



QUAKER LIMERICK OF THE MONTH: "I sing to the praise of Ed Snyder,
For years our Committee's chief guider.
He worked without cease
For justice and peace
As the Hill's most respected outsider."
(By Duane Magill of Los Angeles, on Ed's retirement from FCNL.)

A Friendly Letter

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THIRD MONTH, 1990

Dear Friend,

A long ordeal may finally have ended for my own Langley Hill Meeting. AFLs #87 & #94 reported on the controversy there over the meaning of membership. At issue was an application from an attender employed by the Central Intelligence Agency. This case seemed to me to highlight rather dramatically questions relating to the meaning of membership and religious identity that confront many unprogrammed Friends meetings today.

It began two years ago when George Thomas, who is also an army reservist, submitted a letter of application. It took our Overseers Committee almost ten months to agree on a recommendation, which was that, despite our unease over his employment, Thomas seemed to us authentically called to be a Friend, contradictions and all, and should be accepted. The meeting labored over this at five lengthy, painful and inconclusive business sessions. We then put a hold on all specific membership matters, until we found greater clarity on the broader issues of membership and identity involved in George Thomas's case.

We pursued this clarity in what seemed to us a traditional Friends manner: Several threshing sessions were held, using various techniques to bring to light our ideas about our community, membership, and the meaning of Quaker testimonies today.

The threshing sessions were enjoyable, but didn't yield a resolution. So we fell back on another Quaker expedient: an ad hoc committee, including Friends of conflicting opinions, which was charged with bringing us recommendations on membership, which we hoped might show us the way forward. But while the committee made a helpful report, it too failed to resolve the issue.

After all these gyrations, by Eleventh Month, 1989 it was clear that there would be no escape from having to face the music and say yes or no: Could a CIA employee and army reservist be a Langley Hill Quaker? It took us two more months to overcome a tendency to procrastinate by filling our business agenda with other matters that kept putting off the final confrontation. Thus, the showdown was delayed until First Month 14, 1990. And after another

grueling business session, which nonetheless seemed to many present very covered and Spirit-filled, the original Overseers recommendation was approved, and George Thomas was accepted.

We paid a price for this action. One longtime member resigned, another transferred, others felt they had suffered emotional abuse, several formally stood aside from the decision. And not least, for over a year, our business sessions seemed haunted and burdensome. Even so, I think the outcome had several constructive aspects:

First of all, we found that conflict is not fatal. Further, we have tried to strike a balance between maintaining a sense of Quaker openness and freedom from doctrinaire rules, and a sense that our Testimonies are still meaningful. We were being called on to draw a line, to set limits without setting up a creed, and after all our agonizing, we did our best. We were also favored to have, in George Thomas, an applicant willing to stick with us and wait in limbo for almost two years while we worked this matter through.

While scars remain, the meeting community has, I believe, been strengthened by the experience of doing our best to follow Quaker process and lean on the Spirit through such a protracted conflict. And it may be that Langley Hill's experience could be useful to other meetings facing internal conflicts.

Yours in the Light,

Chuck Fager

Chuck Fager

PS. Did you notice that on the same day last month, news came that the Sandinistas had lost their election, Jesse Jackson was not running for mayor of Washington, Gorbachev wanted a USSR president elected by popular vote in a multiparty system, and Frank Zappa was hosting a show on the Financial News Network. Contra Bob Dylan, these days I do need a weatherman to know which way the wind blows.

Thinking about the first International Conference for Quaker Women, to be held at Woodbrooke College in England on 7/24-31, my first question is: What can women as different as Judith Middleton, Trayce Peterson and Ella Jones possibly have to say to each other that will fill up a week?

A typically male question, one may say, and perhaps rightly. But these three women suggest the amazing range of experience and outlook that will be encompassed among the sixty-five Friends who have been invited to attend.

Take Judith Middleton for starters, as she is on the American planning committee which is selecting about half of the attenders. She's a New Testament scholar, laboring away at a dissertation on narrative strategies in Luke, and a faculty member at the Earlham School of Religion. She comes out of Oregon (now Northwest) Yearly Meeting and a staunchly evangelical background.

THE WALL THAT HASN'T FALLEN

From there, though, she has journeyed into feminism and what is known as feminist spirituality. She speaks evenly but with hints of controlled anger about running into resistance back home to her sense of a call to ministry. She also tells with some weariness of the experiences of too many ESR women graduates, smart, well-prepared, spiritually grounded and anxious to minister among Friends, who run into a wall of opposition and indifference as soon as they leave the campus and try to find a job, especially those who yearn to be pastors. Too many are eventually forced to look outside the Society if they are to find any jobs in their field at all. This is a shameful record for a denomination so proud of its testimony of equality.

