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The Inklings Remembered: A Conversation with Colin Havard

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Abstract

In late 2011, the authors met with Colin Havard, son of Inkling Dr. Robert E. "Humphrey" Havard and recorded his reminiscences about his father, his Catholic faith, his friendships with J.R.R. Tolkien and the Lewis brothers in particular, and the Inklings and practicing medicine in Oxford in general. As the lone Inkling from a scientific background, he brought a unique perspective to the group's discussions.

Additional Keywords

Havard, Colin; Havard, Robert E.; Inklings; Lewis, C.S.— Friends and associates—R.E. Havard; Lewis, Warren—Friends and associates—R.E. Havard; Tolkien, J.R.R.—Friends and associates—R.E. Havard



THE INKLINGS REMEMBERED:
A CONVERSATION WITH COLIN HAVARD

JUSTIN T. NOETZEL
AND MATTHEW R. BARDOWELL

DURING THE FALL 2011 SEMESTER, OXFORD NATIVE and current resident of St. Louis Colin Havard visited the campus of St. Louis University. Colin is the son of Dr. Robert E. “Humphrey” Havard, who was the personal physician of C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien and a member of the Inklings. Colin joined English Instructors and hosts Justin T. Noetzel and Matthew R. Bardowell, as well as a hundred guests, for a “pub talk,” an informal discussion and storytelling session that was co-organized by Thomas Rowland and the Woode-walkers Medieval Studies Group and sponsored by the English Department and the Center for Medieval and Renaissance Studies at St. Louis University. Over a few cold pints of Guinness, Havard discussed his childhood in Oxford, his memories of the Inklings and their social gatherings, and his father’s personal interactions with the Lewises, Tolkien, and others. While Colin realized at a young age that his father had literary celebrities as patients, Dr. Havard simply saw these men as his friends and did not realize how famous Lewis and Tolkien in particular would become. Both authors mention Dr. Havard extensively in their letters, and Lewis often divided the Inklings along religious lines and differentiated Havard and Tolkien as the Catholics of the group. Both Lewis and Tolkien recognized Dr. Havard’s astute medical knowledge, but more tellingly, they commented on his devout faith, his skill in caring for people, and his role as a close friend.

JTN: Colin, would you please to introduce yourself the St. Louis University community?

CH: I grew up in Oxford and came to the United States in 1964 and have lived here ever since—thirty of those years being here in St. Louis and fifteen in New York. I’ve had a very varied existence—I went to college in Oxford, when I first came to St. Louis I was a teacher at the St. Louis Priory School, and when I went to New York I switched careers and became a computer consultant in my middle years. And I am now, I’m thankful to say, retired. What I’m going to be talking about today is memories of my adolescence when I was a young man, and that’s over fifty years ago, and in a way it’s a study in memory—what do I remember,

and how much of what I remember is something that I have created for myself, and how much is really there.

MRB: Colin, your father Robert Havard was a physician at Oxford, and I'm wondering if you can tell us a little bit about how he came to take that position at that place at that time?

CH: Going back before my birth, in the early nineteen twenties, my father was the son of a Church of England priest. He obtained a scholarship to Oxford and studied Chemistry and then went to his father and said, "I'd like to go on and become a physician." And his father said, "Well, that's a very nice idea, but I have no more money, and there's no way that we can do this." And so my father, in a way that would be totally impossible today, in England or anywhere else, figured out a way to get what he wanted. He went to a medical school in London and said to them, "You are looking for a biochemistry teacher, and I obtained a first class degree in biochemistry from Oxford. I am prepared to teach biochemistry in your school if you will teach me medicine." And so he in fact did an exchange, and he obtained his first medical degree from Guy's Hospital in London. And then, just to make things a little more complicated, he went back to Oxford and said, "I understand that you normally require doctoral students to attend the university as well as prepare their dissertation, but I would like to apply for a doctorate and I'd like you to accept my dissertation on its own." The university authorities agreed, and ultimately, when his dissertation was finished, he received an Oxford doctorate. Now, that's simplifying things a lot, because at various points he also studied at Cambridge. At any rate, he was then an academic, a biochemical physician teaching in a university in Leeds, and after all that effort, decided that he did not like academic medicine. He wanted to be someone who dealt with people, and by this time he was married and had one son, my older brother, and he came back to Oxford and found a practice where the physician had died, so he obtained from his widow this practice, and started practicing internal medicine in St. Giles in Oxford.

JTN: And I believe that is where your father first met C.S. Lewis?

CH: That is correct. My father made house visits back in the 1930s, and one of the telephone calls he got was from a certain Mr. Lewis who had been a patient of his predecessor, and he said he was feeling very bad, had sweats, and was aching, and he asked if the doctor could come and visit him. So my father went to his house and he found that C.S. Lewis had the flu. And as he talks about it later, he said, "For five minutes we talked about the flu, and then for the next hour, we

talked about philosophy and found that we had a lot of interests in common.” And so that’s how they first got to know each other.

