



## MEMOS TO SIMI VALLEY & THE JUSTICE DEPARTMENT:

*"The righteous are concerned for the rights of the poor;  
the wicked do not understand such concern....*

*If a king judges the poor with truth, his throne will  
be established forever."*

--Proverbs 29:7-8,14

# A Friendly Letter

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*Selected for Who's Who In Religion*

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Dear Friend,

Do you know much about the Mexican-American War of 1846-47? Few of us do. But it was important, because it intensified the conflict over slavery, and pushed the nation well down the road toward civil war. It also had many similarities to the Gulf War.

Do you know anything about antiwar protest during the Mexican War? Even fewer of us know much about that. Yet there were intense reactions: An eccentric abolitionist named Henry David Thoreau refused to pay his poll tax because of it, spent a night in jail, and emerged to write a classic essay on civil disobedience; an Illinois Congressman with a Quaker pedigree denounced the war; that was Abraham Lincoln.

But what about Friends? Did they bear witness against the war? To what effect? Who knows? I'm almost certain there were many protests; John Greenleaf Whittier, for one, wrote impassioned essays denouncing the war; but that's about all I have seen.

It is in hopes of resisting such historical amnesia that I plan to produce a book of articles and reports on Friends peace witness before and during the Gulf War. It is remarkable how quickly the war has already dropped out of general public awareness. In some ways this is good; the war fever of last year was both dangerous and disgraceful. Yet there is also much denial in it, a wish to forget the massive, senseless destruction carried out in our name.

It would be a particular shame if our Quaker witness is forgotten, because from all reports, there was much of it, and for the most part it was carried out faithfully and well. In fact, on occasion it was quite memorable. Consider these two examples:

At Homewood Meeting, near downtown Baltimore, a few Friends began holding a weekly candlelight vigil on the meetinghouse steps soon after the Gulf buildup began. As war momentum increased, the vigilers gathered more often, and their numbers grew: Friends from nearby Stony Run Meeting, students from the Baltimore Friends School, plus a growing trickle of people from the community at large.

By the week the bombing began, the vigils were being held nightly, with hundreds of people overflowing the meetinghouse steps. Local newspapers and television stations featured the gatherings. A twenty minute silent worship service was added, in the meetinghouse after each vigil. The vigils ended after the cease-fire; but a significant number of people, first drawn by the candles, have stayed on as new attenders.

Or consider Monadnock meeting, northwest of Boston near the Massachusetts-New Hampshire border. Monadnock Friends also organized vigils, though with nothing like the level of public attention gained by Baltimore Friends. Yet they also had an effect: some months later, on a quiet First Day morning, a visitor rose in worship to thank them. He said he had been called up with his reserve unit, had gone off to Iraq, and done as he was told. Yet, he said, he had learned of the witness to another way represented by the Monadnock Friends' quiet peace vigils, and this sign was important to him in the midst of war so far away.

There must be more such stories among us, and they will show, I believe, that in this dark time, and against the tide of public opinion, many Friends and meetings bore their peace testimony with steadfastness. And it is to such faithfulness, beyond any hopes of worldly success, that we are called. We need to remember, even celebrate, these experiences, and pass on the stories to those Friends who come after us.

Thus I want to renew the request made in AFL #129, for Friends to send me accounts of your meeting's worship and witness with concern for the Gulf War. The annual State of the Meeting reports--which most meetings should have recently completed--ought to be good sources, but personal experiences and recollections are important too. Several Friends have already responded; to them my thanks.

Yours in the Light,

*Chuck Fager*

Chuck Fager



If you're like most Friends I know, you have too much to read. Not just newspapers, magazines, and work-related material you're obliged to keep up with either. There's also too much to read for entertainment and uplift. Indeed, as a discriminating reader, you know there's even an excess of high quality stuff around. "**So many GOOD books--so little time,**" is our tee shirt slogan.

This spring that motto fits many recent Quaker publications as well; so what's a busy Friend to do? Be selective, of course; and for the rest, read a lot of reviews, so you can talk intelligently when other interesting titles come up in conversation. This issue will help on both counts: some picks you may want to actually read, and a crib sheet to cover you on some others; take your choice.

