

Friends Council  
on Education

# Chronicles

OF QUAKER EDUCATION

## FALL 1997

### Making Peace: Fifty Years After The Prize

In 1947, the Nobel Committee in Stockholm, Sweden awarded the highly valued Peace Prize to a religious group which practiced peace making as a way of life. That religious group was the Society of Friends, more commonly known as the Quakers. In awarding the Prize, Gunnar Jahn, Chairperson of the Nobel Committee, said, "The Quakers have shown us that it is possible to carry into action something which is deeply rooted in the minds of many: Sympathy with others; the desire to help others ; that significant expression of sympathy between men without regard to nationality or race; feelings, which, when carried into deeds, must provide the foundations of a lasting peace. For this reason they are today worthy of receiving Nobel's Peace Prize. But they have also given us something else: they have demonstrated the strength which is founded on the faith in the victory of the spirit over force."

Fifty years later, Friends around the world are continuing to advance the cause of peacemaking as a way of life. To commemorate this auspicious event, the "Peacemaking as a Way of Life" project was born. The brainchild of Joanne Hoffman, Head of Moses Brown School in Providence, R.I., the Peacemaking Project brought together representatives from the American Friends Service Committee, the Friends Council on Education, the Carter Center, and other Friends schools and universities in both the United States and England. According to Joanne Hoffman, "The 50th anniversary of the Nobel Peace Prize to Quakers provides a wonderful occasion to engage educational institutions in nurturing in our students the concept that each of us can be a peacemaker, especially now in our world when violence seems to permeate so much of everyday life.

The project focuses on the period between October 31, 1997 and December 10, 1997 which correspond to the dates fifty years ago when the Award was announced and the Award Ceremony held in Stockholm. Over 80 schools are participating and have developed a wide array of activities to educate students in peacemaking as a way of life. These include training on conflict resolution and mediation, studying the philosophies of such heroes of non-violence like Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King or researching the lives of other Nobel Peace Prize winners, and writing peace journals. According to Kay Edstene, Executive Director of the Friends Council on Education, "This is really a chance for all of us, educators and students alike, to renew our commitment to the Peace testimony."

In order to celebrate this event, Bruce Stewart, Head of Abbington Friends School, Rose Hagan, Head of Friends Select School and Dick Wade, Head of Germantown Friends School have spearheaded an effort to hold a "Leadership for Peace" conference for students on November 13-15.

Over twenty Friends schools will send student representatives to Philadelphia to participate in a weekend of fun, sharing and working. Saturday afternoon, the students will be able to choose from such diverse topics as the war in Bosnia to how to get students to speak out for peace. Twenty students will be given the task to work together to research the topic and develop an action plan which they can take back to their schools and share with others. "We wanted the students themselves to come up with their own agenda for the conference rather than have something imposed on them from above", explained Bruce. The students will also get a chance to listen to President Oscar Arias, former

President of Costa Rica, who will talk about his own philosophy of peace and approach to non-violence.

The upper and middle schools of Sandy Spring Friends School are organizing a peace vigil on December 10, 1997 at the Capitol building in Washington, D. C. to celebrate the cause of peace. They will joined in a period of silence and readings from Henry J. Cadbury's acceptance speech by Thornton Friends, Baltimore Friends, and Friends Community School.

In addition, Sandy Spring re-dedicated their Peace Tree which had been planted ten years ago by Chief Tarkaronioneken ( one of nine chiefs of the Mohawk nation.) As the Chief remarked when the tree was planted, "The logic of planting a peace tree is to bring minds together. We must appreciate the gifts we have - the sun, the grass, the soil. We should be thankful to be part of this earth." At the re-dedication ceremony, students planted war toys in the earth around the tree symbolizing a 500 year old Native American tradition in which warriors would bury broken tomahawks in a call for peace.

Hopefully, educators and students alike will be able to continue the peacemaking project in their own lives and will remember in the words of Arnulf Overland, Swedish poet, "The unarmed only has inexhaustible sources. Only the spirit can win."

NOTE: If your school or your classroom is not participating in the project, it is not too late! Call Debbie Block, Project Coordinator at (508) 336-9703.

## A CONVERSATION WITH EARL HARRISON

Earl Harrison, Head of Sidwell Friends School, is retiring this year after more than thirty years in Friends education. These are some thoughts he shared at the recent Friends Schools Heads meeting held at Pendle Hill.