MRB: Can you tell us just a little about who the Inklings were as a group and then how your father came to be a member of that group?

CH: The Inklings really were, not an organization, but a non-organization. The Inklings worked out to be the friends of C.S. Lewis, and then to a certain extent, the friends of the friends of C.S. Lewis. They were a group of people that started out with C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien and another academic, Owen Barfield, who enjoyed getting together, enjoyed writing, and would read to each other what they were writing. And they, in turn, invited other people. So, my father somewhat later was asked to come too. Now he was a writer, but his writing was all scientific, and I’m told that it’s still all there on the internet if you want to read about the biochemistry of blood, and it was published in *The Lancet*.¹ But he didn’t read this to the group—he was something of an amateur poet, so he would read that. But basically, he wasn’t one of the big writers of the group, but he was alone among all the people in this group a scientist, and so he gave a different perspective to these people who were all English scholars, history scholars, and philosophers. To have a scientist there gave a different perspective.

*JTN: Since your father did come from such a different background, I wonder what he actually thought of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*?*

CH: When I was really quite young, among the first books we had was *The Hobbit*, which was published in I think 1937. This was way before I could read, so I must have been read *The Hobbit*. And it was one of our favorite books, and we were always asking our father when his friend was going to come out with more about *The Hobbit*. My father listened to *The Lord of the Rings*—it was read by Tolkien to the group as he wrote it, and he would get stuck, and it was several months before he could get back and work out where the story was going. He read it to the group, and most of them, including my father, really liked it, but there was one person, Hugo Dyson, who objected strongly to “all those blasted orcs!”² And after a while, other people said that they found it hard to understand his reading because Tolkien had a rather muttering voice and didn’t read very well. So he had his son Christopher who was some ten or twelve years older than me whom he would invite to the Inklings and who would read the story. I

¹ Dr. Havard published seven articles in the famous medical journal *The Lancet* between 1944 and 1946.

² In other sources, this exclamation is given (along less printable lines) in reference to elves; see Wilson 217 and White 152.

unfortunately never had the opportunity to hear this, but whenever we met Tolkien, we as children would say, "When is it coming? When is the next *Hobbit* coming?" And he said, "It's coming, it's coming, but don't rush me!"

MRB: One of the most fascinating things about your stories is hearing about the relationships between the different people in the group, and perhaps your father more than anyone would acquire nicknames that would stick with him. I wonder if you could tell us about his nicknames?

CH: Well, it is true. My father had more nicknames than anyone else in the Inklings. Hugo Dyson forgot his name, Havard, and they called each other very often by their last names, so he said, "Whatever your name is—Humphrey!" And he called him Humphrey, and from then on everybody in the group referred to my father as Humphrey, although there's no particular reason for that! There was another occasion when he had promised to meet C.S. Lewis and his brother and give them a ride in his car, because he, almost alone among the Inklings, actually drove a car. But something came up, a patient got sick or something, and he didn't turn up. So, C.S. Lewis's brother Warren was very indignant about this and he created the name "The Useless Quack." And from then on he was either known as "The Useless Quack," or for short, "U.Q." And then the final name he got was because during the Second World War he joined the British Navy and was a medical officer on a British ship. And as sailors often do, he grew a beard to save himself the trouble of shaving. Well, as a young man in his twenties, his hair went snow-white, so he had a big (unlike me!) head of hair that was snow-white. But when he grew a beard, this beard was the color of his hair when he was a very young man, which was red. So he turned up with this red beard and got the name added to his other ones, "The Red Admiral," because he also turned up to some of these meetings wearing his naval uniform.

JTN: One of the things that strikes someone who is researching your father is the fact that in Tolkien's letters he refers to the uniforms that your father, the "U.Q.," wore, and I think he very much approved of that look. And Lewis described the Inklings meeting in a letter from 1941 by rhetorically asking: "Is any pleasure on earth as great as a circle of Christian friends by a good fire?" (Collected Letters II 501). In addition to your father driving some of the members around Oxford, what other memories do you have of the activities that the group did together?

CH: There were two main periods for the Inklings, who were founded in the mid thirties. I'm not sure exactly when my father joined, but certainly by the time the Second World War started. In those early days they would meet in C.S. Lewis's rooms in Magdalen College in Oxford, and they would sit down, have drinks,

and read what they had written. And it was very much a private group. They then after a while took to meeting a second time each week which was around Tuesday lunch time. And there they met in a pub in the center of Oxford, which was very convenient for my father because it was about three doors from his office, and it was called the Eagle and Child, which they immediately renamed the Bird and Baby. But there in the backroom they would get together and sit and talk, but they didn't read to each other. My only firsthand experience of the Inklings really was at those meetings. Other times they would go to different pubs, and on the weekends sometimes they would go out of Oxford to a country pub somewhere, and on those occasions my father was very valuable because he had the car.