## LIGHT FOR YOUNG FRIENDS

First up is a group of three books, mainly (but not only) for younger readers. The most substantive is *Lighting Candles In The Dark*, just out from Friends General Conference (220 pages, paperback; \$9.50). *Lighting* is a collection of 45 brief stories, many based on incidents in Quaker history, aimed at helping our children, as the editorial committee says, in "*figuring out who they are and what they stand for.*"

This sounds good in theory; but many such collections, especially when produced by church committees, have been marred by a dangerous sentimentalism: They want to present their values in a positive light, and show the power of faith in tough situations. Fine; but all too often the faith is portrayed as a kind of magic wand, overcoming all evil and enemies with a smile and a kind word.

This is usually bad history, and always bad theology: Jesus didn't avoid the cross by smiling at Pilate; and early Friends overcame persecution only at the cost of several hundred dead and thousands hurt. Yet our writers are as prone to this heresy as anyone; three such pious Quaker myths were pointed out in AFL#56.

*Lighting's* editors have done

unusually well at maintaining a positive outlook while minimizing sentimentality. In one case, they overcome it with the best tool of all, humor: Carol Passmore's "*Popeye the Quaker Man,*" tells how the children of Durham, North Carolina Meeting took on the Quaker Oats Company over their advertising campaign featuring Popeye as a hard-slugging Quaker (for the adult version, see AFL #108).

This is a good story; but even better, in the middle of it there's a cartoon spread that's worth the price of the book. It's drawn by Signe Wilkinson Landau of Philadelphia, with help from the First Day School at her Williston Meeting. She is the ace editorial cartoonist for the *Philadelphia Daily News*, and the strip-in which Popeye maneuvers the bad guy Bluto into helping build a homeless shelter--is an on-target Friendly send-up of the comics Quaker Oats was stuffing in their oatmeal boxes until the kids of Durham Meeting scared them off.

## STORIES FOR FRIENDS ALL YEAR

Such wit and skill sets *Lighting Candles In The Dark* a cut above much other uplifting reading. So if you have children, grandchildren, or First Day Schoolers to read to, this is a book you should get.

Another is *Friends All Year*, by a Canadian Quaker, Margaret Springer (70 pages, paper, \$7.95). Springer is a pro, who teaches writing and publishes frequently in the quality children's magazines. In the book's first story, we meet six Quaker kids together at Canadian Yearly Meeting. Then they scatter to their homes all across the continent (Canadian YM covers the northland from sea to sea). Each of the next six stories features one of the kids: moving to a new home; coping with the death of a beloved grandmother; even fighting city hall. In the closing tale, they are together again at the next summer's yearly meeting sessions.

It is a modest concept, which Springer executes beautifully. The characters are vivid, the writing is supple, the stories well-crafted. I

can't recommend it highly enough.

Finally in this first batch, there is my own entry, *Fire In the Valley*, six Quaker ghost stories (100 pages, Kimo Press, \$8.95; due out in Sixth Month). As it is a total conflict of interest to review my own work, I won't. But permit me to point out that all the stories have some basis in Quaker history, and they range in age appeal from about eight to adult.

I sometimes hear Quaker parents complain that there isn't enough good Friendly reading matter for their children. But that's not true this summer. The three books featured here offer a total of 59 Quaker-related stories to keep young Friends of all ages interested, intrigued, and entertained, while they are surreptitiously Quakerized in the process.

## AFSC FROM THE INSIDE OUT

There are also some useful and entertaining new titles for adult Friends too. The first I want to mention is not actually a book, though it easily could have been. It's a 24-page essay, *Leadership in the American Friends Service Committee and Other Quaker Institutions*, by Bruce Birchard. Birchard is National Coordinator of AFSC's Disarmament Program, and the essay (which you can get from him free at AFSC, 1501 Cherry St., Philadelphia PA 19102) is the result of a three-month sabbatical he took last fall and winter.

AFSC and its troubled relationship with Friends has been a frequent topic in these pages, and in AFLs#127 and 129 we noted what seem like hopeful developments on this front. Birchard's paper offers a uniquely illuminating treatment of some of the trends in AFSC that have been at the core of these concerns, as viewed by a loyal but worried insider.

