

**HARRY AMBROSE SYLVESTER**  
**1908-1993**

Harry Ambrose Sylvester became a member of the Friends Meeting of Washington in 1955. He had been married on September 2, 1954, to Janet Hart. Her family were charter members of our Meeting. Janet died in 1987. Each had been previously married. Their combined family at the time of their marriage consisted of seven children between the ages of eighteen and six. Some members of our Meeting can recall the Sylvester family occupying a full bench in the Meetingroom on Sunday mornings.

Harry Sylvester, born in 1908 in Brooklyn, New York, was raised in the Catholic church and graduated from the University of Notre Dame. His first career was a writer on sports and politics for newspapers. He also was a prolific author of novels and short stories for other publications. Three times he won the O. Henry Memorial prize for his short stories. Then in 1951 he became a United States Information Agency officer, based in Washington, but specializing in Mexico and the Caribbean. He retired in 1971.

In his private, personal life, Harry was a spiritual seeker. When he asked to be our member, he said he had '>separated' himself from the Catholic Church at age 41. He was an avid reader of thinkers and writers who sought synthesis between the religious practices of the West and the East. He was for a time active in FOCAS, and he later organized and developed his own study group for personal growth.

In the 1970's, Harry was very distressed by what he considered the introduction of politics, often cloaked in the traditional religious language he thought he had left behind, into our meetings for worship. In 1972 Harry wrote the Clerk of Overseers, among others, that he had not attended a Meeting for Worship for more than a year. He intimated he was not sure he was coming back.

During the next few years, Harry began to attend the nine o'clock worship group, a small gathering in the Parlor when the Meetinghouse is still quiet. Janet, his partner in his spiritual search as in his life, came too, whenever her schedule allowed. This group also sometimes fell short of Harry's high standards of sensitive and alert '>attention,' which, he frequently explained was the prerequisite to real meditation. But Harry did not separate himself from Friends.

Harry Sylvester spent the last five years of his life at Friends Nursing Home in Sandy Spring, Maryland, disabled by Parkinson's disease. He died on September 26, 1993. A memorial service was held at our Meeting on October 1, and was attended by his and Janet's children, some his twelve grandchildren, his brother, William and his sister, Margaret, as well as friends.

It is fitting to recall this passage from Ecclesiastes (12:7) offered at Janet Hart Sylvester's memorial in 1987: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the Spirit shall return unto God who gave it." God gave Harry Sylvester a seeking spirit. His goal was inner peace and enlightenment. We pray he found it.