

# MEMORIES OF RAY DAVEY

By Maurice Russell

In September 1948 I was walking up Botanic Avenue, enjoying my first week as a medical student when a cyclist stopped beside me and introduced himself as Ray Davey, the Presbyterian Chaplain of Residence. He invited me to come to No 7, College Park East, his base and home for himself and his wife Kathleen, to meet other presbyterian students on Saturday night. I turned up to find about 20 others like myself enjoying country dancing and generally getting to know each other.

Saturday night was a weekly event for us and many others, as we became in many cases lifelong friends. We learned about Ray's experience as a prisoner of war in Libya, and later in Italy and Germany, having gone to work with allied forces on behalf of the YMCA. Occasionally we met some of his fellow prisoners who had come to Belfast to visit him and they would tell us of his great help to them in their various camps.

Sunday evening at No 7 would involve discussions on any topic of significance, with a visiting speaker who might be the Vic-Chancellor Dr Ashby following his recent trip to Moscow, or Principal Ernest Davey from the Presbyterian Theological College, now Union College, or Dr George McLeod, the leader of the Iona Community.

At the end of term there were house parties at Guysmere in Castlerock with a speaker to stimulate discussion when we were not out enjoying the environment. There was a final communion service when Ray used cold tea instead of wine, as he did when he conducted communion with fellow prisoners of war when no wine was available.

Other significant events included visits to Germany and Italy where Ray had befriended local community leaders despite his prisoner status. In Germany we stayed with families who could not have been more friendly. There were visits to churches and schools where some pupils of our age were catching up with teaching, they had missed in the war years. In Cologne destruction was everywhere due to Allied bombing raids, people were living in the cellars of what had been their homes. We visited a work camp where rebuilding work was going at great pace, where some workers who had lost parts of limbs were carrying buckets and handling ladders. On the 12<sup>th</sup> July we happened to be crossing the Rhine when we felt obliged to sing the 'Sash', translated into German by Kathleen Davey! On Sunday we attended Church where we sang the great German hymn 'Praise to the Lord the Almighty' by Joachim Neander: we sang the first verse alone in English, then the congregation all joined us in German.

In Italy we stayed in the Waldensian Church Agape Community in the mountains north of Milan. It was led by Tullio Vinay, who later created a similar centre in Riesi in Sicily for the disadvantaged. (Tullio was invited by Ray to the opening ceremony for the Corrymeela Community). Our meals finished with us singing each other's national songs, especially 'Molly Malone'!

We moved on to Rome where one of the many pleasures was afternoon tea in the Irish Embassy to the Vatican. Our invitation had resulted from an accidental meeting in Dublin between Ray and an Old Leinster rugby friend who was a close friend of the ambassador. From the rooftop of the embassy the ambassador directed our gaze to numerous historical areas of Rome which we could never visit since we were returning home the next day.

Following my graduation in 1954 work outside Belfast and elsewhere resulted in loss of contact with No 7 until in 1965 an invitation arrived from Ray to discuss with others the creation of a community to promote reconciliation in our island. It was clearly Ray's intention to bring together his experience as a prisoner of war, his work with students and contact with groups like the Iona Community and Tullio Vinay's Agape Community in Italy to develop his vision for reconciliation in Northern Ireland.

We met under the chairmanship of the Rev Tom Patterson who informed us that a property was available outside Ballycastle at Corrymeela, a former Holiday Fellowship home which would be appropriate for Ray's concept of a centre for reconciliation. Some of those present were concerned that the timber construction of the building was not sufficiently durable, but a well know landscape architect praised it as appropriate for the local weather conditions. It was then agreed that it should be purchased as the headquarters of the Corrymeela Community under the direction of Ray Davey. The purchase money was quickly raised.

In personal terms I did not feel that I could become a full member of the Community, but I am glad to be still an Associate Member.

Ray Davey was one of the most significant influences in my life as a student when a large number of us learned the true meaning of community. We were privileged to have known the company of Ray and Kathleen. Some of us still associate socially in spite of the age factor