**Ken Jones 1930-2015**

Ken remembered sitting with his father watching Liverpool docks burning in the blitz, “as shrapnel banged off our bin lid”. He was brought up by a neurotic, socially ambitious mother and a humane, liberal father in a middle class family. As a teenager he joined the Communist Party. Looking back on those days, he told me, he was genuinely motivated to help suffering humanity, but driven by a “needy self” which at the time he did not at all understand. Ken went through National Service in the artillery, and a University course he never finished, but had a successful career in the British Communist Party, rising to counter-intelligence chief, sniffing out spies. His professional career eventually got back on track through study as a mature student and he started teaching in higher education.

But Ken was independent minded, not to say a fully paid up member of the awkward squad, and his disputatious ways led to expulsion from the Communist Party (branded a “police spy”!). He turned to Buddhism. He wanted to understand the suffering of humanity on the individual level, neglected by Communism, and combine it with social suffering over the ages, which he called, “great historical mass delusion,” neglected by Buddhism, and he set himself the task of theorising a socially engaged form of Buddhism. His major work, *The Social Face of Buddhism* (1989) was the fruit of this labour. It was an important new approach to make political activists more aware of the contamination of “the needy self” in their motivation, and to make Buddhists more aware of the social dimension of their responsibilities to their vows. Venerable Myokyo-ni of the London Buddhist Centre objected strongly to the sociologising of Buddhism, however, and Ken left the Buddhist Society rather as he had left the Communist Party, feeling rejected and badly wounded. Ken saw the middle part of his life as the low point of the curve of his graph. Things picked up when he had married Noragh, found two new supportive sanghas and made friends with John Crook, founder of the Western Chan Fellowship. He was much happier in old age than in middle age.

As an argumentative contrarian, Ken threw himself into developing an eccentric form of Buddhism reflecting his own interests, which promoted “emotional awareness in the body” and “social engagement.” He pooh-poohed the principles of mainstream Zen: the primacy of zazen, koan study, the goal of enlightenment, the authority of the transmission. Luckily, his friend John Crook was tolerant and allowed him to lead some retreats.

When Ken joined the haiku community he likewise leaped into theoretical debates and became an opinionated essayist. He argued that *haibun* should be written in “haiku-like prose” and condemned the modest, observational *shasei* haiku he thought all too common in British writing. But he proved to be a wonderful poet. Haiku and *haibun* gave him scope for expressing a gently humourous side to his character, with depth and resonance. His *haibun* and haiku are humane, witty, ironic and deploy a brilliant range of unusual concrete imagery. I suggest you set aside the theorising, and read the poetry. His *haibun* collections are a remarkable contribution to our literature.

Ken Jones, though disputatious, was not bitter. He was generous in argument and infallibly convivial, tolerant and good humoured. He was always stimulating company, often because he could not resist smashing your most cherished nostrums, upsetting all received ideas, and offering you something weird out of left field. We shall miss him.

George Marsh

*The new book,*Beyond Mindfulness: Living a Life Through Everyday Zen - Talks & Writings,  *Alba Publishing, £10 (incl P&P in UK; + P&P overseas), is available from: Alba Publishing, P O Box 266, Uxbridge UB9 5NX (cheques made out to Alba Publishing). Ken’s ‘Everyday Zen’ is also articulated in his website*[www.kenjoneszen.com](http://www.kenjoneszen.com/)

*Ken’s publisher at Alba has also announced that a new collection of Ken’s haibun, the ones themed on his developing illness and facing up to death, will be published this autumn. It will be titled* Gone Away*.*