

## MEMORIAL FOR NANCY CRONEN BALL

Nancy Cronen Ball, a founder and clerk of the Walla Walla Friends Meeting many times over the years, passed away on March 7, 2020 at the age of 93.

Nancy did not officially become a Quaker until 1980, but her admiration for the Quaker approach to life had been building for at least forty years before then. She first learned what Quakers were through her sister, Connie, who was six years older than Nancy, and went to college at Macalester while still living at home with the family.

“The values she [Connie] was defining and accepting at Macalester College had a great influence on me. It was at Macalester that Connie began to consider pacifism as a motivating force in her life. She dated a Conscientious Objector to war (a C.O.), who volunteered for a government-sponsored experimental program in starvation, the results of which they hoped would help our country deal with starved war refugees and prisoners of war. I was impressed with his unwillingness to inflict pain on others, coupled with his willingness to suffer himself for what he considered the greater good of society. In the highly patriotic atmosphere of World War II, it took courage just to be a C.O., not to mention volunteering to be starved. Connie spent a summer at a Quaker (AFSC) workcamp scraping old concrete from used bricks with others in a multi-racial, low income area of Indianapolis, so that a settlement house could be built. This was my first awareness of the social concerns of the Quakers. How did all this fit in with cashmere sweater sets and the right kind of saddle shoes?”

Nancy herself went to Oberlin at the recommendation of Connie's Quaker friends, and she spent a summer at a Quaker work camp in Mexico. Her first real boyfriend at Oberlin was a Quaker, which she considered as a promising sign. Oberlin was also where Nancy attended her first Quaker meeting:

“On Sundays I sometimes went to the worship service at First Church (Congregational) especially because of the fine large choir. For awhile I even sang in the choir myself but then decided that I didn't want to commit myself to it because of the demands of my studies -- and also because I wanted to attend the Friends (Quaker) Meeting sometimes, too. The strong concerns for peace and social justice held by several of the faculty members and their spouses who attended the Friends Meeting gave me pause about my own lack of real commitment in these areas.”

Nancy and George went on to lead two Quaker work camps in Mexico in 1951 and 1954, but George, after all, was an ordained Methodist minister, and Nancy, as always, enjoyed singing in choirs, so while their kids were young, the family stayed within that faith tradition. After all four kids had left home, Nancy, once again, went her own her way. She writes,

“George, the children, and I all were members of Pioneer Methodist Church in Walla Walla. I sang in the choir for years but never felt content with the church's traditional form of worship. Stand and sing a hymn (whose words extol dubious theology). Sit. Stand and mumble a repetitious responsive reading. Sit. Stand to read a creed (whose theology I'm supposed to believe but don't). Sit. Listen to people stand and tell God what they hope God will do for them. Stand and sing another hymn. Sit. Sing an anthem while people pass plates with money in them. Listen to an indifferent sermon that rarely deals with theological or social questions. Etc. The children still chuckle over one sermon preached there, entitled, "Was Jesus a Boy Scout?" (Well, no, was the answer, but he *would* have been if there had been Boy Scouts then. I didn't look forward to Sundays except for the choir anthems. I was ready for a change when in 1980, a small group of us decided to try to start a Friends

(Quaker) Meeting (unprogrammed). Thirteen years later we're still a small group but active beyond our size in areas of peace, justice, and other social concerns, meeting every Sunday in the Olin faculty lounge on the Whitman campus. It has been a good move for me. George still attends Pioneer Methodist Church, somewhat irregularly, since he is ordained in the Methodist denomination and feels loyal to it. His father and grandfather were also Methodist ministers.”

The first known Friends activity in Walla Walla was in the mid 1960's when Nancy and George Ball began a worship group in their home with Friends Chuck and Etta Marie James, who had moved to Walla Walla for a period of work, and several others. In the later sixties when the Jameses moved back to Seattle, that group ended. In the Spring of 1971, when Dan and Barbara Clark moved to Walla Walla, the Balls and the Clarks formed an unaffiliated worship group called the Friends Meditation Group, which began meeting on Sunday afternoons in the Fireside Room at the First Congregational Church. The new group included the Balls, the Clarks, one or two others who had attended the prior worship group at the Balls', and several people new to Friends. In 1980, the Balls and the Clarks decided to form a formal Quaker meeting in Walla Walla affiliated with North Pacific Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, and invited others to join with them. Though the Walla Walla Friends Meeting has always been small, many peace and justice initiatives have come out of this little group and its members over the last thirty years, with Nancy often playing a leading role.

Nancy's Quaker beliefs also influenced her public-school teaching career, as when she led a unit on Future Problem Solving. It was at a time when Walla Walla was panicking about the possibility of nuclear war, and students across town were peppering their teachers with questions about where to find bomb shelters and safe drinking water. Nancy tried to steer her class's discussion away from mere self-preservation and to lasting peace by posing the following question: “In what ways might we bring about a more stable world and thereby reduce the likelihood of a nuclear war? This is a different problem than the issue of what can I do in my own backyard to survive, This is your problem -- maybe more than adults even -- because you have longer to live.”

Nancy's daughter Sarah explains how her commitment to the Quaker concepts of peace and justice colored the way she raised her four children:

“We were taught to try to view almost every situation from the other person's perspective. We were expected to focus on the moral implications of the most everyday tasks--failing to take out the trash without being asked suggested we valued someone else's time less than our own, for example. We were taught to conserve the world's resources decades before that became fashionable. We were expected to be brave enough to follow the roads less traveled by in the face of peer pressure. We were expected to complete lists of chores--"it takes many hands to make a family." We were expected to read books that went well beyond the homework we were assigned. And we were modeled behavior that virtually never included even a slightly raised voice--a raised eyebrow was considered a strong statement. Mom in particular expected us to be competent and take responsibility--saying "But *I can't*" about a project would be met with "if your life depended on doing it, what would you do?" Mom and Dad both modeled behavior that signaled that, as a Christopher Wren clock in Oxford says, though in Latin, "Time passes and is put to your account." On Wednesday nights we were given a more meager dinner than usual and then took part in adding the saved cash into a jar that we mailed to CARE. This was Mom and Dad's way of reminding us how lucky we were and to experience and understand hunger--it is hard to imagine most families today doing that kind of thing with their children, but it showed the global reach of their imagination at a time when that was truly exceptional.”