

6: H-R 2-4-10

Charles Robert Lord

Charles Robert Lord, 90, of Pleasant Hill, Tenn., formerly of Grinnell, died Saturday, Jan. 30, 2010, in Wharton Nursing Home in Pleasant Hill following open heart surgery.

A memorial service will be held Saturday, March 6, 2010, at 10 a.m. at Pleasant Hill Community Church. His ashes will be interred at a later date in Westfield Cemetery, rural Grinnell, along with those of his wife Joy who died March 8, 2009. An obituary will be published at that time.

Charles Robert Lord



Charles Robert Lord passed away peacefully on January 30, 2010, at Wharton Nursing Home in Pleasant Hill, Tennessee. He never recovered following recent open heart surgery.

Charlie was born on a farm in Westfield Township near Grinnell Iowa on January 5, 1920, to Jesse and Elizabeth Lincoln Lord, and spent his life serving others.

He worked to make a difference in the peaceful resolution of human conflicts, the advancement of African education and minority empowerment, the safeguarding of the environment, and the improvement of care for mentally ill persons.

His maternal grandfather, Robert Lincoln, was a Quaker minister. He decided to become a missionary after meeting famed world literacy pioneer and missionary Frank Laubach at Berea College, where he earned the B.S. degree in agriculture in 1942. Being a pacifist, when the U.S. entered World War II he registered as a conscientious objector and served the war years in Civilian Public Service (CPS). While assigned to CPS in Philadelphia, he met his future wife Josephine (Joy) Swift, a Quaker staff member for the American Friends Service Committee, and they were married in Wilmington Friends Meeting in 1945. His CPS assignments included being a human guinea pig in a jaundice experiment.

Another CPS assignment was to work in the Philadelphia State Mental Hospital at Byberry. A skilled and professional photographer, he found the conditions at Byberry so deplorable that he decided to defy rules against taking pictures. When his photos of naked, unsanitary, debilitated patients were published in Life Magazine and several major newspapers in 1946, the powerful message hastened the subsequent U.S. movement for humane treatment of mentally ill persons. He then helped form the National Mental Health Foundation to fight for the rights of mentally ill persons. Former First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, after seeing his photos, joined the organization and rallied help for the cause. He continued to be an advocate for the mentally ill and in 2002 was honored for his lifetime of service at a special ceremony organized by the Cumberland County (Tennessee) chapter of the National Alliance for the Mentally Ill (NAMI).

Soon after World War II he crossed the Atlantic to take cattle to war-devastated European farmers needing to rebuild their herds, and then farmed with his father near Grinnell, Iowa for 6 years. But he never forgot his long delayed desire for mission work, and to that end he received a teaching certificate from Grinnell College. In 1954 he went with Joy and their three children to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) as missionaries for the United Church of Christ (UCC). He learned the local language, Chindau, managed the mission's large farm and then became superintendent of schools. He supervised the 53 mission schools, including the building and staffing of 18 new schools. During a furlough from mission work in 1961, he received an M.A. in history from the University of Iowa.

Southern Rhodesia was then ruled by Britain. In 1965, Southern Rhodesia's white minority settlers, determined that black Africans should remain subservient and not attain political power, unilaterally declared independence from Britain. Because he was a known champion of black political rights, the white government declared him a prohibited immigrant in 1966. After teaching at Wilmington College and Dayton public schools, he served as a pastor at Cove Springs UCC in Troy, Ohio (1967-69) and at New Goshenhoppen UCC in East Greenville, Pennsylvania (1970-76). He received a Masters of Divinity from Moravian Theological Seminary and was ordained in the United Church of Christ in 1975. He and Joy then returned to the mission field with the Moravian Church to Tanzania, East Africa where he learned Swahili and taught in a school of theology until 1982. He then served as pastor at Immanuel Marion UCC in Woodman, Wisconsin from 1983-86, and at Carrier UCC in Carrier, Oklahoma from 1986-89.

In 1992, he and Joy moved to Uplands Retirement Village, Pleasant Hill, Tennessee where they continued to contribute to the causes that guided their earlier lives. At the Pleasant Hill Community Church he chaired the Board of Deacons and led the Peace Committee and the Social Action Committee. For many years he joined others in calling for the closing of the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia. He organized work crews to rebuild burned out African American churches in the southeast United States, and joined work camps to rebuild homes in Mississippi following Hurricane Katrina. He was a volunteer mediator for the Cumberland County Victim-Offender Reconciliation Program; was active in Save Our Cumberland Mountains, a regional environmental group, and served on the Board of Directors for Common Cause in Tennessee. He was awarded the "Annual Alumni Service Award" by Berea College in 2003.

He founded the instrumental Uplands Ensemble and directed it for its initial years, while playing the baritone horn inherited from his father. The Ensemble, initially with only five instrumentalists, grew to about twenty members and continues to give free concerts, especially during the holidays and at many public gatherings. He was deeply devoted to his wife and family, and cared wonderfully for Joy in her last years when she suffered from dementia.

National Public Radio aired an interview on December 30, 2009 of Charlie and others about the impact of conscientious objectors' efforts to improve the treatment of the mentally ill. The interview can be listened to, and some of Charlie's photos with audio descriptions seen, at this website: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=122017757&ps=rs>

He was preceded in death by his wife Joy and his brother Alfred. He is survived by his 3 children, Beth Lord of Lawrence, KA; Donna (Brian) Little of Randolph, VA; and Ron (Jenny) Lord of Silver Spring, MD; grandchildren Rachel Lord and Hannah Lord; and Colm (Jennifer) O'Reilly; great-granddaughter Zelmá O'Reilly; brother Howard (Wilma) Lord of Montezuma, IA and sister-in-law Alice (Mel) Lord Unruh of Port Orchard, WA.

His ashes, along with those of his wife Joy, will be interred in Westfield Cemetery near Grinnell at a Memorial Service in the summer of 2011.

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