The next title might seem worlds away from Bruce Birchard's essay, and in one sense it is. *Dark Night Journey*, by longtime Pendle Hill teacher Sandra Cronk (180 pages, Pendle Hill, paperback, \$12.50), is about patterns of inward spiritual experience. It deals with outward service and activism mainly indirectly



and by contrast.

Yet there are parallels and connections here too, because she points out how our outward activism, whether we choose to recognize it or not, is rooted in our inner experience; and when important changes come upon us, from whatever corner, any longterm positive result is often preceded by a time of confusion and loss which has been traditionally called a "dark night of the soul."

Such times of darkness and loss, or "stripping," and their place in the life of the spirit, are Cronk's concern. She shows that this *via negativa* is a key phase of spiritual development, well known to mystics and saints down the centuries. It is, however, a path which is largely foreign to us, alien to our cultural focus on action and productivity.

### GOD IN THE DARKNESS TOO

Refusing to recognize the dark night experience, however, does not immunize us against it. Hardly; sooner or later, we all face major losses of some kind, physical, financial, emotional. And if we can open ourselves to it, there is a long tradition of reflection on the *via negativa* available, to provide comfort and constructive companionship when we are, usually unwillingly, embarked upon it.

Friends have produced their full share of these resources: For instance, look again at the *Journals* of Fox and Woolman, and you can read of times of very deep darkness and stripping that they went through. For more recent examples, get Elise Boulding's Pendle Hill Pamphlet, *Born Remembering*, or Jim Corbett's book *Goatwalking*, featured in AFL #124.

Although *Dark Night Journey* is not a lengthy work, I have to say that it took me some time to finish. Why was it such slow going? Not because the writing is poor or the subject obscure; by no means. The difficulty was simply that I am a creature of my times; given my druthers, I'd just as soon not think about the *via negativa*, thank thee. I'd much rather concentrate on doing something, prepare to be doing something, read about doing something, or write about doing

something. Which is to say, the book was hard because I clearly needed it; and I think I'm not the only one.

Speaking of neglected spiritual paths, Quaker Simplicity is another one, for me and, I suspect, many of us. This alone would have brought *Simple Living* (272 pages, Viking Press, cloth, \$21.00) to my attention. By Wanda Urbanska and her husband Frank Levering, it tells a familiar story from our times: Young couple leaves the urban rat race to seek a better life in the country. But for Friendly readers, there is considerably more of interest here than that.

Frank Levering is the son of Sam and the late Miriam Levering, who were the first nominees for Quakers of the Year in these pages back at the beginning of 1982 (AFL#10). And after several frustrating years trying to make it as big time writers in Hollywood and LA, the rural refuge that Frank and Wanda return to is the Levering fruit orchard on the slopes of the Blue Ridge mountains in Ararat, Virginia.

### THE HOME OF THE GIANTS

But this is not just another orchard. The elder Leverings, whose story is told here in more detail than anywhere else I have seen, are giants of Quakerism in our time. For decades they sallied forth from their spectacular hillside arbor to plant quiet but unmistakable marks on national and world events. At the same time they raised six children along with uncounted thousands of bushels of apples. Theirs is a legacy that could fill a shelf of good books.

Thus in *Simple Living* Frank and Wanda are not simply fleeing the city jungle to rewrite their life-scripts upon some bucolic *tabula rasa*. Rather, they are returning to grapple with a formidable family heritage which they must struggle to make their own. They also have to struggle to preserve it, because the orchard is deeply in debt when they arrive, and could be lost to the banks and the developers if they don't make it profitable again.

The course of their efforts does not, naturally, run smooth, especially as they attempt to combine farming with a continuing writing career. Nor

is there yet a happy ending: Even after several years of hard labor, the orchard's fate is uncertain at the book's end. But their exodus from Lala land to what could more truthfully be called the Real Big Apple is recounted engagingly and occasionally with eloquence; *Simple Living* made enjoyable reading from end to end.

Well, almost. My one complaint against it is that the authors remark several times, apropos of the interplay between them and the elder Leverings, that Miriam Levering "*was no feminist*." Each time I read this, my eyebrows shot up in astonishment.

