

A Testimony to the Motion of the Spirit in the life of Vince Buscemi
Memorial Minute, Morningside Monthly Meeting, New York, New York,

June 4, 2017

A longtime and beloved member of Morningside Monthly Meeting, Vincent Paul “Vince” Buscemi died March 11, 2017.

Born on May 18, 1927 in Brooklyn, New York of Rosa Giacconi and Santos Buscemi, both emigrants from Sicily, Vince was part of a large extended family which included two brothers and a sister.

Growing up in a very integrated neighborhood in Brooklyn, he early learned the value of diversity, which would define his future life and ministry. Gifted with a technical and mathematical mind, he graduated from Brooklyn Tech High School, although further education was delayed by WWII and his service in the U.S. Navy. He attended Pratt University on the GI Bill, graduating with a Bachelor’s in Mechanical Engineering. Continuing his education, he received an MA in Engineering Management from Drexel University. His engineering and management education led to employment in a number of concerns in Pittsburgh and New York City, including Westinghouse (where he recorded two patents), Con Edison in New York, and Gibson Consultants.

He met his future wife, Ernestine “Ernie” Gillespie in Pittsburgh, where they joined the Community of Reconciliation that formed after Martin Luther King Jr.’s death, and that invited all denominations to gather, conducting meetings in homes. Upon moving to New York City, Vince became a convinced Friend and a member of 15th Street Monthly Meeting. A spiritually and socially committed Friend, he took early retirement in order to do God’s work, which would include a lifetime witness against war and racism. Like all things that Vince did, he gave his whole self to the Society of Friends and its historic witness for peace. Soon after retirement, he witnessed as a member of the 500 person International Peace March in Guatemala to stop the fighting by walking across Central America in the midst of continual armed conflict. Immediately upon returning to the U.S., he participated in the Sanctuary Movement at Riverside Church, sleeping outside the room housing a refugee in order to prevent the FBI from entering.

Vince described his Guatemala witness as a “journey of the heart” in a *Friends Journal* article that he wrote while he was a Resident Student at Pendle Hill, where he had gone to better discern what it was he was supposed to do. This residency began a life-long connection with and love for Pendle Hill, which he served as a member of both the General and Executive Boards, and later, with his wife Ernie, as a Friend in Residence.

Vince served as a member of FGC’s Central Committee, and chaired the Ad Hoc Committee on Racism that became the Committee for Ministry on Racism (CMR). He developed a workshop around the issue of racism that aided FGC and yearly meetings in their self-analyses of institutional racism. He and his wife Ernie led workshops in Baltimore, New England, Northern and New York Yearly Meetings, all of which subsequently developed committees to address issues of racism. The culmination of these workshops was a book that Vince and Ernie wrote together, the title of which may best express Vince’s life: *Here I am Lord*.

In addition to his work with FGC, Vince was an active presence in New York Yearly Meeting, where he facilitated anti-racism workshops and was a member of the Committee for Ministry on Racism. His was an important and early voice at NYYM in the development of the Sharing Fund, and on Yearly Meeting Ministry & Counsel in its focus on the creation of Spiritual Nurturance Groups.

Vince and Ernie transferred their memberships to Morningside Monthly Meeting, where he became a member and clerk of many committees, most importantly Ministry & Counsel—where he was able to share his many spiritual gifts. His energy helped to reactivate a dormant Peace & Social Concerns Committee, which became the foundation of his social ministry. For Vince, spiritual and social concerns were inseparable. In his everyday walk, he showed how silence and prayer open the way to social action and how social action deepens silence and prayer. This was most obvious when he went out of his way to make sure that others were welcomed. He was always aware of the stranger who was not listened to or not welcomed into the meeting. Vince engaged the outsider with full attention and respect through caring, humor, works of mercy and the sheer joy that he received from knowing new and different people. One of the reasons that Vince came to Morningside was his early belief that all loving couples should have the right to marry. He continued his commitment to the LGBTQ community, marching in the Gay Pride Parade every year.

A deeply spiritual person, he often led the Meeting in walking meditations that he learned from Thich Nhat Hanh. The honesty of his spirituality was solid, tender and raw, and he invited everyone into that same space, a space that demanded that love and truth always be present together. He often quoted Muriel Bishop that “truth without love is violence and love without truth is sentimentality.”

For Vince, testimony meant putting his body forward, whether before bullets in war-torn Guatemala, as a shield for a refugee, or as a witness against nuclear weapons (for which he was imprisoned in both Brooklyn and Washington, DC). He physically witnessed against war every week, silently standing at the Arch in Washington Square. He walked from New Jersey to New York with Buddhists and met with aides to Gov. Mario Cuomo to discuss closing the Staten Island Navy base. Because he spoke his truth in his actions, he helped others speak theirs. His presence was felt within and without the Quaker community, volunteering not only at the homeless shelter at 15th Street Meeting, but also at the Catholic Worker, where he was in charge not only of insuring that the soup was ready, but also that the physical plant was in shape. Although small in stature, he could be called upon to straighten out any agitation that might arise.

Vince loved hiking (he hiked the Appalachian trail from Georgia to New York); he loved camping, traveling and dancing; he loved family and strangers; and he loved and trusted the Spirit. His life was rich and he enriched the lives of others around him. His wisdom, his inclusive and welcoming nature and his intense dedication to social justice will long be remembered by Morningside and the larger Quaker community.

Vince is survived by his wife, Ernie, his sister Marie Verdolino, 5 children, 11 grandchildren, and much love.