

Talking With Friends



Oral Histories to Commemorate the 200th Anniversary of the Downingtown Friends Meeting House

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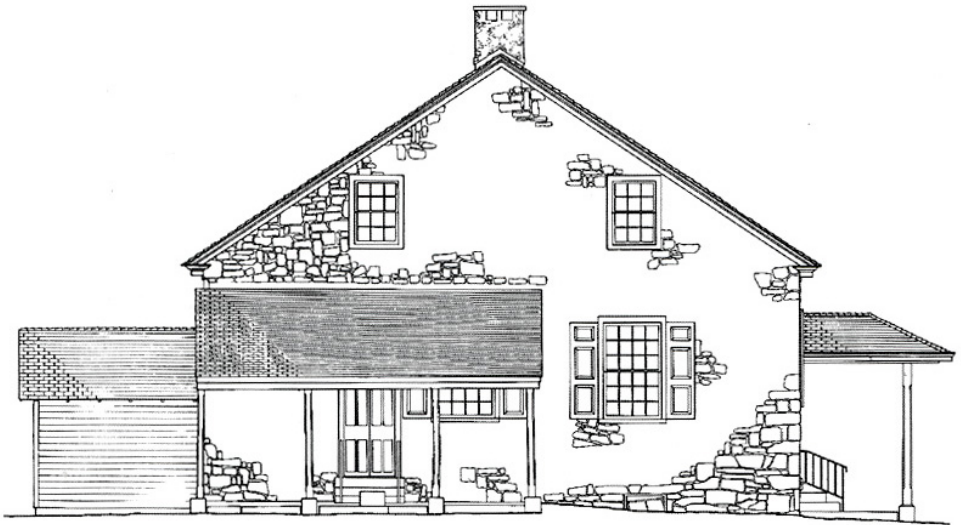
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Downingtown, PA 19335

Table of Contents

Contributors	iii
Introduction	iv
Paul W. Brown Jr.	1
Virginia McQuail	21
Gerard (Gerry) and Margaret (Rita) Williams	41
Francis G. and Enid Brown	61
Louis (Lou) and Frances (Fran) Schneider	85



Contributors

Interviewees:

- **Paul W. Brown Jr.**
November 15, 2003
- **Virginia McQuail**
June 22, 2003
- **Gerard (Gerry) and Margaret (Rita) Williams**
July 23, 2003
- **Francis G. and Enid Brown**
August 3, 2003
- **Louis (Lou) and Frances (Fran) Schneider**
November 1, 2003

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Introduction

This year the Downingtown Friends Meeting celebrates the 200th anniversary of the construction of its meeting house. Since 1806 this structure has served the spiritual needs of local members of the Religious Society of Friends. Those interested in the history of the Meeting might wish to obtain a copy of Francis G. Brown's fascinating book *Downingtown Friends Meeting – An Early History of Quakers in the Great Valley* (Library of Congress Catalog Card Number 99-73618).

For two hundred years, more than 10,000 weekly meetings for worship, 2,400 monthly meetings for business, and hundreds of memorial services and weddings have occurred in this building. Through times of national strife and war, peace and prosperity, this building has served as a touchstone for the believers – a place where different perspectives and opinions were hotly, but respectfully, threshed out until the “sense of the meeting” was apparent. Over the years these many events have imbued the meeting house with a deeply spiritual character.

The meeting house has spoken different messages to different people across time. Those passing by admire the simple beauty of the stone building. Inside, the raised partition and doorway may interest some. Others may wonder why there is no pulpit or why there are no religious icons.

To those fortunate enough to have participated in a meeting for worship, the meeting house speaks with a richer voice. It radiates warmth and spirituality that has accumulated over the years - a warmth emanating from

walls that retain something of each message shared over 200 years of meetings for worship.

Those with particularly long associations with Downingtown Friends are a vital link to earlier times. Their recollections and insights further animate the simple stone structure. As such, the meeting house is not only for contemporaries to meet; it allows generations to come together. Like the meeting house walls, such recollections – if captured - can speak to future generations.

It is with this in mind that Kevin Ferris, Jeff Domenick and Marc McCarron undertook a project in 2003 to capture in print and on video the oral histories of eight of the more seasoned, or “weighty”, members of the Downingtown Friends Meeting. This volume, a direct result of their labors, marks the Bicentennial event.

Over several months in 2003, Kevin, Jeff, and Marc captured on video their interview sessions with the following individuals:

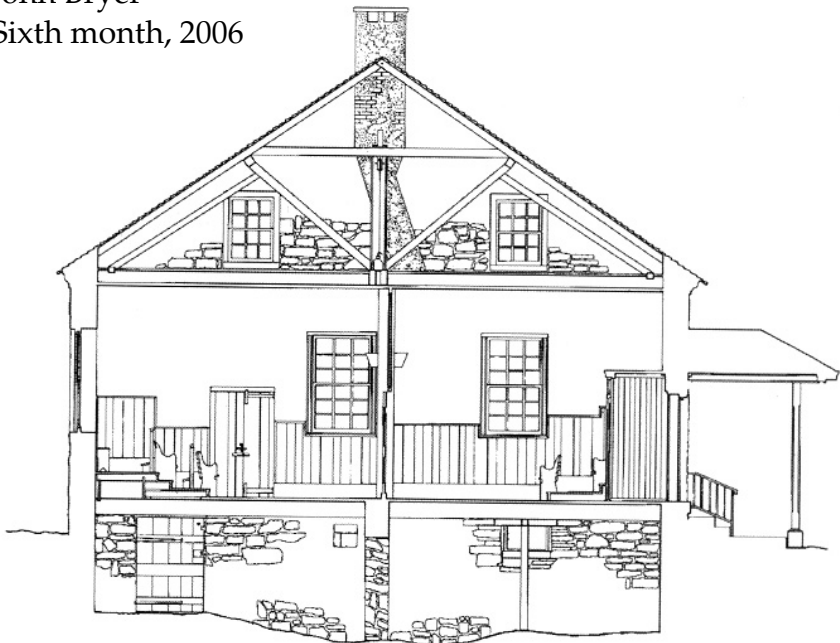
- Paul W. Brown Jr.
- Virginia McQuail
- Gerard (Gerry) and Margaret (Rita) Williams
- Francis and Enid Brown
- Louis (Lou) and Frances (Fran) Schneider

The contents of this book were derived directly from these conversations. Rather than provide verbatim transcripts of the interviews, Kevin edited them into a more readable and appealing narrative in which the interviewer is eliminated. Additionally, some repetition was eliminated, parts were spliced together so that similar topics were joined, and some grammatical

modifications were made. What results are readable narratives that are true to the interviews from which they were derived.

This book will mean different things to different people. To the families of those interviewed, this record represents a gift to future generations who will be able to “hear” their antecedents. For Downingtown Friends members of long standing, this book will recall events in their lives and perhaps spur them to document their recollections for the benefit of us all. To younger members of the Meeting, this book provides a bridge to an earlier time to help them understand how the life of the Meeting has changed over the past century. For researchers the events, people, and customs discussed in this book will be of value across a variety of disciplines. Most importantly, these stories illustrate how truly special these seasoned Friends have been to our meeting.

John Bryer
Sixth month, 2006



Paul W. Brown Jr.

November 15, 2003

Paul's home

Kendal-Crosslands Communities
Kennett Square, PA

I was born May 6, 1913, so my earliest recollections of Meeting and the school, which was an integral part of my experience in Meeting, start around 1919, when the school building was built. I was 6 years old and that's when my first recollections of Meeting really started. The school was built by parents, members of Meeting for the Meeting children.

I was born and raised at 447 East Lancaster Avenue, which is directly across from East Ward Elementary School. Of course, the Meeting and subsequently the Meeting school was within walking distance and my experience with meeting was a six-day experience. It wasn't going to meeting for worship on Sunday for an hour, hour and a half. Because the school was so intimately related to the Meeting, you couldn't go to school without being exposed to the Meeting.

My cousin Francis Brown was about four years younger. He and my sister went at the same time. But Francis' older brother Ellis and I were in the same class and our neighbors up and down Lancaster Avenue sent some of their children to Downingtown Friends School. I would say we had between 25 and 30 kids in the school.

We had kindergarten up to sixth grade. When we started out it was with kindergarten and about first or second grade, I think. Then, as we got older, it went up to sixth grade and stopped and we had to go somewhere else. ... So, as I say, we were at the Meeting for a large part of five days a week -- at the Meeting, not in the Meeting. And we were in the Meeting twice a week, Thursday and Sunday.

It wasn't all Quaker children. I would say maybe at least half were non-Quakers. I think the tuition when we first started was around \$100 a year. And we had one teacher, a Miss Gifford. She became quite controversial

and after about two years she left and we got another teacher who was a more traditional Friend.

At the same time, I remember going to Meeting with my family and five of us, my mother, father, brother, sister and I, sat up on the back bench on the right-hand side of the meeting. And that's where we sat all the time. When we went to Meeting we went, as kids, for a whole hour.

I can remember so clearly how difficult it was to sit quietly for a whole hour. My, that hour went very, very slowly. Now and then events occurred that were funny and that presented an additional difficulty of trying to contain our laughter. It was really, really difficult.

These were not necessarily when I was 6 years old, but perhaps later on. One of the funniest things that ever happened was when my Uncle Bill Cadbury sat up front with Uncle Ellis Brown and old Charlie Thomas. Charlie Thomas sat on the end of the bench and then Uncle Bill.

Uncle Bill was bald but he was trying to grow hair on his head. So he was using some kind of salve, we all knew, to try to grow hair and he had a kind of fuzz up here. And the sun shone in and highlighted that fuzz. Well, one day at Meeting, a bat started flying around and the bat started back at the ... I think it was up in the vestibule by the front door. And that bat flew under the partition, up and then down, just barely skimmed Uncle Bill Cadbury's head. Up, down, under the partition on the next side, and kept going around like this over and over again. Right over his head. Well, you know, for little kids, that ... that really broke us up.

Another thing that happened -- bear in mind this was just a small Meeting; we might have had 15 people in attendance -- there was an elderly brother and sister

who had a farm down near Whitford, good old Quaker names, Downing. Uncle Tom Downing. He actually was an uncle of Ellis Brown, but not my branch of the family.

Tom Downing and his sister were quite elderly and they came to Meeting in their Ford car. At that time there was no driveway at meeting. We didn't have a paved, a gravel driveway, at all. It was just grass.

After meeting, we were all standing outside talking in front of the Meeting -- that's where we talked, not on the side. Daylight Savings Time had just started. And old Mr. Tom Downing and his sister came in the Meeting gate, up around the front of the Meeting, and saw us all standing out there. I guess all of a sudden they must've realized that it was Daylight Saving Time and they had forgotten about it. And they kept right -- everybody was laughing -- they kept right on going, right on out, back home again.

Another time we had a member whose name was John Hershey. He started and managed a nut tree nursery, which was directly across from meeting house, where the church is, the Methodist church and the medical building. That went way back. He grafted different kinds of nut trees and he was an expert. Actually he worked with the Tennessee Valley Authority when it first started because they were trying to develop ways of repairing the damage to the ground in the Tennessee Valley and to develop ways of making a living for the people who lived down there. Nut tree nurseries is one of the things that he worked on. But he came to Meeting and he spoke. His talk was not always on a subject of Christianity, but it was interesting. One day he was talking, something about earthworks, and instead of earthworks he used the word earthworms. That was a funny occasion.

But I remember starting to the school in first grade. We had a teacher, Miss Gifford, who was a very progressive teacher. By progressive I think I would mean classes were relaxed, I don't remember any desks in the school. I think we sat around in the corner, on tables and chairs, that sort of thing. She was somewhat controversial and lasted a couple of years. We kids gave her a hard time, but she did a wonderful job of entertaining us.

At that time, the stream that runs through the bottom of what we call the meadow, where the parking lot is, was a part of pasture for cattle. And it was all grass, no trees, no brush of any kind. The stream was a clear stream, had fish in it. And Miss Gifford used to let us get a stick and put a string on it and a bent pin. Not a worm, not a fishing hook, that would hurt the fish. And we'd all go down there and sit, and hold our fishing rods over the stream trying to catch a fish.

And this was in the very early spring. It was pretty cold. One little boy spotted Miss Gifford kind of leaning over the stream and pushed her in the water. You know how kids are, kind of antagonistic? And then to make matters even worse, we had a fire in the fireplace in the schoolhouse and Miss Gifford had to dry out her shoes. She put her shoes in front of the fire and got them too close and burnt the shoes. Oh, we thought that was great.

We went to midweek meeting for worship at that time. Meeting was open and attended on Thursday morning, as I remember at 11 o'clock, and six or seven elderly Friends would come to Meeting every Thursday and the kids in the school would go. So, really, Meeting and the school were directly related. The influence was, for me at least, that I was exposed to Meeting six days a week, maybe a little over an hour on Sunday, but for

many hours a day, five days a week, during the school year. So the school surrounded the Meeting.

When I graduated from Downingtown Friends School, having finished the sixth grade, I went to the Westtown School. There were six children from Downingtown Friends School who started to go to Westtown. We were driven over by our mothers, who took turns. They left us at school, came and picked us up, and brought us home till we went to boarding school. They continued on with the younger kids, transporting them to Westtown School. So my relationship with the school and the Meeting is really inseparable. And it has been the influence of my religious life, of my life, because I was exposed to Quakers through Meeting and school, and the Bible and Friends' testimonies, at home and then in Westtown School. So it's hard for me to get used to the current liberalism of what we call Quakerism today.

We did not have Quaker instruction at school, but I was continuously exposed to Meeting, to Quakerism. And at that time Quakerism meant Christianity. It meant the Bible. And both at home, and in meeting, and in Sunday school, which we had but I don't remember very well. The ministry related pretty much entirely to the Bible. People who spoke in meeting spoke on a New Testament text, pretty much like a minister in a church would.

And we had *Faith and Practice* which was much more directive in explaining Quaker testimonies. It wasn't, we hope you will avoid the use of drugs, and avoid the use of alcohol. It said, Do you avoid alcohol? Do you avoid harmful substances? In other words, it was much more directive than it is now. Not, we hope you do it. And the Old Testament was a source of stories about the Israelites. Many of the stories were very important to

us. But the source of our religion and our faith was the New Testament and the teachings of Jesus.

Prominent Friends modified the teachings of Jesus or interpreted those teachings somewhat differently than other religious denominations. Quakers like George Fox defined a somewhat different Christianity from the Christianity of the Catholic Church, or let's say the Episcopalians: that of God in every man, direct communication with God rather than through a minister. These things were different between Quakers at that time and other religious denominations.

And all of this led to the Quaker peace testimony and the other testimonies that we find so valuable. In those days, these testimonies were more rules to live by than I think they are today, where everybody is free to modify them in accordance with their own point of view. There's a much more relaxed approach to our religious beliefs now. And this applied to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting as well as Downingtown Meeting. Also in those days, I think our Meeting had a closer relationship to Philadelphia Yearly Meeting than it has today. A larger percent of our members participated actively in the committees of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

You might be interested a little bit in how the Meeting was managed in those days. Of course, in the school, in the meetinghouse, we didn't have any electricity. We did have a coal-burning furnace in the basement and one heat outlet in the middle of the Meeting room, in the aisle with a grate over it. And that was a source of heat in the wintertime. And during the war, during the First World War, I remember that we closed the partitions so that we used only one half of the meeting in order to save on heat. And we did that again, I think, in the Second World War.

The budget, as I remember it, was around \$3,000 a year. Everybody was assessed an amount to support the meeting, which was thought to be appropriate for that particular person's circumstances. And the assessment was delivered in writing when talking about the budget. And in those days, everybody paid 100 percent of their assessment. I think the highest assessment was \$100.

I would say we stopped the assessment around the time of the Second World War because, I remember, in the middle 1930s, having my Uncle Ellis, who was Francis and Ellis' father, coming to us and asking, this was after I was married, I think, 1938, whether an assessment of \$10 would be appropriate. In those days, \$10 was a lot. I don't think anybody was assessed more than \$100, but in those days every member paid his or her full assessment without question.

I don't remember for sure who started the fire in the furnace basement back in the days when I was a child, though I think we had a man who came in and did that. It was not done by a member of the Meeting. And we had two black men who cut the grass and raked the leaves and they were just great, great men. They were probably paid around 25 cents an hour for maintaining the outdoors of the meeting.

Then I think it was probably around sometime in the late '20s or early '30s that electricity was finally brought into the meeting. We had gotten to the point where we really needed it, and it was finally decided to do it. There was great talk about how we would use electricity, electric lights, without destroying the internal architecture of the meetinghouse. And they came up with this idea of having these shielded lights, so we don't see any bulbs but the shields that go around those bulbs reflect the light upward. And that was how we avoided having something hanging down. I sometimes wonder if

we hadn't put in electricity at that time, whether today members of the Meeting would agree to let electricity come in at all. We're so determined to keep the meeting physically as it always was, I kind of doubt we'd have electricity. Maybe we would.