Middleton also spends much time in classes attempting to help newly-awakened feminist women students, especially those from evangelical backgrounds, cope with crises of faith in traditional Christianity, which are frequently evoked as they begin to see just how thoroughly patriarchal its

structures, values and sources have been, and how they have been used against women. "Who is God anyway?" they ask. "How can I worship a god who is always a male?" And then, "What would it mean for me for God to be female? How can I use the Bible, how can I still function in this church? How can I nurture my own spiritual life within such a patriarchal context?"

Tough questions. Given her own heritage and speciality, Judith Middleton maintains a particular interest in scripture, and in finding ways to use it which take account of its "annihilating strands," but which also recognize its value to many efforts at liberation. She notes that the Bible's repeated use as a text for liberation is a phenomenon too often ignored by mainstream, androcentric biblical criticism. And she acknowledges that the search for feminist interpretive models of scripture that do justice both to women and to the text is ongoing and not yet successful.

FAITH YES; CRISIS, NO

Middleton hopes to get some help with this search at the conference. She particularly hopes to broaden her theological understanding by contacts with women Friends of color and from non-European cultures, with whom she says she has had only limited contact thus far.

Trayce Peterson is a Friend who should have much to offer Middleton and other whites at the Conference. For one thing, even though she is a black woman in white society, a seminarian very much involved in biblical studies, and keenly aware of the oppressive use of Scripture in more ways than one, she reports having no crisis of faith as a result. "A lot of people come to seminary from a sheltered background," she reflects, and are "very naive" about the darker side of their religion.

Such was not Trayce Peterson's problem. Although her upbringing was centered in a relatively comfortable and sympathetic setting--Philadelphia Quaker schools and meetings--she was well aware

that Christianity and its Bible had been made tools of oppression. "But my God is a righteous God," she affirms, and "I hear more than oppression when I read the Bible." Besides which, whatever the problems faced by female ESR graduates, at Chicago's McCormick Seminary where she is enrolled, there are many women who hope for careers in its parent Presbyterian churches, "and they really have it rough out there," she says.

In any event, Peterson is not at all sure she wants to be a pastor, even though she has learned to be quite comfortable among pastoral Friends after several years of work in the Quaker project in Belize, which is sponsored by Friends United Meeting. She is still more comfortable now, working at the Chicago Fellowship of Friends, also FUM-sponsored, which is one of the very few predominantly black Quaker congregations in the United States.

REAL DIVERSITY VS. PHONY DIVERSITY

There she sees youth work, and the whole field of urban ministry as her priorities. And to be able to work in these areas she is prudently, if exhaustingly, pursuing a social work degree alongside her seminary studies. As this suggests, she harbors few illusions about the prospects for jobs among Friends in her chosen field.

"I've always been astonished and perplexed," she says, "by the fact that Friends have done so much work with other races, especially blacks, but have been so closed to inviting others into worship. It makes it really a challenge," she adds, "to understand what we mean when we talk about our 'diversity.'"

Ahem, yes. But she says all this calmly, without verbal posturing. And she returns, when thinking aloud about the Women's Conference next summer, to the concern for youth work, noting what seems to be its decline across a wide range of Friends groups she has seen. She was part of a strong and active Quaker youth group in Philadelphia, which did work projects, talked about serious issues and worshipped together.

THINK GIFT SUBSCRIPTIONS!

Stay Awake, Friends.

The Friend of London explains how, with:

THE FRIEND

JUNE 24, 1988

An Uncomfortable but Friendly Friend

FOR ^{nine} ~~seven~~ years Chuck Fager has been disturbing the peace of the Quaker Augustans by raising questions we would rather evade—and sometimes by giving news that we have tried to avoid. It was in March 1981 that he issued, from Baileys Crossroads, Virginia, the first number of *A Friendly Letter*. Month by month the four quarto pages have provided (as he set out to do) an "easy to read" journal. Whether the publication has also enabled "the various groups of Friends to get better acquainted and move closer together" it is at this juncture harder to judge.

But undoubtedly Chuck Fager, a convinced Friend and a working journalist, has provoked conservative, liberal and evangelical Friends alike to think again about unquestioned assumptions. *A Friendly Letter* set out to cover such varied themes as "New service opportunities for young Friends", "The American Friends Service Committee and its critics", and "How liberal and evangelical Friends can get along", as well as featuring "This month in Quaker history" and "Quaker chuckles" in each issue.

Chuck Fager began with an issue on the Law of the Sea Treaty, which seemed harmless enough. In the second he confessed that he might be rushing in where angels feared to tread in making a forthright analysis of the deep divisions within Iowa Yearly Meeting over the Friends Committee on National Legislation. This brought him a postbag ranging from incoherent anger to disbelief that tensions could possibly exist in our beloved Society.

