

May 26, 1985

I stopped upstairs at my office on the way to this meeting and found a farewell note from Diana Pagan, who served as secretary with me in the AFSC's office of administration. This was no surprise; Diana has been helping me make plans for the transition for a number of weeks. Her note once again expressed her great appreciation for the chance of having worked at the AFSC, a theme she has often repeated in recent weeks as the day of her leaving came nearer. It is fair to assume from their character that these statements were heartfelt, and not mere politesse.

Diana always typed a well-crafted document. She was kind to people who telephoned. She cared about her coworkers, and organized parties for their birthdays. She was always sure to remind me if some colleague's spouse was in the hospital, or if someone's child was graduating, so that I could be sure to recognize this in some fitting way. While doing all this she was unassuming. One did not have to cope with her, did not have to placate ego, to deal with idiosyncracies, or to play games. Although she loved working for the AFSC, I was never quite sure that she thought very much about nuclear disarmament or the problems of the prison system. Their commitment to these larger causes is often the reason people give for being glad to work at the AFSC. Indeed, in her focus on those of us closest at hand to her, and her relative disengagement from the broader issues, Diana in some ways was the mirror image of the social reformer who labors to save humanity in a general sense, while trampling underfoot whomever happens to be nearby.

This is a time of year when there are many comings and goings. Diana is not the only person who is leaving our small staff. Is life but a merry-go-round? What is it that these people leave with us which abides?

Paradoxically, we are left with the most permanent impact, and the most vivid sense of personhood, in the case of those people who carried out their living and working with a certain transparency of spirit, with a minimum of personalist sturm und drang, the people who care about others, the people who devote themselves to doing what needs to be done in the simplest and most fitting way possible. These people know that a telephone booth and a cathedral can be equally magnificent if each excellently reveals the natural order inherent in them. Each act of labor can reveal the loving orderliness which moves the universe, not the accidental and particular hang-ups of the maker. We know more of consequence about the great, anonymous singers of the old epics, and about the scribes who illuminated the medieval manuscripts, than we do about those contemporary personalities who bury everything they do in layers of personalist neuroses. The magnificent Shakers never signed the furniture they made. The Nobel Prize given to the American Friends Service Committee cited service given by the nameless to the nameless.

The paradox is further deepened as we realize that not only do we know these people better in the things that are essential, not only do we owe more to them, but that those who discover how to function in this way and to give so much, themselves become filled with gratitude for the miracle of the work which it has been given them to accomplish.

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