**Q:** What is your background? Were you born a Quaker? How did you get involved in Quaker education?

**A:** I was born in Media, Pennsylvania, ten months after the death of Carol Hope Harrison, my only sister. We were Protestants but because of my father's work in Washington and the fact that my mother was unwell, my parents chose to send their three sons to Westtown school. I entered Westtown at age 12 in 1944 as a 7th grader and eventually was inducted into the Society of Friends by a Quaker education. I went to Haverford College and I joined the Society of Friends while a student.

At Haverford, I was pre-med and took all the courses required except one. I became stimulated by a charismatic African-American sociologist, Dr. Ira Reid. Because of his lecturing, life began to get complicated. I spent essentially the next ten years in a period of vocational indecision and search for a valid vocation. That search began at the Yale Divinity School. I really went there as a seeker rather than with thoughts of pursuing a career in the Ministry.

We then went to NY City and lived there for six years. I was Director of Religion for Independent Schools and earned a Masters degree at Columbia Teacher's College. Interestingly enough, I had visited Dr. Reid at Haverford and he suggested that I consider Quaker education as a field and said he hoped that I would lead one of our Quaker schools some day. He died shortly after my visit.

1968 came in full blown force and many schools were looking for younger school heads to try to bridge the gap between the students and the school administration because of a growing distrust on America's direction because of the Vietnam war. I became headmaster at Westtown school and pursued my apprenticeship there with due diligence from 1968-1978. Those were extremely difficult

years in residential education. The assassinations had occurred there were many demonstrations in Washington and racial unrest. Jean Harrison and I were very sympathetic to the students orientation towards the disturbances in our society. We for example attended the Martin Luther King "I had a Dream" speech and that was one of the great moments of my life.

I was then asked if I would visit Sidwell Friends and I had previously met Bob Smith, the head at that time, through the Heads retreats and I had come to admire him a great deal. I also heard that that school had not found any Quaker leadership and I knew Westtown could. And that was a factor. So in 1978 I went to Sidwell Friends and I have been there ever since.

**Q:** What changes have you seen in Quaker education during your career?

**A:** Obviously the schools are far more heterogeneous than they were; the privileged Friends schools are beginning to reflect the society in which they are embedded more than they did 30 years ago. This had been a extremely healthy development. But, most of all, our awareness of the global community has changed the curriculum in a fundamental way. The Friends always had an international outlook, but they weren't teaching Chinese, for example, or other important languages for the new century. There has been a huge development in the last 25 years in service learning. Service Learning is a diploma requirement at Sidwell Friends. We reached the conviction that we make a requirement of everything we feel essential to the core curriculum. On that grounds, exposure during the impressionistic, narcissistic years to the human condition and suffering is extremely important in the development of citizens for the future.

We want to do more. We feel the concept of the future is in community -building partnerships. You start by taking an inventory of the assets of the community to be served and you learn that they have many strengths that you do not have in your school community. There can be a mutuality and exchange of human talents that is taking us way beyond the noblesse oblige period into a new partnership between private schools and the urban neighborhoods.

**Q:** What are the challenges facing Quaker schools in the future?.

**A:** Accessibility and affordability for a broad range of families economically and racially. I believe one of the callings of Friends schools is, not only a healing mission because of the hurts in our society, but to sustain joyful, efficacious schools in which children are cherished and learning is exciting. That is just to provide fine humane schools where the needs of faculty and staff and kids are taken to heart and the rest will fall into place because of the Testimonies on Peace, Simplicity and Community. These are going to be diverse settings in which a culture we do not yet understand is emerging. In the early years of induction of children from families of diverse backgrounds, there was an unstated assumption that they would fit into the ethos of the Waspish upper-class setting. We did not have an appreciation for the uniqueness of different cultures and that the blend of values is going to far transcend what we had before. A homogeneous school cannot prepare students for tomorrow in a heterogeneous society. We have a continuing challenge to sustain the ethos and identity of our Quaker institutions in the midst of our civilization which will soon have 200 million people in it. Quakerism itself is relatively stagnant with respect to total membership yet its insights are on the frontier of human necessity.

**Q:** I have to ask you about Chelsea Clinton? What was that like having her at the school?

**A:** The Clintons were superb parents and took a keen interest in her education and welfare. In the

reception line at the commencement, they could identify more of the parents of the senior class than I could. They had invited many families and teachers to the White House, but more than that, they had reached out to the wider school community to enjoy her adolescent years. Her days at the school were largely uninterrupted and very little appeared in the press about Chelsea at Sidwell Friends and that provided a relief. She was cherished and protected by her friends and teachers. She is of course very bright, extremely determined, by nature gregarious and respectful. Now the Vice-President has a son at the school and we are continuing some low-profile work with some high-profile students.