Tensions often arise because, in our innocence, we do not believe that there are lines which we draw. And there are. Thus, when the pastor of Hinkle Creek Meeting,

Indiana, announced one Sunday in 1981 that he proposed that day and thereafter to administer holy communion, the result was an impasse with Western Yearly Meeting which (understandably) upheld the appeal of five members of the monthly meeting who had been displaced from their committee posts for objecting to the innovation. Matters having got that far, it was perhaps inevitable, as described in Issue 20, that the meeting's bank account, property, the pastor's tenure, the style of worship and Hinkle Creek's status as a monthly meeting should all come under question.

Or let us consider *A Friendly Letter*, Issue 86—"A liberal Quaker meeting learns to draw the line," describing in detail the steps taken by a New England monthly meeting (carefully in accord with *Faith and Practice*) to disown a member whose actions, though sincerely held, were unacceptable. "How often have I heard it said among liberal Friends," wrote Chuck Fager, "that we have no business making judgments about the beliefs and actions of those among us as long as they are sincere seekers." Reflecting on meetings which had "ducked or fudged" such issues, he had been left "very doubtful as to the adequacy of the Sincerity Standard as a basis for a healthy Quaker community life." But how are we to move beyond the Sincerity Standard without sliding back into the "bad old days of dogmatism and mass disownments"? He has no easy answer, but he propounds searching questions from which it is difficult to escape. . . . Of Chuck Fager's considerable contribution to our self-awareness, his stabbing our spirits broad awake, there can be no possible, probable shadow of doubt, no possible doubt whatever.

EDWARD H. MILLIGAN.

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But in her experience, such efforts now seem an endangered species among Friends. She approached the Chicago office of the American Friends Service Committee about a workcamp project with youth from the Fellowship of Friends; such workcamps were once an AFSC staple, but she, in her words, "had the door slammed in my face." Trayce Peterson was disappointed, but not deterred.

For Ella Jones, it is true enough that the problems of inner city youth are not exactly a priority; but then, for her the nearest "city" is a hundred miles away, accessible only by air, and has less than 5000 inhabitants. Nor has she been particularly concerned about the inability of female seminary graduates to find pastoral jobs. But she, after all, is a pastor, and one who never went beyond the seventh grade.

Yet Ella Jones is not all that unusual: there are several women pastors in her strongly evangelical yearly meeting; it also has a woman as its presiding clerk, and she is not the first female to serve in the post.

QUAKER WOMEN ON TOP OF THE WORLD

Where in the world do you find a strongly evangelical yearly meeting with such a record of female leadership? On top of the world--above the Arctic Circle, in Alaska Yearly Meeting, which until 1970 was a mission of California (now Southwest) YM. And Ella Jones, like most Alaska YM Friends, is an Eskimo, or an Inuit in her native tongue. And she should bring to the women's conference a perspective and experience likely to be unique even in such a gathering of originals.

Take for instance the problems of life: Ella Jones worries less about feminist spirituality, limited career options and oppressive use of the Bible than she does about, say, freezing to death. In fact, when I caught up with her by telephone, she had just attended a funeral for a cousin who had been out hunting in fifty degree below zero weather, got caught in a sudden blizzard, and was not found by the rescue team until six days later. One of Ella's own sons was similarly trapped for four days, but was found alive.

Hunting in the Alaska midwinter is not recreation; it is a necessity. Unemployment is very high among Alaska Quakers, although most of those without regular jobs apparently manage to keep reasonably busy in the struggle for survival. Even pastors take time off in the summer to fish and hunt Balluca, a kind of oversized seal, as part of their traditional subsistence way of life.

They have to do something on the side; a pastor's pay in Alaska is less than \$10,000 a year, in a state where a monthly heating bill is typically above \$200 per month, and fresh milk, flown in from somewhere, costs six dollars a gallon. Sometimes, Ella Jones says, when the budget is tight, the pastor's pay is strictly "tithes and offerings," i.e., what shows up when the plate is passed. And the YM has no pension plan for pastors. Evidently they must look to Social Security, some state support, and keeping that Balluca harpoon sharp.

A SURPRISE FOR SILENT QUAKERS

Ella Jones previously worked as a counselor with a local public agency, and it was for this job that she made her two previous trips outside Alaska, to Colorado and Oklahoma, for training seminars. She hasn't been to a yearly meeting other than her own, which she often travels to by snowmobile.

But once when she was in Fairbanks, she met some white Friends, who told her about Quakers who held silent meetings. She was told she would be surprised by these Quakers, and thinks she probably will. She understands that silent meeting Quakers don't even sing much. "But we Alaska Quakers love to sing," she affirms. She sings a lot herself.

There are, of course, some similarities between the problems of life in Seawik, her home town, and in the lower forty-eight. There is alcohol abuse, for example. And drugs. Not a lot of the crime associated with drugs in the cities, fortunately. But there is marijuana, and cocaine, and speed. And native users who turn dealers.

