proudly had his picture taken with Mac. On the other hand, another policeman commented to me that he would like to drag Mac a mile—that Mac was old enough to know that laws are made to be obeyed.

BUILDING A BELOVED COMMUNITY requires serious PEACEFUL PLANET PEOPLE.

**Turned Down for an Honorary Degree**

by William C. H. Joiner

I regret that I knew Mac personally only in his later years. I had read this biography, and when I was finally introduced to Mac by Kees DeJong, a U.C. colleague and long-time member of Mac's church, I had somehow expected a much more imposing and charismatic person. I suppose when we view as a hero someone we have not personally met, we tend to do this. I somehow imagined Mac to have grand purposes and planned attacks on the social injustices that he had worked so hard against. But often Mac's protests and attacks on injustices were serendipitous and sometimes almost accidental. Mac was really simpler, more gentle, more caring, more self-effacing, and with greater self-doubts than the image I had created of him.

But all these characteristics made him the more extraordinary because when faced with an injustice, his dedication, single-mindedness, willingness to sacrifice himself, and, above all, his capacity for empathy and love made him a powerful force. People who knew Mac loved him because he was so very human and yet could rise about the disinterest, lack of caring, or lack of courage that the rest of us all experience from time to time. As has been illustrated in this biography, Mac above all cared about people, not in the abstract, but in the particular. His activism, again and again, was in reaction to a situation which a specific person he knew had encountered. And the wonderful thing was that people he touched reciprocated, and cared about him. I will never forget when he was in intensive care at Bethesda Hospital, hospital rules permitted only limited visitation, but Bethesda's administrators soon gave up on trying to enforce those rules against the people who just kept coming and coming. One administrator in frustration remarked to me that he guessed they would have to erect bleachers in Mac's room. Nor will I ever forget taking Mac in his wheelchair to visit his friend, Berta Lambert, who as a result of a protest, ended up in the county jail. On the elevators and in the hallways we must have encountered a couple of dozen family members of prisoners who recognized Mac and just wanted to shake his hand or touch him. I realized at those moments that Mac had truly created a beloved community within this meaner society in which we most often live.
Knowing this wonderful, loving, and caring individual made it all the more difficult to understand the reaction of the conservative power structure to him and to understand why they saw him as a threat. But that is certainly the way they perceived him. I encountered this when I nominated Mac for an honorary degree at the University of Cincinnati. Although many universities use the granting of honorary degrees as an opportunity to associate a person of recognized accomplishment with the university, U.C. had seldom done this. There generally have been few nominees for honorary degrees. Those who have gotten such degrees are typically business persons who received part of all of their education at the university, or occasionally as person retiring from the university's board of trustees, and once even a person who writes an advice to the lovelorn column with no connection to the university but a personal friend of U.C.'s then president. I had been involved once before in trying to get an honorary degree awarded to a Nobel Prize physicist who was on campus to give a series of lectures. In that instance I was rebuffed by the administrative head of the Honors Committee telling me that although the individual was a Nobel laureate I would have to get three letters of recommendation before he would be considered. I won that one by writing (but not mailing) several proposed letters requesting such recommendations, including one to the King of Sweden asking him to give validity to the Nobel Prize and another to the Queen of England asking her to verify the legitimacy of the King of Sweden. These were circulated widely on campus and so embarrassed the administration that the degree was awarded. The recipient, who had a number of such honors from elsewhere, luckily was unaware of the fuss.

The process of awarding an honorary degree, adopted after that previous incident, is for a person to be nominated, with documentation, to the Honors Committee, which was made up of faculty but was chaired by a designated administrator. The Honors Committee then makes a recommendation to the Board of Trustees, which at U.C. has final say on almost every matter. The Board then generally rubber stamps the recommendations. I learned that previous documentation generally consisted of one or two letters from persons knowing the nominee, attesting to the worthiness of the nominee for the honor. Knowing the conservative nature of our Board and the controversy that has usually followed Mac, I determined that I would have such a well documented package that he could not possibly be turned down. I produced 28 letters of recommendation from a variety of respected community leaders, including a former Ohio governor, three Cincinnati mayors, the Speaker of the Ohio House, newspaper reporters, agency executives, lawyers, business people, persons from the religious community, and others, all of whom had known Mac in different roles, and all of whom wrote glowingly of his appropriateness for the award. When I called people requesting them to write, I expected positive responses, but was struck by the enthusiasm with which people responded to the idea, often suggesting others who would support the nomination. The Honors Committee voted unanimously to recommend him. When it went to the Board, it was discussed in executive session, a violation of the Ohio Sunshine Law, and a strategy was worked out that it would not be among the recommendations publicly presented to the Board, so that they would not have to vote on it at their public meeting. Thus Mac was never officially turned down. The Board simply arranged it so that he was never publicly recommended, despite the work and judgment of the Honors Committee and the overwhelming public support his nomination carried. Subsequently the honors process was changed and Honors Committee is not chaired by a Trustee, thus giving the Board control over the process; so they will not have to face an "undesirable" nomination in the future.

