

Carolyn Miller: A Woman for All Seasons

KAREN L. CADBURY AND SUSAN HALLETT

Carolyn Miller is a tall, slim woman, with sparkly blue eyes, short silvery hair and a stately bearing. For more than 45 years, she and her husband, Cully, lived in Moorestown, New Jersey. This past May, Carolyn celebrated her 90th birthday at Midcoast Meeting in Damariscotta, Maine. In the past nine decades, she has been in a position to observe closely the events, controversies and successes that have been central to Friends. Her personal experience has also paralleled the American experience of moving from close-knit rural farming communities to the secularized, multi-plural and urban communities in which many of us now live.

Carolyn was born in Richmond, Indiana, in 1922, where her father, Clarence Pickett, was a Quaker minister. Clarence and Lilly, her mother, were originally from Iowa. “My mother’s family was Methodist and my father grew up in a strict Quaker farming family with nine children, living in considerably reduced circumstances,” says Carolyn. “They met at Penn College in Iowa. When they graduated, she got a teaching job in Oregon and he went to study at a seminary in Connecticut. They were separated for quite a while before they were able to get married.”

After they married, Carolyn’s parents lived in Toronto, Canada, for several years and then in Richmond, Indiana, where her father taught at Earlham College. In 1929, after several years at Earlham, he was offered two jobs in Pennsylvania: headmaster of George School in Bucks County and the position of executive secretary of the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in Philadelphia.

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Pickett accepted the AFSC job and the family moved to Philadelphia.

“When we first moved to Philadelphia, we lived in Rufus Jones’s house on the Haverford College campus while he was on sabbatical,” says Carolyn. “Then, for 10 years, we relocated a number of times in the area, and I went to eight schools, until we moved to Waysmeet, a house on the grounds at Pendle Hill in Wallingford, Pennsylvania.” Waysmeet, which has five bedrooms, was built for AFSC’s general secretary in the 1950s by a donor and was used to accommodate guests who might be traveling to work at AFSC. “Our home was always filled with people,” says Carolyn. “My parents loved Waysmeet and the neighborhood, and lived there until 1950, when my father retired from AFSC.”

While living at Waysmeet, Carolyn attended Swarthmore High School and began playing field hockey, a sport that she loved. When her doctor ordered her to stop playing competitive sports, she was shocked and distressed. “He said I wouldn’t be able to have children if I continued to play hockey,” says Carolyn. “The social life at Swarthmore High School and at Westtown School, where I went after my years at Swarthmore, centered on sports, so it was a great disappointment. I doubt that anything was really wrong, and I believe this type of thing would not happen today.”

As executive secretary of AFSC, Pickett felt it important that he travel to England, Austria and other parts of Europe to find out how European Quakers were coping during the Great Depression. “His job and career were very demanding and important to him,” says Carolyn. Pickett also wanted

to visit Russia to help determine what Americans could do to alleviate the nation’s extensive famine and starvation. While he was gone, Carolyn’s mother and the children stayed on an uncle’s ranch in Idaho where they helped farm hay and potatoes. As the Depression continued to cause turmoil, Pickett tried to visit to every monthly meeting in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting to talk about conditions in Europe, and Carolyn remembers “visiting dozens and dozens of meetings.”

Pickett’s international and domestic work with AFSC began to attract the attention of influential and wealthy people who were concerned about conditions in the country and worldwide. “My father was able to get some people to contribute money to help,” says Carolyn. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, though confined to a wheelchair, wanted to understand the conditions and challenges that people throughout the U.S. were experiencing, and he relied on his wife, Eleanor



Eleanor Roosevelt (second from right) with the Pickett family

Roosevelt, to assess conditions around the country and provide him with the information he needed to develop policies and assist people in need. Eleanor Roosevelt befriended Clarence Pickett and began a lifelong alliance that included consulting with him over a period of many years on questions ranging from how to get Jewish people out of Nazi Germany, to providing relief for the devastation in Europe and Asia.

"I was in awe of her," says Carolyn. "She came to visit us several times, and we went to the White House for Thanksgiving. Here she was, Eleanor Roosevelt, the first lady of the land, but when she came to visit, she brought only her secretary and one other person. Today, if Michelle Obama came to visit, I'm sure she would have twenty cars and dozens of secret service people, but things were simpler then. She was a dynamo, and she conveyed a lot of information to



Carolyn Miller

Franklin Roosevelt about what she saw.

"At the height of the depression, we took a trip with Mrs. Roosevelt to visit the coal fields where we saw miners and their families starving, and it is the only time I've ever seen children with big bellies and paper thin arms and legs. People just couldn't find food. The miners were desperate. Mrs. Roosevelt reported back to the president, and he started government retraining programs to teach the miners to do something other than mine coal, such as making furniture. She was desperately interested in all kinds of political issues and events. We've had few First Ladies since her who have taken such a deep interest in politics. Mother worshipped her, and my parents went to Hyde Park for her funeral service when she died."

After graduating from Westtown School, Carolyn attended Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. "In 1938, when the U.S. was on the verge of war, I was supposed to study abroad for a semester, but nobody thought it was a good idea for me to go to Europe." At Antioch, Carolyn connected with a group of like-minded

students who opposed the war. "It was not a Quaker group, but it included people who wanted to be conscientious objectors (COs)," says Carolyn. It was at these peace meetings that Carolyn met George Macculloch "Cully" Miller, II, her future husband.