Before that, I don't remember ever using the meeting house at night. In my memory, the school building served as a gathering place for many occasions to raise money for the school. They had suppers there, really good suppers. Charged a dollar probably.

My own involvement in the activities of Meeting -- other than going to meeting for worship -- began, I would say, in the middle 1930s and when my children came along in the early '40s. The school was not in existence. It had closed its doors in the Depression, in the middle '30s. And some of us decided that we ought to start the school again for our own children who were coming along right after the war.

At this particular time, the building was rented out completely to John Hershey, the nurseryman. And he used the cellar for his grafting work, grafting the trees, so he had roots down there. He had big bins of dirt, roots buried, and there was a tremendous job converting the building from a house that was lived in to the school building again. But we raised some money and the school committee was willing to borrow some money. We cleaned up the basement; we renovated the building. I can remember a lot of the work was done by some of us younger members of the meeting -- we had to sand the floors, paint the whole place. And we started the school, I would say, in 1946.

We hired a teacher from Germantown Friends School who was in charge of their primary department, a woman named Mrs. Davison. And she was a progressive

teacher too, but she taught our children. We started out with about the same number of kids we had back in the '20s and early '30s. I don't think at any time we had more than 35 children. Dorothy Davison met Eleanor Cadbury, the daughter of Uncle Bill and Aunt Mary Cadbury, who lived out toward Lionville. And she was Dorothy's assistant. They ran the school for several years, and had to hire another teacher who taught reading and that sort of thing. That school was managed very much the same as the earlier school. Dorothy and Eleanor moved away up to New Hampshire, at which time Frances Ash became the head of the school. The school closed again in the middle to late 1960s and we've had no school since then.

The school closed both times because we ran out of students. In those days, there were cycles of Meeting families having children, basically at the same time. And then you'd run out of those children. They move away or to another school and the need for the school no longer existed. Also, in the 1930s we were affected by the Depression. Then in the '40s, a new generation of children came along and we opened the school up. That generation graduated and moved away and the school was closed. Now with all the kids we have today, it's too bad we don't have a Friends school and can expose them to the kind of relationship to the Meeting that I had.

Over this period of time, I was clerk of the Monthly Meeting, I think on two separate occasions. When I was clerk, our Meeting was so homogeneous, so united, we didn't have many varying points of view like we have today. And I used to enjoy writing up the minutes at home before going to monthly meeting. I could pretty much write the minutes because I could pretty well evaluate what the decision of Meeting was

going to be. I enjoyed doing that. And I've been treasurer of the Meeting for quite awhile.

Once when Meeting was not united was over the ramp. We were in the process of making the recent change in the school building, when we added on the room, etc. A lot of planning went into that. And the subject came up as to whether or not we should build a ramp so that people physically handicapped could get in and out of the Meeting. There was very strong objection, based largely on our firm commitment to keep the physical appearance of our meeting unchanged from what it has been historically. There was both a sense that the ramp wasn't necessary and this idea that we don't want to deface the appearance of the Meeting.

While it didn't affect me, I thought Meeting was taking a step backward and was not keeping up with the clear trend of the times, which was to make facilities available for handicapped people. It was happening everywhere and our Meeting was thinking in terms of a hundred years ago when people who were handicapped didn't get around. So one wet cold day, I borrowed my wife Mary's wheelchair and got up the nerve to go out and sit bundled up in front of the steps that go up into the new wing of the schoolhouse. I would just sit quietly in the wheelchair without saying a word. And after everybody had gone in to Sunday school, I went back and got in the car and guess I waited for meeting. I don't know what happened, but that was my protest. At any rate, we finally got the ramp, and it works very well.

I was clerk of Quarterly Meeting for a time during and after the Second World War. I can remember going up to Coatesville -- when there was a meeting in Coatesville -- on the trolley from Downingtown to save gasoline. So I was clerk of the Quarterly Meeting when it

met at Coatesville. But Quarterly Meeting I don't think has changed one bit from that time to the present time.

The form of Quarterly Meeting is the same as it was 55-60 years ago. The minutes are the same. The people are not the same but they are the same in many ways because they're for the most part older Friends. And Quarterly Meeting used to always serve a meal -- now I think they bring their own. For example, at Coatesville, the Quarterly Meeting would serve a hot supper. I can remember sitting at the head of Quarterly Meeting at Coatesville and my wife Mary brought up our daughter Susan when she was just a little kid. She'd come up, sit beside me as clerk.

I've always questioned whether Quarterly Meeting really served a useful purpose. It's kind of a carry over from an earlier time when getting together periodically for Friends living in a rural area was an important method of communication.

As I look at the future of our Meeting, what are my hopes and what are my concerns? Francis Brown has mentioned from time to time a conversation he had with his father, who years ago, because our meeting was so small, expressed a concern about whether it would continue to exist. I must say that I never had any concern about our Meeting continuing to exist, back let's say 50 years ago. Because it seemed to me that Downingtown Meeting as such was such a strong influence in the community and had strong attachment of the people who were members that its future was assured even though it was very small.

But one of the reasons we were very small was that the community was totally different than it is today. Our community was composed of the Borough of Downingtown and the farming areas all around. There

were no housing developments. Lionville was a tiny little town with a little general store. Coatesville was not a part of our community. And between Downingtown and Coatesville, Downingtown and West Chester, Downingtown and Paoli, there was nothing but farms. So our Meeting was naturally very, very small. I'm not sure that our Meeting membership has grown in greater proportion than the population of the community we serve.

And when I was growing up, we had a group of members and attenders who generally held the same religious point of view. They were influenced by the teachings of Jesus and the Bible. And the strength that we enjoyed was due to this solidarity of point of view, as compared with Quakers in general today, who it seems to me have widely varying points of view, which at times result in the kind of controversy which we didn't have in the early days. And to me this is a weakness. A group that doesn't have a central vision, a concept of a central teacher that we all look to, is in my opinion far weaker than a group that has such a central vision, a central conception, of what their religion is all about.

On the other hand, in my opinion, our Meeting is very strong at this point. We have a very large number of people who support the Meeting, who work hard on various committees. So I think our Meeting is stronger than meetings in general and much stronger than the Yearly Meeting.

I see us as somehow attracting a continually growing number of people, which is quite different from the Yearly Meeting, which no longer has the attraction of a growing population of monthly meetings. And the monthly meetings, the strength of the Yearly Meeting, are moving out of Philadelphia into the suburban areas and are therefore becoming scattered rather than

centralized. Philadelphia has a smaller influence on the suburban areas. Our meeting, for example, has fewer participants in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. I think -- I'm a radical in this respect -- but I think our meeting can get along perfectly well without Philadelphia Yearly Meeting.

The thing that has caused the change in the membership of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting and the monthly meetings is the reduction in the rules and the importance of the testimonies by which we live and in the tolerance of deviation from those testimonies. I disagree very strongly with the point of view that anybody can be a Friend. In order to be a Friend, you have to be willing to accept the basic testimonies that have been adopted over a period of 350 years. In our meetings, we're weakened by the admission of members who have not been indoctrinated adequately into what it means to be a Quaker.

The constituent meetings of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting have been so desperate to attract new members that we have made it very easy to become a member of the Religious Society of Friends in the Philadelphia area.

Too many people are admitted into membership of our meetings -- not just our meeting -- who come with reservations about their willingness to try to live in accordance with the testimonies of Friends. And too many people in the last 50-60 years have been accepted into membership who come in with the idea of changing the Meeting.

We as Friends have to be clear and sure about what we believe. And people who would like to join with us need to be perfectly willing and want to accept those testimonies without feeling that they can modify them in accordance with their own point of view. I'll give you a

little illustration of this. Some years ago one of our young mothers took her child to Yearly Meeting and this child participated in the activities there. On the way home, the mother asks this child, "Did you like going to Yearly Meeting? What did you think about it?" "Oh," the child says, "I want to be a Quaker when I grow up because they don't have any rules." And to me this is a perfect example of the flexibility and tolerance that is weakening our meetings.

Our Meeting is growing and I know that we're doing something right because we have such a loyal, active concerned group of members and attenders. But without a clear understanding of what we stand for, I'm concerned about the future. In our Meeting there are so many people who are searching and that indicates to me that they're not sure what they're looking for. And they're not sure what they're looking for because they haven't accepted a teacher.

We all have something of God in all of us, so I have no problem with the divinity of Jesus. And I sometimes think there's something wrong with me because I'm not searching. I don't feel that I'm searching. I kind of feel sorry for people who don't have enough guidelines to live by and are still searching.

Going to meeting for worship on Sunday is an important part of my life, which I've done all these years. While the vocal ministry in meeting has changed dramatically over the period of time that I'm talking about, I listen as best I can -- I don't hear very well -- to what is being said. It isn't necessarily what I would prefer to hear, but it nevertheless represents a deeply held concern of those people who are presenting the point of view. And I guess the periods of silence are very important to me and the presence of the children in meeting is very important to me, too.

The vocal ministry when I was younger was very much centered on interpretations of the Bible, the Bible stories, like a minister in a church. It wasn't a message, a sermon that was prepared in advance and read, but it certainly was a message that came from the speaker, the minister's experience and exposure to the Bible stories, whether it was Old Testament or New Testament. That was the focus of the meeting for worship. And that's very different from ... the personal experiences that we hear about these days, about bringing up children, and problems and taking care of older people. All of that's very sincere but it's different.

Whether there's as much depth in the ministry today as there used to be is a question of how you measure depth. You can measure it in one way by how sincerely the speaker believes or is concerned about what's being said. I think people who speak in meeting today are very much concerned about the subject they're talking about. I think we have some problems because some members of our Meeting are intolerant of what is spoken of in meeting and are very critical of people who speak in a certain way. I've been criticized for speaking in objection to some of the things that Quakers are currently tolerating, and been told that it's inappropriate to talk about things like that. I've had letters from people severely criticizing me for what I've said in meeting, to the point where I'm very hesitant about saying anything anymore.

I think there's been a lack of tolerance of different points of view, particularly in Monthly Meeting for business. And I think Monthly Meeting has become a little careless about reaching a sense of the meeting, an agreed upon point of view. A good example is the recent discussion about the contribution to Yearly Meeting. Somehow we agreed -- somehow the minutes say we

agreed on a five percent contribution -- but there was far from a sense of the meeting. There were some who recommended two percent, some others thought five percent was right, some others were adamant that five percent was too little, and there were a few who thought we shouldn't give anything. That kind of a condition is not healthy for our meeting. And these different points of view are what I'm talking about as far as the future of the Meeting is concerned. I'm very concerned about our unwillingness to take the time to reach a sense of the meeting.

I've been clerk of many Quaker meetings -- committees, boards and that sort of thing -- but I remember particularly one occasion when I was chairman of the Westtown School committee, which I think I was for 12 years. And we had a big building project that was subject to different points of view. It took us at least a year to reach a sense of the meeting in that committee as to how to proceed, but we finally did. The whole meeting came together in a spirit of comfortable agreement on what was going to be done, but it took a year.

If we don't have that kind of patience, we lose the ability to reach a sense of the meeting. It would be far better to delay a decision until we reach a sense of the meeting rather than proceed with identifying a position that doesn't really reflect a sense of the meeting. It's dangerous for our meeting. *Faith and Practice* points this out too, that for a Meeting to arrive at a conclusion without reaching a sense of the meeting is at the peril of that Meeting.

Diversity in our meetings has some strengths and some weaknesses. In recent years, Quakers have been so frantic about keeping up membership that we have admitted as members people who, with all possible

sincerity, have come to join us but who are not sufficiently familiar with what Quakers believe. So this diversity becomes a handicap rather than a benefit. It's much more difficult for meetings to arrive at a sense of the meeting on a controversial subject because of this diversity of background and teaching and living experience. It puts an additional burden on the clerk to be able skillfully to guide the discussion toward a sense of the meeting. It requires a higher degree of patience on the part of the clerk and the body of the meeting. Our experience recently with the contribution to Yearly Meeting is a perfect example of how we should not come to a conclusion. There was not a sense of the meeting and yet we came to a conclusion. Yearly Meeting does itself a great deal of harm by creating in our Meeting the kind of atmosphere of disagreement which existed on that particular subject. When we talk about supporting our Meeting and Yearly Meeting, we use the word "joy." It should be a joyful contribution of our assets to the Meeting. This was anything but joyful.

I've been involved in many Quaker business meetings and in many non-Quaker business meetings and I have found that in some of the non-Quaker business meetings there's less controversy and more tolerance of other opinions than we have in our own Meeting. I'm not sure why it is. But I've been on one board or another of the Chester County Hospital for a long time and I've never found the kind of disagreement and controversy there that we have on different points in our Meeting. I think there's a unified opinion about the purpose of a charitable organization that results in an ability to come to a conclusion that is united upon.

I don't think you get people focused better until we recognize one source of our faith, and who is our teacher. Is William Penn our teacher? I don't think so.

William Penn is a great fellow and had a lot of good ideas but William Penn isn't our first teacher. He's an interpreter.

George Fox was the first one to enunciate his line of reasoning. And the others, John Woolman and William Penn and others, followed after George Fox. But George Fox got his point of view from the teachings of Jesus. That's the way I see it. George Fox rebelled against the Church of England and I'd say the Catholic Church, but I think his teaching was no different than what you could interpret the teachings of Jesus to be.

The core belief of Quakerism to me is the acceptance of the teaching of Jesus Christ as interpreted by George Fox and some of his successors. That includes the belief that there is that of God in every person and the belief that we as human beings can communicate directly with the spirit of God.

Virginia McQuail

June 22, 2003

Virginia's home

Downingtown, PA

I have been a member of Downingtown Friends for 53 years. I came to Downingtown in '51, when I was just married. I went to the Meeting with my husband Jim a number of times, and finally decided to become a member before my first child was born. We had more than one child and they would all be birthright members.

Jim was already a member. He had been raised as a Catholic and had had a bad experience when he was told by a priest that there was a list of books he should not read. That upset him very much because he had discovered reading as a wonderful thing and from then on he was not very much interested in the Catholic Church. And he learned a lot about Quakers because he went to Haverford School and got acquainted with people who were connected with Haverford College and so he finally decided to join the Friends.

A birthright friend is someone who has both mother and a father who are members of the Society of Friends. At that time, it seemed to be a rather important thing to do because most of the people in our Meeting -- at that time it was a very small Meeting -- were people who either were themselves members of the Meeting and Quakers or had grown up in a Quaker family and so they knew a lot about Quakerism. More than I did. Now the interesting thing was that my sister Enid had married Francis Brown of Downingtown and I had met my husband through them and he was a member of Downingtown. So it ended up that Enid and I, Methodists from Kansas, landed in Pennsylvania and became members of the Society of Friends at Downingtown.

In the '50s, when I first became a member, there were probably about 50 members and attenders, and they knew all about Quaker meeting. Now, we have many people who come who really aren't very familiar

with Quaker meeting and as a result it's harder sometimes for people to understand our way of operating. But when I joined we had a lot of possibilities for learning from people who were already Friends.

There were quite a number of children in the Meeting then. We had no special time for them. They usually were just playing under supervision, and later we decided they ought to be with us in meeting for worship. So we had them come in for the first part of the meeting and then leave, which did not work very well. Then we changed it to their coming in at the end of the meeting. We're still doing that and I feel that is working quite well. At that time, Francis Brown was the executive secretary of the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, so we had many contacts with PYM. We also had Lou Schneider in our Meeting, who was head of the American Friends Service Committee. As a result, our meeting had a lot of contact with Philadelphia Yearly Meeting people and we made use of their facilities and their staff to help us start a first-day school. We decided that we needed better care given to the children in the Meeting.

The schoolhouse was there and we used that for the first-day classes. We did not start our program of opening exercises, which we now have, until several years later. And that came about because we felt that when the children came over to meeting, they were a part of meeting but they really missed some of the feeling in it. So we thought it would be nice if we had some planned service with the children before we went to meeting and that was what we called our opening exercise. It also gave us the excuse to have some music. People who were coming from other Christian denominations missed music. We had a very nice hymnal so we decided to have a little Quaker music in opening exercises. Mostly they were supposed to be for

the children, and whatever message was given was supposed to be something children would understand. That has varied and we've tried other approaches, but now it seems to have gone back to having messages that the children can understand.

The schoolhouse had been built in 1919 for an actual Friends School. This was after the First World War. The people in Downingtown who were members of the Meeting decided they had enough children in their families to have a separate school. So they had a very good school, which a number of our present members attended as children. Then the Depression came along and we had fewer children so the school was closed, but the building was still used by the Meeting. Later, after the Second World War, the Meeting decided again that there were enough children to reactivate the school so all of our three children went to kindergarten and nursery school at the Friends School. There were no public kindergartens in the area at that time. Downingtown school system had no public kindergarten and there were no nursery schools. As a result, we were very popular for quite a long time, to the point that we added first, second, and third grade onto the school program.

