

A Friendly Letter

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Dear Friend,

Three items to get us started: First, one rarely finds grist for a Quaker newsmill in *People Magazine*, but there was some last month: F. Murray Abraham, Best Actor Academy Award winner for his portrayal of the composer Salieri in *Amadeus*, is a Friend. Well, sort of--he's a longtime attendee at Brooklyn Meeting in New York, and his wife--whom he introduced to the meeting after he had been attending for a year, is a member. "I won't become a Quaker until I can really commit myself," he told *People*. "I still have trouble with my temper." The reporter noted also that most of their social acquaintances, who are Quakers, "are not impressed with Murray's newfound fame." But that isn't quite true. The latest Brooklyn Meeting newsletter carried a small notice offering congratulations on his success.

In an equally unlikely source, the Fifth Month issue of *McCall's Magazine*, is an article about the National Peace Quilt, complete with a gorgeous full-color picture of same. The quilt has 50 squares, one from each state, all designed by children. The article notes that the Virginia square is the work of our own Molly Fager, 12, a young Friend in whom we are well pleased. *McCall's* doesn't, however, tell you what our tireless investigative reporting has disclosed, namely that the Pennsylvania, Alabama and Texas squares are all Quaker-connected too. The quilt was assembled by a group of women, including a Friend, from Boise, Idaho, and will ultimately end up in the Smithsonian Institution.

And finally, in our "Them-Who-Have-Ears-To-Hear-Let-Them-Hear" department, is an excerpt from the newsletter *Old Foundations*, published by Joy Weaver of New York for "Jewish Friends," persons who find their religious home among Quakers, yet for whom a Hebrew religious background still speaks somehow to their condition. It is from James Eblin of Columbus, Ohio: 'When I was in college I dated a Jewish girl. For the first time in my life I learned about prejudice, on the receiving end. I experienced anti-Jewish prejudice from Christians and anti-Christian prejudice from Jews...When Sharon died tragically...I enquired earnestly of the doctrines of my church concerning her eternal welfare....These doctrines could offer assurance only that she must share the unhappy fate of all those who did not believe the right things about Jesus...I eschewed the name 'Christian' and for years the name of Jesus passed my lips only as an expletive...I...went swimming in the Ocean of darkness. While I was drowning therein I had a marvelous spiritual experience...I realized to my great consternation that I had...experienced Jesus as Savior and Lord...I must speak...in the language I find best suited to the task. It is morally imperative that I accord all others the same right...I must also respect the feeling of those millions of Jews and non-Jews for whom Christian language has been poisoned, as it was for me for so long. FRIENDS MUST NOT REQUIRE NOR FORBID ANY MEANS OF LEGITIMATELY EXPRESSING ANY REAL RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE.' (His capitals.)

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

This report starts with an account of one meeting's experience; but what happened there could happen anywhere, and has happened among Quakers in more places than most Friends realize, and many would care to admit:

For most of two years, until he was arrested, Chester "Tigger" Wood, was a fixture around the Gainesville, Florida Meeting. He was a bohemian figure, with long hair and flowing beard, who lived simply, mostly out of his car. He earned what little money he had by, among other things, cleaning the meetinghouse, which he did with care and reliability. Members say he was always there to unlock the building before worship and close it afterward.

One other chore he seemed to enjoy--and seemed good at--was taking the meeting's children outside and entertaining them, so the worship could proceed in deeper silence. Staffing a First Day School was something the meeting had trouble doing, and many were happy to let Tigger take over. The children appeared to enjoy him, and vice versa. He also worked with apparent success in the children's program at Southeastern Yearly Meeting, and for two summers took this affinity for children on to the Gatherings of Friends General Conference, where other attenders recall seeing him striding across the dining hall followed by a troop of smiling youngsters, like the pied Quaker piper.

A Prisoner of Conscience?

