

# A Friendly Letter

Issue Number Seventy

ISSN #0739-5418

First Month, 1987

Dear Friend,

One could get a swelled head reading some of my mail. For instance, Bruce Arnold, an Ohio Friends pastor, recently wrote that "The honesty and care with which your letters are crafted is much-needed in our Society; in my opinion, you are performing as valuable a service for Friends today as, say, Howard Brinton did in his."

Well; being mentioned in the same breath as Howard Brinton is pretty heady stuff. But just as I'm getting used to it, into the box at Baileys Crossroads comes something like the following note from Winifred Crosman in Phoenix, Arizona, written on the back of a renewal form which was ~~not~~ accompanied by a renewal check:

"Your *Friendly Letter* subscription was sent me as a gift without my ever having heard of it....I have read each one faithfully--it doesn't take long--not much if anything worth the time or the price. I still don't quite get your point....[As] A Birthright Friend since the times of George Fox and my ancestors I not feel I need what I feel is rather arrogant of you to issue without any authorizing support. I certainly do not feel the need for it. Educated under the best of Quaker leadership from Rufus Jones etc. and Pendle Hill--No thank you. Why pay \$13.95 for your lone opinion?"

Ah well, why indeed? Fortunately for my self-esteem--and my subscription list--most of the mail is closer in sentiment to Friend Arnold than Friend Crosman. Even so, back to earth and on to one of my more undiluted exercises in lone opinionizing, *A Friendly Letter's* sixth annual list of nominees as **Quakers of the Year**. You will note that this year's nominees are all women, and that is by intention. It was argued here (Issue #24) that there is an identifiable strain of Quaker feminism which has left its mark on the world and is still manifest in the Society. In the past year I have seen this tradition exemplified by numerous outstanding Quaker women, and it seemed right to take note of a few examples here.

The list of nominees could have been much longer, but space is as usual limited. One more nominee does bear mention here, though: Kara Cole, who has just left the post of Administrative Secretary for Friends United Meeting after eight years. Kara has done excellent service in a tough job. I have been particularly grateful for the way in which she, though staunchly evangelical in background and convictions, visited widely among and got to know Friends of other traditions. While never compromising or hiding her own beliefs, she was continually present and open to all kinds of Friends. In my time her performance in this respect sets a standard for others to live up to. My prayers and best wishes are with her.

Yours in the Light,

*Chuck Fager*

Chuck Fager



## QUAKERS OF THE YEAR

Alice Walton, known as Allie, is not a famous Quaker. Nor is she even an especially weighty Friend, though she has been clerk of both her Lake Forest Monthly Meeting near Chicago and Illinois Yearly Meeting, and has served on numerous committees. Nonetheless she is a Friend of distinction and impact, and richly deserves to head our list this year.

What distinguishes Allie is that, quietly and with dedication, she has made things happen. Not in a manipulative, string-pulling way, but rather in an enabling, creative, coordinating way. For instance, in 1979 and 1980, she was a key member of the Illinois committee which produced *The Friendly Woman*, a feminist Quaker journal that is put out by a new committee every two years. Feminism, of the Quaker variety, has long been a special concern of hers: She had earlier written and produced a short play on the femininity of God which was performed both at Illinois YM and at Friends General Conference. And last summer she was the moving force behind the preparation and performance of a pageant on Quaker women and the Roots of Feminism which was a major event at the FGC Gathering in Minnesota.

This is not a *modus operandi* that is easy to pin down, yet it is an important one to take note of. Allie has articulated it herself on a couple of occasions, as in 1976, when she was asked to give the Plummer Lecture at Illinois YM. Her title was "Quaker Saints and Other Ordinary People," and it focussed on the special impact of Friends whose names are not widely-known. Again, chosen to address the 1979 FGC Gathering, her subject was "Nurturing the Seed," with special attention given to women in the Bible.

