

WALTER CARRINGTON - MEMORIAL SERVICE
20 September 2005

By Christopher Carrington

Think of Walter, and most people will think of the Alexander Technique. However, for his family there are, perhaps, more complex memories.

The Walter we knew and remember was, like anybody else, shaped by events in his life. He was born on 4 May 1915 just at the time when his father, a Congregational Minister, was about to rejoin the Church of England as a priest. Walter subsequently became a chorister and pupil at the Choir School of All Saints Margaret Street, just off Oxford Street, in London. He then moved on to St Paul's School to complete his education. In his teens he fully intended on leaving school, to join the Society of Jesus, but was diverted by the Alexander Technique. Shortly before he started his training to become an Alexander teacher, he was still debating whether or not to join the Jesuits immediately, or to wait until he had completed his Alexander Technique training. As we now know, he decided to join FM's 2nd teacher training course, which he completed in 1939.

When war broke out, he had clearly abandoned his Jesuit ambitions, for he married my mother and his life-long partner, Dilys, and he enlisted in the RAF. It was while on a pathfinder mission, guiding a bomber raid from Italy over, what was then, Yugoslavia that his Halifax aircraft was shot down. His crew, with whom he remained in contact all his life, are quite certain that they owe their lives to his skill and commitment as a pilot. When their aircraft was hit and on fire, most pilots would have engaged the auto pilot and attempted to leave the aircraft as quickly as possible. Walter did not do this. He remained at the controls to prevent his aircraft from going into a spin while his crew got out safely. He left last and suffered severe injuries including a broken pelvis and collarbone. These injuries resulted in him being kept in hospital instead of a prisoner of war camp. He was released from the hospital, interestingly, with the help of a Jesuit priest, when the Russians captured the area a few months later. After being repatriated to Italy, he wrote that "looking back on it the experience almost seems worthwhile – I have learnt so much about people and things, and above all about myself!"

Walter later returned to flying duties before he was discharged from the RAF in 1946. He always told me that he could have continued flying in the newly formed BOAC, but chose instead to return to Ashley Place and to teaching the Alexander Technique.

These events, and, no doubt, many others, formed the man we all knew and love. He had a wide range of interests, and a detailed knowledge and understanding of a great many subjects. He lived his life enthusiastically and happily in his pursuit of his many interests: furthering the work of FM Alexander, riding, reading and music. He supported the Costume Society, the National Trust and English Heritage, the Royal Institution, the Countryside Alliance, the British Field Sports Society, and the Sporting Arts Trust, to name but a few. Although I never knew him to do crossword puzzles, he could always be relied upon to come up with the correct solution when required, because of the great range of his knowledge including the classics, religion, literature and science.

In short, Walter was interested in everything and all subjects. He was wise enough to know that what suited him was not necessarily right for someone else, so he rarely imposed his views on others. Instead, he provided the encouragement and the “means-whereby” for others to take their own decisions and to achieve their own goals.

You will all have your own, individual and personal memories of Walter, but everyone will remember him for his happy laughter, his warm personality, his ready wit, and above all, for his welcoming smile.

Christopher Carrington – 20 September 2005