



LOOK WHO'S GOT IT FIGURED OUT DEPT: The Peace Learning Center at George Fox College just announced that Director Lon Fendall is taking a year off, to manage Senator Mark Hatfield's reelection campaign. In the same newsletter, the Center announced a grant of \$30,000 from the U.S. Institute of Peace. Hatfield is a main congressional supporter of the Institute; this is its second grant to the Center, its only grants to a Quaker body.

A Friendly Letter

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FIRST MONTH, 1990

Dear Friend,

We reported in Issue #101 about the desperate financial straits in which the Olney Friends School in Barnesville, Ohio has been engulfed. At the Yearly Meeting sessions in Eighth Month, the School Committee, part of Ohio Yearly Meeting (Conservative), presented a plan to convert the school facilities into a conference and retreat center, retaining only a dozen or so students in a drastically scaled-down self-instructional school format. "After 152 years," we concluded then, "Olney is at the end of its rope." And so it seemed.

But perhaps we spoke too soon. Apparently undaunted in the face of its \$400,000 debt, the Olney School Committee last month turned aside the conference-retreat center proposal, and decided instead to keep the school open more or less in its present form. They plan to balance their budget by staff cuts and donations from alumni--many of whom wrote in and urged that the school stay open--and hope in another year to begin rebuilding their endowment.

Yet perhaps we didn't speak too soon....How realistic this new plan is still remains to be demonstrated. The Committee has told all the present staff they must reapply for their jobs, and rehiring will depend on the enrollment level next summer. The headmaster, a dedicated evangelical Friend named Mark Ocker, has decided to leave and must be replaced. Sources at the school say there is considerable tension and uncertainty among current staff and students, with many looking elsewhere for jobs or schools. In such an atmosphere recruiting for faculty or students must be made more difficult.

Moreover, there is little indication that any resolution has been reached in the confusion and even conflict within the School Committee and the Yearly Meeting over what Olney's guiding philosophy and direction ought to be: Should its program be overtly "Christian" and aimed at "leading students to Christ"? Or should it aim primarily at academic excellence as do most private prep schools, including Friends schools, with Quakerism mainly a matter of ambiance? And how can the nineteenth century Conservative

Quaker tradition of a "guarded" Quietist education be expressed in an academic program that is meaningful for the 1990s?

These are challenging questions, variations of which face any school that takes a Quaker heritage seriously. At Olney they reflect a similar set of confusions and even conflicts within the Yearly Meeting constituency itself, because of the close ties between the YM and the school. Ohio YM brings together a fascinating, and problematic mix of old and new Quaker strands, and has not yet been able to weave them into a harmonious design. (But who has?)

Such conflicts are hard enough to deal with in annual Yearly Meeting sessions. They have proven paralyzing to a school which must maintain an atmosphere and deliver a program to students day after day. The Yearly Meeting is planning a major religious retreat for next month, to seek divine guidance in sorting out its various tendencies and perspectives.

In the absence of some such reconciling visitation, we don't hear much sense of renewed enthusiasm and focus in the new plan; it sounds more like hanging on regardless. Not that we blame the committee for that; Olney and the Wilburite tradition it embodies, however imperfectly, are pieces of American Quakerism's heritage that are precious to many Friends, not only in Ohio, who have visited there and come under their spell. There must be a way to maintain that tradition as a resource for the larger Society, and I hope Ohio Friends can find it.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

PS. Do you have a book manuscript which you would like to get published? If so, I might be able to help. See the enclosed letter describing my new publishing services.

As far as I can see, the 1990s are going to be tough. In fact, I think that in America the decade is likely to be remembered as the Gray Nineties, and not because of silver in our hair.

No, by the Gray Nineties I refer to economic forces already affecting most American Friends, which portend substantial downward mobility. This is especially true for middle class Quaker Baby Boomers now in their child-raising years. Here I want to reflect on that unappealing prospect, and point out one crucial way of coping with it.

But is it really that bad? Let's glance at some macroeconomic data about American society in the 1980s. You may have heard a few of these figures before; but they bear repeating.

STAKING OUT THE BALLPARK

To begin with, average household income in the 1980s, according to recent Washington Post figures, grew from \$25,426 in 1980 to an estimated \$27,225 in 1990 (in constant 1988 dollars). That's an increase of only one percent. In the same period, however, the Consumer Price Index was up 43% through 1988, and will approach fifty percent for the decade as a whole.