MRB: Speaking of Tolkien's letters, there is one in particular that shows Tolkien's admiration for your father as a physician, and I'll read this quote to you: "Most doctors are either fools or mere 'doctors', tinkers with machinery. Harvard at any rate is a Catholic who thinks of people as people, not as a collection of 'works'" (Carpenter, Inklings 130). I was wondering if you could tell us how your father came by that reputation.

CH: The particular case or context of that usage was that Tolkien was feeling very depressed and had no energy. And he was a very devout Catholic, but he felt so down that he didn't even get himself to church that week. And so he decided he would call his doctor, my father, who turned up and inspected him and examined him. On this occasion my father said, "I think what you would be best to do would be to go to your church and find the priest and go to confession. I think you're going to find that'll help you." And so on that occasion that did help, and Tolkien really appreciated it. But there were other occasions when my father took exactly the opposite line. As a Catholic doctor in Oxford, there were a lot of religious houses, convents and things, and he found considerable difficulty sometimes, especially with nuns! And we are talking about an older Catholic Church, and those nuns, if a doctor would say to them, "You have got to take it easy, you should spend a couple of days in bed," they looked upon that as an insult, encouraging them not to observe their vows as completely as they thought they should. So my father learnt the right wording for those people, which was you have to preface whatever you say to a nun if you're going to tell her to take it easy by saying, "I am telling you this in virtue of holy obedience!" And so he took each case according to the situation as he read it. And I think he was a sensitive person, and I think he had a good sense of psychology as well as of *pure physical medicine*.

MRB: To follow up, there seems to be a tendency in modern culture to create an opposition between the humanities and the sciences, and obviously, the members of the Inklings were in the Humanities and your father was a scientist. And I'm wondering about that blend, if they saw that one could benefit from the other and vice versa.

CH: I know that my father, because he was a scientist, at times rather made fun of the other Inklings. For instance, both Tolkien and C.S. Lewis hated the automobile. They felt that it created a terrible smell and it crowded the streets, and they looked back to the good old days when everyone went around in a horse and cart when they were young. And so they hated the automobile! My father said he could appreciate their desire for the good old days, but at the same time, he wondered why it was so necessary for them to call on him whenever they needed to go somewhere—to drop whatever he was doing and take his car along! So, he teased them to a certain extent on their not being entirely logical, shall we say. I never heard him talking a lot about this matter. He was a big reader himself, and he admired a great deal the literary scholarship of Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. On the other hand, he felt that he was aware of other things in life. C.S. Lewis, for instance, wrote a number of science fiction books, and he consulted my father about the science that he was putting into them (not that they are particularly scientific, but they involve traveling to other planets). And so he sort of sent various ideas that he had past my father.

JTN: One of the discussions that Matthew and I have in our Oxford Christian Writers courses is that Lewis's space trilogy in particular thinks about the idea of progress. We specifically focus on Lewis's character Weston, who is a scientist who is committed to furthering humankind no matter what the consequences are to the inhabitants of foreign planets. And so I wonder what the Inklings and maybe even your father thought of this idea of progress and how it was perhaps connected to science.

CH: I'm slightly reaching here because I didn't hear my father talk about this specifically, but the sense of it I had is that both Tolkien and C.S. Lewis were suspicious of the idea of progress, the idea that the world would get better if we could have bigger roads, faster trains, and drive faster. On the other hand, my father would challenge them when they fulminated against some of the features of modern life and say, "If you were living in 1910 and you got an infection, there's nothing I could do for you, whereas now we have penicillin and we have these various advances in medicine which are going on all the time. Are you really saying that you wish they were not?" I don't think either side particularly ended up saying, "All right, you win," but it formed a topic of conversation, and my father was much more ready to say "Yes, but!" when they talked about the glories of merry old England.

MRB: C.S. Lewis wrote to his brother in 1940 that the group had “a furious argument about cremation” (Collected Letters II 358), and you mentioned before that you actually attended some Inklings meetings. I was wondering if you could set the stage for us and tell us where those meetings took place and if you took part in any such discussions.

CH: I was a sixteen or seventeen year-old schoolboy and my father asked me if I'd like to come to some of these meetings. And with some trepidation I went, because I had the sense that these were very intelligent people and I was very young. So at any rate, I met him at the Bird and Baby and we went in, and the first thing I remember is that at sixteen or seventeen he handed me a large glass of beer. And he didn't particularly avert the fact that I had not drunken beer before that, and what I tried sipping quietly on the side I found I didn't like it! So I sat in my corner of the room with this big glass of beer trying to look as grownup as I could with, as it happened, a palm tree next to me, and I would quietly empty this beer so it would appear to slowly go down because I didn't like it. And I'd listen to these people talk and observe, and ultimately the Inklings were very welcoming, but they were friends and so they spent most of the time talking to each other. The one Inkling who was the most welcoming of all was C.S. Lewis's brother, who was Warren or Warnie Lewis, who had not gone to the university but had been in the British army, and reading since, I have discovered, was an alcoholic, but I didn't know that at the time. But he just paid attention to me as somebody who must be feeling a little out of his depth and was friendly and asked questions about me. So the others were not standoffish but were not as warm, so I have always had this very warm feeling for Warnie Lewis.

