

# Harvard Beats



## *All is Well*

The Nor'easter hit Harvard on Saturday mid-afternoon, just as though its swirling flakes, like so many townspeople and former townspeople, could not bear to miss Malcolm Sutherland's memorial service at the Unitarian Church.

The retired minister was a benevolent and beloved presence throughout my years growing up in Harvard, and I knew many in our town would be feeling the blow of his death from cancer on Nov. 19. I trekked down the hill, on foot through the storm, unnerved by the weatherman's dire warnings to stay home except in an emergency. I wondered that the

service hadn't been postponed till more people could attend.

But I found the church filled — lighted and warmed by the breath, voices, and tears of those who had known Malcolm in his many roles: pastor, counselor, activist for social justice, singer, friend, father. Malcolm himself (who moved to Maine last year) had provided much of the service's content, when he learned he had little time left. His favorite hymns and selected readings shaped the program, which was also graced by a tribute from his longtime friend the Rev. Dr. Carl Scovel (now retired as Unitarian Universalist minister of King's Chapel in Boston) and an emotional eulogy from his son,

Malcolm III. Malcolm's wife Mary Anne, daughter Anne, daughter-in-law and three grandchildren sat with the congregation.

The Unitarian Church choir sang the anthem "Choose Something Like a Star" from "Frostiana," its lyrics by Robert Frost clearly resounding through the sanctuary. One choir member remarked to a friend that she had never felt the singers so palpably inspired, and I believe that feeling was shared as everyone's voices joined in with the hymns Malcolm had suggested: "Sovereign and Transforming Grace," "Dear Mother-Father of Us All," and "God of Grace and God of Glory." A friend tells me she hasn't stopped singing them ever since the service, or hearing the request he left in parting: to live our courage and not our fears, and to support the social justice causes he worked for. Malcolm gave people the tools with which to approach life, rather than advocating on specific issues, she remembers. "He wanted people not to just

react to him but to come to it on their own."

The Rev. Carl Scovel's tribute chronicled the amazing scope of this minister's intellect, leadership, and commitment in a career that touched lives and social movements across the country. He spoke of Malcolm's gentleness and his passion, and of how he came to Harvard as a retirement job, knitting together a congregation that had been deeply divided, healing and gaining their trust with his "calm optimism" and his strength as a listener. No matter what the struggle, "He believed in his soul that all would be well."

Malcolm III, a towering figure with a charming resemblance to his father, told of the dad who had given him steadfast love and inspired him by example. As he described Malcolm's way of approaching and receiving every person "with respect, affection, and interest," quiet recognition and empathy seemed to rise from the gathered extended family.

Many in the pews had moved away years ago; "It was like taking a step back ten or fifteen years to the old congregation," marveled a church member later.

The Rev. Wendy Bell, who now guides Harvard's Unitarian Church, closed the service with the benediction that Malcolm had always given: "And now, beyond the power of any spoken word, may the spirit of love do its persuasive work in our minds and in our hearts, that we may testify by our lives to its presence, its power, and its peace."

The gathering continued at the Fellowship Building, amid a potluck spread to rival all feasts. While the snow gusted into mounting drifts, people who loved and were loved by Malcolm laughed and shared snowy bear hugs and poured out their memories and affection, into the evening. No blizzard could stop them from attending Malcolm's service and reception and we sensed that he, too, was attending.

— *Montana Miller*