

## MINUTES FROM TOM STURTEVANT VFP CHAPTER MEETING

MAY 26, 2016

PRESENT: Peggy Akers, Martha Morrison, Clarence "Smitty" Smith, Suzanne Hedrick, Dud Hendrick, Robin Spencer, John Morris, Peter Morgan, Jerry Kamke, Alison Whitney, Tom Whitney, Dave Crowley, Regis Tremblay, Peter Woodruff, Rita Clement, Richard Clement, Dan Ellis, David Larsen, Bud Buzzell, and Doug Rawlings

\* Dan Ellis began the meeting by playing a song he has written using the Doug Rawlings' poem "Walking the Wall."

\* Richard then opened up the official meeting with a very special dedication to a very special VFP member, Suzanne Hedrick. He presented her a plaque that recognizes her life long efforts on our behalf to create a world of peace. The plaque rightfully declared her as a "beloved peace maker." Suzanne's immediate response to this honor: "I'd do it all over again if I could. There are so many wonderful people in this group whom I have been honored to work alongside. I will treasure this moment forever." And then, as we dug into a splendid cake recognizing Suzanne, people around the table spoke of special moments we treasure from knowing her:

> Richard recalled a moment at the Common Ground Fair four or five years ago when he was confronted by an irascible cur who wanted to lecture people like us about our many failings. After he was done confronting Richard at the VFP table, he proceeded to a table staffed by Suzanne that focused on the contributions of the United Nations. Richard stood alongside Suzanne as she went toe-to-toe with this moron.

> This moved Suzanne to remember a few incidents in her amazing life -- in 1987, she had joined with Witness For Peace to venture down into Nicaragua, a war zone, to protect the lives of innocent villagers. She recalls being in the back of a dilapidated pickup truck that burst into fire and the courage of fellow Women's delegation members in saving each other. Then she recalled going to Guatemala in 1989 to help indigenous people confront the murderous Rios regime. She remembered not just the terror engulfing this country but the beauty of the people in welcoming her. Then she recalled going to the Traprock Peace Center where she picked up a life-sized rendition of a cruise missile, which she towed to Maine on a rickety old trailer. She was then at BIW joining the Berrigan brothers as they protested the manufacture of yet another destroyer. She sighed: "This kind of work keeps me young."

> Tom Whitney remembered Suzanne joining a delegation to Venezuela, despite a lingering illness, to meet with fellow educators about the power of alternative education. What, we asked her, inspired her to become so involved in the lives of others. Her reply: "I remember living in Levittown in the early sixties when the KKK came to town to harass African Americans," and she had a two week old child, so didn't do anything to stop her neighbors from joining in on the harassment. That caused her to declare that never again would she stand by as others suffered injustice. She also recalled being inspired by Tom Sturtevant, who, at the time, was a fellow teacher in Augusta writing stinging letters to the editor opposing the American War in Vietnam. She admired his courage, and, of course, joined with him. She

then remembered going to Joe Brennan's office and speaking out on behalf of Central American people being attacked by U.S. Proxies during the 1980's. She recalls being mortified by the "great" George Mitchell's arrogant response to a demand that our government withdraw support for the vicious regimes we were propping up down there. Mitchell said: "If we (sic) left, they would eat each other up." Again, we are indebted to Suzanne for not just "being there," but also for her courageous stance against those in power.

> Dud Hendrick recalled Suzanne coming into his UMaine Peace Studies class and speaking to the students about Central America and how she just "blew them away" with her passion, intelligence, and compassion. Dud spoke for us all as he declared that she, alongside Tom Sturtevant and Art Whitman, are the true inspirations of this chapter.

> Peggy reminded us that Charlie, Suzanne's husband, has contributed greatly to Suzanne's successful efforts on behalf of world peace. Peggy then asked for us to sing a song of Suzanne's choice. Suzanne led us in a rendition of "You Are My Sunshine," with Peggy remembering her son, Diego, singing just after 9/11. More cake and ice cream! And then Suzanne told us that the Finnish national anthem was one of her favorite songs, which caused her to remember yet another amazing action she was involved in -- she attended a funeral for an American nun, censored by the Church for her work on behalf of the campesinos, down in Nicaragua at a church with a large hole blown in its roof. Again, she remarked on the beauty of the people who were so intent on making her comfortable amidst their own crushing poverty. Ah, Suzanne! You are a force to be reckoned with and a joy to be around. Bless you!