Miriam Levering not a feminist? She, who helped write the Law of the Sea Treaty, and knew its 300-plus articles backward and forward; she, who was a moving force behind much of the Quaker UN Office's programs; she, who as long ago as the fifties, packed her brood in the car to go on speechmaking trips on behalf of the UN and international lawmaking?? (I could rant on, but Marnie Clark does me one better, in *Lighting Candles In The Dark*, with her story, "*Who Owns the Sea?*" about Miriam's and Sam's life and work.)

### A NON-FEMINIST--NOT!

But how is it that such a notable record of independent achievement, which few of her more verbally militant sisters could match, doesn't qualify as "feminist"? I'm stumped. Somebody's definitions got garbled in the eighties, I suspect. To my mind, we need all the "non" feminists like her we can get.

But this cavil was not a deterrent to my enjoyment of *Simple Living*, which has the tang of one of the Levering Orchard's best apples.

\* \* \* \*

**FLASH! THIS JUST IN:** Besides reading, there's some new listening you shouldn't miss: Quaker singer Susan Stark's new album, *Cancion de la Loba*, is finally out, after months of delay, and it is terrific. At \$10.95, you should give it a listen.)

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(NOTE: All the items reviewed here, except Bruce Birchard's essay, can be ordered from the FGC Publications Office: 1-800-966-4556.)



INSIDE: Candles for a Dark Night--  
Spring Book Issue

Forwarding & Address Correction Requested

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### THIS MONTH IN QUAKER HISTORY

It seems that Lucretia Mott just couldn't stay out of trouble in Fifth Month, at least in the late 1830s. In 1838, she was a key organizer of the Second Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, which gathered on 5/15 in brand-new Pennsylvania Hall, built by and for abolitionists and other reformers. Within two days, however, the hall was a smoking ruin, burned down by an angry pro-slavery mob, and the Mott family had barely escaped an attack by the crowd.

Bad as the outward attacks were, the internal conflicts in the convention may have been even worse. Many antislavery leaders, and not all of them men, were against such independent female organizations; they were even more shocked when some radicals, including Lucretia Mott, insisted that women should be able to speak before mixed female and male audiences. The "woman question", in fact, soon led to a split in the abolitionist movement.

Surveying the rubble of Pennsylvania Hall, the convention organizers, Lucretia among them, vowed to meet again in Philadelphia the following year. But where? After the riot and arson, few institutions were anxious to host the gathering.

Lucretia asked all seven of the local Friends meetings, and every one declined. Finally, the convention was forced to meet in the "hall" of the Pennsylvania Riding School; the hall was, in fact, a stable.

The Convention met as scheduled in Fifth Month, 1839. A few days before it opened, Philadelphia's Mayor, one Isaac Roach, called on Lucretia to offer some suggestions for keeping the peace: Don't meet at night, keep the meeting female only, and don't let blacks attend. Except for pointing out that the stable couldn't be lighted for night sessions anyway, Lucretia told him, politely n doubt, to bug off: black women would be at the convention whether he liked it or not. Despite the mayor's fears, the convention met without disturbance.

The strain of these efforts made Lucretia ill. To help her recovery with a sea voyage, she and her husband James were named delegates to the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London. They took ship on 5/7/1840, headed for what became a historic confrontation: The convention's refusal to recognize female delegates, which galvanized Lucretia and others into the creation of a self-conscious feminist movement.

### QUAKER CHUCKLE

During the struggle over whether women should be allowed to speak before "promiscuous audiences" of both men and women, a New England abolitionist named Maria Chapman wrote a poem lampooning the hysterical reaction against the idea by many clergymen and other worthies. While Chapman was not a Friend, her verses ring too true and tart to be passed by:

*Confusion has seized us, and all things go wrong  
Women have leaped from their spheres*

*And instead of fixed stars, shoot as comets along  
And are setting the world by the ears....*

*They've taken a notion to speak for themselves  
And are wielding the tongue and the pen  
They've mounted the rostrum, the termagant elves  
And--oh horrid--are talking to men!*

--Thanks to Margaret Bacon, in *Valiant Friend*