

“A Part of Who I Am”

An interview with Abbey Pratt-Harrington AFSC Midwest Region Executive Committee Member

March 2014

Q. Please tell us about yourself.

A. I currently work at Earlham College in the Newlin Quaker Center. The majority of my job is to work with Quaker scholarship students in the Quaker Fellows Program.

So I spend a lot of time talking with freshman about what it means to be a Quaker, what are our beliefs, what’s our history, what does it mean to be a Quaker nowadays. I also do a lot of things in my community with non-profit work and things at the seminary where I just graduated.

I grew up in a few different places but mainly in Athens, Ohio, which I consider my hometown. So it’s hills and Appalachia – a college town in a farming area. I grew up as a Quaker, I’m a birthright Friend.

I’ve spent the majority of my life as part of the Friends General Conference Quaker tradition, but I’ve spent a good chunk of years with the Evangelical Friends Meeting as well as the Friends United Meeting.

Q. What about your education?

A. I went to Wilmington College in Ohio for my undergrad, which is another Quaker liberal arts school. There I received my Bachelors in – and this is a very long title – Social and Political Studies with a concentration in International Studies. And I loved it. I spent lots of time doing things with the Friends Committee on National Legislation and other Quaker programs.

But I also studied history and religion as my minors and loved those, as well. When I graduated, I felt called to go to Earlham School of Religion where, last May after three years, I received my Masters of Divinity with an emphasis in peace and justice studies.

Q. Please tell us about your involvement with AFSC? What’s it meant for you?



Abbey with EC members Bob Wilcox, Matt Burton and Bob Yeats



With AFSC staff Molly McQueen and Mary Zerkel and EC member Bob Yeats

A. Growing up, I always knew about AFSC, but I didn't know much about it. I knew it was a Quaker organization and it sounded really cool. In college I was more focused on FCNL.

Then in seminary, at ESR, I was hearing more about AFSC. I considered doing an internship with AFSC, but other things came up and so it didn't pan out. But in my last year there, I got into a great

conversation with Linda Garrison [a former Midwest EC co-clerk] about AFSC, and I wanted to learn more.

She asked if I'd be interested in serving on the Executive Committee, and it sounded like a really cool experience to learn more about AFSC and what it's doing. I'd always heard about what AFSC had done in the past, but not the present.

So I started looking into what AFSC is doing and got really excited. I filled out a potential member pool form and so went through that process and joined the Midwest Executive Committee in March 2013. I've spent the last year learning all about AFSC and specifically what we're doing in the Midwest Region.

It's been fascinating learning about the programs, who's doing what and how it all functions. Seeing the process from the Executive Committee end of it, seeing how I'll be engaged. There have been some AFSC events at Earlham where I work that I've gone to.

So that's been my involvement. Over the past year, I feel I've learned a lot and I'm letting other people know about it in my Meetings.

Q. Did you go to AFSC's Boycott exhibit when it was shown at Earlham?

A. I did go to the Boycott exhibit. It was at Earlham a few weeks ago, and it's a really cool exhibit. It was an interesting space – you couldn't get too close to the posters, but it was neat to see all the students there who were interested and engaged.

It was good to get the Boycott brochure with all the pictures and more information about them. And people from my Meeting that I attend in Richmond came, as well.

Q. Where do you see going in the future, both with AFSC and your life in general?

A. With AFSC, I'm looking forward to the next two years serving on the Executive Committee and more fully understanding each of the programs. In the first year, I learned a lot, but this feels like the first EC meeting at which I really feel like I know what's going on. There's been so much to digest.

But now I feel more ready to delve deeper into how can I participate and help these programs and be more supportive of them.

I'm looking forward to learning more about the work AFSC is doing outside of the Midwest Region because there are so many programs all over the place – so getting connected to the larger AFSC organization.



With AFSC staff Jennifer Bing and EC member Paul Ricketts

In terms of my own life, you know I'm at that great transitional period where I'm trying a whole bunch of different things, and I'm not sure what I want to do. If I stay at Earlham for a while, that would be great. I'm also looking at doing some non-profit work at some point in my life.

So I'm in a time of flux, and it's a really good question which I don't have answers for yet.

Q. What motivates you to be involved in peace and justice work?

A. That's a great question, and I've never come up with a specific answer other than it's just such a part of who I am. And maybe it's because I grew up in Quakerism, in a very liberal place that's always believed there has to be another way.

That's been ingrained in my DNA to a certain degree. Studying wars, and what makes wars, why is there inequality, why is there injustice? I have to believe there's a way we can all be equal and all live well together.

And there's not necessarily an easy path or road, but you have to work towards it because if you're not working for it, you're perpetuating the system to a certain degree.

I don't know if I'm as much of an activist as I used to be, and maybe it's just the time in my life, but it's always been some part of myself. I've found that if I'm not doing something, then it feels like something is missing – there's some part of my life that is lacking and needs to be there.

So I think overall it's my Quakerism, it's who I am as a person, and this belief that we can all live in the world well together and there has to be a better way. That's the brief answer – I could probably give you a 20-page thesis on it. [Laughter]

Q. Anything else you'd like to add?

A. I'm having a great time, I'm learning so much, I really feel privileged to be here and be a part of this committee.

Q. We're lucky to have you.

A. Thank you.



**American Friends
Service Committee**