Those two numbers, crude as they are, provide the benchmarks of downward mobility: The average American's cost of living went up by almost half in the 1980s, while household income went up only 1%. In the '90s, I believe we will see more of the same.

In the '80s, we have coped with this disparity primarily by working harder. The Harris Poll told the Washington Post that between 1980 and 1986, the typical work week, including commuting, grew from 40.6 hours to 46.8 hours. Small wonder that Harris's respondents also reported a 32% drop in their leisure time.

And more of us worked. The number of intact households where both parents were working for pay rose from 50.4% in 1981 to 56.2% in 1986, with later increases also likely. However

consistent it might be with the laudable thrust of the women's movement, it is simply a necessity to maintain a middle class way of life. And most Friends I know, for all our talk about simplicity, want to be simple and middle class.

This goal is made harder for families to sustain, however, under the pressure of three further factors: the costs of health care, housing and education, all basics for working families, have gone up in price much faster than inflation: Health care by 43% between 1980 and 1986; home prices by 80 to 90% or more; and college costs have more than doubled in many places. (This is especially true of private colleges, and Quaker schools are no exception: at academically prestigious Swarthmore, the total cost for next year is \$20,780, versus \$7,830 in 1980.)

BEATING INFLATION, BEATING US

With the possible exception of housing, these costs show no signs of slowing down. Among Americans, and Friends, healthy retirees with reasonable pensions are generally in pretty good shape. Their houses are probably paid for, their children out of school, and Medicare cushions some(not all!) medical costs. On the other hand, single parent/single income families are under terrible pressure: In 1987, the typical female-headed household's annual income was under \$15,000; male single parents averaged \$10,000 more.

Furthermore, some of the advantage our elders have is being eroded by another 1980s trend likely to continue into the '90s: the decay of our infrastructure--roads, bridges and other public facilities. In the '60s public spending on these items was 4% of GNP; in the '80s it was down to 2.2%.

Normally this decline is of a creeping, incremental sort--the streets get a little dirtier and bumpier, toxic waste dumps take years to clean up; the enforcement of clean air standards is delayed, and delayed again.

But occasionally its effects show up cataclysmically: After the MacArthur

Freeway collapsed during the recent California earthquake, it was disclosed that the state had long known it needed strengthening. All through the '80s, in fact, it was on the list of roads to be worked on--but there was no money. So the roadway fell on the just and the unjust, the old and the young, the rich and the poor, with fatal impartiality.

Other bridges will fall for lack of funds to shore them up. They won't be there because of the federal deficit, the continuing drag of military spending, and the coming huge bailouts. "You can expect reductions," one military spending forecaster told the New York Times on 1/3, "but it is really difficult to cut off the spigot." Indeed. This long string of obligations will in my judgment limit the extent of any "peace dividend" resulting from the welcome changes in Eastern Europe.

TROUBLED BRIDGES OVER TROUBLED WATERS

In any case, any "peace dividend" plus a whole lot more will soon be going to the bankers--the honest but shrewd foreign ones who have been funding our mad weapons-buying spree, and the crooked but perhaps shrewder ones at home who cashed in on the savings and loan bonanza. Moreover, in case you haven't heard, there are increasing numbers of regular banks that are quietly teetering on the edge of insolvency, making it likely that the S&L bailout won't be the last one we pay for.

The underlying reality of this situation was laid out starkly when the much ballyhooed Education Summit was being told there would be no significant increase in federal money for public schooling; at the same time, Congress was quietly agreeing to dole out \$300 billion for the S&Ls, and to lie about the price tag.

Add these factors together, and you can see why the next ten years present a bleak, gray prospect to me. When I asked Tim Willard, an editor of The Futurist magazine about this, he foresaw these trends not only continuing, but also contributing to a rise in social tension.

Announcing: Editing/Publishing Services

P.O. Box 1361
Falls Church, Virginia 22041
703-845-0427

Dear Friends,

For generations, self-publishing has been an important way for new light to be spread and tested among Friends. Some of the books which have reached Friends this way in recent years are:

Barclay's Apology In Modern English, edited by Dean Freiday, a masterful restatement of this Quaker theological classic.

Facing Social Revolution, by Jack Powelson, which cogently challenged much conventional Quaker wisdom on international economic development;

Quakerism: A Study Guide, by Leonard Kenworthy, one of many useful self-published volumes from a distinguished Quaker educator and writer;

Daily Readings From Quaker Writings, by Linda Hill Renfer, a wonderful new collection for reflection;

And I might also mention my own

Quakers Are Funny, among several others.