"I remember Pearl Harbor day," says Carolyn. "Cully and a bunch of us were gathered around the radio in a common room, sitting on the floor, when the announcement came. We

assumed the U.S. would go to war and we were scared to death, wondering what the world was coming to. Cully decided to register as a CO, but our friend Bronson Clark decided not to register with the draft board to mark his objection to the war, and he was sent to jail."

She continues,

"I told my parents that I wanted to get married so I could travel with Cully if he got a CO assignment," says Carolyn. "My father said he had a series of talks he had to give in Mexico, and that I should go to secretarial school, learn shorthand and accompany my family on the Mexican trip, and then we could get married. He told me I was going to have to earn a living and that I needed a skill. That was the bargain."

After completing secretarial school and the trip to Mexico, Carolyn and Cully were married in 1942 at Providence (Pa.) Meeting, a united Friends meeting. Three days after they were married, Cully received his draft card from the Manhattan draft board in New York telling him to report for his first physical. "They hated COs," says Carolyn, "and Cully was very thin and very tall, so he kept failing the height-weight ratio in the physical, but then they would call him

again for another physical. Every time he went in, he was judged mentally or physically unable to serve." Finally, the draft board in New York State told Cully he had to go to Dayton, Ohio, for an interview with a tribunal where his case would be reviewed. After the interview, the New York draft board finally decided not to draft him.

"When Cully was not drafted, after I don't know how many physicals, he took a CO job on a farm, because that was considered a vital wartime occupation," says Carolyn. "Some conscientious objectors were treated quite badly. Cully's brother, Larry, served as a firefighter for a while, but then he was pressed to be part of an experiment. He had to wear underwear infested with lice, and then the military used different chemicals to destroy the lice. Part of the group was sprayed with placebos, but the men weren't told what they were sprayed with. We had a cousin who developed jaundice in the experiment. Many COs were exposed to chemicals or diseases in these types of experiments. Other COs were sent to work in mental hospitals."



Carolyn Miller (second from right) with her daughter, a granddaughter, and two of her great-grandchildren

After he finished the job on the farm, Cully enrolled in Columbia University's graduate program in education, and Carolyn and Cully moved to New York City. "His father did not understand his CO position at all, and he disinherited him, so we started out desperately poor," says Carolyn. "After Cully completed

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graduate school, we moved to Moorestown, New Jersey—still during the war—and Cully started teaching social studies at Moorestown Friends School. We couldn't buy any appliances back then. There were none for sale, so we borrowed an icebox and an iceman delivered ice.

"When we first moved to Moorestown, the Orthodox and Hicksite meetinghouses sat next to each other with Moorestown Friends School located not far away," says Carolyn. "The majority of Hicksite and Orthodox meetings were not united and, since we'd been married in a united meeting, we decided not to join a meeting right away. Some of the Orthodox members were still wearing traditional clothing, which they continued to do up until the 1950s, but I had mixed feelings about that because they had to have the garments custom made and they were very expensive, very elegant clothes.

"In 1950, when my daughter Jennifer was four, Cully was teaching and teachers were not particularly well paid, so I found a job working for a surgeon in a hospital-based medical practice. I ended up loving my work, and I was there for 25 years," says Carolyn. "The job meant a great deal to me and not only financially. I didn't have medical training when I started working there, but I picked up the medical lingo very easily in a short amount of time. Medicare was introduced, and I typed the medical and operative notes on a beauty of an electric typewriter. The job became more than full time as the hospital went from about 125 beds to, when I left, 450 beds. I was able to watch as the world of medicine evolved and changed significantly. The surgeon I worked for took a partner, and, later, a second partner, and I became the office manager."

In 1975, when the Maine Photographic Workshop, in Rockport opened for its first full season of operation, Carolyn and Cully traveled there so Cully could be a student. "He loved professional photography," says Carolyn. That summer, they bought a small summer house that was for sale in Rockport, and Cully worked on his photography more and more. In 1993, they built a year-round house in

Rockport and retired there permanently.

In her 90 years, Carolyn has seen joy and sadness. In 1999, Carolyn's daughter, Jennifer, died of cancer. Cully passed away in 2003. Now, she has three grandchildren and two great-grandchildren, and her daughter, Debbie, lives in South Carolina. Carolyn says that as she reflects on her 90 years, she often thinks about how her mother lived through a remarkable period of history, witnessing an evolution that culminated with putting a man on the moon. "While her life was extraordinary," says Carolyn, "I don't believe that she saw as much change as I have seen. Our problems today seem tougher, and they are magnified by our growing global population. I listened this morning to the news on Syria and I can see, both in Syria and in other places in the world, how challenging the problems we face today are to solve.

"I do not consider myself a speaker for Friends, but when I was growing up, Philadelphia had a large number of people who were in business or starting schools or who were in medicine or engaged in profitable occupations," says Carolyn. "Now, many Quakers are teachers or social workers or are in modest paying occupations, so there is not the financial support for our meetings and organizations. Also, when we attended Moorestown Friends, there were—in the beginning—about 500 people and lots of children in every grade in the First-day school. But by the time we retired, the membership had already begun to decline.

"Here in Maine, at our meeting, we've also lost members, and we've had a hard time attracting families and children," says Carolyn. "I love my meeting, but we are all middle-aged or older. We could get discouraged, but perhaps what we need to do is to think more about how Quakerism can be relevant and how it can adequately prepare us to meet the future."

Today, Carolyn is active in her meeting and community and close to her family. She maintains a vital interest in everything from current political and social events to the ever-changing features of modern popular culture. □

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