I don't remember a lot of what was talked about. They would get into these discussions about ethics, they get into discussions about religion, they get into discussions about current events. I don't remember anything very much, except for one occasion when we arrived and I was sitting there and Tolkien was there, but C.S. Lewis had not turned up. And Lewis came walking in and he had a rather loud, commanding voice, and he said, “Will anyone here tell me what's so bad about suicide?” Well, these were a group of people who were all supposedly good Christian people, and I as a well-brought-up young Catholic boy was really horrified at this heretical idea, and he got going on the subject of suicide—suicide in ancient history, suicide as the noble thing to do, the man who was on the expedition to the Antarctic who walked away from the tent because he was holding everyone back. And he produces as strong an argument as he could for saying there's nothing wrong with suicide. Well in the meantime Tolkien, who was a very orthodox Catholic, was fluttering in his corner, and they got into this discussion and what was a sort of intellectual argument in which Tolkien and the others were trying to shoot down Lewis's arguments. And sitting as I was, just sort of observing and not taking part, it dawned on me

increasingly that this really was like a game. Lewis didn't particularly believe that there was nothing wrong with suicide, but he really liked to have a discussion which got heated and involved a lot of argument. So, I happened to sit in on one of those occasions when he was what they call in England "taking the Mickey out of" Tolkien in particular.

JTN: Colin, you told us about how Lewis often wore drab clothing and was less concerned with his physical appearance, while the quieter Tolkien was a sharp dresser and liked to wear bright hobbit-like waistcoats. Can you also share the story about your father's experiences going on walks with Tolkien and Lewis as another window into their respective personalities?

CH: Different groups among the Inklings enjoyed going on walks in the countryside, and my father walked sometimes with the two Lewis brothers and with Tolkien and some of the others. But, the two that could not go for a walk together were Tolkien and C.S. Lewis—they could not do it! And the reason was that Lewis had a plan when he went for a walk. England is, it has these public footpaths and you can walk long distances through private property. A public footpath is sacred, it's community owned, and a farmer cannot plow it and forbid people to cross their land. From time immemorial, this is a right of way. So anyway, there were these walks that went for quite some distances, and Lewis liked to plan where they were going to have lunch and where they were going to stop for the night—this was like a walking vacation. And, it involved keeping up a fairly steady pace, and then they would stop and take a rest. Well the problem about Tolkien was he, as he walked, was looking around all the time, and every time he noticed something that interested him, and it might be a rock with a fossil in it or an interesting looking plant, he would examine this plant and he would look all around to see if there was anything like it, so that Lewis's plan and the pub for lunch got completely thrown off. So after about two or three times trying to go for walks together, they agreed it just didn't work, and they didn't often take walks together!

MRB: Colin Duriez wrote that your father once recognized Lewis as the center of the Inklings (118), and Nathan Comfort Starr called Lewis the animating element in the group (quoted in Como 222-23). I wonder if these claims matched your impressions of him as well.

CH: I don't think the Inklings would have existed without Lewis. Lewis was a joiner and attracted people to him. He was a very big man, he looked rather like a farmer, and he was a very sociable person. He engaged people in conversation and he could make friends with people (and sometimes enemies). So when the

Inklings developed, rather than were founded, most of the people were people he chose, that he liked to meet with and have conversations with. So he invited Tolkien rather than Tolkien inviting him. Now that didn't mean that some of the others including Tolkien didn't invite friends of theirs to come, and if you read the diary of C.S. Lewis's brother, sometimes he can get quite indignant because someone in the group invites a visiting person who he, Warren Lewis, didn't feel fitted in. So the group had in common a friendship with C.S. Lewis for the most part, and if you were going to diagram it you would have C.S. Lewis in the middle and the others connected to him, as a rule.

JTN: Some biographers of the Inklings, most notably Humphrey Carpenter (120-22), have talked about how the relationship between Tolkien and Charles Williams was a bit strained, and how that may have affected Tolkien and Lewis's own relationship. And your father has written about how he couldn't understand Williams's writing, but the author loved to laugh. Did you have any impression of Williams as an Inkling, or did your father ever remark on his relationship with the group?