After learning what happened, I consulted a lawyer to ask whether the Board's violation of the Sunshine Law could be challenged so that at least some public attention could be
focused on the issue. He felt that it could. Since this was just before spring graduation, he even suggested that an injunction could be obtained to prohibit graduation ceremonies (where the honorary degrees are awarded) until the matter was heard. He felt that we would not win the case in a local court, or even on appeal, but thought we might have a good chance at the level of the Ohio Supreme Court. Unfortunately such a drawn-out legal process would cost tens of thousands of dollars to pursue, and even if the money could have been raised (several faculty colleagues indicated a willingness to contribute), it was not an expenditure Mac would have approved of, knowing of other more pressing needs in the community. Moreover, preventing students and their parents from attending graduation ceremonies hardly seemed an appropriate way of responding to a Board who probably would not have cared about that one way or the other except for the bad national publicity it would have engendered.

Fortunately, Xavier University subsequently awarded its highest honor, the St. Xavier Award, to Mac a couple of years later. I understand that his nomination for that award was encouraged by several persons who were upset by the outcome at U.C.

Ironically, although Mac received a lot of other honors, they were not very important to him. Although others were concerned about his treatment at U.C., it seemed not to bother him at all. I think Mac always thought that all he had ever done was what was the right thing to do in each instance, and he didn't think he should receive special recognition for that. That this gentle, unassuming, caring individual could be viewed by the local conservative power structure as such a threat that they were willing to act illegally to thwart his receiving public recognition still amazes me, and indicates how insecure this power structure really is. Or do they understand, perhaps better than we all do, that Mac's beloved community could bring about change, could make this into a more caring world, could break down barriers of privilege and better the lives of the less well off? Perhaps in this sense Mac was a threat, just as new ideas and new movements have always been viewed a threat when they challenge the status quo. And also perhaps in this we can find hope. If, by preserving Mac's beloved community, by joining and supporting the people and organizations working for social change, by caring for individuals and letting that caring lead to the definition of our causes, as Mac did, we can serve Mac's memory and create a better life for ourselves and for others, Mac would love us even more for that.

MAC

by Brian Crum

Mac is my father, like no other man can be.
   He's also my mother, he touches me so gently.
He speaks to me kindest words, with the most High Love,
   And often reminds me that there are higher laws above.
He treats me higher than a prince, president or king
   When I take him my problems, the TRUTH he does bring.

Now, we sat down to donuts and milk, one fine summer's day
   Next to a church that was all painted gray.
We sat under the tree, in a cool summer's breeze.
   Funny, that tree's name was called heaven
And as I had finished the last drop in my cup,
   What do you think Mac did? He jumped up!
With hurting leg and all, he jumped up and did ask,
   "Let me get you some more--how 'bout another glass?"
The impression of this day will always last.

In my heart his hospitality is so very RARE,
   Like a fine gem or crystal
   The love in his heart, his empathy and care.
They wrote about Mac and others I guess
   When in the scriptures Jesus confessed
That the children of God, called Peacemakers, are blessed.
   He didn't mention 'til later that we'd all be arrested.

I actually hate being tortured by cops,
   But following in Mac's steps I got a tiny taste of what he got.
Like stun-guns, broken fingers, I should've expected
   To be beater and kicked, thrown down and rejected
By the world, as the WORD brings
   If we were of the world we'd be treated like kings (and queens).
He teaches that religion means "Let Freedom Ring."
   And that if we don't stand for something, we'll fall for anything.

One thing I've noticed, when Mac disagrees
   Is he can change one's mind--without making enemies.
How he does this is completely astounding.
   When I try to do this, people just get confounding.
Sometimes I feel I must speak quite strongly
   Even if later I find I'm wrongly.
Then I promptly admit my error,
   Say I'm sorry and leave myself in God's care.

