

March 24, 1985

I travelled to meeting this morning from Jersey City, and as I approached the bus stop at 7:30 a.m. a young man, obviously thoroughly chilled, anxiously asked me what time it was. It turned out that he had been waiting for an hour and a half, and no bus had come. He was quite nervous, because, as he explained, he was heading for his induction into a four year hitch in the Marines, and he was afraid he would be late.

As would be natural, he was in a mood of mixed expectations and apprehensions, of which the failure of the bus system was only one element. He seemed anxious to talk. He had lived in Jersey City all his life. He explained that being only 19 years old he was too young to land a job. He seemed to be looking forward to the \$500 per month plus room and board which the marines would provide for him. He was worried about making it through boot camp at Parris Island, South Carolina. The bus finally did come, and during our bus ride he repeated several times the advice his recruiter had given him: keep your eyes open and your mouth shut, and everything will be okay. He was obviously resolved to follow this advice to the letter. He was also worried about the physical rigors of boot camp and kept reviewing how many weights he could press. Mostly, he was looking forward to the training in microchip electronics which he apparently believed he had been promised.

The possibility that he might find himself in situations dangerous to his own survival, that he might be expected to kill other people, or that the Marines might renege on the microchip education, seemed not to be part of his thoughts.

It was only a few days ago that I was discussing the concept of Truth with some members of our Meeting, and I rather glibly stated that the Truth should be expressed, and could be expressed, in all circumstances. I wondered to myself, as I listened to my fellow bus passenger, what the claims of Truth on me in this situation might be. Should I be boldly expounding pacifist ideas? Or should I, perhaps, be planting ideas, like seeds, in this young man's mind which might come to fruition at some future time? His agenda was one of seeking sympathetic reassurance. Was it my responsibility to respond with confusing, disturbing or anxiety-provoking ideas?

Our ride was over before I could sort this out. As we shook hands in the Port Authority pedestrian concourse I wished him good luck, and told him that I was sure he would be a great Marine. He seemed very appreciative of our encounter as we parted.

I suppose a different person in this young man's situation might simply have continued sitting around Jersey City, perhaps drinking beer and grumbling about unemployment. Yet I wondered about this young man's venturing into the unknown, carrying a few necessities in the bottom of a large black plastic garbage bag, waiting alone at a bus stop on a cold, gray Sunday morning with only a stranger with whom to speak. Was there no one with a jalopy to take him to his rendez-vous with the

Marines? Perhaps there had been a party the night before, and he had preferred this solitary departure the next day.

How often do we set out as bravely as this young man, venturing into the unknown in spite of our reservations about how many weights we can press? Or are we more likely to sit at home where it is safe? We may feel we cannot write or speak adequately, so we do not write or speak at all. We may fear betrayal or disappointment, so we fail to love. We can be like a ship which longs for the sea, but which remains in the harbor with its sails furled, wondering what it was meant to be or to do, wondering about the meaning of its existence. Let us hope we will always have the courage to assay the great voyages, the truly magnificent undertakings, to which the Truth always summons us.