

keep your mind open, keep searching, seeking, finding answers whether it is about string theory, particle physics, or theology.

MD – MORE THOUGHTS for OCT 8

We are all on a journey through this life. Judeo-Christian Scripture tells us we only get **one shot at life**, and we are preparing for eternity. I think Ulrich was preparing for eternity. There is much I do not know about my friend Ulrich. We only met at the end of his time at MIT, he had just become an emeritus professor, and was 'retiring or retired' but still have some link with Chinese students and with the international space station ... all of which sounded very cool to me!

I knew he had been a part of Grace Chapel in Lexington with his wife Gerda, who helped in a prison ministry program. A friend at the church had linked us together and we began to meet for our Thursday lunch group.

He was not afraid to consider death; in fact, all of us can be certain of one thing – our physical life is limited and will come to an end. Sadly, we are well aware of this due to our last two years of the pandemic. As we met weekly I enjoyed listening to him talk about research and things with students. His quiet gentle spirit and care always came through. Sometimes he would arrive before students and we **talked about concerns for his family**. Several people here have talked about his care, his mentoring and their **hospitality** as a couple in their home that touched many. His care and their care, as a couple made a lasting impact.

One friend named Ruth was happy to meet Ulrich & Gerda, because she had studied abroad one full year in Germany. She tells of walking into their house was like walking into Germany. Hang out on Sundays. Walk around this interesting place. Eating-typical open faced sandwiches... she too remembered Christmas tree with real candles.

She remembered his old Bible, & noted it was very well used. A good thing.

I have also got to talk to members of the family. You have heard from **Robert** and can see his words in the program printed by the Physics department. Well done Robert! Indeed one remarkable thing about your dad, he did not think **there had to be an issue between science and God**... Why to some people not get that? Science could be God letting us & investigate/figure out things... as we search for truth. Your dad was a man who had much trouble and challenge in life, but humbly kept going and figuring out some wonderful things with God's help, energy, perseverance.

I have enjoyed speaking with Katharina about her own memories of her father. She too a **teacher**, shared his love for **music**, for **Bach** as we have heard today. She also got to tell me more about the story of her parents which was great fun. You can see a tiny part of this in the words the **Gerda** shared that we printed in the bulletin. We also talked about her taking care of her mother in recent years. I also got to speak with Peter during our first funeral gathering in Lexington, but I knew already how much his father had care and concern for him.

I had great fun hearing the story first hand from Gerda of how she met Ulrich, and their time in **Marburg** and **Hamburg**. She too shared his faith in God - raise the children during the heavy early days of research and work. Hear of their challenging life growing up in Germany during and after the end of the war. Some details on her **Red Cross** work. **ASK her about this tall German student coming to ask this student nurse to dance in the yard of the castle** in Marburg. Sounds like a movie scene to me. And I can almost imagine/see the **glint or sparkle in the eye** of a young Ulrich as he invited her to a dance on the small dance floor. Then their life shared for around sixty years. Faithful at church, faithful at MIT, faithful with prison ministry, faithful in marriage, providing for their family. What a team! Something tells me that she had something to do with the same sandwich I saw every Thursday- rye bread –

turkey, ham, cheese – salad leaves. Usually an apple or one to share.

I hope you have been able to see some of the family photos and the German countryside. These photos make me think of the 23rd Psalm that many of you may have heard, even if you are not from Judeo Christian background. "Partly written in our program, ***"The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul."*** This Psalm is often read at a funeral because it talks about God being present even ***"when I walk through the shadow of death."*** I mention it here in this memorial because of a story that Gerda told me about a memory from 1974. ***I think there were several times when Ulrich walked through the shadow of death. As a child, the war, years that followed, and then later with his health.***

In the days before the discovery of the J particle – really just before. Ulrich had spent long hours at machine on Long Island. Then later he did the same and came home from Geneva, looking at accelerator there too...He had come home with great pain in his leg & saw the doctor. Getting a call about emergency surgery for a closed artery, to have a bypass from a vein in his arm. When the operation went unusually long, she drove to Mt. Auburn hospital and praying ***Psalms 23 over and over.*** The doctor had finished; then the leg got blue, had to open up again, repeat operation. Took til past 5pm. Gerda had seen these go wrong in Hamburg with bad result. She rejoiced and thankful to God when she could see him again, still alive! ***Indeed Ulrich, again, had walked through the shadow of death*** and God had brought him through along with the wonderful work of Dr. Murez. – Afterwards he started slowly to stand, to walk, then walk the block. Then going into MIT. Went to computer center, it took over half the day. When they walked that evening for his exercise, he turned to her and said, ***"You know today the machine works!"*** He had 8 to 10 people build a machine, on the accelerator to look for things... ***I have seen something very very big.*** So similar to what Professor Jaffe said, 'the rest is history'.