It is unlikely that any of these books, or numerous others which could be mentioned, would have been accepted by an established "trade" publisher. After all--the Society of Friends is a small body and few of these books have made a profit. But then again, few were produced as strictly business ventures; rather, they expressed a concern or a message that the writer felt led to share.

In the past few years, a number of Friends have contacted me about book manuscripts they had written, usually hoping I might publish them, under my Kimo Press imprint. Instead, I have urged them to self-publish their books, as I have, pointing out how desktop publishing technology and the availability of quality contract printers has brought this possibility within the reach of almost anyone.

One or two Friends have taken this advice, self-published their books, and gotten their message out on their own. But for most, this process still sounds too technical, too expensive or just too time-consuming. And for some persons it is; certainly it takes time and a certain familiarity with the process.

For those who feel they need assistance, I am now offering publishing consulting services. These services could include editing, arranging for typesetting, proofreading, printing, and assistance with marketing--just about everything, that is, except ghostwriting(I'm too busy with my own writing for that). I can even get covers designed--by a Friend, since I'm no artist.

If you think I might be able to help you get your message into print this way, let me know. Write to the address at the head of this letter; or you may call me, weekdays, preferably between 10AM and 1PM Eastern time. There is no charge for an initial consultation.

I hope to hear from you.

In Friendship,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

PS. Remember what George Fox said: "Walk cheerfully over the world, answering that of God in everyone--but don't forget to write some of it down." Or words to that effect.

The Friendly contribution to this tension will come as more of us have the novel experience of being economic losers. This could make for a very different kind of Quaker witness. Modern Quaker activism has been typically carried on for others: abolitionism is the prime example, followed by our eighty years of devotion to Prohibition. To be sure, women's suffrage in the nineteenth century, and the environmental movement today deal with issues affecting some or all of us as well. But even here, if one digs a little, the old aroma of noblesse oblige seeps out.

There's nothing wrong with this, but it reflects a context of at least some comfort. Facing the substantial erosion of our own economic status, though, that's different.

DENY IT AS LONG AS THOU CANST

It's also embarrassing. It goes against the grain of all our class and cultural background, and in the face of it the first, and perhaps most tenacious response is likely to be denial. Indeed, I would suggest that denial of this change is endemic among middle class Americans today, Quakers included.

Such denial is hardly surprising. Americans are an individualistic bunch, and Quakers are more individualistic than most; so we do not easily identify our personal experience with that of a large group. In addition, we are still haunted by the legacy of Puritan theology, in which worldly success was a sign of God's favor, and failure was evidence of moral corruption and divine displeasure. It was not so long ago, after all, that Quakers who went bankrupt were quietly disowned.

Dealing with these pressures privately and alone, however, is a recipe for disaster. The strains they put on marriages and families are particularly intense. Many can only be dealt with effectively, if at all, at the macro level through legislation and even international agreements.

But these statistics have not been cited as prelude to a political call to arms. My own laundry list of social reforms can wait for another

time. In any case, I'm not overly optimistic about the chances for meaningful social reforms in the short term; there, too, it looks as if we're in for more of the same in the Gray Nineties.

Instead, I've been looking into how individuals and families can cope with all these tendencies in advance of the millennium. What can help us keep it together, as we are stretched ever thinner across the rack of job, home, health, school, kids, etc., while trying to change the world at the same time?

Here at least, there is a practical answer. It was data from the Gallup Poll's Princeton Religion Research Center that confirmed my suspicion as to the most important ingredient of the answer, though in essence it was almost ridiculously self-evident.

A SIMPLE ANSWER TO A HARD QUESTION

Gallup's continuing research shows that one of the most reliable ways for individuals and families to cope with the stresses of the coming years will be to (is thee ready?)--

Go to meeting. Regularly.

Yep. As George Gallup, Jr. told me, "Church involvement results in positive social behaviors, and discourages negative social behaviors." This is true internally, in that regular churchgoers feel happier, more optimistic and satisfied with job, marriage and family; and it is true externally, in all sorts of ways: regular churchgoers live longer, lead healthier lives, and are more active in social and public affairs. "The correlations hold up even controlling for demographic factors," Gallup said. "It is decidedly a good thing."