### *Vintage Stock, Bearing Quiet Fruit*

Allie is of vintage Quaker stock: She was born in 1910 at, and then raised on, the campus of George School in Newtown, Pennsylvania. George School was the leading boarding school for Philadelphia Hicksite Quakers; and Allie's father was headmaster there for many years. Doubtless this heritage helped shape her forthright yet disarming way of speaking and writing. This quality came briefly to public light many years ago in Deerfield, Illinois where she had settled with her husband Lew in 1950, when a controversy arose over plans to build an integrated housing development there. The local opposition to the idea was loud and strident; but a main voice of local support, the Chicago media found, was a woman who was outspoken yet disarming at the same time--Allie. (She has frequently used this same style on me, responding to various issues of this letter, writing plainly of what she liked and didn't like, a kind of eldering which is a great gift to a Quaker, as it has been to me.) Trained in art, she has produced many posters and designs for various events and groups over the years. Among these was a block for the national peace ribbon, which showed a demon surrounded by dancing figures above the words, "Poor old war god, losing power hour by hour"; it was selected for display at the Textile Museum in Washington. Health problems have begun to slow her down recently, but she is on the schedule for next summer's FGC Gathering, to lead a high school workshop on "Feminism 101." The participants will be a favored group.

### *To Elgon Friends, With Love*

In last year's FGC pageant on Quaker women and the roots of feminism, which Allie Walton the part of Sarah Grimke, a pioneering Quaker abolitionist of southern origins, was played by an Atlanta Friend, Janet Roache. But Janet was doing more than playing a role; she was also preparing to carry this distinguished tradition a large step further. We described in Issue #64 how she left the Gathering a day later, headed for East Africa, to pursue a leading she had long had to make direct contact with the Friends of Elgon YM in Kenya, and work to develop some meaningful relationships between them and U.S. Friends. Although this leading was endorsed by both her monthly and yearly meetings, it was very much an individual initiative, taking Janet thousands of miles away from home to a place she had never been before. She faced numerous obstacles in making the trip: raising the money to go, and then coping with cultural differences, language barriers and several bouts of malaria while she was there. But despite these she made her trip, visited all three YMs in Kenya, and did what she set out to do: Conduct a needs assessment among the women of Elgon YM, and then return home to spread the word among American Friends of the opportunities for witness and service that exist there in abundance: They need teachers, health workers, religious education resources, and much more.



This trip itself was remarkable. Even more remarkable is the larger vision of which it is a part, a vision of Quaker volunteer international service. This is hardly a new idea; indeed, it was once a hallmark of the Society in America, and provided the model for programs like the Peace Corps. But such efforts, under Quaker auspices, have been all but abandoned in the last twenty years. Janet Roache has set out, singlehandedly, to resurrect them, to make them an intercontinental reality in the 1980s and 1990s. This is about as audacious an undertaking among Friends as I am currently aware of; but I think she may yet pull it off.

As Janet's work goes forward, Atlanta Meeting maintains a fund to which tax-deductible contributions can be made, for program expenses and to support future volunteers. She figures it will cost about \$5000 a year to support a volunteer in Kenya. The address, for contributions or to get more information, is: Kenya Fund, Atlanta Friends Meeting, 1384 Fairview Rd. NE, Atlanta GA 30306.)

Janet's methods now are straightforward: traveling and speaking, showing slides and writing letters, keeping in touch with Elgon Friends, looking for organizational sponsorship and raising money to support the volunteers she is confident will begin to come forward. All this is in addition to working fulltime in an Atlanta refugee program, and keeping up her own home and family life. (Does this sound like too much? Maybe, but it's hardly unprecedented: Lucretia Mott, while creating the women's suffrage movement, also raised six children.) Janet says her visit to Kenya has been a profound spiritual experience for her, from which she has been learning to put the concerns of wealthy Americans into a larger, and yet more modest perspective, one in which the testimony of simplicity has a larger meaning; the trip has also been a lesson in learning to be more flexible, to trust the spirit.