I need to share this one passage just with Gerda and the rest of you can just listen. She will remember these words from her wedding day, and it is my prayer for her even now: ***I pray that God may strengthen you with power through his spirit... that Christ may dwell with you in your heart through faith... That you, being rooted and established in love will be able to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ. Amen Eph 3:16,17, 18***

There are many passages of Scripture if I was to preach a sermon. But I also know that Ulrich would not wish this service and time of giving thanks for his life to be too long. I know there are more words to be shared at the lunch to follow. But let me share one more word from Robert's story of Gerda coming back for a visit and the family being in Germany/ Switzerland for the recent summer. The funny story about driving an older car when the brakes seized and asking your mom if she wanted to continue or return home and she said – Keep Driving. You kept driving 700 kms, fixing the seized brakes with a screwdriver along the way, just like Ulrich would have done.

May we each do some things that Ulrich did.... Care for others, work hard, mentor others, enjoy life, research hard things and keep searching for answers whether spiritual or physical. As the Physics bio & article said of Ulrich acting as engineer, ***"Becker is brilliant in the design and building of experiments, in instrumentation and analysis of data."*** I would add these final words about Ulrich, that ***"It makes sense that a designer like Ulrich would want to seek out and know the Designer of the Universe. And then keep seeking out to find answers, literally all of his life."*** May we do the same.

BECAUSE OF HIS FAITH IN CHRIST – I will look forward to a reunion with Ulrich, where finally we will both be able to understand some full answers to questions we have for God and other things. Those of us here still have time for more research. May we make the most of our time.
[Pray: May Our Lord Jesus Christ have mercy on us, on Gerda, family and these loved ones. Amen]

In a moment you are invited to listen to the organ postlude and then make your way to the Pappalardo Room. I regret that I need to take off to lead our annual retreat weekend with international students off campus that began this morning & I think Ulrich would like that.

Datum / Date:

And now, let me share a benediction for all of us, that you may have heard during the coverage of the recent funeral of Queen Elizabeth the 2nd, from a few weeks ago. Upon hearing it I thought of Ulrich.

Go forth into the world in peace. Be of good courage. Hold fast that which is good. Render to no one evil for evil. Strengthen the faint hearted. Support the weak. Help the afflicted. Honor all people. Love and serve the Lord, rejoicing in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the Blessing of God almighty, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit be amongst you and remain with you always.

Amen.

Go in peace.

theological box, but he pointed others toward God/Jesus. Just as others had done for him. His experience in visiting the Schaeffers of L'Abri helped him to enjoy a similar open discussion approach like our lunch group. As an empirical scientist his faith in God was also more personal, data driven, experience driven... not just a hypothesis, but real faith, based on evidence & his own experience.

MY WORDS- MD: Ulrich was a physicist who dabbled in theology and I was a pastor / chaplain talking to a brilliant scientist. We were quite a match- had fun together, despite my not being about to speak German nor his language of physics.

J. Jaffe Words from Physics community- (apologies to Ulrich and Physics professors)

Professor- Bob Jaffe - *Ulrich was a kind and gentle man who sought to simplify physics and order the world around him. Ulrich was a remarkable physicist and human being. My first memorable interaction with him was the day of the October Revolution in 1974. Ulrich showed up at the CTP excited (in his Germanic way) with two graphs: one with a sharp peak and the other with a broad one. He was explaining that one graph showed their data on mu-pair production at BNL and the other showed the pair-autocorrelation function. I of course assumed that the sharp peak was the auto-correlation function and the broad, relatively uninteresting one was the enhancement in the mu-pair mass distribution. It took a few minutes for me to figure out that the situation was the reverse and that the mu-pair enhancement was narrower than the experimental resolution. Ulrich smiled broadly. My jaw dropped and the world was never quite the same!*

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Another said> Ulrich was a bit like a flower child who had the misfortune to be born into a Prussian culture! He was ardent about physics and personally warm. He was a mentor to hundreds of students in Junior Lab. He was more than a superb physicist, he was a consummate engineer. I believe that he made Sam's experiments possible by his endless attention to detail.

Peter Fisher- former Physics Dept Chair - *Ulrich was a mentor to many of us and a bright light in our Department and he will be greatly missed.*

****You will hear more of these stories during the lunch to follow with the Physics department ****

\$81 MDean- Back to my story. The last time that we had lunch Ulrich handed me a closed envelope and told me to "tell me what you did with the contents". He had turned 81 years old, and inside it had a little note saying he had **\$81 dollars in cash for his 81 years of life** and he asked me to disperse it with those in need and then tell him what I did with it.