CH: Charles Williams died when I was perhaps eight years old, so I never met him and never saw him, so anything I know about Charles Williams I know because of what I've read. Charles Williams was sort of a rococo-type writer, he wrote very differently from either Tolkien or C.S. Lewis, and I don't know if gothic is the right word, but at any rate he was a very different writer. C.S. Lewis really liked his writing and really liked him, and thought that here was a great author, and he came to Oxford because of World War II. He was employed by the Oxford University Press, which actually had its headquarters in London, but the University Press moved its offices to Oxford because of the bombing in the Second World War, and Charles Williams came with them. And he was working as an editor for the University Press and at the same time doing his own writing. From what I've read, Williams read one of Lewis's works at the same time that Lewis read one of Charles Williams's and they each wrote a letter to the other saying how much they enjoyed it. So they got together, and Lewis really did a lot for Charles Williams, who didn't have a college degree. Lewis managed to get him lecturing rights at Oxford, because Williams was very knowledgeable on Milton and so he gave a series of lectures on Milton. He died rather unexpectedly in the later years of World War II.

At any rate, Tolkien didn't see the same qualities that Lewis did, and so from the time when Williams was invited into the Inklings, Tolkien was somewhat upset. The Inklings started off right at the beginning with a really deep friendship and admiration between Tolkien and Lewis, and Charles Williams came in a bit like a cuckoo into the nest. And so I think it's plausible to suggest that Tolkien really felt that he had lost a friend or had lost the strength of

friendship that he had had with Lewis when Williams came into the picture. Tolkien himself, and I'm quoting from things I've read since, said that the Charles Williams (and the later marriage between C.S. Lewis and Joy Davidman in a civil ceremony) really shocked Tolkien. So somewhere between 1944 and 1949 there was a certain estrangement, but they still carried on getting together. C.S. Lewis really encouraged Tolkien to finish *The Lord of the Rings*, which he found very difficult to do, but the closeness of their friendship was never quite the same from the arrival of Charles Williams.

MRB: You were talking just a bit there about the war, and I'm wondering what memories you have of it, or of your father around that time.

CH: One of my earliest memories as a child was that my father, as a physician, needed guinea pigs because he trained the first responders. If there was to be an air raid, there were non-medical people who trained to provide first aid and they needed to have practice in doing this, and they needed a doctor to teach them what to do. So among the people my father found to be guinea pigs were his own children. At the age of about five I remember being bandaged up by some lady, and she first of all said, "Well, where does it hurt?" And I said, "It hurts in my tummy." So she wrapped bandages around me. My brother was lying next to me, writhing in agony, and he was fully two years older, and said his leg felt very bad. And he had much better luck—he got a splint and all sorts of more interesting things. So that was my earliest memory. I remember lying in bed, and if you listened you could hear the planes flying over, and if you knew what you were listening for, single-engine planes sound one way and planes with two engines or more sound different. Well, someone had told us that if you listen for one engine you knew it was not a British plane, that it was a German plane. So I do remember lying in bed and hearing planes flying over. But the Germans did not in fact bomb Oxford, and so I didn't go through the suffering in London of watching buildings being destroyed around me.

I think the main sort of memory of it is as sort of a "gray period." England is separated by the Atlantic from the United States, and the whole of the rest of Europe was occupied by the Germans, and so the food that we had was sufficient but very, very boring. All the things that you take for granted, like grapes or bananas or oranges, they don't grow in England, it's too far north. So the ships that were coming across the Atlantic were bringing things that mattered for the war effort, and in the meantime we lived in this under-heated house, and in fact we had no central heating in our house, so we had open fires. And the stores could not be lighted in the regular way because everything had to be blacked out for the German planes, so it was a blackout. Life was very gray and I didn't particularly know at the time, but looking back, I realize that my parents

were very preoccupied by that reality. When I was five or six years old, my mother took me aside and said, "I want to tell you what to do if you are in the street and you can't find either your father or me. And this is what you're going to do." And it was finding a policeman and all that. And a bit later I said to myself, "I'm never walking around the streets without my mother and father. I was in my own yard, or if I went anywhere, I was with some adult." What did she mean if I couldn't find anyone? Well, what she was obviously preparing me for was if there was a bomb dropped, and my parents got killed, what would I do? And so she was trying (without explicitly telling me) to tell me what to do if I couldn't find my parents.

*JTN: Speaking of your family, to continue along that line, I was wondering what you or your father thought about the appearances that your family made in the writing of the Inklings, specifically your father's appearance in Lewis's space novel *Perelandra* and your sister's dedication in *Prince Caspian*?*

CH: Well let's start with the second one first. Starting in 1944 I went to a boarding school, a sleep-away school, my sister did not, and Lewis came up with this plan somewhere around 1950, for writing his Narnia stories, his stories about children. Well this was before he really met Joy Davidman, and he knew and remembered very well the sort of children's stories that he liked when he was young. So he wanted to write stories that he would have liked when he was that age. But at the same time, he wanted to have somebody to check out if he was on the right lines, so among the people he asked to read his manuscript was my sister, and she read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and *The Voyage of the "Dawn Treader,"* and she then wrote, as an eleven-year-old, a book report or review for Lewis on how the story came across to her. And he made some changes and he really valued having somebody of her age. And I can't think of any of his other friends who had children of that sort of age, so anyway, one of the Narnia books is dedicated to my sister—if you look at *Prince Caspian*, it is dedicated to Mary Clare Havard. So that's how it happened.