But how did there get to be so much leadership by women in such an evangelical group? It is certainly not

a matter of affirmative action. Rather, in Ella Jones's case it was a timely combination: a pastorate fell vacant, with no one to fill it; and Ella Jones felt a call. Like many of the classic Quaker ministers, Jones resisted her call for a long time; but with her husband's encouragement, she finally yielded, and now pastors the Ambler Friends Church.

Ella Jones is looking forward to the women's conference, and expects to be asked many questions as the only Eskimo there. But she will also be one of the only full-fledged female pastors on hand as well. And where some evangelicals lean heavily on New Testament passages declaring a subordinate role for women in church affairs, this does not seem to be a big deal for Alaska Friends. In fact, the YM superintendent, Robert Sheldon, told me he had recently conducted a Bible study class on First Corinthians, in which Paul directs (in 14:28) "Let the women keep silent in the churches." But Sheldon noted that elsewhere in the same epistle Paul seems to take a more equalitarian line, an acknowledgement of ambiguity in Pauline teaching that many evangelicals would be loath to make. If the involvement of women in Alaska YM has been primarily a matter of adjustment to necessity, it is an adjustment which seems to work.

COMING: A LIVELY CONVERSATION

Besides these three, there will also be women from Latin America, Africa and Europe, some of them doubtless bringing cultural experiences as striking to the hosts as anything the three highlighted here will have. This should provide an encounter with true diversity, not to say culture shock.

On second thought, these Quaker women will undoubtedly have plenty to say to each other in that one short week. Let's hope they'll share some of it with the rest of us. (NOTE: The U.S. planning committee needs to raise \$25,000 for travel costs for some of the attenders from the Western hemisphere. Friends and meetings who wish to help should send checks to: Friends Women's Conference, Section A, Earlham School of Religion, Richmond, IN 47374.)

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NINTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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AND--A QUAKER IN THE CIA, PART III

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From: Chuck Fager, A Friendly Letter
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THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

You wouldn't expect to find two eminent Quakers quarrelling over an army general, but it happened in 1885. The general was Charles George Gordon, who was killed in Khartoum, the Sudan, on 1/26/1885. Gordon's death marked one of the more melodramatic chapters of British imperialism; it came as he was fighting an apocalyptic Muslim rebellion against Egyptian rule, with the Egyptians acting in this case as imperial subcontractors for Britain.

Gordon saw himself as a "Christian warrior", bringing light to the dark continent; he had earlier waged a campaign against the still-flourishing Sudanese slave trade; and his death at the hands of fanatical Muslims caused an international sensation in the West, where he was praised by many as a hero of Christian civilization.

Among those swept away by Gordon-mania was, unexpectedly, the American Quaker poet John Greenleaf Whittier. Whittier called him "a Providential man, his mission in an unbelieving and selfish age revealed the mighty power of faith in God....For centuries no grander figure has crossed the disk of our planet." Strong words from a Quaker for a soldier; but perhaps predictable, given Gordon's battle against African slavery, which

paralleled Whittier's own devotion to abolitionism. On 3/4/1885, Whittier sent his comments to an English friend, and excerpts from the letter were printed in the British press.

But another English Friend, the great parliamentarian John Bright, saw Gordon quite differently. Bright had resisted British military-imperial schemes for almost forty years, often alone and in the face of intense vilification. Bright and Whittier never met, but were well-acquainted by letter; and when Bright read Whittier's comments, he sat down and on 3/18 sent the poet an angry eight-page retort. To Bright, the idea of a "Christian warrior" was a contradiction in terms, which should be clear to a Quaker. "Gordon," he added, "cared little for his own life and apparently less for the lives of others, or he would not have devoted himself to the savagery of war....This seems to me a sort of madness, which I cannot understand. Would the merciful Saviour have deemed this a service rendered to him? The war spirit which reigned supreme in Gordon seems to me wholly at variance with the spirit inculcated in the New Testament."

Who was right? I prefer Bright, yet while Whittier was clearly too fulsome, was he entirely wrong?

QUAKER CHUCKLE

What do traditional Quaker testimonies mean in the world of the 1990s? Here are two recent responses:

Jan Hoffman of Mt. Toby Meeting in Massachusetts, overheard a conversation on simplicity during a meeting workday: "Is using a blender consistent with Quaker simplicity?"

It's only a one-speed blender."

"What does Quaker simplicity mean in practice?"

"About 90% of what the rest of society does."

"So if everybody else has ten-speed blenders, we can have nine speeds?"

The other is from Friend Ahavia Lavana of New Jersey, a staunch feminist who wears a button that says: "I am the Mother of All Things, and All Things should wear a sweater. And a condom."