**Q:** What will you miss most about your job?

**A:** I will miss the students. I will miss the vitality of each day that extracts more from you than you are prepared to give. Each day is new and I am energized by the pulse of the academic community. I have worked with a gifted faculty and superb Board of Trustees. I have gone through the molting of a headship once already and I don't think the second stepping aside will be as painful as the first. I was a child of Westtown so that leaving was especially hard.

**Q:** Why are you retiring? What are your plans?

**A:** I am ready to simplify from the inside out and to explore wonder in what I now cannot understand. I am ready to put the grandchildren on the front burner. My life began with a sense of a spiritual journey. And I believe that I am returning to that curiosity about the world we find ourselves in, curiosity about the stages of being. I am very excited about it. I had two pieces of advice so far - one oldtimer said "Don't volunteer" and my dear wife said "Earl, the Quakers will nibble you to death."

I have some interest in helping to establish a new retreat center in Virginia. It is important to me to find continuing pathways to involvement in Quaker Education. I feel tremendously indebted to the vision and kindness of Quaker school communities. In so far as they can demonstrate that love is possible in a group significantly larger than the family, they are attempting to do so. All schools have problems; Friends schools are communities that have the full range of the human dilemma and yet their optimistic drumbeat girded by the beautiful testimonies about the vision of the peacable kingdom is on the frontier.

## STORIES OF CHANGE IN COMMUNITY

The Second International Congress on Quaker Education - June 19-22, 1997

by Pat Macpherson

The Second International Congress on Quaker Education, held at Westtown School on June 19 - 22, 1997, brought together over 500 educators from Friends Schools and Colleges all across the United States as well as from Friends Schools in Kenya, Costa Rica, Tasmania, Japan, England, and Ramallah. In addition, Quakers from Cuba, Burundi, Mexico, Canada, and South Africa also attended the conference, making it a truly international affair. The Congress program included over 100 workshops and sixteen panel discussions with time left over for singing, square dancing, eating, and friendship. "It was inspiring, dynamic, varied, humorous, insightful, and friendship-producing. Quakers educators are a dedicated group!" said Ruth Stokes, former clerk of Cambridge Friends Board of Trustees.

The Congress was co-sponsored by the Friends Council on Education, the Friends Association of Higher Education, and Westtown school as part of its bicentennial celebration. In addition, funding from Philadelphia Yearly Meeting brought Friends from far away places, subsidized small schools with small budgets, and Friends teaching outside Friends schools.

The Congress theme, "Stories of Change in Community", allowed educators internationally the opportunity to present their work and visions of community and change. Topics were splendidly varied and interesting, yet lots of connections could be made among workshops, as many participants noted. A wide range of Quaker educational issues were covered including Navigating Diversity over Time, Access to Quaker Education, and Peer Culture and Leadership issues. The Kenyan Quaker Education presentation highlighted special education for the disabled and the Latin American panel discussed service learning and culture. As Thomas G. Kirk, Jr. College Librarian, Earlham College, remarked "the Congress was made wonderful by the collection of interesting people willing to explore fundamental issues in Quaker education and share experiences."

At the opening assembly of the Congress, Asia Bennett, executive secretary of the Friends World Committee, introduced the international participants, many of whom had arrived that day. Tom Farquhar, Head of Westtown School, gave a slide presentation of his sabbatical travel to Friends Schools internationally in which he had offered personal invitations for these schools to participate in the Congress. As Susumu Ishitani, Hosei University, said "I feel envious to see Friends schools and teachers able to share and exchange ideas and experiences frankly to one another. We Japanese Friends can learn a lot from the experiences you have had." Don McNemar, President of Guilford College reminded participants of the importance of our "Quaker moment" for education as global networks emerge.

An illustrious panel of Quaker educators including Eugene Mills, Acting President of Earlham College, Earl Harrison, Head of Sidwell Friends, Diana Abdel Nour, Principal of Ramallah Friends School, and Simeon Shitemi, board chair of Friends Theological and Technical College in Kenya all told stories of the change in their communities over their tenure in Quaker education at the Friday evening banquet. Saturday music was provided by the Georgia Sea Island singers and Tribe One, a Philadelphia multicultural ensemble.

Meeting for Worship on Sunday morning began with Kiswahili hymn singing led by A. T. Miller, former Friends school principal in Kenya. Paul Lacey, professor at Earlham College reflected on the spirit of the Congress, "This gathering gave us a joyous experience of the transformative power of Friends education. For those who spend their lives for student learning, the Congress reminds us of the pleasures of receiving fine teaching and nurturance in community." The participants cherished the fellowship and hospitality of the gathering, relishing the rare opportunity for renewal of the vision of community. As Mary Corbett Vlastits, Uwchlan Monthly Meeting put it, "The intellectual stimulation and information shared was enormous and satisfying. But even more critical was the spiritual climate."