There's an unpublished book by Tolkien called "The Notion Club Papers" which has a red-bearded character called Rupert Dolbear in it which may or may not be based on my father.³ In the last four or five years there's been a discussion going on, my older brother's been contacted by some scholar who's found this unpublished manuscript of Tolkien's saying, "Is this your father?"

³ "The Notion Club Papers" can be found in *Sauron Defeated*, the ninth volume of *The History of Middle-earth*, edited by Tolkien's son Christopher Tolkien. The time-travel story focuses on the Notion Club, an Oxford discussion group loosely based on Tolkien and the Inklings.

And my brother would send me pieces and say, you know, "What do you think?" And we agree basically that there were parts of it that sounded like my father and parts of it that were nothing like my father. And ultimately, the man who wrote this learned article said just that! But Lewis involved my father more. He wrote a book early in the Second World War called *The Problem of Pain*, which is a religious book on how a good God can permit there to be pain. How does that please God that there should be pain? And he wrote this whole book on pain and he asked my father to write an appendix to this which was just really pain from the point of view of the physician. And so, if you go to *The Problem of Pain* you will find this two or three page appendix in which my father describes pain as seen by a physician. And finally, there is this science fiction book. The plot of the book needs for there to be a doctor because someone's coming back from space travel and no one knows what sort of state he's going to be in, so they have to have a doctor, and the name chosen by C.S. Lewis is that name Humphrey which was given to my father. I don't think there's much more to it than that!

MRB: So you've already talked a little bit about Lewis's marriage. Can you say more on that?

CH: Joy Davidman was a Jewish lady who was married and lived in New York. For a long period of time she was a communist, and she was an agnostic, but at some point she was introduced to the writing of C.S. Lewis, and she was very much attracted by his writing and his views on religion. And she corresponded with him and said that she was planning a trip to England and asked if they could meet, and so she came to Oxford and met with him. Well, at the same time her marriage was breaking up, so she had two sons, and after two more visits, she decided to stay in England. So she rented a house in the part of Oxford where we lived, and Lewis was friendly with her, but if you had asked him at the time, he would've said he thought she had a good mind and he liked having discussions with her. Then there was something of a crisis. Her visa ran out and it was necessary for her to go. The British authorities said "You can't stay here any longer," and she had this in her history, she had been a communist, and if she went back, she would find herself in trouble with the McCarthy investigations. So she talked to Lewis and said, "I don't know what to do with this. I really and desperately want to stay here, I don't want to go back to the United States, at the moment things are really very uncomfortable there." And Lewis came up with this idea: he said "We could go through the motions of getting married before a Justice of the Peace. I'm a Christian, I'm an Anglican, so I don't think that's a marriage, so we could do that, and as long as you understand that's what I'm doing. I'm doing this as a charitable way of solving your problem." He talked it over with my father, and although my father was a

pretty orthodox Catholic, he felt that this argument was fine with him, because this was just an arrangement. Lewis did not talk about it to Tolkien because he was sure (and I think rightly sure) that Tolkien was much more strictly orthodox Catholic than my father, and would have said, "Marrying not in front of a priest in whatever form is always wrong." And Tolkien would have been very shocked. So they went ahead. On one afternoon in Oxford they went to the registry office, and my father and Lewis's brother were there as witnesses, with Joy Davidman and Lewis. And they went through a ten-minute ceremony in front of the registrar and they walked out, and Lewis turned round and said, "Well, I've got a lecture to give, so I'll be off!" And he took off, and so there's my father and the new bride, and Warren Lewis said, "There's a pub just across the street," so they all went across the street and had a celebration of this wedding.

What ended up happening was that Joy Davidman got breast cancer which had metastasized before they found it, and she was considered to be dying, and Lewis recognized what he had not recognized before, that he had feelings for her that were considerably more than an interesting mind. And there is a movie called *Shadowlands*, which is based on a play, on these events.⁴ Lewis decided he wanted to get properly married in front of an Anglican priest, but the bishop of Oxford said, "No you can't do that, because she is divorced, and you can't remarry." And Lewis said, "Well, her first marriage was to a man who was already divorced, so it wasn't really a wedding." And the bishop said, "I don't care! You can't do it, and you're too famous a Christian to do this!" Well, ultimately they found a priest from another diocese who was prepared to go to the hospital room and they were married there. My father was no part of that wedding.