\* Richard passed around two cards for us to sign -- one to Art Whitman on his 90th birthday and another to Karen Wainberg wishing her well after she suffered a stroke recently.

\* We all took a moment to applaud Peggy for her work putting together Suzanne's recognition party -- she designed the plaque, she ordered the cake, and she organized us all to give Suzanne her just due.

\* The secretary's report from the previous April chapter meeting was accepted as written.

\* The treasurer's report reflects a balance of \$6,983.35 with \$155 in dues coming in over the last month. It, too, was accepted.

\* The Standing Committees report: Richard and Doug attended the annual MaineShare meeting in Augusta. It was an excellent meeting with good keynote speakers (Justin Alford, in particular, speaking of the poverty in Maine amongst our school children and his organization's efforts to combat it). As a result of the meeting, Richard has invited Kate, MaineShare's director, to our next chapter meeting. Richard also reported that we are in good standing with MaineShare.

Dan Ellis reported a membership of 132 as of this meeting -- 81 members are currently paid-up dues paying members. He continues to inquire about those who have not paid dues.

\* Regis reported on his recent trip to the Ukraine alongside Bruce Gagnon to commemorate the massacre in Odessa that took place two years ago, a massacre supported by the U.S. government. Regis spoke about how amazed he was that he and Bruce even got into the country since 16 other journalists and progressives were turned away. Among other documentary films that Regis took is Bruce's eloquent speech and analysis with the church where citizens were burned alive in the background. Regis remarked on how appreciative the people were when they realized that Bruce and he were from Veterans For Peace and were intent on getting the truth out about what happened there. As a result of their presence, Regis has been invited to go to Russia in October and then to North Korea to film others working for peace. Regis acknowledged our chapter's financial assistance and our moral support that helps make his work possible. Regis then told us that he has just returned from Washington, DC where he interviewed Ray McGovern (ex-CIA debriefer for four U.S. Presidents and current member of VFP's advisory board) and the author/professor David Vine whose book BASE NATION is the definitive work on our government's imperialist, neo-colonial aspirations -- according to Vine we have 800 military bases in 80 countries. He also interviewed Peter Kuznik, who co-authored along with Oliver Stone the most comprehensive history of the U.S. Since Howard Zinn's groundbreaking PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES. On June 24th, Regis and Bruce will be presenting a public forum on their travels in Brunswick.

\* Dud shared with us his work with the BDS movement on behalf of the Palestinian people. He and Rob Shetterly, Bob and Maureen Tobin, Ridgley Fuller, and Samantha Coe have formed the Downeast BDS movement to pressure the realtor REMAX TO DISINVEST ITS HOLDINGS IN THE West Bank. Their group has joined with Bruce Gagnon, Mary Beth Sullivan, Lisa Savage, Lee Sharkey and 26 others across the state to pressure local Remax offices to disavow the actions of Remax International. He encourages other members of VFP to join him in his efforts.

\* Doug passed out copies of the Spring 2016 issue of PEACE IN OUR TIMES that continues to feature our international and national efforts to reveal the workings of our military and to offer moving examples of VFP members' efforts to counter militarism in all its forms. This quarterly newsletter is purchased in bundles by chapters (we usually print about 6,000 copies of each issue) so that members can use it to educate their communities about our work. Please pick up copies from Dan and Doug to distribute in your areas.

\* Richard opened up the discussion of the Elders' Statement that members had been encouraged to read prior to this night's meeting. The point of our discussion was to decide how we should respond to Fred and the Elders concerning our participation in the project. Martha, as our liaison to the Elders Group, asked us what we wanted to do. It was suggested, by Doug, that we endorse the statement as it stands, that our chapter be listed as one of the supporters of the statement, and that we disseminate it amongst our other national and international chapters. As we speak, the Elders group is polling its eighty members to get their feedback. Doug made a motion to this effect and Smitty seconded it. But wait a moment here! As the discussion of the motion continued, others objected to some of the specific language in the statement. Rita and Richard objected to the call for "two years of service to the country." They thought that the word "required" should be changed to "encourage." Richard also thought that point #7 needed further elaboration since it mentions "torture, capital punishment, and

