

# Jane Manring's 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Speech

June 5, 2011

How many of you were present at the lovely retirement party that the school gave me back in '95? It's so good to see you! I ask this because, yes, I know what you are thinking; I am wearing the same dress I wore then. Chalk it up to Quaker frugality and some sentimentality!

Thinking back twenty-five years ago, I'm not sure I would have taken the job if I had known some of the things that were in my job description. The Founding Friends were admirably thorough in planning the school. They created a mission statement, they articulated policies, building inspections were performed and agreements with Adelphi Meeting were clearly defined. My letter of agreement stated that I would teach part time, recruit students and staff, and oversee the maintenance of the building. That seemed easy enough. What I didn't know was that we would move every two years. More than once I was enrolling families in June when we had no firm rental agreement for September. That's not all! I didn't know I would have to be fishing kindergarteners out of the chapel at the Covent of the Religious of Jesus and Mary where they had slipped in to view the nun laid out in her coffin. There was no line in my job description telling me that I would be expected to meet the firemen at the Calvert Road building in the middle of the night. I was summoned because the basement had flooded. "You the principal?" a fireman asked. "You go on in there and tell us if everything is OK!" I waded into a foot of water hoping the electric connections were sound. The longer I held the job the more I became aware of how mutually exclusive was the mission, to be situated in Prince Georges County, to maintain an affordable tuition, and to pay teachers respectable salaries!

There were things I didn't know back then. What I did know was that we had an opportunity to let our lives speak through creating an institution where our lives speak through creating an institution where our values would be practiced. As people joined us adding their energy and vision it was apparent that Friends Community School was filling a need. It is not a surprise to stand here today in this ecologically friendly building and see how the school is thriving. So many people have contributed through their labor, insight, concern, and donations. Commitment is what grew the school. Early families committed to the school mostly out of terror of facing the grandparents with the reality that they had put the kids in a school that didn't exist! They were diligent in getting the school off the ground. Teachers committed to working hard because this was an institution where they would teach according to their belief about what constituted good education. Families committed to working hard to support fundraisers while meeting their financial obligations. We all committed because being part of FCS enables us to live part of an ideal.

It is gratifying and inspiring to see how the school has grown and to look back over the many accomplishments. I think how our graduates choose to live is the measure of our success. We have alumnae working to serve their communities, choosing to put their ideals into action. Some are in the medical profession, some in social work, some are teaching, some working in the media. It is my hope that the sense of community students experience at FCS is what they want to duplicate in the wider world.

What a lot has been accomplished! A school grown from a population of 32 students to a student body of 250. Classrooms in the Meetinghouse to classrooms in unique building in a natural setting, students in kindergarten through 2<sup>nd</sup> grade grown to a student body that encompasses kindergarten through eighth grade. I marvel at the work, commitment, faith, and vision of all who have been part of this.

Betty Smallwood asked me what I wanted for the school in the future. Let's look ahead 25 years to 2036. Students now in first grade will be 31. How will we prepare these students for the future? How to equip them to live and contribute to a shrinking world, a world with scarce resources, more people, conflict, more electronics. What predictions will lead us? How will these graduates make their lives speak through the opportunities and challenges that will be waiting for them? I believe our tasks is to make the best assessment we can of that future world then tailor our curriculum toward equipping our students to thrive in it. We must ask ourselves how each unit in our curriculum addresses this challenge.

What kind of citizen will be needed in the future? Sam Caldwell, a Quaker writer, has written his answer, "A Person With Eyes For Invisible." It is my favorite piece of education philosophy. I quote him and paraphrase him; "A person with eyes for invisible...a person who knows deep down that what we see, taste, smell, and hear is not all there is in life; a person who, in an age of rampant materialism, is not a mere materialist, but who has firsthand experience of the reality and importance of spirit in life; a person rooted as much in the Unseen as in the Seen; a person who has a capacity for reverence, and who is as well equipped to worship as to work; a person who has discovered experimentally that there is something in us that cannot be conjured or coerced, but which must be honored and obeyed; a person who recognizes that everyone, by virtue of this Inward Life, is potentially a child of it and therefore an object of ultimate concern; a person who has inklings, however faint, of a permanent Oneness with all living things; a person who does not easily lose heart, who is optimistic about the capacity of love and good will to mend the affairs of humanity; a person who has the courage to follow the inward argument where it leads."

My wish is that Friends Community School will be guided by this vision as we grow during the next 25 years nurturing persons with eyes for invisible.