Audience Question: You mention that your father was Catholic, but your Grandfather was an Anglican, so I was curious as to how that came about, and whether it gave your father any different perspective on his faith.

CH: My father had not the easiest of relationships with his father. My grandfather had been a farmer, and he became a policeman, and then later in life he found that he had the calling to be an Anglican priest. There was something about the policeman in his style of Christianity, and my father found him very judgmental, and they butted heads a good deal. So my father, in getting his scholarship to the university, was to a considerable extent breaking with his father. My father later was talking to me in his old age, and I said, "When you became a Catholic, did you become a Catholic really because you examined all

⁴ The 1993 film *Shadowlands* was directed by Richard Attenborough and stars Anthony Hopkins as Lewis and Debra Winger as Davidman.

the claims of the Catholic Church and rationally decided that it was the only true way to go, or was there some part of it that was showing your father?" And he said, "Well, I think I'm prepared now to admit that a good deal of it was getting a rise out of my father!" So there was that element in it! He had, like Lewis, spent part of his twenties as an atheist, and so he left the Anglican Church to become an atheist and then ended up as a Catholic. And that gave him a connection with Tolkien, who became a Catholic as an infant, and my father stayed close to Tolkien to almost the end of Tolkien's life. They would go to church together, because once again, Tolkien didn't drive, and so my father drove him. When Tolkien left Oxford when he retired, they stopped seeing as much of each other, but the Catholicism did produce a closeness with Tolkien.

Lewis wrote some of the most generous books on Christianity, books that are really helpful to Catholics and Presbyterians and Anglicans, almost anybody, such as *Mere Christianity*. But he himself grew up in a very bigoted part of the United Kingdom, Northern Ireland, where until ten years ago they were still shooting guns at each other, the Catholics and the Protestants. And he was a very Catholic Protestant in lots of ways. For instance, he went to confession, which practically no Protestants did, but he also retained some of the suspicion of Catholics—not Tolkien or my father, but Catholics in general. "You never really can trust a Catholic" was the sort of sentiment, and he let it slip every now and then, and that offended Tolkien and my father. There is a term used in England: "papist." A papist is a not very polite way of talking about a Catholic, and so in his books he would write about literature in the Renaissance, he would talk about papist authors and Protestant authors and use the word papist. And so there was a sort of insensitivity on his part according to my father and Tolkien, but on the other hand, I think Lewis would have said they were oversensitive and he was just being himself.

Audience Question: Did Lewis share any of the Narnia manuscripts with the Inklings or anyone other than your sister?

CH: The Narnia books were written after the Inklings meetings where they shared books stopped—they stopped in about 1949 and he started writing after that. Secondly, I don't think he would have done that, because I think he would have felt that at least some of the Inklings would not have been very receptive to children's books. So no, except for my sister and some friends, he didn't share the Narnia books.

Audience Question: I remember you telling about your mom having the Inklings over for dinner. Can you tell that story?

CH: The Inklings were a totally masculine group. Some of them (not Lewis) had wives, but the wives were never invited, so it was sort of like a boys' club in that way. But every now and then occasions would turn up, and one of them was that my mother invited Lewis and his brother to dinner. But Lewis had this habit of addressing all his conversations to my father and ignoring entirely anyone who was on the distaff side, and so my mother, who was herself a college graduate, felt she had some things she could contribute, and felt somewhat put-out. The second side of all this was that finally, when he was in his sixties, Lewis gets married, and the first thing he says is, "Well come along Joy, let's go to the Inklings together." And all these Inklings who've had wives in the background for all these years suddenly find that Lewis thinks it's perfectly all right to bring his wife along! And they were quite indignant about it.

Audience Question: What was C.S. and Warren Lewis's house like?

CH: When I was about sixteen and my sister was fifteen, Lewis and his brother had a plan to go on vacation, and they had a man who looked after them named Fred Paxford, but he got sick. They had this fairly large house that was called the Kilns, and it was a fairly old house too. Originally it was owned by somebody who made earthen-ware dishes and stuff, and it had a fair-sized property and a small lake. So, how could they go away and leave this poor man who had a fever and at least needed someone to keep an eye on him? And they came up with this idea which was that they would go to my father and see whether a couple of his children could take charge for two or three days. And so I went with my sister and stayed at the Kilns, and it must have been 1946 or 47. And, there was this man Paxford who was an interesting character because he was apparently a countryman who, whenever you said, "It looks like a nice day," would always say, "Wait, it's going to rain before it's teatime."⁵ And Lewis used him in one of his Narnia books for a character called Puddleglum. Anyway, this was the man we were meant to be looking after, and fortunately for us, all he really wanted was an occasional boiled egg and some toast, he wasn't feeling very well, so that didn't require much taking care of. We in the meantime had to try and figure out what we were going to eat, and we didn't have any experience at all in cooking, and so mostly we just snacked, until one day we said we were going to do this properly and we were going to have soup and then we were going to have the main entrée and a dessert. Well, everything went fine except that we had no idea how long things took to cook, the house had a really ancient stove, and so the

⁵ Fred Paxford was the handyman and gardener at the Kilns from 1930 until Lewis's death in 1963.

potatoes for instance were hard as a brick, and we ate everything in the wrong order!

