

Winifred (Winnie) Walker-Jones

August 16, 1925 – December 27, 2010

When Winnie Walker-Jones applied for membership in the Religious Society of Friends in January of 1948, she wrote “there is no longer any doubt in my mind, now God has given an answer to my soul.”

Born on August 16, 1925 in Cortland New York to Joseph Arthur Walker and Winifred Ann Roberts, Winifred (Winnie) Walker graduated from Keuka College in upstate New York in June 1947 as an honor student and editor of her school newspaper. She spent several summers doing volunteer work in projects of the American Friends Service Committee in Philadelphia.

Winnie grew up in New York and, with her family, was a member of the local Episcopal Church. She entertained doubts about that church and was a seeker of other churches. Her first contact with Friends came during her sophomore year at college when she met the AFSC youth secretary and then, the following summer when she volunteered for the AFSC Student-in-Industry project in Philadelphia and where she regularly attended Meeting for Worship. She wrote of attending these meetings “I found that for which I had been searching – I hadn’t know what I was searching for, but I did know that I had found it.” She wrote in her application for membership to FMW that “God wishes me to join Friends... I can say no more.”

Winnie obtained a job teaching at Bacone College, Oklahoma’s oldest continuing center of higher education, began in 1880 with the help of the American Baptist Home Mission Society, Professor Almon C. Bacone, a missionary teacher, who started a school in the Cherokee Baptist Mission at Tahlequah, Indian Territory. On January 31, 1948 Winnie wrote: “Very simply – I desire to become a Friend. Long and serious meditation and prayer has resulted in a positive and clearly defined spiritual conviction that it is the faith in which I can best serve God and find the deepest peace within. Up to this very day I have intellectually been sure that such was the course I wanted to take, but have resisted because of the lack of a spiritual ‘yes.’

Knowing that there were no Friends meetings near her Baptist College to seek a meeting in which she could become a member, she corresponded with the American Friends Fellowship Council. The Council had an arrangement with FMW and the 57th Street Meeting in Chicago whereby those Meetings would consider applications of persons who are not living near an established Monthly Meeting. On June 4, 1948 Winnie applied for non-resident membership in the Friends Meeting of Washington and became a member of FMW on September 20, 1948.

She married Harry Jones in 1950 having met him while they both attended Howard University. Winnie Walker-Jones was mother of Karen Cecilia, born on June 12, 1952 and Kenneth Lawrence, born January 19, 1955; mother-in-law of Helen Horvath; and grandmother of Rachel Jones. After their marriage, Harry and Winnie decided to live outside the continental U.S to an area where their inter-racial marriage in 1950 was less subject to the racism of the U.S. She applied to Friends overseas programs to work; from the record the American Friends Board of Missions was not supportive and refused to hire an inter-racial couple. Winnie and husband Harry moved to Denmark where they both taught English at the American University in Denmark from 1950 to 1952 and during that time, and until her death, Winnie continued to remain a member of the Friends Meeting of Washington. Her husband was a long-time professor of English at Morgan State University. They were divorced in 1974.

Winnie was a wife, professor, birder, and leader. She served on the Supervisory Committee of BYM for two years before becoming Clerk of Representative (now Interim) Meeting, starting in 1979. In 1984, while serving as Clerk of Representative Meeting, the Presiding Clerk became ill and she presided at the Annual Session. Winnie then served as Clerk of the Yearly Meeting until 1988.

“Every organization she joined, she wound up heading.” This message, given by one of her children at her Memorial Service, describes Winnie’s path in Baltimore Yearly Meeting and her beloved Friends Meeting of Washington.

Winnie was also respected among Washington area birders. She led bird walks at the BYM annual sessions and after she retired and moved to Friends House in Sandy Spring, MD.

September 1980 Winnie wrote about her membership and activities at the Friends Meeting of Washington that “(m) own spiritual development has been in great part the result of continued encouragement on the part of this Meeting, its committees, its Business Meetings, its regular Meetings for Worship, and, above all, its individual members. I am grateful.”

Winnie also served Friends Meeting of Washington as Clerk and as Co-Clerk in the late 1980s, assisting less seasoned Friends to become comfortable clerking. In a report on the Spiritual State of FMW in June, 1989, a time when the Meeting was riven with dissent about the issue of same sex-commitment and gay marriage, Winnie wrote that “We turn again into the path lighted by the spirit of truth and love in the sure knowledge that as we pursue our ministry, we will continue to find, always, that with the thorns, there will be blossoms as well.”