

Richard A. Bellin, Sr.

March 5, 1933 – April 11, 2012

Our friend Dick Bellin was born in Albany, New York to Mildred Grosberg Bellin and Dr. Harold Bellin. He was proud of his parents – his father practiced medicine in Albany, sometimes bartering with his patients during the Depression, and his mother was noted for her influential cookbooks, *Modern Jewish Meals* and *The Jewish Cookbook*. He and his high school sweetheart, Jean Pennell, married young and would have six children – Richard, Jr., Debbie, Patty, Cindy, Amy, and Sue (who died in 2008) – before going their separate ways. Dick delighted in his eight grandchildren.

By profession, Dick was an engineer, and over the years FMW benefitted greatly from his knowledge and experience. He earned his B.S. in Engineering at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in 1956 and worked in the engineering field for 14 years before returning to Rensselaer for a Master of Science in Management. He then worked as an engineering-economic and management consultant to the electricity and gas industries, moving to Washington, D.C. in 1977 to join Foster Associates. He was a Registered Professional Engineer in the State of New York, and a member of the National Society of Professional Engineers, among other professional organizations. He published papers and taught courses in engineering economics and related subjects. Dick also had extensive experience in computer programming, a talent he used on FMW's behalf as the Meeting entered the digital age.

Dick was a lifelong music lover – classical, opera, Broadway, contra dance, everything. In his youth he had played clarinet, trombone, tuba, and string bass in addition to piano – but his true love was the keyboard. He built his own harpsichord, rebuilt a classic player piano, and cherished his restored Steinway grand. In his time he played the pipe organ for both synagogue and church. His interest in the dramatic arts was catholic enough to include Shakespeare and Doctor Who. (It should be no surprise that he believed Shakespeare did not write Shakespeare nor that he found the original Doctor Who superior to the current.)

Dick's early religious education was solidly Reform Judaism, though he never had a Bar Mitzvah. However, Dick always considered himself a Jew – noting that anyone born into a Jewish family can't really feel any other way – but he stopped practicing Judaism long ago. In his 2011 draft autobiography he remembered:

How much of Judaism either of my parents actually believed is questionable. Tradition is a very funny thing. Daddy would never eat pork except in a Chinese restaurant, where somehow stir-fry cooking would render it kosher.

As he grew older his beliefs diverged from any conventional religion. Dick's interest in psychology led to his first experience with Quakers in 1976 through the Friends Conference on Religion and Psychology. He wrote:

FCRP made me aware of the whole world of Jungian psychology and the place of myth and legend in our lives. Jung is vastly different than the "tell-it-like-it-is" pragmatism of Gestalt and Humanistic Psychology, but in many ways much more interesting. FCRP remains one of the mainstays of my life.

Dick attended every FCRP conference until prevented by his health in 2011.

After attending and serving Friends Meeting of Washington for two decades, Dick applied for membership in 1998 – startling Friends who assumed he had long been a member. A copy of his heartfelt but very businesslike letter is attached, but in his autobiography he wrote:

Becoming a Member after being an Attender for so many years has been more of a change than I expected. I have made a real commitment to the Meeting, a commitment which has absolutely nothing to do with what I believe or don't believe. If anything, my non-theist humanist beliefs are stronger than ever, my Jewish roots and outlook color everything I say and do, and I am as much of a misfit as ever. But so is everyone else, and in the Quaker world I have found a place where all of this is accepted and acceptable. ... I call myself a non-theist, which is a kinder gentler term than atheist, although I am not sure that quite fits. Secular humanism *per se* is appealing, but too cold and intellectual. I think that if nobody in the Quaker world believed in God, Friends would be just another Ethical Culture Society, and just as dry. ... I still wonder how much of a Quaker I really am. However, one of my truisms is that a Quaker is anyone who can stand the Quaker business process – belief is irrelevant.

Dick's early service to the Meeting was as a member of the then Finance and Property Committee. He was deeply involved in the Meeting's finances, working closely with the bookkeeper and helping to set up a new computer accounting system and a database for contributions. When F&P split into two committees he served on both. He was given the title of Financial Coordinator, preparing the annual budget for the Meeting. Until 2005 when he relinquished the position, he probably knew more about the Meeting's finances than anyone except our auditor. In recent years Dick rarely attended Meeting for Worship, but he was a valued member of the Finance and Stewardship Committee; among his specialties was detailed analysis of contributions to support our fund-raising efforts. He also served on the F&S Committee and as a Trustee of Baltimore Yearly Meeting.

Dick's was the larger Quaker world of the FGC Gathering, where he was, among other things, king of the golf-cart shuttle. He often said the combination of the Jewish Friends, FCRP, and FGC was the principal reason why he was a Quaker. But he also considered Pendle Hill to be a spiritual home, visiting often for FCRP meetings, as a sojourner and weekend student, and as a regular at the New Year's weekend, when he would find sublimity in meeting in the Barn and joy at the piano on New Year's Eve. He would travel there, as he did everywhere, in his red Toyota convertible – the least Quakerly of vehicles.

14 April 1998

To: Overseers Committee
Friends Meeting of Washington

After more than twenty years of on-and-off attendance, Way has finally opened for me to request membership in Friends Meeting of Washington. Since joining the Finance & Property Committee, I have become active in the affairs of the Meeting, have become deeply involved in many of its financial aspects, such as the mechanics of the Meeting's bookkeeping, and have come to feel a part of the community.

In addition to my attendance at Friends Meeting of Washington, I am involved in the larger Quaker community, primarily through the Friends Conference on Religion and Psychology. I have attended every FCRP conference since 1976, and am currently serving on the Planning Committee as Co-Registrar. I have also been a member of the Planning Committee for the local Washington FCRP almost since its inception. I am presently Registrar for that group, and have in the past served as Clerk.

I am also a regular attender at Friends General Conference, and have been to ten gatherings. My involvement in FGC includes participation in Jewish Friends, which is a network of people who are involved in both the Quaker and Jewish worlds in one way or another. Although I no longer practice Judaism, I was raised and still consider myself Jewish, and this group has helped me immensely in becoming a part of the Quaker community.

Finally, I have been to Pendle Hill many times as a sojourner, a weekend course participant, and for FCRP Committee meetings. I consider that place very much a spiritual home.

The primary value to me of my involvement with Friends is the growth and development of community, both here in Washington and elsewhere. In this community I have found an openness, a commitment to honesty and integrity, and an acceptance of individual beliefs and differences. I trust that my continued participation as a Member of Friends Meeting of Washington will enhance this sense of community for me and others.

In Peace and Friendship,