Today Tigger is behind bars in Florida, and has been since Second Month, 1983, when he was arrested and charged with molesting the child of a Gainesville Meeting attender, a small boy. Another boy was also said to be involved. Although there was no allegation of physical violence, his bail was set at \$75,000. It was reported to the court that he was actually on probation for a similar offense committed some years previously, also in Florida. In Sixth Month of 1983, he was sentenced to seven years for probation violation; the prosecutor had called for fifteen years, the maximum sentence.

Tigger writes from prison that he is innocent of any crime. To be sure, he admits some sexual involvement with the children concerned--and many others, for that matter, including one at an FGC gathering. But he insists, first, that there was no coercion involved, and that second, such activity, engaged in sensitively and lovingly, is good for them. "I am a pedagogue, a teacher of children," he wrote proudly from his cell in 5/1983, "my teaching skills have brought amazing results, spiritually, sensually and sexually too. I am a pediatrician, a healer of children, restoring emotional, physical, eroginous health. I am a pedafile, a lover of children, improving their love of God, self, and each other." (The spelling is his.) Nearly two years later he was repeating this sentiment in long epistles to me and others, including in them what he said were transcripts of letters from two child lovers, expressing their pleasure in the relationship and saying how much they missed him.

A Crime Which Robs People of Their Reason

Whatever Tigger thinks, however, such activity is a crime. Furthermore, it is the kind of crime that produces reactions of panic and even hysteria in many adults, including Quakers. Certainly Gainesville meeting, otherwise a quite liberal, tolerant unprogrammed group, was all but torn apart once the charges against Tigger surfaced. The parents involved, both single mothers, were outraged, and demanded some stern action. When the initial response was the convening of a clearness committee, one of the mothers left, apparently for good; the other has only occasionally returned. There was much anger and recrimination, as many others considered Tigger's behavior a horrible, unforgivable betrayal of trust, and ever since have considered him a non-person, someone not even to be mentioned.

Not everyone felt this way; when Tigger was tried, two people from the meeting were there, and one asked that he be allowed to seek treatment outside of prison. One meeting member has visited Tigger every few months throughout his imprisonment, though he says little about his visits in the meeting at large.

For his part, Tigger's letters are most plaintive, and often touching, when he speaks of his pain at the loss of the community he enjoyed in the meeting. He has expressed the

forlorn hope that when he finishes his sentence, there might again be some place for him there. Most reports from the meeting, however, suggest that his return would create an instant crisis there, with no clear outcome except massive opposition.

We said at the beginning that what happened in Gainesville could happen anywhere. In fact, while researching this case we learned of a similar problem in another Florida meeting, one in Intermountain YM, another in New York, and still another in Philadelphia. With more digging, more such situations could undoubtedly be brought to light.

Not all the meetings involved have reacted so intensely, or with such complete rejection, however. In one case, a member was arrested in another town, and the meeting helped him get a new trial, in which the charges were thrown out. In another, the member admitted the activity, but the meeting asked the court to release him into the group's custody. The court agreed, and the person lived in the meeting house, under continuous, Friendly supervision, until his trial, when he was given a year's prison sentence.

Not An Isolated Story

Moreover, there are Friends who have taken the study and correction of such behavior on as a challenge to their Quaker belief that there is that of God in every person. One such is Fay Honey Knopp of Vermont, who is also a veteran prison visitor and activist researcher. She has studied sex offenders for more than ten years, and developed materials for both adults and children on the subject. She has corresponded with Florida Friends about Tigger's case and the results of her researches. One important finding was that many pedophiles, like Tigger, consider themselves misunderstood and persecuted, even prisoners of conscience. Another was that most pedophiles are otherwise normal, often highly respectable people, as like as not married pillars of their meeting. A third finding was that ordinary psychotherapy does not do such persons much good. To make real change, they need to work with therapists who have been specially trained to deal with their type of behavior.