incarceration" in merely one sentence. Doug mentioned his reservations about the two year commitment part of the statement but thought that the overall strength of the statement was sufficient to minimize the impact of that one part of it. Others disagreed. Jerry Kamke suggested that we table this discussion and move it forward to the next meeting. Peggy asserted her reservations about the community service statement and asked about the Peace Corps. Martha thought that the word "service" included organizations like the Peace Corps and pointed out that the statement calls for increased participation of a Department of Peace to enforce the statement's goals. Rita suggested that we accept the motion to support the statement but provide an asterisk pointing out that we don't agree with all parts of the statement. Martha thinks that this is the final copy of the statement, so recommended changes will probably not be taken up by the Elders group. Richard reminded us that, like any other motion presented to the group, the will of the majority prevails. Regis suggested that we take out all of paragraph #6 about service to "our country" and stated that he cannot personally endorse the statement. Martha pointed out that the Elders wanted to engage as many U.S. Citizens as possible in a discussion of what our country should do and thought that the statement would encourage more empathy amongst us for the plight of others. Regis still has problems with the term "country" -- what country are we talking about? Jerry pointed out that less than one percent of our citizens now serves in the military and that war contractors and their desire to increase their profits are really running our foreign policy. Richard asked how important #6 was to the whole statement. Smitty said that we might say that our chapter is behind the spirit of the statement but has reservations about some of its details. Richard said that if #6 were dropped, he'd support it. Peter Morgan agreed with Richard. Finally, Doug, in his immense wisdom, withdrew his motion. We then asked Martha to return to the Elders group and ask them if they would re-consider point #6 and further elaborate on point #7. Martha will also enquire if the statement is still open to change. Doug will contact Fred if Martha thinks she needs him to. If we find out that the Elders are not willing to change the document, then we will vote on our participation at the next meeting.

\* Richard announced that the meeting place for the Brunswick Memorial Day parade on May 30th will be the same as last year's. We are #44 on the list of participants. Smitty will shuttle people from the Hanaford's parking lot to the Topsham gathering point. Members are encouraged to dress in black.

\* The Moving Vietnam Memorial Wall will be in Thomaston, Maine over the Memorial Day weekend.

\* Doug and Peter Morgan will be going down to Washington, DC to help deliver 147 letters written to The Wall. They will also join in on participating in the SWORDS TO PLOUGHSHARES BELL TOWER installed across from the Lincoln Memorial ( see separate Memorial Day report for more details).

\*John Morris reported that planning for the Maine Peace Walk continues with a meeting at Russell Wray's home in Hancock. He also talked about the upcoming June 18th protest at BIW around the launching of the Zumwalt destroyer and its totally inappropriate "christening." There is a possibility that civil disobedience will take place at the protest. John also attended the Dan Berrigan commemoration in Portland.

\* Pat Scanlon's upcoming video and recording "Extremists for Peace" was mentioned and members were encouraged to participate in the recording in early June.

\* Richard announced that our Common Ground Fair application for two tables at the fair (September 23, 24, and 25) was accepted -- \$210. Members are encouraged to volunteer to staff the table.

\* We agreed to purchase a full page ad (\$200) in the National VFP convention booklet that Peggy, Dan, and Doug agreed to work on. We have to submit by July 8th.

\* Peggy made a motion, seconded by Jerry Kamke, to contribute \$40 in sponsorship of the Brunswick Peace Fair (August 6th from 10:00am to 3:00pm). All members are encouraged to attend and also help staff our VFP table.

\* Richard announced that there will be two 90th birthday celebrations for Art Whitman on May 29th and May 30th.

\* Robin moved, and Doug seconded, that we donate \$20 to the Hallowell Parade this year. Last year Dud and Rob Shetterly represented us well by dancing in the streets.

\* Doug reported that he had followed up on his previous meeting with the Somali community's cultural director about VFP hosting a social gathering sometime this summer. The director told Doug that he will contact his Imam and get back to him.

\* Robin passed out her recent essay addressing her concerns about U.S. Activities on Viegas Island. She encouraged us all to read her statement and to continue research and action against the injustice our government is perpetrating down there.

THE NEXT CHAPTER MEETING WILL BE ON JUNE 30TH AT THE UU CHURCH IN BRUNSWICK.

The meeting adjourned at 9:03pm.