#### ***Writing the Book On US-USSR Cooperation***

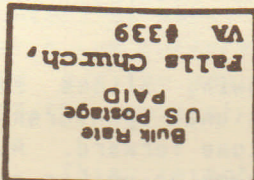
This year another Janet has had to practice trusting the spirit in pursuit of a leading: Janet Riley, executive secretary of the Quaker US-USSR Committee in Philadelphia. As this was written she had just returned from Moscow, where she worked on the Committee's plans for a book of writings by distinguished American and Soviet writers on key experiences of ordinary life, to be published in both countries. Besides all the usual meetings, paperwork and fundraising of a self-supporting Quaker committee, her work finds her dealing with government bureaus in a country half a world away, corresponding with some of the most famous living figures in American literature, and being tutored twice a week in Russian.

With such an agenda, one might expect Janet Riley to have been trained as a diplomat, or at least in international relations with a minor in American Lit. Not so. Five years ago she worked putting up wallpaper, after raising a family in the Washington suburbs. But she also was feeling a growing concern to bear a constructive Quaker witness for peace. When she heard about the journey to Russia by Philadelphia Friend Kent Larrabee, and his resulting vision of a Friends Meeting in Moscow, she felt this leading somehow related to her. Janet became part of a committee of interested Friends which met to consider and refine Kent Larrabee's vision. The idea evolved into a hope for establishing spiritual linkages between American and Soviet people, and the book project is the way that has initially opened. Along the way Janet spent a year studying Russian at Bryn Mawr College, then stayed in Philadelphia to staff the office the Committee opened at the Friends Center in twelfth Month, 1985.

This project faces a seemingly endless list of things that can go wrong: The first Soviet publishing house they dealt with turned out to be unable to handle the Russian end of the project; so they had to find another. Then there is the problem of recruiting distinguished writers, and getting them to submit top-quality material, plus finding translators for the Russian manuscripts Janet brought back from Moscow. And down the road, a joint American-Russian editorial board will have to reach consensus on all the material, which given the vagaries of literary taste--never mind politics--might turn out to be easier than reaching a disarmament agreement, and then again might not. This is not to mention finding a U.S. publisher, and meeting the estimated \$50,000 annual expenses of the Committee while all this is in progress. Money for this project has often been particularly scarce, and Janet has literally had to operate for long stretches on faith, supplemented by her limited savings. (Contributions and inquiries are welcome at the Committee, 1515 Cherry St., Philadelphia PA 19102.) To say there has not been anything quite like it attempted before is an understatement. My hat is off to her for trying, and even getting this far.



INSIDE: QUAKERS OF THE YEAR--  
OUR SIXTH ANNUAL NOMINATIONS



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### THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

George Fox died on 1/13/1691, in London. Physically weakened after his many hard journeys, adventures and imprisonments, Fox spent most of his later years visiting among Friends in and around London, and corresponding with Quaker groups all over the world. He kept at this labor until two days before his passing. Some opponents had accused him of being a dictator over the Society of Friends, and he was clearly a commanding and not always gentle figure. Yet one of his last great campaigns had been the settling of Friends' groups into the highly decentralized system of monthly, quarterly and yearly meetings. No one person, however weighty, was essential to this system. As the historian Braithwaite notes, "The best proof of this lies in the fact that [Fox's] death made no disturbance in the life of the Church....He remained to the last in close touch with affairs, but only as a revered elder among many brethren." Fox was greatly mourned by Friends, but as Braithwaite adds, "the only succession he had to provide for was that with respect to foreign correspondence," and this he handled by writing a letter to the Morning Meeting of Ministers and elders, which they opened a week after he died.

### QUAKER CHUCKLE

The notice in Issue #68 announcing the CPS Oral History Project has brought many welcome replies. One, from Kenneth Ives of Chicago, included a fine specimen of the stories the Project is intended to collect and preserve. Here it is:

A CO at the camp in Coshocton, Ohio had been a professional wrestler. One day when he and some other inmates had made the long trip into town, they were hassled about being COs by some local youths, who insisted that only force could change the Germans' views.

In response, the ex-wrestler took off his coat, challenged one of the local boys to a match, and promptly threw the townie across the room. He then asked the youth, "Now do you believe that force won't change people's views?"

"Heck no!" the local boy hollered back.

"That's exactly my point," said the CO, who put on his coat and left.

We're looking for all kinds of CPS stories--funny, inspiring, happy, sad. If you know some, or would like to help collect them, let us hear from you.