Furthermore, she wrote Florida authorities that "One must differentiate between various types of persons who are alluded to as 'child molesters.' Some can be re-educated in the community, and others require restraint." Some behaviors evolve from a compulsive attraction to children and others out of an ideology of sexual freedom regardless of age. Though both types of persons might cause long-range psychological harm to children, she concluded that "Chester could learn to control his behavior toward children if he were permitted to work with a sex-offense treatment specialist, or enter a community-based program," and urged the judge to avoid a long jail sentence.

Reform and Reentry: A Challenge To Community

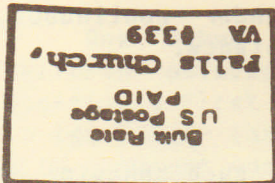
Honey Knopp also made her case for specialized treatment to Tigger in letters, and in his early replies, he expressed willingness, as a matter of "survival." But more recently, he has drawn back from this idea and has since been adamant in defending his self-concept as a healthy, "tender, loving person" who has a God-given talent with children, has done them no harm and needs no treatment. The reason for this shift is not clear, but the negative impact of prison life cannot be discounted: although he is apparently a model inmate, Tigger has been beaten, repeatedly sexually threatened, and was moved abruptly from one prison after being told his life was in danger. He has had periods of suicidal despondency. What will happen to him when he is released, sometime in 1986, is anybody's guess.

While Tigger's case has left many in Gainesville Meeting wanting not to hear or speak any more about it, others familiar with the situation have been moving to prevent its recurrence. Southeastern YM has had to rethink its approach to its children's program; and FBC planners are attempting to screen their volunteers more carefully, and ask them explicitly to cooperate in making sure no such incidents happen again. Still others worry about the impact of mistaken or false charges against adults, as awareness of this problem becomes more widespread, and the urge to call in the police becomes more reflexive.

The only sure thing about these issues is that, no matter how hard many Friends understandably try to avoid thinking about them and learning how to cope with them as a religious community, they will continue to come up, because what happened in Gainesville could, truly, happen anywhere.

INSIDE: Child Molesters
Who Are Quakers

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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

In Fourth Month, 1942, a British Quaker CO named Bill Brough was serving with the Friends Ambulance Unit in Burma, then under attack by Japanese troops advancing from China. On 4/9 he set off in one of two trucks to pick up frontline casualties to carry to a makeshift field hospital being operated by Gordon Seagrave, an American Baptist missionary. At a first-aid post they were told the wounded were further ahead, and Brough drove off to find them. A little later, apparently between the lines of the two armies, the truck's windshield was shattered by a bullet. Calling to his interpreter to follow, he jumped from the vehicle, with bullets whizzing around them. As they tumbled into a ditch artillery shells began falling nearby, one of which blew up the abandoned truck. Crawling along the ditch, Jones somehow made his way back to the Chinese lines. There he found some casualties, directed them to the remaining truck, crammed twenty of them into it and helped drive back to the hospital. Once there, Brough gulped down some coffee and headed back to the front for another load.

Such everyday valor won the respect of Dr. Seagrave, who was no pacifist. In fact, he was made a major in the U.S. Army by General Joseph Stilwell, commander of the retreating Chinese-American forces. Writing of one of these Friends in his diary, later published as a book, Seagrave reflected, "conscientious objector? Yes. But any sensible man objects to the things he objected to. He certainly never objected to war because of fear, nor yet through dread of hardship."

QUAKER CHUCKLES

Two From England

As Quakers we would never bet
On horses, bingo or roulette;
Good food, fresh air and simple fun
Are prizes here for everyone:

Bed and breakfast, lunch and dinner--
We hope you'll find each one a winner.
So: if you crave our lucky streak
Stay overnight--or for a week!

--an ad for Old Jordans, in *The Friend*, London

In hospital, you will agree,
Is not a pleasant place to be.

What keeps it being far, far worse
Is that of God in every nurse.

--"St. Luke Ward, by Roy Linnell, from *The Friend*