The children had midday meeting for worship on Wednesdays and their parents sometimes came to them. So the parents began to get rather interested in what Quakers were all about. I think this accounts for some of the growth that we've had in our meeting: Parents sent their children to the school and then became interested themselves in the school and in the Quaker beliefs and values.

Being a parent in the school community was very rewarding because we were a very close community. We were all very much interested in our children's health and development and so forth so we did lots of things

together. We had a parent group, mothers particularly, who met on a regular basis and made changes and things that they thought were necessary. Then we also began to have some social activities and one of our favorite activities was square dances. The meeting itself had had an interest in having a square dance party and now we had a larger group that we could involve in that. It was a very good way to get acquainted and it made for a lot of sociability. It also meant that a number of people who had come just for the school for their children were beginning to come to Meeting and were ending up becoming members. It was a very important part of our whole development.

I was one of the newcomers to the school and to Quakerism. I had attended a Friends college for two years, and my sister had graduated from a Friends college, so we knew quite a bit about Friends. But Friends in the Midwest are somewhat different from Friends in the East because in the East we have no minister. In the West, we have ministers and choirs, and meetings are very much churches like other Christian churches. So we had to get acquainted with the ways of Quaker meetings.

The values were something that I had in my life for as long as I was alive. The pacifism, nonviolence, the belief in that of God in every person, which meant that you had respect and interest in people of other races, of other nationalities, and a general concern about life that you were living in your community. That did not seem too different. On the other hand, the Quaker way of work was very different in that we did not decide things by the majority. We decided by waiting until everybody could agree to the plan that we were discussing. This is a very hard lesson for us to learn and it was also a very hard lesson for the other parents to learn. They weren't used to that. You just took a vote and that decided it. Now we

waited for the agreement of the Meeting for whatever we were doing. Sometimes that took a long time and that is not easy when you want to make up your mind about something. It's very hard to take so much time to come to what seems like to some people a very simple decision.

One of the things that made it finally easy to come to a decision was that we had very strong committees that were given the responsibility of working problems out and bringing in options for us to decide upon. We had things like hospitality committee, overseers, which meant people who took on some of the jobs of a minister in that they kept informed about the members and the things in their lives that were important, and were there to help in case there were problems that a member was having. Trustees took care of the buildings and the lawn and the graveyard and that kind of thing. And finance. That was the committee I stayed very far away from. I'm not interested in money. It scares me a little bit. I was not interested in working on that committee.

We had a good nominating committee, and that was the first committee that I was asked to be on. Ellis Brown, Fran's father, was the person who asked me. He was on the nominating committee and he said it's the most important committee in the whole meeting because it determines who makes decisions for us. It was a very great pleasure to be on that committee. Later, I was recorder for the meeting for 12 years, which was a long time. That was perhaps one of the most interesting jobs I did because I had to keep track of everybody and have their addresses and telephone numbers. That was important and I enjoyed doing it.

The committees worked very well because there were enough seasoned Friends or Friends who knew about the Quaker way of operation that new people could come on a committee and learn before they had to

take responsibility for things. In that respect it was very helpful to have so many people as members who really had grown up in Quaker families. Sometimes these days, it is harder. We have new people coming on. We give them responsibilities and expect them to know how to handle it and it isn't always easy. So, I think it was easier then.

One of the values of being a small Meeting and having many children was that our children felt very, very comfortable at first-day school. We had teachers for them and we worked hard at our plans and the courses that we were trying to work out with them. Even though sometimes it was a little hard because children would come one Sunday and not appear until their parents brought them three Sundays later. We had really very conscientious mothers and the occasional father teaching them. My children felt very comfortable in the meeting house.

Sometimes they were a little bit difficult because they felt so much at home. Once when we were trying to have a meeting for worship on Thanksgiving Day -- that came up as a suggestion and we had decided to try it -- a very small group of people appeared. (We did not try it again.) I was sitting in front and the two younger children were behind me. I heard this kind of snickering and I looked around and here was our daughter Kathy, about four or five years old, and her friend walking or crawling on the back of the bench that was in front of them. We put a stop to that, even though it meant we disturbed the meeting a bit. But they felt very much at home and that was good.

Our son, Tony, who was 18 at the time of the Vietnam War, was I think very much influenced by his experiences in our Meeting and at the Westtown School. Our family had been pretty much Quaker pacifist

without even talking about it much. Tony really had to make his decision about how he would register and serve. He took the problem to Meeting and he said that he came out of Meeting having decided that his way should be to go to Canada, which was, of course, a big blow to us. He was only 18. We would have preferred that he be a conscientious objector, but he felt very strongly about it and felt he did not want to be a part of the military system at all, even to taking a CO status. He has become a Canadian citizen. He went to college in Canada. He's an organic farmer now. It is very pleasing to know that he has made a decision with which he and his family have been able to live.

One thing about his going to Canada that pleased us was that he did go with a working visa. He stayed with the parents of a Westtown friend of his and went in the worst snowstorm they had had in Canada for several years. He started looking for a job and got a job on a farm, which seemed to me almost impossible. But he did it and as a result had a very happy experience in Canada. His wife is also a Westtown student from Indiana and she joined him and they have very fine daughters.

There was a lot of discussion about the Vietnam War in Meeting. In reference to Tony's feeling of not wanting to cooperate with the war, I think he got some of it from Meeting and some of it from Westtown and discussions they had there. We had quite a large discussion about it in meeting for worship and meeting for business. Tony became impressed with the importance of letting other people in our whole community, the community of Downingtown, know about the possibility of becoming a conscientious objector. So he asked permission at the business meeting one time to have a period set aside on Sunday afternoons when people in the community could come and talk with

members of the Society of Friends about conscientious objector possibilities. This was not completely accepted by the Meeting and as a result Emilie McIlvain asked if she could come and talk to young people about the other opportunities within the service. So Tony and Emilie for several Sundays had a little opening for people to come and talk about the war. They had perhaps two or three people over a period of four weeks. So it was not widely accepted. But it did mean that Tony, as an 18-year-old, felt comfortable enough with the Meeting to ask to have this possibility and was accepting of letting Emilie explain her position.

One of the problems in a small group like our Meeting is that people do take strong stands about certain things or say things that are upsetting and feelings are hurt. We try to have a method for handling that, which is called a clearness committee. If someone feels they have been mistreated or not understood, they can ask for a clearness committee and they can ask for whom they would like to have on the committee. It is a very important way of trying to settle disputes, disagreements, hurt feelings, and it works moderately well. It does not work completely well. We have had several committees that have come out very well and the people involved have accepted the decisions and cooperated. We also had several which were just barely accepted and have not completely eased feelings. We've also had disagreements that were never brought to clearness. We are too quick, perhaps, to accept the comments that people make, the things they say. We are too quick to want it to be right. So we accept those things but the hurt or the disagreement still is not faced. That's been something I've struggled with myself with people. I've been on several clearness committees that I felt did

not really face the deepest problems. And this does make for some pressure in the Meeting.

In some cases, people have left the Meeting. In other cases, it does seem to heal by time. In other instances, the pain is still there but, as in so many things, going on kind of helps. I think Quakers have a part of the answer, but I don't think we have the whole one. We need to be greater people than we are perhaps to be able to really help people.

This, of course, does play up the absence of a minister, who often is able to step in and help individuals resolve their problems. When you're doing it not as a minister, but as a friend or supporter, it's much, much harder to do. If you have the trappings of a minister and the training of minister, it seems that it would be easier. I am often surprised at how many trained people we have in our membership, but even for them it's very hard to be on a clearness committee and face the very hardest of problems.

Part of this difficulty is the result of having a larger membership and a membership that doesn't know the other Friends in the group as well. It makes it perhaps easier for decisions to be made quickly and without thinking of the other people involved. So I don't think we want a minister. There are plenty of churches right now that are involved in difficult arguments among their congregation and ministers who aren't able to solve problems either. It's not an easy thing. The times that clearness committees are successful are very, very great, and a tribute to the people who served on the committee. It's worth continuing to try them.

And, of course, we do have many ways of getting to know each other. We have cooperative dinners, which are usually very happy occasions. Only eight people

sitting around, enjoying good food, and they can get to know each other quite well. The fall festival is something that began a number of years ago as partly a money-raising activity but also partly to give our members something concrete to work upon that is fun, and demands a certain amount of skill, interest and enthusiasm. People get to know each other better through that. There are a number of other things.

One of the groups that I belong to has been the sewing group, which is also known as the group that gets the newsletter out. It started out as a sewing group. Those of you who have not been members for fifty years may be surprised to hear that. It started in Meeting when I was having my babies and it was a wonderful group because we could take our children and they could play around on the floor of somebody's house and have a good time. We made clothes for the American Friends Service Committee and knitted things and hemmed things. We were doing a job that was worthwhile and also having a good chat. It brought out people, women, who were elderly and who didn't get around very much anymore and who loved to talk. It was a treat for the younger ones too. Now that I am one of the older ones, I realize what a treat it was for them because it really is a part of a personal relationship, which is very, very nice. As I said, we did clothing for the American Friends Service Committee, and we made cushions for the meeting house benches, which was a tremendous job. We didn't choose our materials as well as we should because they got worn a little faster than the commercially made ones. Those have been discarded and we now have new ones. We also made 19th-century Quaker costumes for the program we put on for the festival. We made a lot of those. And then we kind of ran out of jobs that challenged and so we took on getting out the newsletter.

The rumor goes around that the sewing group is a group that makes decisions and is running the Meeting. I'm afraid it's a false rumor. But we do discuss a lot of things and we do have a very good time and we do incidental projects like putting up the chairs for the opening exercises, like cleaning out the refrigerator when it gets too full -- things that are probably very important to the life of the Meeting. And we do discuss some of the things that come up in business meeting and we do talk about it and pass it back to husbands or daughters or sons, people who are in positions of authority. Maybe we make more of an impression than we would think, being the small, mixed-up group that we are, but I don't really think it's true.

As I was saying, the sewing group when I started had the older women in the meeting and the youngest members of the meeting who were just in the childbearing years. It's never been a large group. I think that probably we have about the same number of people even with a larger membership than we had back in the '50s when I first went to it. We do have, I think, more young women in the group these years than we would have had back in the '50s. That's kind of surprising because more women are working, but we do have a number who are staying home while their children are still in junior high and high school. They come to be with the sewing group.

One of the things I've most enjoyed about Meeting is spotting newcomers and getting acquainted with them, finding their names, trying to remember them. I make some really good friends that way and it's probably the thing we, all of us, ought to be doing. I do get a little impatient with the people who say, "I don't want to speak to her because I don't know whether I've spoken to her before." But it is so easy to somehow indicate a

friendly interest and say, "You know, I know your name but I've forgotten it." People usually forgive that. I know it isn't as easy as it seems to me, but if we're going to be a caring community we really do have to demonstrate to a degree that you are welcome and that we are happy to have you in our community.

Of course, you need to talk to people you know too. I've just been reminded that a couple members of our Meeting have said they really kept coming because of Camp Swatara. That camping weekend at Swatara is a part of the Quarterly Meeting program and has the advantage of helping the young people realize that we aren't the only Quakers in the state of Pennsylvania. Swatara was begun by members of Downingtown Meeting because we rejected so thoroughly going to Quarterly Meeting four times a year because of the distances within our quarter. It's a long ride to Harrisburg and so forth. It was decided that we would try having a weekend that would make up for the fact that Downingtown Friends didn't want to go around four times a year and meet other Quakers. We usually have a pretty good attendance. It's usually fun and there is usually some sort of learning attached to it.

Having just said this about being welcoming and friendly and so forth, a lot of the growth that we've had in our Meeting is due to our very good children's program. It's taken very seriously by the people running it. There are many, many people who don't really decide to pick up the religious part of themselves until they have children and then they begin to think maybe this is something we ought to be getting our children involved in.

I do think that one of the core beliefs that I am comfortable with is that there is that of God in every person. Sometimes we fail to see that glimmer of God.

But we need always to be trying and to cultivate our own bit of God within us.

It's a very hard concept to explain to other people, except that it does seem to me that almost always we can find something of hope or value in somebody even if we may be crossing them off our list because of being not so approving of what they're doing. It seems to me that we almost always can. Now I haven't been in situations where that's impossible. It probably seems very Pollyannaish. I don't think it's an easy concept to share. It's easier to understand the bit of God that's within yourself, that sometimes you can really touch when you need help and when you're trying to sort things out.

To look for it within yourself is something that you have to cultivate and I think it's possible. I know my concept of God is based upon my love of nature, of beauty, things that are truthful and good. I can't, of course, put God into any kind of pattern or a picture. That is hard to transfer and, I think, people don't understand it. To me it isn't important. I don't have to describe God. It's a feeling rather than anything that's concrete.

Meeting for worship is the thing that I find is really most helpful to me. To have the time and the ability to think clearly, as clearly as possible and seriously, about some of the problems that bother me. Also, finding that of God in the people around you sometimes becomes much easier when you're having a quiet time and a time to reconsider all the things that have been going through your mind about that person.

The silence is probably the most important thing in meeting for worship. Messages are sometimes inspiring at the time I hear them, but I may have forgotten them by the time I get out. But some of the

thinking I've been doing and the feeling I've been having will stick with me as something important. I have often felt more relaxed and comfortable and able to cope with problems after I've been in meeting for worship, without even having it come as a burst of light.

I can find something valuable in my hour or my forty minutes in meeting very often even though I had not done any preparation or not consciously done anything. I do at times read at night and often try to read things that apply to problems that I have and am trying to solve. Some people I know regularly find scripture or poetry or something that they feel they wanted to bring to meeting. Once in a great while I do that, but very rarely. So I'm probably not someone who prepares for meeting as much as I should. I think also journal writing is one of the things that I wish I did and I think that is a part of prayer too. Putting things down on paper sometimes puts it in a different context even though you've written it and it came out of your brain. You can look at it differently when it's written down. That can be very helpful when you're trying to resolve a situation.

I can remember the first time I spoke in the Friends meeting in Downingtown because it was such a scary thing to do. I was rather sorry I had done it afterwards, but it was partly because I spoke about how much the silence meant to me. After the meeting, one of the older women spoke to me and said, "You broke the silence," and I said, "Yes, I did." I used to speak much more than I do now and partly because the meeting was smaller and partly it was because I was probably doing more struggling with problems. It often takes me a very long time to come to the decision that I want to speak in meeting, that I will speak in meeting. I usually am rather breathless when I sit down. It is a rather overwhelming thing for me. I don't do it easily. I'm aware that there are

people in our Meeting who really need the silence and are somewhat disturbed when too many people speak or when a lot of people speak. That has kind of dried me up a little bit at times. Nothing very serious. I think you can enjoy your message even if you don't give it to everybody else.

One of the things that I have felt happy about doing in our Meeting was addressing social concerns. The first one was a very important one to me. In the 1950s, Meeting became a part of an interracial coalition made up of prominent people in Downington, black and white, representing their churches. The coalition first raised the question of having a separate room for black children in the public elementary school. Children were not mixed until they got to junior high and high school. This really seemed very, very bad to me. Several of us who were members of the committee for the Friends Meeting really took a very active part in raising questions and in discussing this. We took petitions around and did quite a lot of work on the subject. They finally did integrate the elementary school. Black teachers were hired. Our little coalition had something to do with raising the question and getting it started.

We moved over into housing and that really affected me a little bit more than the school thing did. The school thing was big and covered a lot of people. The housing was something that was smaller. There was a piece of land that was going to be developed for housing and there was an underlying ruling that they were not going to sell them to black people. We had a prominent realtor in Meeting and he became very upset that we were raising questions. We actually lost him as a member, him and his family. It was property near the meeting house so it was kind of a sad situation.

It worked out that parts of the land -- I think, the lower-priced part -- were open to everybody. But I think there were parts that were not open. It was a political situation that we weren't prepared to get into but it was something that really affected us quite a bit. The big thing was that this coalition finally ended up providing a coffeehouse for teenagers at the Meeting schoolhouse. This was, of course, after the school was no longer being a school. So we had a mixed-race teenage coffeehouse. It was quite popular for about a year and a half and then it got a little big for our Friends schoolhouse. So it moved to the fire company and then it got much harder to control and we finally pulled out. But that was something we had a lot of cooperation in the meeting for doing, had high school kids in the meeting who were part of it. It was called the Zodiac and we had, what were those lights that were so popular during those days? Black lights. Strobe lights.

