

Harry McGurk

Born Glasgow, Scotland, 23 February 1936 — Died Melbourne, 17 April 1998

We were saddened by the death of the Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies, Dr Harry McGurk, who passed away on 17 April 1998 from complications following heart surgery. He was sixty-two.

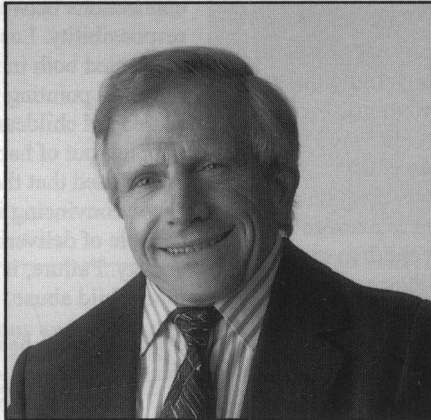
Harry was born in Glasgow in 1936. He left school at fifteen, and worked as a clerk in an electrical firm. During his youth he was very active in the Church of Scotland Youth Assembly, and became a member of the Iona Youth Associates. He spent much of his spare time on Iona – a small, windswept island off the Isle of Mull on Scotland's beautiful rugged west coast – helping restore the island's ancient abbey. His involvement with the Quakers dates back to that time.

In his early twenties and wanting to further his education, he took up evening classes and, at the age of twenty-four, did a Diploma in Social Work at the University of Glasgow. He then worked as a probation officer for several years. After a period in Nigeria working with the Education Authority there, Harry returned to Scotland to complete a degree in psychology at the University of Strathclyde, followed by a PhD on the Discrimination of Orientation in Infancy and Early Childhood.

In 1971, Harry was offered a one year post-doctoral fellowship at Princeton, New Jersey, following which he returned to the UK and joined the Department of Psychology at the University of Surrey. During this time he published numerous research articles and books, supervised many post-graduate students, and held visiting professorships in the United States, Australia and Spain. In 1990, he moved to the University of London as Professor of Developmental Psychology and Director of the Thomas Coram Research Unit at the University's Institute of Education. From there he moved to Australia to take up the post of Director of the Australian Institute of Family Studies in June 1994.

Harry went to the Institute with an international reputation for his research into family matters. He brought to the role of Director an abiding commitment to social justice issues, especially those involving children, and a wealth of experience and worldwide contacts. He had enormous energy, vitality and dedication. As the Federal Minister for Family Services, Mr Warwick Smith, said, 'Dr McGurk's dedication and expertise significantly raised the level of public debate about issues relevant to Australian families. The research undertaken by the Institute during his directorship helped to inform policy makers and the community alike.'

During his years at the Institute, Harry devoted time and energy to research and projects that he believed were important for the wellbeing of Australia's children and



families. One of these was the Parenting-21 study, the Australian component of an international collaborative research project investigating cultural differences in parenting practices. As part of this research, Harry was particularly involved in working with the University of Queensland, Cairns, and with Torres Strait Islander families. Other projects with which he was closely associated were the Looking After Children Project; Modelling the Costs of Child Neglect and Abuse, with the South Australian Office for Families; several child protection evaluations for the Victorian Department

of Human Services; and the National Youth Suicide Prevention Strategy Communications Project. He was a member of a national consortium that is proposing to conduct a feasibility study for longitudinal research on the outcomes of child care for children. His participation and expertise in all these endeavours will be hugely missed.

Harry was a member of many international organisations, including the Board of Directors of the International Family Policy Forum, the Society for Research in Child Development, and the British Psychological Society. Since 1996 he was President of the International Society for the Study of Behavioural Development, and for some years was the editor of the *International Journal of Behavioural Development*.

Over the years, Harry developed a passion for cycling, and enjoyed some wonderful cycling holidays in England and Scotland. After his move to Australia, he continued to pursue this passion, along with his other interests, the latest being table tennis. It was during his regular lunchtime games at the Institute that the staff there were able to enjoy fully his bracing humour and challenging wit. And it was here that they learned more about Harry the man, rather than Harry the Director, as he shared his knowledge of music and opera, his fondness for cooking and good (vegetarian!) food, and his experiences in the many countries he visited. He talked often of his love of Scotland and particularly the island of Iona.

A Meeting for Worship was held to give thanks for Harry's life at the Quaker Meeting House in Toorak on 22 April 1998. Deepest sympathy is extended to Harry's daughter, Rhona, and to his partner, Anne, and her sons, Daniel and Eric. He will be sadly missed. □

This obituary is based on the obituary written by Narda Sowter, AIFS, in *Family Matters* (Autumn 1998, Issue No. 49). With thanks to the Australian Institute of Family Studies for their cooperation.