

A SYMPATHETIC ATTENDER OF QUAKER MEETINGS...

BY CATHERINE RAINE

...TELLS HOW SHE CAME TO FRIENDS BUT IS NOT A MEMBER YET. When I was ten my pastor baptized me by total immersion in a pool behind the altar. I was one of a batch of white-robed Baptist initiates from my Sunday School class. When my turn came, I descended four blue-painted steps to the waiting minister who was waist high in water, and clutched his hands as I was briefly, awkwardly dunked backwards. Then I ascended the stairs on the opposite side and dashed, dripping, to a ladies room thoughtfully equipped with blow-dryers and a rack for hanging robes.

Baptists emphasize voluntary baptism as a public proclamation of personal conviction, but in my case I felt socially obliged to join the parade into the baptistry. In my Missouri hometown at the northern frontier of the Bible Belt, Baptists were the establishment class. There was pressure to process the youngsters into this group. So a few months before our proposed baptism date, the Reverend summoned my peers one by one to his study and asked, "What does Baptism mean?" I knew the rote answer I was supposed to give, which was, "Accepting Jesus Christ into my heart as my Lord and Saviour." And I did repeat these words exactly. But my heart didn't truly embrace Him, and I couldn't make eye contact with the pastor, a perfectly kind man with lovely white hair. That moment of insincerity in the study was an unconscious opening into which my need for genuine faith later nudged me towards Quakerism.

As a teenager, I grew more fervent, even dreaming of becoming a missionary like Lottie Moon. I joined Acteens, a girls' mission group. We travelled to Native American Reservations in Oklahoma and South Dakota, and to deprived areas in Hawaii, Kansas, and Missouri. We taught Vacation Bible School, performed morality plays with felt puppets, and offered testimonials to sister congregations. We sang "Rise and Shine and Give God the Glory," and "Pass it On" and staged yet more puppet shows for Vietnamese refugees, who must have thought we were nuts. I went to an Acteens Convention in Dallas, where I attended a workshop on "Christian Grooming" led by a former beauty queen. (Can CYM boast a session to rival this one?)

Once I started university, my zealous past

became uncool, even though I missed the communal fun. After taking some Anthropology courses, I was particularly ashamed of how Acteens had subjected Native Americans to irritating Evangelical puppetry. When I attended my grandmother's church during spring break, I antagonized the Sunday School by asking, "How do we know for sure that our beliefs are right and the people we are evangelizing are wrong?"

In university, I joined Amnesty International and learned that Missouri has the death penalty by lethal injection. AI contacts led me to the Missouri Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty, which numbered many Friends in its ranks. One Quaker couple lost their son to gun violence. They insisted that they did not want the state to execute their child's killer.

Dedicated abolitionists sparked my curiosity about the Religious Society of Friends, but I didn't attend a meeting until I returned to Missouri after three years of graduate school in Scotland. I was twenty-six and struggling with decisions about where to live, what career to follow, and how to cope with my father's terminal illness. I gratefully accepted the comfort Penn Valley Meeting offered during my dad's final months and death.

Contact with Quakers and their commitment to social justice helped lead me to two years of service in Baltimore as an AmeriCorps volunteer. I quit my job as a university composition instructor and taught adult literacy and G.E.D. courses instead. From Baltimore I then returned to Scotland, where Stewart, a member of Glasgow Meeting, and I were married under the care of the meeting. Our wedding ceremony was one of the most moving experiences of my life. I cherished the words of the guests and enjoyed the simple, open pattern of the worship service.

When we immigrated to Canada in 2002, we stayed at the Toronto Meeting House for our very first two weeks. The hospitality of the meeting really eased the trauma of such a radical change. Don Bowyer, one of the Resident Friends, baked bread and played cards with us. Many Friends offered employment advice and gave us a series of providential housesitting assignments

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A Great Canadian Friends' Myth

By Meredith Egan

Dear *Canadian Friend* (the very informative periodical), and (more importantly) Canadian Friends,

While devouring your fabulous periodical last month, I noticed that the lovely Bev Shepard got down and dirty and spoke of the F-Word (which we don't encourage in our house), the need for more Canadian Friends to Financially Support the Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) with money to do the work of CYM....

So, I reached for my cheque book. But alas! I noticed that while F is for Finances, O is for Oversight, or Oops! or Oh my gosh! — if Bev and June Etta (the lovely, capable editor of CF) don't know, imagine how many other Canadian Friends are also mistaken? I set aside my cheque book to write you...

You see, in the informative article, Bev outlines the very important work of CYM so that readers may be aware of why they should support CYM financially. She mentions *The Canadian Friend*, then Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC). I agree, being a Committee Member of CFSC, that CFSC does fine, fine work. Very Important Work (hereinafter referred to as VIW — a new acronym for Friends) She accurately reports that this is work of CYM — however, it

is implied in the article that monies sent to CYM support the work of CFSC... And there is the "Oops!"

This is a myth...A Great Canadian Friends Myth believed by many Canadian Friends for years. You see, monies given to CYM do not fund CFSC programs.

CFSC raises its own money to do its VIW (other than the travel budget for members of CFSC to attend meetings). I am astounded at how little Canadian Friends give to CFSC, and the amazing work done with so little money, which convinced me to enquire about Friends in the first place. CFSC is expecting an unplanned deficit budget for 2004–2005, and we are determined to fix it. And so Canadian Friends, whom we serve, have to ask themselves a very serious question or two.

Do Canadian Friends want all the VIW of CFSC to continue, and if so, will they support it financially? Or, are we doing too much work for Canadian Friends (and our other loyal supporters) to pay for? If too much, what do we stop doing? International Development projects bringing sustainable incomes to people in the Third World? Peace work in Canada and elsewhere? Advocacy and education in Aboriginal affairs? The important

work (a bit of bias showing here) of justice advocacy and education, in our quest for penal abolition and just living?

As we discern our solutions, we hope that you will consider checking to see if you or your Meeting directly support the work of your service committee, and if you/they don't, could you ask whether you/they might be called to do so. Or, if you do give directly to CFSC, whether you might increase your giving, and allow all of our VIW to continue.

Thank you for allowing me to do my small bit to dispel A Great Canadian Friends Myth. Read the latest *Quaker Concern* and consider sending a donation (tax creditable!). I will know when the cheques inundate Anne, our Very Able Office Staff, that you have, in fact read this; and Jenn, the Meticulous Bean Counter, will tell me that we have set the understanding right.

I will reach for my cheque book now, and write separate voided cheques for CYM and for CFSC, so that direct deductions to them both can begin, and all the important work of Canadian Friends may continue. I hope you will reach for yours, as well. ✱

Meredith Egan is a member of Vancouver Meeting.

IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR CYM — THIS IS A CHANGE!

Friends' tendency to often register late - sometimes very late - for the Canadian Yearly Meeting gathering has been causing problems of logistics and stress. It has therefore been decided that the deadline for CYM registration will be enforced.

Starting this year, please note that late registrations for CYM will no longer be accepted.