One of the things that I personally was active in was the starting of a YWCA in Chester County, in the West Chester, Downingtown area. There was one in Coatesville and there was one in Pottstown, but not a YW in this section of Chester County. The reason I was recruited was because I had worked for the YWCA and had gone on a national list and they got my name. The reason there was felt to be a need for a YWCA was, again, a race problem. The YMCA did not include black people in West Chester -- or I know the YMCA in Coatesville did not. There were a couple of West Chester Quakers who were very much concerned about this. They'd been having discussions with their meeting and so forth. They first of all tried to make an agreement with the YMCA to admit women and black people. Well, they were asking for too much and were very firmly turned down. These women got very upset and decided they

would open their own YWCA. I think my son Chris was about two years old at the time, so it was in the late '50s, early '60s. I was, of course, very much interested because that had been something I was interested in for all of my life, since I can remember. It has grown and prospered. It is still not as strong as I think it ought to be but I can no longer be of any help. At any rate, it was something I was very much interested in. It was not a meeting project, however. It was definitely my doing the thing I was concerned about.

Now the other thing I did as a member of the Meeting was to arrange to go visit a prisoner because we had known him fairly well and he had Meeting contacts. I felt that we really should do something just to give him support if nothing else. So that was something I did with several other members of the Meeting who also were concerned that this Friend was in such a bad situation. We did not do it as a meeting program. We just decided to do it. We were doing it because he was a human being and someone that needed loving and caring attention. We did report to Meeting that we were doing it a couple of times and I think it was accepted. It did make one realize how very, very difficult the prison situation is and how almost impossible to imagine that anyone can really recover from being incarcerated, whether they're innocent or guilty. It was something I enjoyed doing and I think people who I was doing it with found it rewarding in many ways, too.

These activities are all part of my need to be related to programs and activities that hopefully are going to improve our world, my belief in the God in people and the belief that we can tackle some of these problems and make some progress. My doing it is caused by my belief that it is possible. I don't think they push

my faith, I think my faith pushes them. I had to do it and I'm disappointed that I didn't do more.

I've talked a lot about activism and I do regret, in a way, that I've never been as active as I could have been. I think young people today have a really great opportunity to keep themselves informed, to do jobs that are related to breaking down some of the social barriers. We have the evidence that nonviolence training is very helpful to children as well as adults. I think they have a real opportunity as young people to be a part of that.

One of the problems for young people in taking advantage of the programs that are available is that you get very discouraged when things that you're working on don't materialize the way you hope to see them. I think they need to be positive about the fact that there is value in actively opposing. Now I feel very strongly that with this last war there were many more demonstrations by people all over the world against the causes of war and that is unusual. We've had many demonstrations but not to this extent. I feel we've made some progress. And I think young people need to keep working and not get discouraged.

Gerard (Gerry)
and
Margaret (Rita) Williams

July 27, 2003

Williams' home

West Chester, PA

Gerry: Does thee want to go, or does thee want me to start?

Rita: Well, I guess I would start. When we first moved to Downingtown we didn't have any children and we lived outside Downingtown in Fisherville. Gerry was working for Sun Oil Co., and I, being an Episcopalian, went to the Episcopal church. They were very unfriendly. Nobody spoke to me, not even the minister, so I finally told Gerry about this when he came home and he said, "Well, I notice there's a little Quaker meeting on Lancaster Pike and next time I'm home on a first day why don't we go?" And we did. The Browns and the McQuails were there, and who else were members of meeting then?

Gerry: The William Cadburys and the other Cadbury, what was his name, at any rate, two Cadburys...

Rita: Gerry probably could add more, but everybody welcomed us, and we then had our first child and we would bring him to meeting and leave him in the car. We parked the car right by the meeting house door so if I heard him I could get up and leave. I don't think we had at that point much first day school. Of course we didn't need it then. There wasn't anything for the little children.

We liked the friendliness. We liked the people, the way we felt welcomed and appreciated. This is why we continue going to Downingtown Meeting.

One of the interactions that we had was with the McQuails. They were involved with this little theater group called the Barley Sheaf Players, and they got us involved in that. Gerry played the attendant in *Harvey*, the bumbling attendant, and at that point I was very pregnant so I just helped with costumes and did the sets.

That was fun. The Browns weren't in on that. And then the McQuails also played bridge and I played with Jim and Virginia and a friend of ours.

Gerry: The schoolhouse was in operation then. There were a number of grades. There were a number of teachers. Fran Ash ran the school. Our children did not go, but I believe the McQuails went and probably the Brown children. It was successful for a number of years and then as children are -- they are kind of in bunches. Well, the bunch moved on and there just was not enough activity from the Meeting or from members of the community to support the school. After the school was shut down it was vacant, and at that time there was a great interest in taking in Vietnamese refugees. So the Meeting took in the Trans, a Vietnamese couple that came to this country sponsored, I believe, by the Presbyterian church. We supplied temporary housing in the school. So the meeting took a great interest in the family and gave them great support. Virginia McQuail, for example, would run the husband over to West Chester several times a week for English lessons. He already spoke some English, having worked for GE in Vietnam. And indeed we still see them from time to time coming and attending Meeting.

I had burned out with meeting for worship, having as a child gone every single Sunday -- we never missed -- and then at Westtown School going twice a week. There was the reprieve of about four years when I was in the Navy and then another few years after we got out so I was not really meeting-oriented. Indeed, I resigned from 12th Street Meeting, where my parents had moved our membership from Moorestown. If it hadn't been for Rita, who insisted that we should have a place of worship, I may not have gone back. But because of her positive reaction to the Meeting, and both of our

positive reactions, we started on this long, very beneficial, wonderful saga of nearly 50 years.

The decision to go into the Navy was an interesting one. My father had been a noncombatant in the First World War. He'd been a purser on an ammunition ship. And so I was confronted at age 17 with a decision, two decisions: One, I did not study during the summer so I could enter Westtown in my senior year. Therefore either Westtown would not accept me and I would go elsewhere to finish my high school or I would join the military. So I went down to Washington to visit my sister, who was working there, and went to the Navy recruiting station, where they took me in. When I came back and told my parents, my father in particular, that I had joined up in the Navy until I was 21, he gasped and said, "Why the war's going to be over in a year. And here you're going to be stuck all that time." This was in 1942. But, at any rate, my parents signed for me, and away I went.

In boot camp I had an interesting experience. Before I had finished, the chaplain's office called me forward and the chaplain sat down with me and said, "I see you've been raised a Quaker. Do you feel that your upbringing will in any way interfere with your performance of your duty if you are under stress?" I allowed that I didn't think that would be the case. So I went through the Navy and came out and having been away from meeting for worship for a long period of time did not feel the inclination to go back until, as we've discussed, Rita introduced us to Downingtown Meeting. Of course, this felt very comfortable to me, the plainness, the simplicity and the type of worship that I was so used to. The more formal religions were a very uneasy experience for me.

There was never any issue whatsoever, going from the military to Downingtown Meeting. Having been a birthright friend and given the powers that be at that time in this little Meeting -- we wouldn't have more than 20, 25 people at the Meeting -- so it was like a big family rather than the organization we have today.

In previous years, Friends had been asked to leave a meeting when they joined the military. The only negative time at meeting that I had -- on returning to Moorestown Meeting, in uniform -- was not a negative. People were glad to see me. I was, of course, still very young then. But in Boston I went to Cambridge Meeting in uniform. I had probably just turned 18 then, and was going to a school there, a Navy school, and went to meeting. I suppose a certain amount of the new, naive appearance was still with me. A number of years later, during the Korean War, I returned to Cambridge Meeting in uniform and I was actually shunned then by even some cousins who were up there. It was a very uncomfortable experience. I was not welcome.

Rita: In the early days of attending Downingtown Meeting, I was busy with the children. We had the one car so I was stuck up on Mill Hill with the children and then thee would come home. Meeting was really my only social activity. I didn't belong to any committees. I did help once in awhile in the kitchen, but I didn't feel that I, not being a Quaker, should be active on committees that were of importance to running the Meeting. Thee became clerk, but I don't know when that was. That was after we came back from Westtown.

Gerry: We were at Downingtown for about three years, and then I took a job at the University of Pennsylvania and we moved into Mt. Airy, and our membership was transferred to where my mother grew up and had her membership. Then we came back. But we

only had a few people at the Meeting. So I was recording clerk at one time. I did the newsletter at one time. I was clerk. I was on the finance committee for a long time. Of course, I'm an overseer now. The fall festival started up in the late '70s, and we had an auction that was one of the big money-makers. I ran the auction, and then did the wedding. We had a wedding pageant at that time. There's still one, but this was the one Jim McQuail wrote. I narrated that. We also had an almanac, and I was editor of the almanac, probably other things too. And on Yearly Meeting, I was on representative committee, and on the Yearly Meeting committee on education. So the few of us had to double up and handle many of the activities and committee responsibilities.

The committee I least enjoyed was being superintendent of the Sunday school for a short period of time. That was a nightmare. And evidently others thought so too, 'cause I was relieved without much ado. The activity I enjoyed the most was the auction. And we had wonderful people, not only working the auction, but we had the Bradleys, particularly Philip Sr., who loved an auction. He was a major contributor. We ran the auction in, I would say, a professional way. And there were many details that had to be looked after and we did, I think, a good job with that. But that was the most fun. I enjoyed that tremendously.

Rita: Gerry was involved with the auction and my part of the fall festival was -- in the beginning -- in the greenery, doing the plants and flowers. Then the Fergusons -- Joyce still goes to Meeting -- they ran the general store, which was in one of the booths in one of the sheds. That gradually grew and I think the McVickars took over and ran that. And then eventually it got big enough, the book section was separate, and we moved into the schoolhouse and I helped with the general store

part. Bob Santangelo took over the country store and it really flourished and, of course, the auction became deceased so the general store took over those aspects of it. It has grown ever since. We have a lot of people that help set it up. We have Peggy Broadley, and Ellis Brown would come in and polish silver and wash some of the things for us. A lot of people sent things in that were dirty or needed to be thrown out. Having Peggy and Ellis do that was just great. And now we have a committee, which I'm no longer on but I do help. I'm still a general store person and I enjoy that thoroughly, setting it up.

As the festival has grown, we have incorporated the community more and more. We have a section for the Meeting and for the Society of Friends. We have a section for the Visiting Nurses Association. They will take blood pressures. We try to involve as much of the community as we can, the Fire Department, the Historical Society. Does thee think of any more?

Gerry: The fall festival, in my opinion, has been a very positive force in building community within our Meeting. In one dimension, if we come to Meeting on first day, we participate in the meeting for worship and we have a little gossip session after and go home. That is one level of participation. But with the fall festival, involving so many members of the Meeting -- I think Bob said there were something like 125 people involved in the fall festival -- and when people are involved working together, you have frictions. And we had, I believe, a great testimony to the workings of Friends within the past year. There was a faction that resented the new leadership, there was a lack of communication between trustees and fall festival committee, which led to certain problems, and an ad hoc committee was set up whereby the various factions were brought together. That resulted in now a relatively harmonious relationship between the

various committees of the Monthly Meeting and the fall festival committee. And there were adjustments made on all sides in understanding as well as behavior.

Do we handle conflicts within the Meeting well? I think that we do. To me, where there is differing of opinion, and the Meeting has to come to a conclusion, it is here that Friends are tested and we disagree with someone and yet maintain a loving spirit. I think that does not always happen within the Meeting, but I think it usually does. So the Friendly process of discussion, and of endless committees and ad hoc committees, and the slow movement of progress within the meeting body and the meeting community, to me is a very positive and refreshing experience.

There have been obviously times -- we are humans, we're not saints -- that we have had times of great dissension. And there are times that we have not had amicable resolution to issues and these have dealt with a combination of the fervent positions that people have taken as well as personalities involved. But over the years, looking over 50 years, I think that we've had relatively few such incidents in the life of our Meeting.

Rita: One of the conflicts that we had that I think probably took a long time, took a couple of years to resolve, was on homosexual marriages. It was brought up by a member of our Meeting, and then we had several called meetings to discuss it, and the oversight committee proposed a minute, which was not accepted. It was not acceptable to some members. Over, I think, a matter of three years, finally, they came up with a minute that everyone could accept. The outcome was calling it a same-sex union, instead of a marriage, which seemed to satisfy everybody's doubts. But it shows the true Quaker process of working things out so everybody was able to

agree. It wasn't exactly what was wanted in the first place, but something was acceptable.

Gerry: The consideration of how a Monthly Meeting works its business in comparison to other organizations is an interesting concept. The downside of the way Friends do business is the agonizingly long time it takes to achieve anything. And it goes on and on. We don't vote. So finally maybe a committee is set up and then you wait another two or three months and the committee comes back and then there's more discussion. An issue may drag on for a year or two or three years before there is conclusion. But the positive side is that all opinions are considered and are worked into the fabric of a decision. When a decision is made, it is usually one where if not everyone, nearly everyone, is comfortable with it. Now, in contrast to the friendly way of handling business, other groups are much more expeditious. You go in with an agenda, you come out with answers nearly all the time to questions that are raised. You may have some for and some against a position. One votes and the majority takes the issue and you move on to the next. At the end of the meeting, a good many decisions may be made. But there isn't the comfort level among those present that we have in a Friends' way of doing business.

Rita: I'm thinking about when Gerry was working at Westtown School and they wanted to build the new arts center and they met and met and they couldn't decide where to put it, either in the greenwood or in the south woods.

Gerry: Paul Brown was clerk then.

Rita: And all these people. I never went to any of the meetings, but Gerry said they were really, people were adamant, that, "Oh, you can't take down those old trees."

Gerry: Part of the virgin forest --

Rita: Part of the virgin forest, etc., so one night I guess it was about two years or so, long time, he came home and he said, everybody agreed.

Gerry: It was brought up and it was the most miraculous experience of harmony at a Friends meeting that I've ever had. And those people who had objected to it, just a wonderful feeling came over the committee meeting and we moved ahead.

Paul Brown was a fantastic clerk. Superb. And very clever. He'd bring something up and he'd quickly move ahead like that and it was gone, and people were kind of gasping and now you're on the next issue. He was a wonderful politician.

Rita: Do you remember when they wanted ... didn't want to put up a walkway, handicapped access to the Meeting? And Paul came to Meeting and sat in his wheelchair in the parking lot because there was no way he could get his wheelchair in the Meeting? Some people didn't want to put a ramp into the schoolhouse, but I think Virginia and several other people persisted.

Gerry: Yes, I remember it very well. It was cold. And Paul, who was ambulatory at that time, placed his wheelchair between the meeting house and the Sunday school building and he had a coat on and a hat and he sat there a solitary figure. And we had to walk into the opening exercises and see Paul there and then we went into the meetinghouse and Paul sat out there during the meeting for worship, and we were all extremely uncomfortable about the issue. And, of course, the issue was that Paul felt that a ramp should be there in case his wife Mary could come to Meeting, come to the opening exercises. So it was a matter of a policy issue. This issue had gone for a long period of time but by the time the

next Monthly Meeting for business came and the issue came up again, it was quickly resolved: We got a ramp.

Rita: To me, the core belief of Quakerism, as far as I can see and having become a Quaker later in life, is that there's a little piece of God in all of us. It gives an equality to everyone and diminishes the thought that people are better than they are. That to me is the important thing. I didn't know I felt that way until I was introduced to Quakerism, but I think it always was part of my fabric, of the way I felt. I didn't have it in words so much as I felt it. And when I was going into training, nursing school, the psychologist sat down and said -- of course this was back in 1948 -- how would you feel if one of the patients was illegitimately pregnant? Or was a prostitute? And I couldn't think of how I would feel any differently about anybody.

The other core belief is being able to communicate silently. I communicate while walking to the Y or something. I'll have a one-sided conversation with the supreme being. Thee having always been a Friend, how does thee feel?

Gerry: I think the acceptance of equality, that in the eyes of God we're all equal, to me is a very important part of Friends testimony. The peace testimony, which is certainly an important part of Friends testimony, is one that I have great difficulty with. As an ideal it's certainly very commendable, but one that is not a tenable position. The reason it is not is that I see nowhere in the fabric of Friends addressing the problem of violence -- particularly within our community -- a way of handling violence. I reflect on William Penn, too. William Penn in this colony while he was the proprietor, there were executions. William Penn had a constabulary. William Penn had militia here. When his son decided to enter the military and he was given a rather lesser rank or

position, William Penn was furious and went to the authorities to see that he'd get a better position. So I think of Penn as a very practical man.

As an extension of the peace testimony, I think of what Jesus said, that the first two commandments are the most important: Love thy God with all thy heart and all thy soul and all thy mind. And the second one: to love thy neighbor as thyself. He used the word "neighbor." That meant those people around him, those people in the same community is the way I interpret it. I don't interpret it as someone of a foreign land who is threatening our country. I do not take that to interpret some individual in society who's going to threaten me or threaten our community. That is not a neighbor.

Now, on other aspects of Quakerism, there's the sense of equality. Oh, yes, simplicity is an extremely important aspect of Quakerism to me. One, it affects the frame of mind of the individual to strip frivolity from whatever, whether it's the art in your house, or the furniture or colors that one may use. It strips away the ostentatious dimensions of thinking of yourself or of thinking of the setting in which you operate. Simplicity is very important. I think simplicity in speech, in directness, is an important aspect of Quakerism. It's important because I think that in simplicity of expression there is more directness, or more of a focus on truth, truth as that particular person sees it.