Furthermore, Gallup reports, the favorable effects increase as church involvement deepens. His polltakers have developed a special scale for measuring church involvement, and he says that for those in the upper ten percent of involvement, the positive effects are substantially increased: "They are vastly happier than those who are least spiritually committed," Gallup said, far more likely to be working for the betterment of society, and report a much

lower incidence of various outward problems like drug abuse. Active believers also tend to be closer to their families, feel more financially secure, and are significantly less likely to have experienced "severe marital discord."

Thus, even in terms of bald '80s-style self-interest, church involvement could be seen as an investment, a way of loading the demographic dice in your favor. But there's more to this than just poll numbers: Churches have been the historic refuge and staging ground for oppressed groups in America struggling for freedom and advancement.

African-Americans understand this almost intuitively; no wonder Gallup surveys consistently show them as having the highest church attendance rates among American ethnic groups. Quakers also knew this once, when we had to struggle for religious liberty in places like Massachusetts, or--before that--battle for survival in England.

WHEN THE GOING GETS TOUGH...

Not that I think we will be facing the whip and gallows in the next few years. Still, if the American middle class ever does decide to fight to reverse its downward slide, a base in the churches will be perhaps one of the most important, if currently least appreciated resources it can have.

So, if you want to make it through the Gray Nineties in one piece, Friend, take some free advice: Next First Day morning, roll out of that bed, corral any available family members and trundle off to worship. While you're there, write a check for the meeting budget; and go to that potluck and Bible study group, and even those committee meetings (in moderation).

It may not seem like it, but you'll be living out one of the better slogans from the '80s, namely: Think Globally, Act Locally. And if you keep it up, and mind the Light, you'll not only increase your chances of getting through the rest of the century, you may also be making it possible to say, somewhere down the road, that, yes--

Gray can be beautiful.

FIRST CLASS MAIL

INSIDE: FACING UP TO THE GRAY NINETEIES:
A QUAKER SURVIVAL GUIDE

Address Correction Requested

From: Chuck Fager, A Friendly Letter
P.O. Box 1361
Balley's Crossroads, VA 22041

THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

In 1828 Friend Levi Coffin visited North Carolina on business. While there he attended a slave auction, where, he wrote later, "...a woman was placed upon the stand with a child in her arms....The bidding was lively and she sold for a high price. I supposed that the child was included in the sale, but soon saw that it was to be sold separately. The mother begged her new master to buy her child, but he did not want it and would not listen to her pleading. The child was torn from her arms and she was dragged away screaming, 'My child, my child!'"

With this and many similar scenes vivid in his memory, it is no wonder that Levi Coffin became a leading Quaker antislavery activist in his home state of Indiana, and in Indiana Yearly Meeting, then the world's largest. But such activism did not sit well with the Indiana elders who made up its ruling Meeting for Sufferings. They were all against slavery, true enough; but they strongly disapproved of such radical activities as the Underground Railroad. Helping slaves escape from their masters was against the law, and more and more often provoked violence

from slave-catchers. Persuading slaveowners to free their slaves, helping former slaves emigrate to Africa, working quietly for changes in slave laws, and praying--these were the proper methods for the quiet people called Friends.

Coffin and other "radicals" were not to be held within such limits, and said so, loudly. By 1842 they had thoroughly upset and alarmed the Indiana elders. That year the Meeting for Sufferings banned abolitionist Friends from serving on committees or holding offices. Coffin and the other "radicals" were outraged, and determined not to submit. Thus in First Month, 1843, Coffin and several hundred other abolitionist Quakers formed the Indiana Anti-Slavery Yearly Meeting of Friends. Relations between the two groups were acrimonious.

The split lasted until 1856. By then, tempers had cooled and some older intransigents had died. But most important, as the struggle over slavery deepened and veered toward war, what had seemed "radical" in 1843 was almost obligatory a decade later.

QUAKER CHUCKLES

A Quaker sales manager came into a meeting with a salesman whose track record had been steadily declining. "Friend," he said quietly, "the purpose of this meeting is to fire thee with enthusiasm. Because otherwise, I am going to fire thee--with enthusiasm."

One first Day evening a female Quaker minister dropped in on a nearby church which was holding a revival. When she sat down the visiting evangelist was just hitting

the high point of his sermon. He had the congregation in the palm of his hand. They were on the edge of their seats, hanging on his every word:

"You must repent!" he shouted, sweat dripping from his face. The congregation held its breath. "You must all repent," he repeated. "Repent or die!"

"Indeed?" murmured the Friend. Then turning to the woman next to her she said, "I'm certainly glad I'm not a member of this church."
