

Ten Quakers in a Van

BY JILLIAN WYCHEL

In 1980 Yearly Meeting was held in Dunedin at John McGlashan College, 16 to 19 May. Back then I was still living in Wellington and David in Whangarei. We were friends but not yet a couple. We both wanted to go to Yearly Meeting, but cost was a problem.

Talking with Wellington Friends, I found that there were six of us wanting to go: Phyl and Joe Short, Catherine Benland, Peggy Jennings, David and me. With another four we could hire a minivan and travel together. The word went out, and straight away we had Elsie Bennett, Angela Brusse and Elwyn Walke from Whanganui and Chris Daamen from Palmerston North.

So the plan was hatched. I organised tickets on the 10am Picton ferry on 15 May from Wellington, arranged for us to pick up the minivan at the terminal in Picton, and booked a motel in Ashburton for an overnight stay both on the way down and the way back.

Our Yearly Meeting began on the ferry! So many stories shared. And shared sandwiches. No problems with picking up the van, and all our menfolk were willing to take a turn driving.

Our first test of Quaker decision-making started as we approached Christchurch. It was getting dark and we planned to go into the city and find a fish and chip shop. Decision was required as to which off-ramp to take from the bypass to get into town.

Suggestions were put forward and turned down so we circled round once again while the discussion went on and on. We circled a second time as the discussion got louder. Then the city lights came into view because Chris Daamen who was driving had decided to make a unilateral decision! Peggy Jennings sat on the pavement eating her fish and chips and made some pointed remarks about Quaker processes. And the joyous thing was that no one lost their cool and we had a brief silence before we ate!

The rest of the trip went according to plan. One highlight of the journey back was a stop in Kaikoura where Joe Short knew of the best place to buy crayfish. We enjoyed a splendid lunch by the beach and Joe bought supplies for home.

There was much talk about Yearly Meeting, and of particular interest to David and to me was the story of the educational purpose of the Settlement. This resulted in a 1980 seminar at the Settlement on *Towards Community*, which David and I facilitated with Angela's assistance. Angela ran the kitchen, and it was my first introduction to her barley pudding.

Just for interest, some of the matters discussed at YM 1980 were:

- Public Questions on work, unemployment and new technology; and approaches by Friends to racial unease in New Zealand (this was the year before the Springbok Tour)

- FWCC - reports from our representatives on the 1979 Triennial gathering

- Peace: Nuclear-Free Pacific and reports of the visit by Adam Curle (first Professor of Peace Studies at Bradford University)

- Other minutes were about advertisements in *The Listener*, and reports from Linley Gregory and Robin Watts on projects Friends support.

The epistle from that Yearly Meeting (which incidentally was only three paragraphs long) ends with these words: 'We have gained strength from hearing about and knowing dedicated individuals who have had tremendous influence in our lives and the lives of others. We pray that we will recognise and use the divine potential that is within each of us to transform our lives and ultimately the whole world'. Bruce Dickinson was our Yearly Meeting Clerk.

At least four of the Friends who were reporting to Yearly Meeting (Sue Stover, Robin Watts, Linley Gregory, Rachel Bloomfield) were all under or just over 30. They were all active in Yearly Meeting committees and attended Meeting for Worship regularly.

It is sobering to reflect that only three of us who made the journey in the van are still alive. With my Oral Historian hat on I ask Friends to record stories like this either written or digitally. They keep our dear ancestors alive and preserve our history.