Rita: The different beliefs in Quakerism, I feel, is one of the strengths of Meeting. People have their own values and their own aspects of them, yet they can sit together in meeting for worship and have a unified experience. As far as the messages, they are so very often exactly in the direction I've been thinking.

Gerry: I think that's true and I think that with very loose rules, guidelines, you're going to have people with wide-ranging views, and particularly our Meeting, where most of the members and attenders have come from other religious denominations. With 165 members of our Meeting, you can count on one hand the people over 50 or 60 who are birthright friends. All the rest had either come from other denominations and then there are a few who had one parent who was not a Friend. So bringing this background can be an advantage in some ways but a disadvantage in others. For example, the centering on Easter. There are Friends who feel that Easter Sunday is a particular occasion whereas traditionally, when I grew up, Easter was just another first day. My mother would have a little Easter basket with some jelly beans in it but other than that not much was made of it. Even Christmas in the meeting, when I was a child, nothing was made of it. You didn't have a special meeting on Christmas day.

Rita: And at Westtown, Christmas was just a regular day.

Gerry: That was Uncle Charles, my grandfather's brother. Have a book of his compositions, and one was about Christmas, how everybody knew that Christmas was a very special holiday on the outside but at Westtown it was treated just as any other day and how he resented that and at home things were a little bit different.

Why do I go to meeting for worship? It's an important time in my week to go and reflect. The messages are often contributing to my spiritual evolution and I think in the past year or two the quality of our meeting has improved tremendously. The quality of the messages has improved. They seem to have a more thoughtful and spiritual inspiration rather than an off-the-top-of-the-head mental response to a message

someone else might have said. So the depth of the spirituality to me has improved.

The silence in the meeting for worship is a marvelous mystic dimension because it isn't a dead silence most of the time. It is a very alive silence with energy. And there's a very refreshing aspect to Quakerism and the meeting for worship.

Rita: Why do I go to meeting? Sometimes I don't go. I need to reflect at home. It's not often, about two or three times a year I stay at home and reflect. In fact, when we've been on vacation, Gerry and I have gone out and sat in nature and had a meeting for worship with the two of us. But I go to meeting as a sort of time to reflect and get my act together for the coming week. And I'm not disappointed. I'm always sort of rushing around and doing things. Going to meeting on first day gives me a chance to have a time that I actually have to settle down and not be thinking about all sorts of what I have to do and what I should be doing. It's a very important time in my week.

When I've spoken in meeting, it's just that I have to. I've spoken in meeting quite a few times. At least for me, I will just have something come into my head -- it's usually very short -- and I'll just have to say it. I'll try to squelch it for a little while and then I am just forced to give the message. It's nothing that I plan. Only once did I really regret it. Bitten Krentel had given a message in which she sounded very unhappy and didn't know how to face something. I was very moved to say "The Lord's Prayer." I got halfway through -- now I say "The Lord's Prayer" at least two or three times a day -- and I couldn't remember the rest of it. I just stopped and sat down. That was a horrible feeling but I guess that was all I was meant to say.

I always start out in meeting saying "The Lord's Prayer." I still have certain hangovers from my Episcopal church rearing and Episcopal boarding school. I will say "The Lord's Prayer" and then I go to the Stations of the Cross, the top of the cross being praising God, thanking God for my blessings, and then the bottom of the cross, asking forgiveness for my sins, for what I've done wrong. I don't think that any of us really, unless you're a murderer, are sinners. And then the other part of the cross is intervening, asking for favors for various people that are very ill, or ready to die, and don't seem able to get relief. Or anybody that needs to have strength given to them. And then, after I've done that, I just sort of sit and meditate and listen to whatever messages come. Meeting goes very quickly then.

Gerry: On speaking in meeting, my response or motivation is very similar to Rita's. Sometimes I will have a message that stays with me the whole meeting, and I go over it, over it, over it, and it just isn't the time to deliver the message. Other times it appears to be the message to give. For example, this morning I spoke in meeting and I had been thinking about this issue of the Korean War, evidently this was some kind of a memorial day for the Korean War. I listened to some of this on public radio, and so this was with me. And the peace testimony. Had Francis Brown not spoken about his experience as a CO this morning, I probably would not have spoken, but it just seemed to me the time to deliver my message.

There are a number of messages -- maybe most of the messages that I have delivered -- that have not been music to the ears of the Meeting members, but that hasn't been a particular concern to me. The concern I deal with is the motivation for me to speak. In the times when I've sat down, I thought that I could have expressed myself a

little more clearly, more smoothly, but I don't ever regret having given a message.

Rita: One of the things that I really like about meeting is that there is no definite thing that you have to do or think about, that you have you and God.

I had never been in a peace march and I listened to activists and I felt very strongly about the war in Iraq and so when our friends the Brintons were going in to the march in Philadelphia, I said, "Could I go along?" And so I marched and I felt very good about it. I felt that it was worthwhile. And it was a very, very interesting experience, the tremendous age difference among people and then the vitality. A lot of people went further from anything I've ever experienced, with costumes, the flags, the shouting. I think if I felt strongly about something again I would go on another peace march.

I never had the opportunity to go on one before. Gerry isn't interested in peace marches or does not feel that they are effective. But I just felt so very strongly about the Iraq war. But a peace march isn't something you just go to by yourself. You need to go with a group, at least for me at this stage in my life. So when I had a chance to go, I did.

Gerry: Quaker activism is a relatively new dimension of Quakerism. Of course, I go back a long time, and when I grew up I don't ever remember any activism being part of the Quaker testimony. When I grew up, a person's actions and deeds and presence spoke. That was the testimony, not organized activities as Rita described. So this is not a dimension of my life. It's not a dimension of Quakerism I embrace but that's fine if other people want to do it.

For me, activism takes away the individual, the presence and the stature of the individual. We had, for

example, during World War I, prominent Friends go down to Washington but this wasn't considered an activist group. There was Clarence Pickett, and there was Rufus Jones, and there were other very important prominent individuals who went down to confer in Washington. Indeed Friends later went over and sat down with Adolf Hitler, who received them graciously. But I think that's a little bit different than marching and waving banners. To me that's a whole different mode of expression.

The American Friends Service Committee was established as a relief organization after World War I. And members of my family contributed to this activity, not only in Europe but in Russia. A classmate of my father came back with a Russian bride. And my aunt married a man, and they went over for the Service Committee and they stayed in Belgium almost the rest of their lives as missionaries. My father's brother did the same thing. I don't interpret that as activism. I interpret it as an expression of a way of helping those needy people at that time in history.

Rita: With my own beliefs, I'm very much a feminist and I'm very much for women having the right to choose what they do with their own bodies. I don't know whether I would want to have an abortion, but I feel that this society should not dictate what we should do and how we should behave ourselves as far as beliefs. I think you should be allowed to believe... I guess I am an activist in a way, as far as women's rights, that women should have equal rights to men.

With Quakerism you're allowed to make your own decisions and you're given a great deal of freedom as far as your thoughts. You're not compelled to believe one way or another, you don't have people preaching to you that you have to be saved. One of the things I like

about Quakerism is that you're not preached to and told what you have to believe or feel.

Gerry: Another dimension that perhaps we haven't touched on specifically would be the strong personal ties that we as members over time develop among one another. And particularly having been involved with this meeting for a long time, there are people in meeting who are important to my life. People with whom I don't agree all the time, people with whom I become frustrated at times, but people who are important to my social and spiritual well-being.

Francis G. and Enid Brown

August 3, 2003

Browns' former home, now home of
their daughter Deborah and her
husband Graham Miles

Downingtown, PA

Fran: Our family didn't come here to Downingtown until 1870, that's the Brown side, but as you will hear, through my mother we go way back in the Downing family.

I guess I'm an aborigine as far as this generation is concerned. I've been really a member of this Meeting all my life, although I was not a birthright member. That's sort of an interesting story. My mother was an Episcopalian, but on her mother's side, the Downing side, they go Quakers all the way back. But my father had married an Episcopalian so he would go out the drive and turn right to go to Quaker meeting on Sunday morning and Mother would turn left and go to the Episcopal church.

She played the piano for us at our Sunday school and she helped teach the Sunday school in the early days. This is back in the early '20s. And sometimes we used to refer to her as one of our best little Quakers. But -- and this is the point I think is important for everybody who is a Quaker or a Friend -- at some point you really make a decision in your life that you want to be a member of the Society of Friends, a member of Downingtown Friends Meeting. One of my earliest memories was out in our vegetable garden, I guess I was 10 years old, and my father said, "Does thee want to be a Quaker?" And I said, I did. That was an important decision in my life because I made the decision and became a Quaker. So I wasn't a birthright Quaker.

My earliest memories go far back into the Meeting but they're very vague. One of my earliest memories was going to the Downingtown Friends School, in what we call our school building, which is now our activities building. But it was built as a school in 1919. The school started very interestingly, in what is now the Downingtown Public Library. Then it was the Dr.

William Todd house, and the school was held there when it started in 1918, and the next year the building, what we call our school building, was completed. I went there and that was a great experience. It was almost a one-room schoolhouse with one or two teachers and it went from kindergarten up to sixth grade. When we got through sixth grade, a good many of us went on to be day students at Westtown School. It wasn't a school just limited to members of the Meeting but for the whole community.

Of course the original school was just the two main rooms, the fireplace room and across the hallway, which is the children's room now. That was the original school. What is now our main building was added on much later, about 15 years ago. So I went to school there and then as I say went on to Westtown. The school stopped operating in the early '30s because they just ran out of students in the area. The school was rented out to John Hershey, who became a member of our Meeting. He was a nut tree man -- quite prominent actually. He and his wife Betty Hershey, during the '30s, had their office in the school building and their nursery across the road. In fact, some of the trees that are there now came from this man. Then the school was started up again after World War II when another generation of people came along.

Let me tell you now about my experience in World War II, and this really goes back. Many of my friends in college were Quakers. My senior year at school, I did something that had a great affect on my life, and that was to participate in summer work camp put on by the American Friends Service Committee. This was only the second year that they did summer work camps. My older brother Tom had gone to the first one and this was the summer of 1935. Our camp was out in Western Pennsylvania. We were doing things like making a

recreational program for coal miners' families and so forth. But many of my friends out there became future classmates. So in 1941, the draft was started and at that time the draft was only for one-year training. We weren't at war yet; this was before Pearl Harbor. So I decided to apply for a conscientious objector status, and this did take a real decision on my part. There weren't any other persons in our Meeting, at that time very few of my age, who were actually drafted. So I was almost alone in the Meeting as far as taking a CO position is concerned.

I wrote a statement out to the draft board -- I still have a copy of that statement -- and I was accepted. Wouldn't have any problem because this was a Quaker community, and, of course, you could say that at that time to be a conscientious objector you had to prove that by religious training and belief you qualified for that position. Well, in September, or late August of 1941, I was actually drafted and was sent to a civilian public service camp down in North Carolina. The three historic peace churches -- the Quakers, the Mennonites and the Brethren -- operated camps for conscientious objectors. This was provided by law. In the case of the Quakers, we took in many people who were not Quakers. But these were called Civilian Public Service camps and, in the case of the Quakers, they were run by the American Friends Service Committee.

So I was down in a camp for a year, in North Carolina, and got on to very interesting specialized service, doing surveying work along the Blue Ridge Parkway. Then we had gotten into some big forest fires down there. They used COs to fight forest fires and so some of us volunteered for firefighting out in California. We went out to California and then after that summer I decided I would like to try my hand at farming. We always had a little farm here, and I thought I would learn

more about farming. There was a shortage of dairy farm workers in Connecticut so I applied and I was sent to a dairy farm outside of Hartford, Connecticut. We were on a bus line about nine miles outside of Hartford and often on Sunday mornings I would hop on the bus or I would ride my bicycle and I would go into Quaker meeting, which was held at that time at the Hartford Theological Seminary. Quakers up there were very kind to me.

There's a lot I could tell about that but I'll come to the main point of my experience up there, and that was when I met my beautiful wife. When I was on this dairy farm, I was very much all by myself as compared to being at camp. These Civilian Public Service camps, really it was a college education in itself. You had these terribly overqualified workers, Ph.D.s and scientists and one thing and another, all doing this manual labor in Civilian Public Service. I call it my second college education, the bull sessions and so forth. Of course, I met many people who became lifelong friends. But when I went into this dairy project in Hartford, then I was all by myself. And as I said, I went in and got to know some people at the Hartford seminary and went to Quaker meeting and so forth.

Well. I met a man up there, Arnold Chutes. We went out bicycling one night and he said, "You ought to come to a square and folk dance at the congregational church in Hartford." This was in early September. So I cleaned up, took the bus in, and when I got there it was in the basement of this congregational church in downtown Hartford. I got there a little early and nothing was happening and most of the people were much younger than I. I thought, well, this is a younger group, and I thought I better leave. Just then two girls came down the steps, one in a nice little red-striped square dance uniform.

So when they walked down the steps, I guess I was trapped, and anyhow I'd like to describe it. If you remember the movie *Casablanca*, when Ingrid Bergman walked into that crowded bar, that beautiful woman. That's the way it was and as we like to say, the following spring we got married and we lived happily ever after. Now I'll turn to my good wife to tell a little bit more.

Enid: I graduated from college and didn't have a job or anything. Since my sister Virginia was coming east, I thought, well, I'll come east and see what she does and maybe I can get a job. We went to Hartford, and I stayed with her in an apartment. She was working for the YW but I needed to get a job and I was fortunate enough to hear about a job at the Bushnell Memorial, a theater and stage production place in Hartford. Because I'd had a college education, when I went to get a job they asked me about that and I became the treasurer. And had a wonderful time. Fran was able to come and sometimes sit in the balcony and sometimes sit in the other places, but we had a wonderful time.

Fran: At the Bushnell Memorial, new shows would start there on trial runs before they went to New York City. So Enid could get tickets to *South Pacific*, *My Fair Lady*, the Trapp Family singers, and so forth. So life suddenly picked up. By then I'd shifted from dairy farm work to what they called dairy herd testing, where you go around and keep records for individual dairy cows. I got my car, which I had put back in the garage during the war. So suddenly I had a car, and I had gas for the car -- of course everything was rationed -- and I had a girl. Then soon after the war, we decided to come back here and made the apartment in the north side of our house. We divided up this house because my parents were the only ones living here. Then we had our family and Enid

and I became very active in the Meeting. Now maybe you have something to add...

Enid: I went to a Quaker college in Wichita, Kansas -- Friends University. And I would not have been a Quaker out there because the Quaker church was just like my Methodist church only I thought my church was better than the Quakers. More liberal. However, I did meet a couple of teachers who were Eastern Quakers and when I took courses with them I found out about Eastern Quakers. When I finally graduated from this college, I came with my sister to Hartford, Connecticut, where Fran and I met and we came back to Downingtown. When did we come back to Downingtown again?

Fran: Well, we told how we met at the square dance and the man who ran the square dances and his wife became very good friends of ours. They had a very nice place about 25 miles outside of Hartford. When we got married we decided we'd be married there at their home. We stayed up there a little longer and then we came back to Downingtown and got into the life of the Meeting in the community here.

The life of the Meeting when we came back was very much like it is today, but not nearly as many people. I wouldn't want to say that it was much different. The school was very much the center of the Meeting at that time -- this was the second school now. When our kids came along, they went there and that school lasted until about the mid '60s. Then again that school stopped because we ran out of students. But when we came back and started up the school, there were young people and our kids who were very active in the life of the Meeting. We had a lot of work bees, as we still do, and we have early pictures of work bees, cleaning up the place and so forth. Later on we started the fall festival, but that's another story.

Enid: I was a Methodist when I met Fran and I did not become a Quaker until we'd got married and I was about to have a child. I decided I would join the meeting at that time, so that she would be a birthright Quaker. I thought if I didn't become a Quaker before she was born then any children afterwards when I became a Quaker would be birthright Quakers. So I thought she might as well be a birthright Quaker, and it was easy for me to accept the attitude that Fran had during the war. My grandparents were Mennonites. My grandfather bought three farms so that his three sons would not have to go to World War I. That influenced my feeling about war.

Fran: All my life and when we got married, our lives together, the Meeting's just been front and center. That was our life, our community. Of course, we had other friends, but the Meeting was our world so to speak. When we ran the school there, I went there. Then when our kids came along we didn't even think about where they would go. Our children went to the Downingtown Friends School up to about the sixth grade. That's when it stopped. Then they went to the public school until they were ready for Westtown. Then each of them went to Westtown, mostly the last two or three years where you had to board, 11th and 12th grades. So they had a mixture of both public education and Friends education. Of course, the cost is unbelievably different now than it was then. When our kids went to Westtown, as I remember, the cost for boarding and everything was around \$1,200 a year. We could almost afford that even then, and now of course I don't know whether we could send our kids to Westtown at all with the current tuition levels.