But the house itself was a bit of an eye-opener because these two brothers lived there, and it was full of books. That was the first thing I noticed—every room was full of bookshelves. And the books were interesting because there were a lot of children’s books and an awful lot of books that I had no idea what they were about, between the Classics, English literature, and even learned things on Anglo-Saxon. Everything was very dusty, and in particular they had carpets or area rugs, and someone some time had told one or both of them that if you flick your ash (and they both smoked) on the carpet it’s a good way of preserving it! At any rate all the carpets were this sort of gray color, and I don’t know what color they were underneath the gray! It was a much larger house than the one we lived in, but it was a curiously dowdy one. And I think when Lewis finally got married to Joy Davidman, she more or less did a clean sweep and had the whole thing redecorated. But I spent time in it before that.

Audience Question: Did Dorothy Sayers have any connection with the Inklings?

CH: Dorothy Sayers was definitely a close correspondent of C.S. Lewis, and I may be wrong on this, but I don’t believe she ever attended an Inklings meeting. I do think there was a relationship between Lewis and her.⁶ I know that she wrote a radio play on the nativity of Christ, and I know that C.S. Lewis worked with her on that and they sort of compared notes on the plot and the best way of presenting the nativity on the radio. But I don’t know a lot more than that. I don’t believe I ever met her, but I would have loved to have met Dorothy Sayers.

Audience Question: Of all the books, including The Lord of the Rings, which one is your favorite?

CH: Of Lewis’s books my very most favorite is *Out of the Silent Planet*, one of the science fiction ones, and I couldn’t live without *The Lord of the Rings*.

Audience Question: What’s your opinion of the movies of The Lord of the Rings?

CH: Basically I thought they did pretty well, except that there is one scene in *The Two Towers* when they wreck the plot by having a Ringwraith dive down on Frodo to take the Ring. Now, the whole point of everything is that Sauron does

⁶ For details on Lewis and Sayers’s interactions and collaborations, see for example McBride 78-79.

not realize where the Ring is, and so to add that to the story makes a nonsense of some part of the plot in my mind. But that's the only bother really, because I don't really mind not having Tom Bombadil in it or a lot of the things that were changed. But that one change I thought was unconscionable.

Audience Question: Some people say that Perelandra was better than That Hideous Strength because of its form and content. And so I think my question is what would Lewis have to say about that?

CH: I think he was very fond of *Perelandra*. The sense of it I have is that it's just a little bit wordy, you know, in terms of the construction as a novel. *That Hideous Strength* is an example of a book that was very much influenced by Charles Williams. He had got to know Charles Williams between *Perelandra* and *That Hideous Strength*, and so *That Hideous Strength* really has a quite different feel to it than either *Out of the Silent Planet* or *Perelandra*, even to the extent of Ransom, the hero, the protagonist, seeming to change character. I think that *That Hideous Strength* is also one way of getting back at his college, at Oxford, because he does a wonderful job of making fun of the atmosphere at Magdalen College, Oxford. But then it goes into all this Merlin stuff!

Audience Question: Did the group ever handle tragedy as a group, like was there ever a death of a close friend or maybe reflections of the war? Was there a peculiarity in the way the group dealt with tragedy?

CH: The biggest tragedy that took place when my father was in the group was that my mother died in 1950, very young, and my father was devastated. I think he felt that he got support and sympathy from his friends, but I think that their friendship wasn't very personal a friendship and it didn't really help him that much. He seemed to go off on his own in his devastation, and if someone had asked him, "Well couldn't you talk it over," I think he'd have said, "What good would that do?" Anyway, I don't think that any of the other Inklings' children were casualties of the Second World War. Tolkien's children were older. So I think it was my mother's death that really made it. Later on Joy Davidman died, and again, as Lewis wrote in *A Grief Observed*, you get the sense that "What good are other people when you deal with something so horrifying?"

Audience Question: What was the end of the Inklings like? What was it like when they finally stopped meeting?

CH: First of all, the formal meetings of the Inklings stopped happening in 1949, and I think there is an actual date. When did they finally stop even getting

together? When Lewis died (on the same day as the assassination of President Kennedy in 1963), my father kept up his friendship with Tolkien, and there was no sense that this was the Inklings anymore, but at least they were friends. So I think you'd have to say the end of the Inklings was the death of Lewis. From then on, as an institution or even as a loose group, it ceased to be.

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