And then he was gone. I did not get to see him his last few weeks of life. So, as I shared with the family in 2020 - I took the \$81 was able to provide some meals for 3 or 4 students in need but I gave the bulk of the funds to a new friend, post doc from Middle East, a new follower of Jesus; struggling financially in search of a new post doc position, but strong in faith. Indeed, God is good. Thank you Ulrich for sharing your life, your mind and your devotion to following God in Christ Jesus along life's twists and turns. Your **humility**, your **love of life**, your **mentoring** of students, and yes a desire to give back even as an emeritus professor in your later years.

About Science and the Bible: *Ulrich did not reject authority of the Bible, but he wanted to help make the Bible be credible and understood for the 21st century mind. He believed in Jesus' death, resurrection. Did not reject miracles... his perspective allowed him to believe in miracles. He dealt with science, reality, facts, experiments, personal experience. He worked to strive to understand the God of the universe.*

NOW - I am not here today to really preach a sermon to you about salvation available in Jesus Christ. But I do want to speak for Gerda and **THANK GOD for sharing Ulrich with all of us.** I would love to talk about the **J particle, the God particle, or share my own hypotheses & research on God's existence** for all of you brilliant physicists out there. If you want to join me for research in this area then join our Thursday lunch group like Ulrich did at noon on Thursdays next door in W11. You too can be like Ulrich,

Hello. I am Michael Dean, an MIT Chaplain. Friend of Ulrich. Served here Christian chaplain 25 years. to: **Gerda, Robert, Katharina, Peter:** I am glad to be here again to remember your husband and father. And today we are glad to have many others from MIT and elsewhere. It is right and good for all of us to gather here today. I want to give thanks to God for Ulrich Becker.

MDean- About a decade ago a friend on staff at Grace Chapel, introduced me to Ulrich who wanted to connect with MIT students and help them make sense of faith and science. We enjoyed English conversation, **Thursday lunch group**, Easter or Thanksgiving dinner events, apologetics seminars, faith & science discussions on Truth, Jesus, Dark Matter, Black holes, space station research, Theology, and later years when he became aware that his time was limited, he wanted to make each day count. One day during his last year, he spoke explicitly about knowing he was living in his last days. We would even joke that we did not know how long the warranty on our bodies would last. And eventually he started to tell me that **"if he was not here on Thursday for our lunch group, it might mean he is – Not Here."**

He and I shared a few things in common- he lost his brother Peter long ago in a tragic mountain hiking accident ; I lost my own brother Stephen in recent years in a tragic car accident. Ulrich also enjoyed **spending time with students**, post docs and especially those we worked with who came from places far away. So did I. So we began to meet nearly every Thursday next door in our W11 building here at MIT. But he made an impact on others in our circles for many years. He knew the life of a grad student and post doc from long ago. He could speak to them in a way that was different from me. A few of the students from our group shared a few memories with me after he passed away.

Words from lunch group- Hidenobu, ~post doc from Japan – sad that he did not get to say goodbye to Ulrich. He was intrigued by this older gentleman, who was both a scientist but still somehow believed in the God of the Bible. His wife sent a note, remembering her first days arriving here from Japan. She wrote:

He was such a great man always kind calm and gentle...

When I first came here I was nervous because I couldn't understand well what they are talking about during a lunch group. But Professor Ulrich cheered me up and shook my hands. He'd given me a piece of confidence. I never forget. I will miss him so much. ~Tsubasa Mochigase

We did not get to spend lots of time together outside of lunch group but our links at lunch created a link with Gideon who spent even more time with Ulrich organizing some forums about the relationship between faith in God and science, physics, our place in the universe. What it means to be human and how we made sense of who God is based on his revealed word in the Bible. Gideon was fascinated with Physics, Computer Science and faith, and he could take on the same level as Ulrich.

Gideon Lee– MIT alum, from Hong Kong. from our lunch group **3 thoughts** - 1) invited family to their house for **Christmas gathering**. Songs. The Tree, really German style 2) After MIT, Gideon did his PhD research on the theology of Francis Schaeffer. And Gideon interviewed Ulrich about his time visiting the Schaeffers of L'Abri community, not far from Cern. Ulrich loved to opine freely & their style /was helpful for him. Less dogmatic, but asking questions ... part of his journey back to faith 3) Gideon recounted his meaningful times with Ulrich, much like you have heard- Grace Science Club were insightful points. He enjoyed Open Discussion – like we did at our MIT international lunch group. Ulrich had an understanding of the universe as an open system that allows God to have room to act.

Later Gideon reminded me of Ulrich's zingers- like his job was **'to keep murdering hypotheses'**. His belief was that science is real, ongoing. But he also believed in God. He did not fit into some tight