Enid: It just seems to me the obvious thing to do if we could afford to send our kids to Quaker schools

because we were such devoted Quakers here. They all turned out very well.

Fran: The Meeting just was part of our life. We never had a rule that you had to go to meeting every Sunday, but our family just went to meeting. There was no question about that. Our children enjoyed it. Their close friends were members of the Meeting, and they loved to go to Meeting Sunday school and Friends schools. So we're very positive about that but we also know that you can get a good education in the public school system.

Meeting for worship when I was very young was always, I expect, 25 people, maybe 30 people, not nearly as many as we have today. The thing that really makes the difference today is that we have a shared vocal ministry, which I like. But in those days, this may be just typical of our Meeting but there'd be one period where one person would speak. For several years, that one person carried the ministry. I remember that we would sit in silence and that one person would usually speak and that would be the one message we would have. Sometimes I thought we ought to have more messages but we didn't. Those messages were always very deep, very often they were biblical, orthodox biblical.

The first person I remember who sort of carried the vocal ministry in our Meeting was my grandfather, Ellis Yarnell Brown, who married my grandmother, who lived where the funeral home is now. They came out and lived in Downingtown, where my father and uncles and so forth were born. He was the first person who sort of carried the ministry and then after that was a man by the name of Dr. Howard Pennell, who is the uncle of Betty Fawcett, who recently passed away. He was a physician in Downingtown and he spoke very movingly. I

remember him. He was almost the sing-songy type. "Our dear friends, let's center into the depths --"

Carrying the vocal ministry was just happenstance. There's just a period when there was only one person in meeting who was gifted in the vocal ministry and carried that out. It may not be the case in other Meetings, but it was the case in our meeting. And then Uncle Bill Cadbury, William Edward Cadbury, he and his wife, who was my father's sister, and had gone to Haverford College with my father. He was one of the last recorded ministers in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. They had been members of Germantown Meeting, but had a summer place out here and then finally moved out here and joined our Meeting. Well, Uncle Bill occasionally, as his ministry, would kneel in prayer. We don't have that anymore at all, but he would actually kneel in prayer.

Enid: And the kneeling benches are still in the meeting.

Fran: The kneeling benches on the front benches were for kneeling. And this was something. When this happened, he would kneel ... he would be up on the facing bench, and kneel and give a prayer. Well, when that happened, the custom was that everybody in the meeting would stand up during the prayer. And that was a very, very powerful experience as I remember it. After awhile Uncle Bill -- we all called him Uncle Bill and he actually was my uncle -- asked that we not stand. Then he would still give prayer, occasionally, during his lifetime. But that was very, very moving.

Of course, prayer of any sort is something that has just disappeared from the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, and we don't record ministers anymore. But, of course, the facing benches originally were for the ministers and elders, perhaps the overseers, persons who had

designated rank of some sort. And the vocal ministry mostly came from the facing benches. They were raised so they were like a sounding board, so they could be heard better.

As time went on, the idea of recorded ministers seemed like a status symbol that was no longer comfortable to Friends. The idea was that you were then designated to be a public spokesman for the Society of Friends and Quakers, and it just became outmoded. There's a little push today to reinstate that status but I don't think it will happen. Now, of course, I'm talking about in the late or mid '60s, the practice of one person carrying the ministry for a number of years week after week gave way to what we have today: a shared vocal ministry, which is much better, much better. It's more democratic. It's not just a few people designated to preach, to minister.

One of the concerns that I have for our Meeting today, as we look into the future, has to do with the quality of our vocal ministry in meeting. I would prefer fewer messages in meeting rather than too many and occasionally we're going to have -- we do occasionally have -- totally silent meetings. That's very nice once in awhile. But what I sort of feel is we need to deepen our lives a little bit so that the ministry, the vocal ministry, whoever gives it, instead of just sort of being anecdotal, has more depth to it. How do you get to that? What am I talking about? I'm not setting down any rules, but I think if we, if people who ministered, could refer to the writings of early Quakers, you know, like John Woolman saying that we should turn all that we possess into the channels of universal love, this should become the business of our lives. If we could frame our messages more around writings of early Quakers or phrases of the Bible, psalms, the Scriptures, Christianity. I just feel that

there's a shallowness that we ought to be careful to guard against. But again, I'm very positive about our Meeting and the quality of our meeting for worship. And I am very bullish about the Meeting entirely.

Now, related to what I just said about the vocal ministry, and again I don't want to be overly critical at all, but one of the factors that comes in here is that today we have many members of our Meeting, thank goodness, who come from a non-Quaker world, who suddenly come into this world and don't have the background that I'm referring to. How do we nurture people and guide them so they can enter into the depth and fully participate and appreciate the meeting for worship, which can be so meaningful and often is so meaningful? One of the things that, in my experience, helps a meeting for worship is when somebody will give a message, maybe a very brief message, and open up a theme. It's amazing how that theme gets picked up by others and gets developed. Then you've got really a covered meeting, where we move together and you can feel the unity.

You know the Yearly Meeting has put on these Quakerism 101 courses that try to help particularly new people become oriented in Quaker history and know about how Quakers got started and the philosophy of our meeting for worship. It's quite different than any other church service. But I don't know whether that's helped a great deal. I think if anything we need more of that. But I would emphasize, if you're a Quaker, you've got to enter into your own search, your own private search. You know most of the things I'm talking about are in *Faith and Practice*. You read the writing of early Friends in the back of *Faith and Practice*. And study Quaker history. You gotta do it yourself.

I'm 86 years old, just about as I speak, and I am still searching, still trying to understand the teachings of Jesus and still trying to understand the Bible, and understand my own religious philosophy. Now, people have said to me, "What do you do when you go to meeting? What do you do?" I've been asked to share that with our Sunday school classes sometime. You know, it's a very simple thing. I shared in meeting the other day a little prayer that, a definition of prayer, that is not Quaker but which helps me. This little definition is that prayer is a quieting of your mind and an opening of yourself to a larger awareness. And that's exactly what I do when I go into Quaker meeting. First of all, I just try to quiet my body -- that isn't very hard for me at my age, but it's very hard for young kids. But the hardest thing is to quiet your racing mind, you know your thinking and intellectual pursuits, and quiet your spirit and just open yourself up to a larger awareness -- that's the presence of God -- and take it from there.

I frequently have ministered in meeting but I can say quite honestly that I never come to meeting with something in my mind that I'm determined I'm going to say that day. I really don't do that. But there is a preparation that goes into Quaker meeting. Maybe you or I, any of us, would have a concern. Maybe it's about the environment, maybe it's about peace, maybe it's about our personal faith. Maybe it's been building up in us for months. And on a certain Sunday at meeting it just seems right to share that message. So there is a definite preparation and we don't just come to meeting just cold. We shouldn't just come to meeting just devoid of anything. But you don't come to meeting on any Sunday determined that you're going to give a certain message, at least I don't.

Enid: I've only spoken in meeting once and actually it wasn't here in Downingtown. It was at Old Caln, where we go on the third Sunday of each month. And I had an inspiration and I said it, which surprised me because my main contribution at the Meeting is the flowers, and that's part of my ministry.

Fran: Many people aren't into vocal ministries but have their own individual ministries. With you it's the flower arranging.

Enid: It's always been a joy for me. The thing that I enjoy doing for the Meeting, and for myself as well, is arranging flowers to have at meeting. I don't do it just to have flowers there, but putting the flowers together I think about meeting and I think what I want to do when I go to meeting. I think about a lot of things. When I go after the flowers that I'm going to put in Meeting, I consider it my preparation for meeting. Then I have joy in arranging flowers and fortunately I guess I have some ability in that because I get many nice compliments about it. I won a few prizes when I was a member of the garden club.

I suppose it's partly just habit, going to meeting every week. As a child I went to Sunday school and church every week, that was the Methodist church. But I have done it all my life and I guess I'll continue to do it. But when I go to meeting now, I will say, I settle down when I look at the flowers and if I feel like I've done a good job it makes me comfortable. If I feel like I haven't done such a good job, I kind of forget them for a while and say that next time I'll do better.

I prefer fewer messages in the meeting than sometimes we have and I don't like to have controversial things in the meeting brought up in a message, which has happened once in awhile.

I guess Quakerism to me means that I believe in nonviolence, and there is that of God in every man, and the silence is very good to me. I have to keep reminding myself that this is what I believe. Sometimes it's difficult when you have to deal with the things that are going on in the world.

Fran: I'd like to just comment further on this question of ministry. Not everybody is gifted in the vocal ministry and everybody has their own. That's one thing I like about Quakerism. You know, we didn't abolish the ministry. It is said that Quakers abolished the ministry, but that isn't the case. We abolished the laity. We're all ministers, and everybody has their unique something to do and Enid has this wonderful ability, artistic ability, to do the flower arrangements which inspire us so many times. My own father, who went to meeting all his life and sat at the head of meeting the latter part of his life, never spoke in meeting that I remember. He wasn't gifted in that way, but he had other gifts. And so we all have gifts.

In the late '40s I think it was, maybe early '50s, Dad and I used to walk up on what we called the hill and one day I remember him saying that he felt our Meeting at Downingtown would die out pretty soon and there was every reason to say that. We were really kind of a closed group, everybody called each other, even if you weren't directly related, cousin or aunt. We never really zeroed out, the school always helped us, but we reached pretty low status. However, I am glad to say that my father was wrong in his prediction and our Meeting has grown. It's unbelievable how it's grown, how we've attracted people. I guess one reason is that a lot of the meetings down around the Main Line, young couples can't afford to live there. People are moving further out here and they're gravitating to our meeting. We don't

have any definite outreach program but, again, coming back to this thing that everybody is a minister and everybody has something to do. You take our fall festival and you take all the activities of our Meeting, taking food to the Salvation Army, and all the things we do. It's a great many things. We've got a flourishing good young adult program, a Sunday school program for children, that attracts families. Other meetings that don't have Sunday schools and aren't attractive, they're going down the tubes. We're getting too big even for the facilities we now have.

Now as far as what does the meeting mean, what does the meeting stand for, what does the Society of Friends stand for, two things come to my mind:

One is our manner of worship, and now I'm referring to Eastern, historic Quakers rather than pastoral Quakers or evangelical Quakers out in the West. Seems to me the most important thing is our manner of worship, which is based on silence. We all come in and we gather and we sit wherever we feel comfortable, and we're led in the spirit for that morning. That's a beautiful thing. Of course, sometimes it works better than others. Sometimes, as Enid said, we have too much ministry and maybe it's not deep enough, as I've said. Other times, maybe we don't have enough. I don't want to go to meeting with just a silent meeting Sunday after Sunday. We need to develop that. So holding our meeting on the basis of silence is a very, very unique thing in all of religion, Christianity, all religions.

The other thing, I think, is our testimonies and the most important of our testimonies is the peace testimony. Those two things, our silence, our manner of worship on the basis of silence, where anyone is free to share a concern or thought or prayer, and our testimonies, particularly the peace testimony, are the two things that

really make the Society of Friends stand out. I think that's what's drawing people to our Meeting, those two things in particular.

The source of the peace testimony, Enid has already indicated, is that of God in every person. If there is that of God in every person, then every person has a divine thing. The position I took during World War II and I still take is that I just simply cannot be part of killing a person because there is that divinity in that person. That is the bedrock position that I hold. Now, on top of that is what we'd call the more positive dimension, and that is I think war often creates more problems than it attempts to solve and violence begets violence. The Quaker peace testimony, as Raymond Wilson once said – he was the great executive of the Friends Committee on National Legislation. I heard him say once that the Quaker peace testimony is the abolition of war. I think that's what we mean to try to do. The present war on terrorism, with military might and military warfare, is not the way to prevent future terrorist attacks. The way to do that is develop more friendships throughout the world.

Coming back to my career, so to speak, I had a hard time finding my major interest and work in life. When I got out of the Civilian Public Service after World War II, I worked at a leather company in Wilmington, Del., and from that I operated our farm here in Downingtown, taking up on my farm work during the war, which I enjoyed very much. But my other big interest was the Society of Friends. I had many friends who worked for the American Friends Service Committee and there was an opportunity to work for Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, our denominational group. So, in 1958, I was appointed associate secretary of the Yearly Meeting. Then in 1964 I was appointed general

secretary, in which office I stayed until my retirement in 1980. My work largely was ecumenical work with other denominations, the Pennsylvania Council of Churches, the Metropolitan Christian Council of Philadelphia, and, most important, I was on the board of the National Council of Churches. All of those things brought me in close contact with the Vietnam War, the civil rights era. My work wasn't directly in the social action field, but it was very much in support of that.

Today, ever since Sept. 11, 2001, I've been rather -- not unhappy -- but I thought Philadelphia Yearly Meeting ought to have more of a response to the terrible attacks on the World Trade Center. And several of us got together and proposed that Yearly Meeting take on a special secretary, a peace secretary. My concern was that not only Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, but the Society of Friends and the nation, be more prominent, take more of a leadership role in the whole peace movement since Sept. 11. The American Friends Service Committee is doing a good job now; Friends Committee on National Legislation continues to do a good job. But the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting just wasn't ready for some reason to really launch out on a major effort to get into peace activism.

I don't feel that the Society of Friends is just an activist group. It's this combination of our silent worship and our action. And that is its faith and practice, to use the title of our book of discipline.

I'll almost humorously say that I can hardly count the number of times that I've gone to Washington with others and demonstrated around the White House and around the Pentagon in opposition to war in general and at that time, the Vietnam War in particular.

Enid: And you took Deborah one time.

Fran: Oh, and I might comment on one thing. One of the high points of my life was being in Washington, for the time of the March on Washington when Martin Luther King gave his great "I Have a Dream" speech. Somehow you decided not to go that day

Enid: I had little children.

Fran: Yeah, little children, and Deborah was I think a senior at Westtown School, and this was in August of 1963 and as a member of the board of the National Council of Churches, there were a block of seats reserved right below Lincoln's statue, right below where Martin Luther King gave his talk. And so it was a lovely warm summer's day and people in what they call the reflecting pool between the Lincoln Memorial and the Washington Monument were sitting beside it with their feet cooling off in the water. It was just like a Sunday school picnic. Everybody was having a nice time, talking to our friends, having lunch and there were speakers filling in. Burt Lancaster was there, Adam Clayton Powell, the congressman from New York City, was there, lots of dignitaries. And the thrust of the whole thing was to pass the civil rights bill, which was done in 1964.

And then, in the middle of the afternoon, Martin Luther King went to the platform and you can just feel the electric shock that hit everybody. Everybody just suddenly woke up. You can hear the speech today but having the memory, which Deborah and I have, of actually being there and hearing him talk about the day that he hoped that his little children, little black children and white children, would not be judged but by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. When he finished that speech, and said, quoting the old Negro spiritual, "Free at last, Free at last, Thank God almighty we're Free at last," the place erupted in a way that I have never experienced. They just applauded and then

everybody in little groups just gathered together and held hands and sang, "We Shall Overcome." It was undoubtedly the most impressive thing. And that's something I benefited from because of my work with the Yearly Meeting, and being on the National Council of Churches board.

So, anyway, I've been bothered a little bit by what I feel is sort of a pulling back of many Quakers, in regard to our peace testimony in particular. I think that Sept. 11 was so awful that I think many people, even Quakers who up to that point had supported the peace testimony, are beginning to have second thoughts. Steve Baumgartner, who's the executive at Pendle Hill, the other day said that he was monitoring Friends Journal, the letters to the editor and the articles in the Friends Journal, since Sept. 11 and you can kind of feel that many people, they're not necessarily losing faith, but they're asking questions. I don't know what to do about that. My peace concern is stronger than it ever was. If I was a conscientious objector in World War II, I'm a pacifist today.

I felt clear, when it was a case of going to conscription for one year, I felt clear to register as a conscientious objector and I went to these public service camps. This was before Pearl Harbor. I remember very well on Sunday, Dec. 7, 1941, when we heard on the radio that the Japanese had attacked Pearl Harbor. That created great internal consternation within me. I remember that afternoon. Sundays we had off. I went up into the cloudy murky day, almost rainy. I just went up in the hills above our camp in North Carolina and I just had to say to myself, all of a sudden the world was different. Our nation was at war. And was I still able to take a pacifist position when our nation went to war. And I came out of that feeling that I had to do it, and I

never regretted my decision. But I'm fully sympathetic to people today, who, as I say in reading letters to the Friends Journal, evidence that they're thinking this whole thing through again. And I'm not judgmental, but I think Quakers of all groups -- we're the most recognized peace group in the world really, and that's what people know about us -- I think that we need to step up to the plate and I hope we will.