Better to say something and appear to be brash
   Than it is to say nothing and let the moment pass.
Mac has a friend named Vivian; they both taught me to speak
   My heart freely to everyone, not to be like a sheep.
For all the time I must speak my feeling, tho' it may offend
   For Jesus offended many, so the Bible contents.
Mac always said before every action I should ask
   Myself what would Jesus do? Before taking the task.

And tho' my words must sometimes cut to the quick,
   I should try to speak them with love.
For Jesus said, "Be cunning as a snake and guileless as a dove."
   Mac, you are my strength, my guidance to that goal.
Whenever I am with you, I feel so very whole
   To make a better world, leave it better than when I came.
Mac has always shown me that helping people should be my aim,
   Speak my truth with love and strength, tho' it may hurt a few.
In the end I will be happier and, I know, you will be, too.

To be honest with myself and the people all around
   It's an inside job, and serving God better, that is where I'm bound.
There is no other Mac.
   There's no doubt about that!
But truly I'm with him even tho' we're apart.
   For truly I carry him here in my heart.
He's left some indelible impressions so deep in my soul,
   Impressions that tell me giving and sharing, that's life's true goal.

With kindness, true meekness, humility and things,
   He speaks truth to power.
Be it to presidents or kings.
   Whenever I have a problem, it's him I go to
Seeking solace and peace
   Like so many others do.

Only a quarter to use his rest room is a very cheap price.
   Whenever I'm over there with him, eating beans and rice.
When I'm with him he acts like there's no one else in the universe.
   I 'most never see him get curt, angry or terse.
As if no one else has troubles or cares,
   He is my best friend; he is always there.
And when, perhaps maybe, there's something I need to hear,
   Then the truth he so gently speaks into my ear.

Some think Mac's a prophet, a saint, a holy man--
   He is all that and more to me, and if he can do it, then we all can.

Mac has brought me down the path to the place where I now stand,
   But absolutely nothing in return did he demand.
By watching and listening to him, how to love my soul has learned.
But even at 89, I can't keep up with him, down every twist and turn.
   To be with him everywhere is that for which I yearn.

It's not just the Mac that you see on TV
   That I love and cherish: his life and soul and what he means to me.
It's the Mac who does good when there's NOBODY there to see,
   The great and small things he gives to you and me
In private: unannounced, no cameras or media of any fashion.
   He shares with the poor his money, time and compassion.
No, I don't love him just because of the Mac that the whole world sees;  
It's the Mac whose tears of compassion dwell in the deepest part of me.

Mac and Vegetarianism

by Elizabeth Farians

Occasionally I took Mac to lunch, quite often on his December first birthday. Sometimes I took homemade soup down to him (he loved soup) in his small apartment behind the Dominican Sisters House on York Street. Sometimes we went up to Clifton.

It was difficult to be on the street with Mac because so many people would come along to speak to him. He seemed to know everybody. It was the same in the restaurant; one hardly could get a word in edgewise. But one of the times when we were together he asked me why I was a vegetarian. I reminded him how farming and animal husbandry had changed and how things were not the way they used to be on the family farm. I explained why "factory farming" was the name given by animal rights activists for the production of dead animals for food, euphemistically called "meat" in our culture. I told him how the animals were treated on today's farms, like so many cans of peas, with no consideration for their wellbeing. I told him how chickens were de-beaked in a terribly painful procedure, kept in tiny cages no larger than half a folded newspaper, stuffed by the thousands in poorly ventilated warehouses, never to pick in the barnyard at a blade of grass and then hung by their feet on an assembly line to be decapitated. And all this to please our taste buds for chicken.

I told him how the cows were treated with no concern that they are sentient beings. I explained how they are kept pregnant all the time so that they will produce more milk and thus are tied up to milking machines for hours on end. I revealed the fact that scientists are trying to engineer genetically a new kind of cow that would produce even more milk, a cow whose teats would hang on the ground so heavy with milk that the cow hardly would be able to walk. . . . I reminded Mac that humans are the only species, which drinks milk after weaning and that it is the dairy industry, which has sold us a bill of goods on the nutritional value of milk for adults.

I also told Mac about the horrors of the slaughter house and the pollution problems caused by the production of the so-called "meat," the doubtful nutritional value, the psychological harm of eating "meat" and how many more people could be fed if we ate the grain directly instead of recycling it through a cow. Mac said he had never really thought about all this or reflected on it but because of the inhumane cruelty involved in meat eating, he would no longer eat meat. He became a vegetarian from then on.