As Pat Macpherson, Congress planner and facilitator summed up, "The Congress provided an opportunity for teachers to tell their stories. While common enough inside schools, the chance is rather rare to hear stories across schools and across cultures, across the divide between colleges and secondary schools, and among Friends with a vision of each student as an integrated being of mind, body, and spirit." According to Kay Edstene, Executive Director, Friends Council on Education, "Our faith in Friends testimonies gave us a stable common ground on which to explore our different histories, issues, and perspectives". Participants requested that Quaker educators gather more than once every ten years in order to experience the intense revitalization which can be found in the Friends education community.

A collection of essays will be published this fall by the Friends Council on Education and edited by Pat Macpherson. The collection will include several talks given at the Congress (already available at the Congress website, [Congress@Westtown.edu](mailto:Congress@Westtown.edu)) and eighteen essays written as reflections of the Congress by Quaker educators.

Pat Macpherson directed the Congress and is editing the collection, *Stories of Change in Community*:

The Second International Congress on Quaker Education.

## LEARNING THROUGH SERVICE: A TRIP TO HANOI

Ralph Lelii, an English teacher at George School, got the idea when he was teaching a course entitled "Literature of the Vietnam War." "I felt the Vietnam War had changed America. Students look back on the 60's as a mythical time and the War as ancient history," he explained. In 1989, Ralph began corresponding with the USA - Vietnam Friendship Society, an organization in Vietnam which is trying to increase contact and improve relations with the United States. He raised the question of some kind of student trip and was politely but firmly refused. In 1992, his contact in Vietnam told him they could begin talking about a trip and in March, 1995, George School became the first school in the United States to take students to Vietnam.

The students stay in Hanoi which as Ralph says, "is more like the old Vietnam." In addition, citizens in Vietnam are not allowed to own guns and the country is relatively crime-free. Students can feel safe walking around the city any time of day or night. For the first time this year, the Friendship Society received permission to house Ralph and his contingent of 18 juniors with 19 Vietnamese families. The experience was amazing.

The families were extremely concerned about leaving the Americans with a good impression of their country so they were very anxious to honor the visitors. Even though they sleep usually four people to a room, a bedroom was given up so that the students could have their own room. The Vietnamese only buy a very small amount of meat for themselves every three or four days but they tried to provide their guests with meat at every meal. "We protested", said Ralph, " but you can't refuse the honor." Of course, the Vietnamese could not comprehend the vegetarianism which a few of the students practiced. "If you have meat, why wouldn't you eat it"? they asked.

Many of the families had merely a hose and bucket in which to wash. The standards for privacy are so different in Vietnam that the bathroom door is never shut, causing quite a bit of consternation on the part of the students. As one student put it, "Living with the Vietnamese people totally contradicted our perception of what right is." Another student commented, "Their monthly salary is less than the cost of our shoes."

The purpose of the trip was to do service and the George school students worked on a variety of projects. They visited an orphanage called the Peace Village which houses children with third-generation affects of Agent Orange. As a result of the use of this deadly chemical by the American military, children in Vietnam are still being born with birth defects, including paralysis and mental retardation. The students played with the children, gave gifts, and painted a peace mural on the side of the school.

In addition, the George School group visited E Hospital which had cement floors, open windows, and cots for the patients. Each patient had to have a family member with them in the hospital to take care of them. In the 102 degree temperature and 100% plus humidity, the students helped to clear an acre of land of weeds and debris. Ralph commented, " All of the hospital employees including nurses, doctors, surgeons, and even the hospital director came out at some point during the day to work. Can you imagine that happening in an American hospital?"

Upon return, the students say that it was the most challenging, enriching experience of their lives. They realize that while they are living extremely comfortable lives, people are living and surviving in what seems to us as very harsh circumstances. An educated professional in Vietnam makes about \$70 per month and owns two changes of clothing. As one student put it, "It makes us question our affluence. Do we really need it all?"

As Ralph summarizes his experience of the Vietnamese people, "The war with the United States was only one in a series of wars for Viet Vietnam that have lasted over 2000 years. War is part of the fabric of their history. Even though everyone over the age of thirty has experienced loss and can describe horrific experiences during the war, there is no bitterness. People are so open and friendly and accept life as it is. Frequently, the electricity goes off so the electric fan in the house stops. I thought I was dying because of the heat, but the family I stayed with didn't even flinch."