Many people became Quakers after the 1930s and '40s. They worked for the AFSC or attended work camps, which were very popular back in the '30s. Many non-Quakers went to them. They were motivating things. But I think most people today witness the opposition of other countries to our going to war with Iraq. It reflects the fact that many people are very antsy about our government's policy of using military might to squelch terrorism and hatred in the United States. Many people are thinking about that. I don't know why it is but anytime you're threatened -- even if someone comes into your house and threatens you or your family or your loved ones -- it's human nature to reach for a gun. We just all feel that's the answer. But to me that isn't the answer. Because the guy with the gun, he's a much better shot than I am. I'd rather use friendly persuasion with that guy. Get him to talk. Make him a cup of coffee. That's my way of doing it. But the world at large just seems to have this bent toward war. They love the American flag, waving it to sing "God Bless America." I don't know how you make a dent on that. I can only hope. But that's why I don't give up on Quakerism and Christianity as I understand it.

When I worked on the farm in Connecticut, one day we were in the farmer's, my boss' car, and I remember him saying that, until I came on the scene, he didn't know a thing about Quakers, except one thing: He said there's one word I identify with Quakers and that

word is "peace." At the time I thought that was sort of a putdown because he didn't know anything about Quakers, but then since I've thought that's the greatest compliment that Mr. J. William Holt, who I became very friendly with, that's the greatest compliment he could have paid to Quakers, that we're known for that one word "peace."

Louis (Lou) and Frances (Fran)
Schneider

November 1, 2003

Schneiders' home

Glenmoore, PA

Lou: I'm a refuge from my upbringing in having come to Quakerism. I grew up in a very formal religious framework. My maternal grandfather was a minister and four or five of his sons were also ministers. We went to church and Sunday school every Sunday, and I was eventually confirmed by him. As the years went by, into my teens and college years, I realized that I was moving away from that, although I myself became a minister, having gone to Union Theological Seminary and graduated from there. I had a small independent, nondenominational community church in New Jersey for three years until I was drafted just on the eve of World War II.

However, by the time I was 21, I had worked every summer at various odd jobs to save money so I could go to college. I was able to pay my full years' freshman tuition out of savings that I had accumulated as a child and a teenager. So I didn't need to have a job during the summers. One of my friends drew my attention to an ad by the AFSC, the American Friends Service Committee, offering opportunities in volunteer summer work camps. I got in touch with the AFSC and they offered me a place in a camp in Thornhill, Tennessee, in association with the Tennessee Valley Authority. That was my introduction to Quakers. We met every morning for a quiet meeting for worship. We had evening discussions. A number of people from the AFSC staff, including Clarence Pickett and on down to the heads of various sections, came to meet with us for one or two days. And this opened my mind to a much broader approach to religion than I had ever had before. It was non-dogmatic and far less structured than anything I had been used to, and I had an intuitive feeling that this was where I felt comfortable.

That was in 1936. Later on, in 1940 I believe, the Selective Service and Training Act was instituted and everyone had to register for the draft, though there was no war at that time. When I registered, I had to indicate my profession, which was clergyman. The law provided an absolute exemption from the draft for clergymen. Not a deferment, a discretionary deferment, but an exemption. I started thinking about this. Why should clergymen be absolutely exempt? Why aren't all men absolutely exempt from military service? I was able to insist on this at the time and they classified me as 4D, I think it was.

Fran: That's right.

Lou: Eventually, I was able to negotiate my way out of this category and expose myself to the draft and I was drafted. But then, of course, I was also a conscientious objector and I believe my orientation and association with the American Friends Service Committee and Quakers had a good deal to do with my having arrived at this point of view. So it wasn't long before I was drafted, in September of 1941. At that time, men were drafted for one year. The war, as I say, had not yet started. I was offered the option of going to an alternative service camp, Civilian Public Service, under three different auspices, the Mennonites, the Brethren and Quakers. I chose the AFSC because I'd already had some association with the Service Committee. And then, of course, in December, apropos Pearl Harbor, Franklin Roosevelt declared war and we were all drafted for the duration, which turned out to have been a little over four years for me.

When the war ended, I had four years of continuous association with the AFSC. Eventually the Service Committee exhausted a reservoir of volunteers, men and women, to be the directors of the camps they

were responsible for administering, and it became possible for assignees who were drafted to assume these responsibilities. Selective Service gave their permission. After several months at Cooperstown, New York, where I was assigned working with the Forest Service, the men in the camp elected me to be the director of the camp when the volunteer director was transferred. It was at that point that I came to the attention of the AFSC. We, Frances and I, went on from there to be directors of a camp in Elkton, Oregon, and after a little over a year there the AFSC central office invited me to Philadelphia to assume responsibility for the oversight and administration of the whole program countrywide.

You might explain the opportunity we had then to get married. You were then with me from then on.

Fran: That's right.

Well, my family was Methodist. My father was a pacifist in World War I so I've been a pacifist for a long time. I didn't wait to meet Lou to come to that. So when he was at Union Theological and I was at Columbia, we met over lunch and so forth and found out that we had strong convictions together. We couldn't get married because I still had to make a living and he was not making one. So we had to wait a year while I worked in Detroit and Lou was in field camp.

Lou: Cooperstown.

Fran: Cooperstown, right. Then when we got married the Service Committee found things for Lou to do almost immediately and we went to Elkton, Oregon. We must have had 200 men in our camp, in various side camps, and that was a very interesting place to be. Then Lou had to come to Philadelphia, taking responsibilities, and we lived with the Warings, Bernard and Grace Waring, who were wonderful Quaker folks who

belonged to Germantown Meeting. So we started going to that meeting and that was our first official meeting.

Then when we moved out here, Grace Waring's cousin Billy, William Edward Cadbury, belonged to Downingtown Meeting. So we came to Downingtown Meeting. At that point, we had a year-old daughter, two sons, one older, one younger. Our daughter Susie just immediately gravitated to Martha Brown, who's now Martha Bryans, and they were best buddies and have continued to be best buddies to this day. I guess I would say that my real commitment to Downingtown Meeting came from Martha and Susie, who were such good friends. At that time, Meeting had several young families with kids, McQuails, Browns, Schneiders ...

Lou: Ashes --

Fran: Ashes, Stilwells. Those are the little ones that I remember. And we got together at least once a month for lunch with all the kids, everybody bringing something and it would be here or at somebody else's house. That was a lot of fun. I was involved with Westtown then teaching, and Westtown used most of my energies. So I was not as much a part of the local scene but there was always the monthly thing with meeting which was very important. There was a sewing group at that time and they really worked on things for the Service Committee, things to send overseas. And Lou's mother was living with us then and she always went to Meeting sewing group.

Meeting very much included the children. There was, for one thing, school. It must've been from kindergarten through third grade and so it cost a little bit but Meeting helped with the cost and children were very much a part of the Meeting. Every meeting included the

children; the downstairs part of the meetinghouse was for them.

Lou: Schoolhouse...

Fran: Schoolhouse. When meeting was upstairs, when we were doing other things, the kids were downstairs.

When I grew up, I went to public school. I wasn't a Quaker. There were no Quakers where we were. My convictions came from the family rather than from church or school. I thought when I had my own children I really wanted them to be in a Quaker school. It seemed to me that Friends school ought to be different. I kept questioning, is it really? Are we really doing something different or is it just my wishful thinking? But it was important to me that they go to Friends school and have this opportunity. So when we finished with Downingtown Friends School in third grade, they got some scholarships and started at the Westtown School and then, very fortunately, I was able to teach at Westtown in the lower school so we only paid a tenth of the cost.

Lou: Frances worked our children through Westtown.

Fran: And then since I was in the business I worked them through college.

The thing that was different about Friends school I could be sure of was personnel, people who had ideas about Quakerism were there. So it ought to come through, and these were the people I wanted my children to know. I'm not sure that Friends school is that different and a good school should be doing the same thing Friends school is doing. I'm not sure how I'd look at it nowadays. I'm glad I don't have to figure that out today.

Lou: You may have sensed from some of my earlier remarks that I tend to be quite independent in my thinking. I was not a member of the Society of Friends throughout the whole interval of World War II and my association with the AFSC in Civilian Public Service. I decided not to be a Friend at that time because I had taken my position against military service quite privately and independently. I wanted to retain that distinctive independence so long as the war lasted. It was only after the war ended and we were living in Germantown that I became a member of Germantown Friends Meeting.

The war ended in 1945, and the Service Committee offered me a position in the personnel department. While I was engaged in that job, I was approached by the head of the foreign service section, asking if I would be interested in going to Europe to oversee the emergency relief work that AFSC was undertaking throughout Europe at that time. So in the spring of 1948, we went to Europe and were there for two-and-a-half years. I was a commissioner for Europe. There were two of us working together in that role, one of us was in the central office while the other one was out in the field, and we alternated that way throughout our service. We were working then, I seem to remember, in about 13 different countries and it took a lot of administrative coordination and program development coordination between the field and the central office at 20 South 12th Street in Philadelphia. And that was the role of a commissioner. We were not directing anything. We were facilitating communication back and forth between the people in the field and the central office.

One of my most memorable experiences during this service was shortly after we arrived in Europe. I went to Germany in the spring of 1948 -- my first visit to Germany -- to attend a conference of all of our workers in

Germany. At that time there were about 75 or 80 American and British volunteers doing emergency relief work. This was on the eve of the Berlin blockade laid down by the Russians. Our small group, going from Paris, was stymied in getting into Berlin because of the blockade. We couldn't cross the Elbe River on the bridge. We had to wait our turn on a very primitive little ferry that took about four or five cars at a time -- and it had no motor power of its own. It ran on a cable and the current slid it across the river and slid it back again. That took hours and hours and hours. We eventually arrived in Berlin and the conference had already started. I entered the room while one woman was still speaking about her experiences as a Quaker during World War II. She described one of her experiences this way:

The war had ended. Her husband was a very prominent judge in Germany, and he had been arrested. Her son had been taken to serve in the military. She had no idea where he was. She was out of touch with both of them. And one day, two Russian officers came to her apartment in what had become East Berlin. They said -- this was right after the war ended -- "We are making an inventory of facilities that we will need to provide for our occupation and our troops. We'd like to look over your apartment." They came in and they said, "There are many things here that will meet our needs. We'll be back tomorrow with a van to collect them." They were at the door when they were talking to her. And having heard this from them, she said, "You have already taken my husband. You have my son. I don't know where he is. These things in my apartment are things that we have accumulated throughout our married life. They mean a great deal to me, sentimentally. They don't mean a thing to you. I will not let you have them." And she said they never came back with the van to collect anything.

Fran: And she had a moral to that --

Lou: Then she reflected on this experience and she said, "If you are in fear, you are in reaction against your fellow man. If you are without fear, you have the opportunity of entering into a harmonious relationship with him." But it meant a great deal to me. I wasn't reading a textbook about Quakerism. I was hearing words from a woman who had had this direct experience and that made all the difference in its impact on me. That has had a lot to do with my appreciation of Quakerism. My feeling is that there's a kind of fluidity to Quakerism. There's nothing categorically predetermined or dogmatically laid down within Quakerism. It's a continuous openness to revelation and to fresh insight. We today have the same opportunity that people 200 years ago or 400 years ago may have had to discover what was right and what was the truth at that moment for them in their lives. It's terribly important for Quakers today to retain this sense of vitality and liveliness in their own experience in the context of Quakerism. It's more than traditional, in other words. It's informed by tradition, but the truth has not yet been fully discovered and we have a short time on this Earth to participate in that effort to discern more and more clearly what it might be.

Fran: Lou's strong involvement with the Service Committee was good for the family because it stretched us, but it was sometimes tough to live with. Susie at age 3 was describing her father and she said, "On his short vacations, he puts windows in the house, and on his long vacations he goes around the world." We were very much aware of the long vacations. He would be gone five months at a time and we were three small children and me and Lou's mother, and Lou's father for nine months while he was an invalid. We were all in this house. It was

the grandpop's illness that urged us to add a wing onto the house. That was to take care of him. But he only lived a year, I think nine months after that. Luckily we had Meeting and Meeting friends -- and good friends with the young families. They helped me out socially so I was a part of something. That was the main thing -- and going to Meeting was an important part of our week.

Lou: I was again in Germany in the spring of 1948 and Charlie Reed, who was the director of one of our major program segments in Germany, and I set out to drive from our office in Darmstadt to an international student center that we had launched in Germany. We had rented an Army jeep for our trip. And we drove through the village of Dachau and realized we were right at the entrance to the concentration camp. We looked at each other and our look said, Should we stop a moment and see this? He had never been at all, though he'd been in Germany for a while. So we went through the gate, walked through the gate. There was one German kind of gardener, watching there, and we greeted each other. Then we could immediately see where we were, the evidence of a concentration camp having been there. The whole camp was still structured and still there. On the left, as I recall, as we walked in, were several ovens, the doors were open. They were constructed in such a way that you could slip a body in lengthwise. On the right of the ovens were mounds and mounds of spring grass, covered mounds where the ashes of people who had been incinerated had been piled. You walk down a little further and the door to the gas chamber was open. We walked in this large cavernous room, with ceilings about 20 feet high, and I had heard that people were induced to enter these gas chambers in order to take a shower and you could see what might appear to have been showerheads in the ceiling. Actually they were the vents

from which the gas was eventually administered. You could see evidence on the walls, where people had desperately tried to climb on top of each other to escape the gas and to get out of there. It was ... I mean Frances spoke a moment ago about having been unaware throughout World War II of the extreme –

Fran: Horror --

Lou: Horror surrounding the war that was going on. And this was my personal experience of it after the war and a most ... I was going to say moving experience ... actually it was an unassimilable experience. Charlie and I got back in the jeep to go on. Neither one of us spoke to each other the rest of the journey. It had that much impact on each of us. I've made this remark among Friends on one public occasion recently. There is an exhibit that's been going around Europe and around the United States called "The Silent Helpers." It's a review of the experience of the AFSC and Friends Service Council, England, and the volunteers who were associated with that program of emergency relief in Europe. When it came to Philadelphia a couple of years ago, I was invited among others to make a few remarks about our experience. I made two points.

One was a feeling I have had about the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Friends after World War II. The chairman of the Peace Prize committee, in awarding the prize to Henry Cadbury, who was the chairperson of the AFSC, remarked on the help offered by the silent to the silent. And that never rung a bell with me emotionally or spiritually. It depicts those of us who were involved, both as relief workers and as recipients of relief, as automatons, and we were very real people with very real feelings in reaction to the horrible situation that people were facing throughout the war and in the immediate post-war years. We were not without feelings by any

means. And I remember the experience of some of our refugee workers on behalf of Spanish refugees during the Spanish Civil War. They got to the field and discovered that they had become partisan in support of one side or the other. This became evident to such an extent that the office in Philadelphia had to caution them that they were neutral. They could not be partisan and openly express political identification or sympathy with one side or the other. That's a very difficult frame of mind to develop, particularly when you're in the field and in face-to-face daily contact with situations that almost spontaneously call for you to make a judgment. I referred to this in what I had to say that evening, that this was more than help from the silent to the silent. They were human beings on both sides, who were recipients and on the other side who were offering the aid. It was not a pre-scripted relationship or experience by any means. There were real feelings involved.

The other thing I mentioned, speaking quite personally, Alice Shafer was one of our workers in Europe before the outbreak of World War II. In 1938-39, she was stationed in Berlin, representing the AFSC. At that time, we were making every effort we could think of to help Jews particularly, who were being persecuted by the Nazis, to leave Germany and Alice was involved in this effort. She said that on one occasion in the evening, she went to a downtown hospital in Berlin to visit a friend. She got to the elevator and was waiting for the elevator to close and go up when all of a sudden Adolf Hitler came in the elevator with a dozen roses, obviously himself going to see a friend. There they were together in the elevator -- a most unexpected and remarkable experience for someone to have.

She told me about this years later when she was directing our program in Guatemala. I was down there

on a visit with her and we were having supper one evening and just reflecting on our experiences. She told me about this encounter, and from time to time I've wondered, Suppose I had been Alice Shafer? What would my reaction have been to be face-to-face with Adolf Hitler? And I've come to the view, if I had known then what I since learned about the atrocities and the terrible suffering of the war, I could've jumped him and strangled him.

I'm not a candidate for Quaker sainthood by any means. But I say this just to emphasize that on the one hand there is principle, and conviction about that principle that one or another of us may have, but then on the other hand there's the human experience over here and somehow we have to find a way to bring these two considerations together. That's not easy to do. Speaking as a pacifist and a Quaker, I'm inclined to feel, now that I'm almost 90, that it's terribly important to honestly face up to this dilemma and I acknowledge, even though I've been a lifelong pacifist, and I probably will continue to be one -- I certainly am one right now in respect to the war that's going on in Iraq -- I'm not without a struggle in holding that position.

I'd like to be able to live long enough to resolve that struggle. It reminds me of a line from Ralph Waldo Emerson that has struck my attention in this respect: He said, "Conscience is essentially absolute but historically liminary." And this reflects the dialogue that goes on among Quakers and the dialogue that takes place within each one of us in an effort to resolve the dichotomy between essential absolutism and historical limits. How do you remain faithful, consistently faithful, to the absolute when you're dealing with pragmatic situations? I don't know how else to put it.

