

MAC

5th November, 2015

If you start with your name and a bit of background about your life.

Robert Roy Kirk McGregor is my name. I was born in Brisbane in 1947. Normal life, semi-rural outer Brisbane suburbs. Went to Brisbane State High School, left in sub-senior, which is grade 11 in these days. Worked for the Taxation Department for a while. Worked part time at a service station. Good Lord. Eventually, well, I actually missed out on being called up for National Service, but I was in a bit of a doldrums at the time. I was working for Woolworths Corporation and I wasn't particularly happy with my job and I decided to volunteer for National Service. At the same time as I was due to go for my medical for National Service, well, shortly before that, I broke my leg playing rugby union and I changed my mind about National Service. I thought I'd get out on my broken leg disability. But it didn't work and I was accepted and had two years as a National Serviceman. Fought in Vietnam, left, became married - not got married, I became married. And I'm still married. I've been married 46 years to the one lady. I have a marvellous wife, three terrific children, three marvellous grandsons. Life's been good to me.

Could you please describe... what does peace mean to you?

I can't quite grasp what peace means. Somebody said it was the absence of war, but that's not necessarily true. I don't ever see there being peace in the world. There's always somebody envying somebody else. Or somebody's competitive spirit, call it testosterone or whatever you want to, wants to always put one over somebody else. As one gets more and more power, one becomes more and more powerful and so is able to do this, and bring people along with them to assist in what often is an unjust, immoral conflict.

How important is peace to you?

Well, not being able to quite grasp it, it's very hard to put any importance on it. But the concept of peace I think is extremely important.

Is it linked to other conditions and values?

Well, I don't think its peace at any price. I think peace has to be paid for and the strange part about it is that it's paid for in blood, sweat and tears. So, it's a bit of a conundrum.

Has the significance of peace changed for you over time?

Yes, it has. Yes, it has. To answer that question, I'm thinking more of peace of mind than peace as the absence of war. And as one gets older and one sees results for one's efforts earlier in life and they're positive results, one becomes at peace with oneself.

So is peace a tangible thing then - does it become more tangible over time or is it more imagined?

No, it's abstract.

How do you lead a peaceful life? Is it an active thing peace?

Sometimes it's easier to keep the peace by being inactive [laughs]. Well, peace is a concept in your mind and I think we all like to achieve it by whatever means one applies to a particular situation.

Is there a difference between peace of mind, personal peace, and social peace?

I'm a solitary person. I'm happy with myself and I'm happy with those I put around me. I try not to get involved with social issues to be honest, because some I find hard to understand, therefore, I tend

to leave it alone. But in my situation, again because of age sometimes and this is not a cop out, I think, "Gees, that's the wrong thing, but how can I change it?" And I've got other things to do and I tend to leave it to the younger generation to perhaps take up the cudgel.

What about your Cambodia project? Is that something that you do to actively engage in peace, in making reparation, in making the world better?

Yes, it is. I'm getting a vast amount of satisfaction out of the success we're achieving in clearing land mines in Cambodia. There are 30,000 amputees in Cambodia at the moment. And there is less and less happening as a public awareness campaign, where it's keeping children from touching things that they are curious about. Something that people don't think about is that it's not only people that are maimed and killed, it's also a farmer's oxen. Which is like losing his tractor and he cannot plough the paddock anymore. It has a very nasty social and economic impact on him and his family. But yes, to answer your question, I really do feel we're doing something.

So do you think that peace is best found alone or with others?

I think the way it should be found is with others, but it's easier found alone.

How do you make peace with yourself? Do you do anything specific?

I find at the end of the day a bottle of good red [laughter] for some reason I haven't quite grasped. But towards the end of the bottle, everyone's my friend!

Do you remember choosing peace, do you remember it being a conscious decision for there to be peace in your life?

No. It was just a fortunate result of earlier actions.

Do you have any memories of intense peacefulness? Any experiences that are dear to you?

I can remember coming back from Operations when I was in Vietnam and you felt that Nui Dat was your haven. While you were away from the base, our military base at Nui Dat, we were always on edge. You never slept a full night; you're always on edge. That was part of the job. But it was so good to come back and you could feel, the moment you came through those gates in the

front of Nui Dat, that all the load seemed to come off your shoulders. And you felt at peace, even though we were in a war zone, you felt at peace.

Security?

Yep.

My last question is do you think art and peace are interrelated, but that's because I've been talking to some people who make art. Do you?

No, I'm not very arty. My wife is. But I think that seeing some art can bring thoughts of peace. And the opposite too, some art can get your heckles up.

Thank you - I love your short answers!