

A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Twenty-One

Twelfth Month, 1982

Dear Friend,

Permit me, first, a personal note: on Twelfth Month seventh, our family was enlarged and enriched by the birth of a son, Asa David Leonard Fager; I hope this will be as memorable a holiday season for you as it has been for us.

Turning to the news, there are several items to take note of briefly: On 11/30, Senator John East of North Carolina inserted into the *Congressional Record* (on pages S13581ff) a long series of articles and reports purporting to show that the nuclear freeze movement is communist-inspired and manipulated. In this material, the AFSC was again prominently featured, though no new evidence of subversive connections was presented. Further, Ronald Reagan has twice, since our last mention of this topic, reaffirmed his belief in this explanation of the recent upsurge of peace activity: on 11/11 and again on 12/10. With the recent pastoral letter of the Catholic bishops on the subject, these charges have become increasingly subjected to the derision which I think is their just rejoinder; even the FBI and CIA, in testimony released 12/9, failed to corroborate the charges. Still the president clings to them, and a flurry of activity on the right wing indicates that we will be hearing more of them. I will be following these efforts as they unfold; it is encouraging that they have been given so little credence by the press and public so far; but in my judgment it is prudent to monitor such attacks on a continuing basis.

Last month we wrote of an impending court suit involving Hinkle Creek Meeting and Western Yearly Meeting in Indiana, a suit scheduled for trial earlier this month. The trial was delayed by the judge, in favor of a more pressing case, and as this went to press no new date had been set. Informal efforts to mediate this dispute have continued, but also at press time there was no sign of progress which might head off the litigation.

Our report in Ninth Month concerned the difficulties Friends of New England Yearly Meeting, and in particular Cambridge Monthly Meeting, have had with the matter of including any Advices in their revised book of Faith and Practice. This month, however, comes word that at their most recent business meeting, Cambridge Friends at length agreed that Advices should be included in the volume, "in some way." Just exactly in what way is still unclear, and discussion on that is continuing.

Finally, our very first topic, the Law of the Sea Treaty, was signed this month in Jamaica by 117 countries, but not the U.S. It is my belief that our nation will sign the treaty, but not until another administration is in office.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

SERVING TO SERVE AGAIN: A SEASONAL STORY

Like many other people, Doris McLaughlin once saw a magazine ad featuring a photo of a hungry, homeless child somewhere in the Third World; and also, like many others, she responded. In 1950, she signed up with the Christian Children's Fund, agreeing to send \$10 a month to support a 9-year old child, an escapee from mainland China's communism, in a Hong Kong orphanage. She kept up her support for 10 years, until the boy left to work in a knitting mill.

In the years that followed, Doris was kept busy with home, family and teaching music. Like most of us, she also moved several times; and through divorce and remarriage changed her surname. Small wonder that along the way she lost track of her young Oriental beneficiary.

Then, about two years ago, Providence stepped in: a letter came addressed to her with her previous last name, to an old, mid-1960s address. But the post office, instead of simply returning the letter, delivered it to the only other person in town with the same last name, who turned out to be Doris's former sister-in-law, who passed it along to her at her present home in Arlington, Virginia.

"To Hear Your Sweet Voice, and To See Your Sweet Face..."

The letter announced that Johnny, as she had always known him, had made it: he had opened his own export business, and was a success. It also said he wanted very much to hear from his "mama" again. So Doris wrote, offering congratulations on his achievement. Soon his letter was followed up by phone calls, in which Johnny asked, "When are you coming to Hong Kong to visit me, Mama?" Doris laughed and thanked him; she had no plans to make such a trip, especially on her modest music teacher's income.

But Johnny persisted. *He* would send her a ticket; he could afford it now, and nothing would make him happier than to see the "sweet face" of his "mama." And by the way, would she like to spend a week in China while she was there?

Well, the upshot was that last Fifth Month Doris boarded a jet and flew halfway around the world on an all-expenses paid, first class trip to Hong Kong and China, just as Johnny had promised. He did get to see his "mama's" face, after all. And he showed her that he had indeed become successful: he took her to his smartly appointed office, complete with a trim, bilingual secretary, and, touchingly, a carefully-framed photo of Doris as a young mother, which she had long since forgotten having sent. He took her to the old orphanage, to meet some of his now-retired teachers, and there reminded her that it was she who had dubbed him "Johnny" in the first place, as part of the deal for her monthly contributions (she had long since forgotten this, too).

But most impressive to Doris, he introduced her to his wife, Fung Ho, and his children, Patrick and Susane. Doris and Fung Ho hit it off immediately. Doris recalls walking arm in arm with her through the city, both of them chattering like schoolgirls, so comfortable together that they repeatedly forgot that they did not speak the same language. In short, the trip started out to be everything in the way of an unexpected reward a faithful "mama" could ever have imagined. It was something right out of Ecclesiastes Chapter Eleven, verse one.

The Other Side of the Story

Then, on her fourth day in Hong Kong, Doris and Fung Ho went out into the city by themselves. But instead of shopping or sightseeing, her hostess steered Doris to a hospital, and the office of a social worker, who could speak English. Once there, Fung Ho suddenly broke down and began to weep. The social worker translated for her a story Doris had not expected.

It seems that Johnny was more than a prosperous exporter. He was also the keeper of a mistress, the engaging secretary Doris had met. This was not, she was told, uncommon among his peers in Hong Kong; but it was no less painful to Fung Ho, who had labored with him for almost 20 years as he worked his way up and out of the knitting mill. Further, she had not finished school, and Johnny had never allowed her to work on her own. What would happen to her and her children if he left them? In their society cast-off women were of little value.