Fran: I got a book called the *Inhumanity of Man to Man* and really pored over that. That was Erich Fromm, right?

Lou: Yes.

Fran: It helped to realize that other people were dealing with this and, of course, he's a psychiatrist so he should have some answers. I think what it adds up to is that within your own experience you have things that are not what you would like. And how you deal with it, how angry you get, what you do when you're angry, what this does to other people, and this is the basis of inhumanity. It gets magnified when the social situation is in a desperate state like Germany was. That's as much as I could figure so that I could feel that I could live with it for awhile. It was really heavy.

It seems to me that when we were being such absolute conscientious objectors in World War II, we were not really aware of the international situation. That is, I don't remember hearing about Nazism. It was there, that's what we were fighting about. I don't remember it. I was not clued in there. I'm not sure that that would have altered my conviction, but it ought to have had something to do with it. If there were ever a reason to fight a war, that would have been it. Maybe fighting a war is not the answer to it, probably not. But I've wondered about it recently.

Lou: I'm recalling one more insight I had into the problem each of us faces from time to time, reconciling our commitment to principle with what action to take in response to a given situation. I was in Tokyo once with Anna Brinton. She was directing our program in Japan after World War II. She and Howard Brinton had long been associated with each other as the directors of Pendle Hill and she volunteered at one point to go to Japan to

undertake this assignment for the AFSC. It was the first time I had been to Japan and she devoted herself to my education. I was just coming into a job as secretary of the foreign service section of the AFSC, and she thought that I ought to have the experience of seeing Mt. Fuji at sunrise because it was spectacularly beautiful or could be at that moment on any day. So we arranged to see that. We walked for a couple of miles in the predawn hours from the Friends Center in Tokyo to an outlook in the city that gave the best perspective on Mt. Fuji when the sun came up. And when it came up, it was very hazy and it was very indistinct through the haze. After we had watched it for awhile I turned to her and said I was disappointed. I had expected to see a kodachromatic brilliant image in front of me. She said, "Oh, this is the way the Japanese love to see it because nothing in life is ever very clear."

In my work with the AFSC, I was not only involved in work abroad but in a general way with work in this country, both in respect to peace education program efforts and what we then called community relations work. Of course, during the '60s, this was the height of the civil right struggle in this country. I was not actively directing any particular program but I was generally in touch with the programs that we were carrying on in respect to desegregation and civil rights. On one occasion, Martin Luther King helped plan a march from Selma, Alabama, to Montgomery in order to dramatize the urgency of this struggle. The group assembled in Selma to begin this march, I believe at the Edmund Pettus Bridge. Anyway, Colin Bell, who was then executive secretary, was part of this march and a young man from our New England regional office was also there, Jim Reed. When they got to the bridge, they were met by sheriffs and sheriff's deputies and

threatened with violence and had to turn back. They could not continue the march. Later that day, I believe it was a Saturday, our colleague from New England and two or three others had gone to a restaurant around the corner from the church that had become the headquarters for this event during that day at Selma. After the meal, as they were coming out of the restaurant, he apparently had been spotted as one of those who had engaged in the aborted march and he was struck with a bat or bludgeon of some kind and in effect beaten to death. He died shortly thereafter. A huge memorial service was planned in the church the following weekend and I was designated to represent the AFSC on that occasion and to deliver a brief eulogy. So I did, along with Martin Luther King, who was obviously the main speaker.

After the service, the group planned to leave the church and march to the courthouse in the center of Selma in order to commit to a continuing struggle for civil rights despite what had happened the week before. We were marching two by two through the village and I remember we were slowly co-joined by a lengthy line of Alabama state police cars, with two policemen in each car. As we slowly made our way down to the courthouse, they drove beside us all the way. I can remember looking in one of the car windows at one point and I've never been stared at so hostilely in all my life as I was in exchanging glances with that state trooper. It reminded me once again of how courageous and staunch people have to be to persist in an effort like the civil rights struggle, particularly the black people who at that time were the focus of this whole effort. I was more of a bystander, as you can see, then I was an actual participant, although I was part of that dramatic moment.

After the war in Asia ended in 1945, the Japanese surrender, there was a lot of turmoil in East Asia. The Japanese were forced out of Vietnam. The French came back in. They were defeated by the Vietnamese forces at Dien Bien Phu, in July of 1954 as I recall. I had read a little bit about this and I was planning a trip around the world at that point to begin in September as part of my education and orientation toward becoming secretary of the foreign service section of the AFSC. And I remember saying to one of our senior staff members, "In making this trip to Japan, Korea, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and so forth, do you think I ought to stop off in Vietnam?" And his reaction was, in effect, Where is Vietnam? Nobody knew anything about Vietnam at that time. But I had read enough to know that there was a burgeoning problem there, particularly on the part of refugees who were trying to escape the fighting.

Anyway, I planned to spend two weeks in Vietnam in October of 1954 and I remember writing back to Philadelphia on my impressions of the situation, wondering whether or not this was going to be a need that the AFSC should address in its overseas work. I was scheduled to meet the head of a government ministry, but when I arrived I was told that the government had changed hands and no one was prepared to see me. I went down to the river where so-called U.S. Marine ships, the kind that had been used to transport troops across the ocean during World War II, were unloading refugees from the north. They had wanted to escape and go to South Vietnam. The United States was just beginning to establish its administration and control over South Vietnam.

I followed one of the trucks on which a group of about 20 or 25 refugees had been loaded to go to their resettlement. There was no reception for them. There

were no resettlement camps. They went up what was then known as Highway Number 1 outside of Saigon and got to the place where the last truckload of refugees had been dumped. They were unloaded and the truck went back for some more and that's just the way it went on both sides of the highway. The highway had been cleared of jungle growth about 300 feet on either side for security reasons and it was on this cleared area that these people were putting together branches and limbs and trying to establish a home for themselves. I remember talking to a Vietnamese man who turned out to be a Catholic priest. He had a group of refugees assembled and they were beginning to build a church. I practically said to him, "My God, man, what do you want with a church when these people need shelter to live in." And he said, "My people would rather have a church."

Well, I could never put that together with the reality of the situation that they were facing. Anyway, I believe I was the first representative of the AFSC to have visited Vietnam, but then in a way, I was also in a sense the last one, although I really wasn't. But in 1975, the North Vietnamese who had taken over all of Vietnam, invited me to join a small international group of peace advocates who had championed the cause of peace throughout the war to come to Hanoi and celebrate the end of the war. And I did that, helped lay a wreath at the tomb of Ho Chi Minh, which is kind of like Lenin's Tomb in Moscow.

Meanwhile, we had sent agricultural equipment and medical supplies to North Vietnam and one of the acquaintances and friends I made during that time was a North Vietnamese heart surgeon and we sent him equipment that he could use in open-heart surgery. I remember going to the hospital after these had been delivered and staying there with him and his wife. They

expressed their pleasure over having been provided with this sophisticated equipment to help them carry on their work. That was on one visit. On a subsequent visit, the one celebrating the end of the war, the program had come to an end and everyone was dispersing. I was in a back street trying to find my way back to my hotel when all of a sudden I heard a loud voice in the crowd saying, "Schneider, Schneider." And there was the doctor. He was an honorary or member of the Politburo and he had been up on the roof of the mausoleum. It was such a spontaneous and cordial re-acquaintance that we had on that occasion.

Fran: He came to visit here too.

Lou: Oh, yes. He was here one day, with a group of North Vietnamese from the United Nations. And we entertained him overnight, I guess over the weekend, and on Monday morning we were leaving to go back to the office in town and we stepped out the kitchen door here and he stopped and he said, "The birds. The birds." He could hear the birds. I was not paying any attention to them but what he was really commenting on was that defoliation in Vietnam as a result of the use of Agent Orange had completely decimated the bird population. And it just was striking to see him, to observe him listening to the bird songs early in the morning here.

Friends were not completely in unison in the response of Quakers to the war in Vietnam, and just to illustrate this: Kenneth Boulding was a very prominent and outstanding, well-known Friend in this country. He was a philosopher, an author, a poet, a teacher of economics, out in Colorado. On one occasion he wrote me and said that he was so disturbed by what appeared to be the AFSC's partiality toward the North Vietnamese throughout the war that he planned to come to

Philadelphia and stand at the entrance to the Friends Center on a Monday morning in quiet witness --

Fran: To protest --

Lou: To protest what he thought was an imbalance on the part of the AFSC and its treatment of the war in Vietnam. And I thought about that and, of course, I was deeply committed to what the AFSC had for years and years been doing in Vietnam. I'd been in Vietnam several times, and it had never crossed my mind that we were out of proportion or favoring one side or the other in the attitudes we were taking. So I told him I would greet him at the entrance and I would stand with him. As our staff came in that morning they all passed both Kenneth and me standing side by side in witness to our respective perceptions of the Vietnam experience.

I've been talking a lot about my experience with the AFSC but of course that's in the context of Quakerism and I have not had much to say about our local meeting, which is now celebrating 200 years. I recall some of my early impressions of the Meeting. We came in 1951 and the Meeting was a lot smaller in those days. There were many fewer people in attendance at a meeting for worship. I'd say probably no more than 25 or 30 people, and there was still a traditional separation of a sort. The women who sat on the facing bench would sit together on one side -- if you're facing the facing benches they would be on the left -- and the men would be on the right, as I recall. Included among those on the right were William Edward Cadbury and Ellis Brown, Francis Brown's father.

Fran: And Richard Cadbury...

Lou: And Richard Cadbury. William Edward Cadbury, as I recall, never spoke in meeting but he frequently prayed. When he got ready to pray, he would

always kneel, and there used to be little kneeling stools -- four peg legs on a very low stool up there, I don't know whether the little stools are still up there or not. But he would kneel and the rest of us would all stand, the body of the meeting would stand while he offered his prayer. That tradition has long since passed, of course but it's one of my vivid memories.

I also remember an encounter with Ellis Brown, who in my recollection never spoke at meeting, but I was pleased to discover that he had a nice sense of humor on one occasion. I mentioned this episode that I had recently had to go to Washington for some consultation of some kind and I went to Wilmington in the dead of winter, in January, to get a train. While I was waiting for the train, a man approached me and asked if I'd give him a dollar. He wanted to buy some razor blades in order to have a shave. I thought to myself, I'm just being taken once more. Anyway, I gave him a dollar and before the train arrived in the station he returned from the men's room and he was clean-shaven and he thanked me. The point of this is, you never know. You never know. Anyway, I was out in the area between the schoolhouse and the meeting after meeting when people were just chatting with each other and I heard this voice behind me say, "Say, brother, can you spare a dime?" And it was Ellis.

I remember one other early impression about meeting for worship. We used to have a member, John Hershey. He had a nut tree farm, and he specialized in groves of nut trees. He rarely spoke in meeting but he occasionally did. He was not at all a sophisticated person, and he would frequently get up and say, "It come to me while I was on my tractor..." and then he would go into his message. And on one occasion, he said, "It come to me while I was on my tractor to share this with you --." He spoke of a couple who were on a dairy farm and the

man got up at predawn hours to go out to the barn and milk. As he was leaving the bedroom, with his wife still asleep, he wrote a quick note to leave on the bed table beside her and he said -- I don't know what her first name was -- but "Dear Abigail, I admire and respect thee very much." He signed it with love, and I've always appreciated that message particularly as I reflect on our own marriage of 61 years now. It just reminds me of the Meeting's annual fall festival. I participated in that a couple of times and once I was persuaded to read the wedding certificate and I think I have never been at a more sterile occasion than the portrayal of the

Fran: Wedding --

Lou: Quaker wedding in the fall festival. And why do I feel that way? Because there's no vitality to it, no life in it. The most interesting part about a Quaker wedding, in my experience, is what people have to say after the couple have committed themselves to each other. I was thinking of this the other day. We watched a movie called *Coal Miner's Daughter* and a young man just returning from World War II goes to Loretta's cabin to tell her father that he'd like to marry his daughter, who is only 15 years old. The father has considerable hesitation but eventually he gives it serious consideration and he turns to the young man and says, "Do you like her?" And the young man says, "I love her." "I didn't ask you that. I asked, 'Do you like her?'" And it opens up a whole dimension of marriage beyond the first blush of romantic love, well the continuation of romantic love. And that is, if I can put it in John Hershey's words, "Do you admire and respect her?" But you know you don't get any of that out of the depiction of the Quaker wedding at the fall festival.

Fran: You can't can it --

When we first came out here looking for a place to live, we came from the Warings' house, and Gracie had phoned her cousin Mary Cadbury to tell her that I was coming and Mary Cadbury invited me to lunch. So I came with one child by the hand and one child on the hip and we went to the Cadburys and went to their downstairs of their house, an old stone house like this. Mary Cadbury held the baby while I drank my soup and it was a wonderful feeling and that was really our introduction to Meeting.

When we found this place, this piece of land, and arrived, the first thing we did was to go to Downingtown Meeting. And I felt that was mine. The Browns were there. They were congenial. They were trying to farm too. They had three children, overlapping with ours, and there were other young families, everybody with kids our age, and we all got together frequently so Downingtown Meeting was real for me.

Meeting for worship ... I'm not a mystic but I do believe that there is a mystical facet to life and when I go to meeting I figure other people have something that would be a help to me if I can get in tune with it. That's why I believe in meeting.

The pacifist conviction seems to me fundamental for being a Quaker and it's been a part of my life since I was a small child. We worried about whether or not my father was going to go to ...

Lou: Fort Leavenworth prison...

Fran: Fort Leavenworth prison during World War I. Luckily he didn't have to go because he had three children but he was on the verge. The next draft might have taken him too. So that was very much a part of my conviction. And that's why I think I'm a Quaker.

It just makes sense that there's that of God in everyone. Where else would it be? We are here, this is what we know, we've got plenty of non-God in us -- we're bound to have some God in us and you have to look for it.

Lou: As I reflect on my long association with Quakers and as a member of the Religious Society of Friends, I'm inclined to think that the most central and important component in that relationship is the meeting for worship and my participation in it from time to time. Meeting for worship doesn't have any real significance unless one is there and joins in the silent worship that takes place.

I see Quakerism as a very fluid experience that people can be associated with. The meeting for worship, for instance. Any meeting for worship -- the one that's going to happen tomorrow -- is unprecedented. It's the first time that that meeting for worship will have taken place. And who knows what's going to emerge from it? Who knows what the impact is that it's going to have on people who were there? If one is open to this possibility, it becomes a very, as I say, fluid experience in the life of Quakers.

I remember remarking once in meeting several years ago that I have never had the experience, the personal experience, of God in my life. I've read about God, people have told me about God, but I couldn't tell you or anyone else about God because I don't know God. I don't know that God knows me. And this is not a thing you usually hear in a Quaker meeting. It was interesting to me, after meeting broke up, that at least 12 or 15 members came up to me and expressed their appreciation for having come out in the open, so to speak, with this -- it's not exactly a confession -- this matter-of-fact, straightforward statement. I've never

prayed. I wouldn't know how to pray, because I'm not sure if you're praying to someone on the other end. But the interesting thing about meeting for worship, in this respect, is how many people are there whom I otherwise wouldn't have known had this same idea if I hadn't said what I had said. That to me was both enlightening and reassuring, and left me with a positive feeling.

And the way this touches on my own personal, private orientation toward Quakerism and the meeting for worship is, I go once a year to a urologist for an examination in connection with my prostate gland. On one of those occasions I went to the lab in the Brandywine Hospital. Well, you just don't walk into the lab there and get your blood drawn. You have to go to the main reception area and register as though you were being admitted to the hospital. Eventually my number was called and the young woman invited me into her cubicle and she said, "Name, Address, Phone Number, Age, Birth date, Next of kin, Religion." And I thought to myself, Religion? I can choose. She's offered me the opportunity to make a choice. I remember reciting this in meeting. I said I almost felt as though I should have said, "Why don't we go to the lunchroom and have a chat about this over a cup of coffee. This is a big question." And she had to prompt me. I was in a kind of a daze meditating over this question and I finally said, "Quaker."

On the way out to the car I thought to myself, she hasn't the slightest idea what my religion is. And I wasn't sure I did either. So I came home. I went to the dictionary; we have Susie's old college dictionary, American College Dictionary, up there on the shelf. I looked up religion -- I had never done that before -- and I thought the definition was a definition of Quakerism: Religion is a quest in search of those values that make up

the ideal. And it goes on to suggest it then is concerned with the application of this ideal in pragmatic ways to the life around us in the universe. Religion is a quest. That's where I am in my relationship to Quakerism.

And I remember once Wallace Pollack and his wife Stella were here one evening, for a social evening with us, and we had a rambling conversation by the fire about many things. He's my age. On the way out I said, "Wallace, do you believe in God?" And he said after pausing, "I stand in awe before the mystery of it all." That's as far as I can go.