I have to laugh to myself, though, because when I read to him from a flyer put out by Feminists for Animal Rights, the list of diseases said to be caused by eating dead animals, he balked and said he didn't believe it. I really didn't care because not eating meat for the animals' sakes was what really mattered and he would get all the health advantages whether he believed it or not. I ended by giving him one of my buttons containing my slogan: "Nonviolence Begins with the Fork." He always kept this button displayed on the grapevine wreath with his button collection.

Mac often called me, usually late at night. The first thing he always said after "This is Mac," his voice swinging up on the "ac" part of Mac, was "How's your mother?" Mac had a
computer-like memory for people and their situations. I appreciated his calls because I could no longer visit him. I was the sole caregiver for my almost ninety-six-year-old mother.

Mac would tell me how he was feeling and especially about the pain in his leg. He said he had been falling forward, "pitching," as he called it. He said it was bad enough when he pitched to the left, but he certainly did not want to pitch to the right!

Mac called me just three days before he died.

Mac's Arrest in 1979

by Elizabeth Farians

Mac called me rather early Friday morning, January 19, 1979. He said that the sheriff's men were coming to arrest him and he asked if I would come down to be with him. Of course I knew why the sheriff was after Mac, so I hurried as quickly as I could to his Dayton Street church-home. I was surprised that Mac had called me because I was not a member of his church, but rather I was a good friend working with him and Earnest Bromley on the death penalty issue.

When I arrived, Mac was alone and he was frightened. I was somewhat shocked to find him alone in that big building at such a momentous time, but as I reflected on the situation I began to realize that not too many of his church members really understood Mac's protests and not all of them supported him in his "stubborn stances for justice." From the point of view of his parishioners his jail time sometimes took him away from them and the church, and perhaps some church members resented his bringing so much trouble on himself and so also on them. I asked him about this, and he said he was sorry to be away from the church, but that it was good for the church members not to be too dependent on him. He added that they had good leadership among themselves.

Mac asked me to take the perishables out of his refrigerator after he left and he showed me where to hide the key after I locked up. By that time the sheriff's men arrived. They were the biggest, burliest men I had ever seen. Mac opened the door and after they challenged him about cooperating with the arrest, he slumped into the corner of the vestibule and they carried him out.

Just then Lou Moores from the Cincinnati Enquirer arrived. I was so relieved because I didn't think the police would rough up Mac in front of the press. I was still worried about how they would treat him in the van and in the jail because so few understood his nonviolent resistance. I went home and called lawyers Allen Brown and Robert Newman to see what they could do to help.

Then began a very long time of anguish for all of us as we tried to get Mac out of jail while at the same time supporting him in his protest. I was the treasurer of the ad hoc group which collected money for the various expenses of the campaign to get Mac released while Prosecutor Simon Leis kept the grand jury in session long after the session should have expired.

One time during our picketing the jail I decided to try to get in to see Mac. At the desk I said I wanted to see Vic Carelli to ask if I could see Mac. "Who are you?" the clerk demanded to know. I said I was a theologian and that Mac might die on their hands if they didn't let him out. They must have thought I was his chaplain because they let me in to see Mac.
The Most Christ-like Figure We Had Ever Known
By Bill Mundon

As our new church, the Community Church of Cincinnati, began to grow because of Mac's ministry, it was also growing with friends of his activist causes. More and more on Sunday mornings we found Mac away from the church. We loved Mac for what he was doing, oftentimes he was in jail and fasting, and it was not easy for him. We knew he was protesting for or against something that he believed in deeply and so did we as his congregation. Our disappointment was simply that we missed him and needed his personal guidance.

Though most of the members of the church did not demonstrate with Mac, and he never asked, we supported him in ways that made what he was doing easier for him. We cared for his family, and his church. We did on occasion, as his church, picket with signs and songs, in front of the Court House when he was there in jail.

I don't ever remember an open and outright difference with Mac on issues, although I'm sure some members had different opinions on such controversial topics as abortions. There were no debates on the issue, and the differences did not cause any ill feelings. In our church people felt free to follow their own convictions.

Mac was the most Christ-like person we had ever known. We followed him because of his strong Christian teaching and his demonstrated Christian faith. Whenever there was doubt for him, he would simply ask, "What would Jesus do?"