Nor was it common for a woman to strike out on her own, in the liberated American style. But like many an anguished Westerner, she had sought counseling in her despair; that was how she had come to begin seeing the social worker--secretly, lest it cause Johnny to lose "face."

Fung Ho was not asking Doris for advice, just for understanding and compassion, which Doris tried to provide. As Fung Ho later put it, "I did not know where my courage comes in disclosing all my family problems to you. Maybe it is because you had won my basic trust at the very first sight." Thereafter, as they went off to Peking for their week's tour, Doris saw her host family in a different light: the son, she realized, was rebellious and not doing well in school. Fung Ho, at heart such a vivacious person, was subdued and unhappy. And Johnny's demeanor was revealed to be consistently and blatantly ostentatious: flaunting his expensive possessions, smoking constantly and drinking heavily. Even his bringing her to Hong Kong was, to an extent, another way of showing off; she was a unique artifact.

Mixed Feelings and More Unhappy News

Doris returned to America with considerably more ambiguous feelings than the had expected to have, yet hoping above all that her visit might have worked to bring Johnny closer to his family. But the letters she has received from Hong Kong since then have not been encouraging: she has heard from Fung Ho and her son, but Johnny has yet to reply to any of her several letters. Fung Ho's first letter was dogged: she had decided, she wrote, to stay with Johnny come what might, though things were not getting easier.

Her next letter, late this fall, was a bombshell: it was written in English, dictated to the social worker. Fung Ho said she had just been to another hospital to see Johnny. She had just been told he was suffering from lung cancer, and was expected to live only a few months. His secretary-mistress was with him, and barred his children from visiting; Fung Ho was allowed in for only a few moments. Further, she revealed, he had not spent a single night at home since Doris had left; the family was all but abandoned now. She had not yet told the children of their father's condition.

"Hong Kong is a sad place," she concluded. Perhaps it would be better for them if they left there. Perhaps they could come to the United States? Could Doris help them come to America, she asked tentatively? Then, as if embarrassed, she added a postscript: "Don't worry about me. I learn how to take care of myself. Sorry once again to share my unhappiness with you and disturb your peaceful life."

The latest letter came just a few weeks ago. It was a Christmas card from Johnny's son. The note with it reflected a boy's controlled hostility: "Now, our family has just mother, Susanee and me. Father has gone away, we all don't know where he lived. I think that you can't easily contact him. Don't remember him too much, he has someone to take care!"

A Mother and a "Mama"--More Questions than Answers

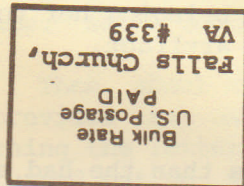
So in this 1982 holiday season, Doris McLaughlin, besides the usual observances, is exploring the strange new field of immigration laws (all stacked solidly against admitting a widow with little education and two minor children). Doris doesn't know whether Fung Ho really wants to come to America, or whether she wrote of it in a moment of panic. If she does, Doris has little capital for an immigration legal battle, and no political influence to make use of. But she says that, if asked, she will do her best to help. In any case, she will stay in touch with the family as long as she can. She is still, in a sense, a "mama" to this beleaguered family half a world away, though now a committed friend as well. She has written again to Johnny, but has not yet had any reply.

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By the way, if you are wondering what this story has to do with Quakerism and the pages of this newsletter, it is this: Doris McLaughlin is a member of Langley Hill Monthly Meeting, as am I, and that is where I first heard this unfolding story. It seems to me a fine example of heeding George Fox's advice to let your life preach, and that made me want to share it with you.

A SPECIAL HOLIDAY STORY

INSIDE: PILGRIMAGE TO HONG KONG--



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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

Quakers have more to celebrate on the 25th of this month than the birth of Jesus. For in 1657, in what was then the Dutch colony of New Amsterdam, peaceful citizens were striking a blow for freedom of worship, on behalf at that moment of Quakers, but in the long run for Americans of all persuasions.

Governor Peter Stuyvesant had just sent a messenger to the Long Island town of Flushing to deliver a proclamation banning "the abominable sect of Quakers" from his dominions. There weren't many Quakers there; the year before, a group of Friends bound for Boston had landed there wafter their ship was blown off course. When one of the Friends, Robert Hodgson, preached pacifism and refused to do "hat honor" to the officials, Stuyvesant had him jailed and flogged; his 1657 proclamation said that anyone giving shelter to a Quaker was subject to a stiff fine.

But the night after it was delivered, the citizens of Flushing drew up what they called the Flushing Remonstrance. It is an eloquent document, in which a key passage is: "The law of love, peace, and liberty extends even to Jews, Turks and Egyptians... our desire is not to offend one of his little ones, in whatsoever form, name or title they appear, whether Presbyterian, Independent, Baptist or Quaker...."

The sheriff of Flushing was the first to sign it, but when he delivered it to the governor, Stuyvesant promptly had him arrested. The Remonstrance was outwardly a "failure" until the Dutch West India Company finally overruled Stuyvesant and allowed a Quaker, John Bowne, to return to his Flushing home despite the governor's ban.

QUAKER CHUCKLE

Making It Perfectly Clear

Jean Sterrett, of Brooklyn, New York Meeting reports that last year she attended a fundraising dinner for a Quaker college. Finding herself seated across the table from the parents of a freshperson at the college, her husband inquired of the couple, "Are you Friends?"

"Oh no," came the prompt reply, "we're married."

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