

Friends Testimony on Gambling

by Norma Jacob

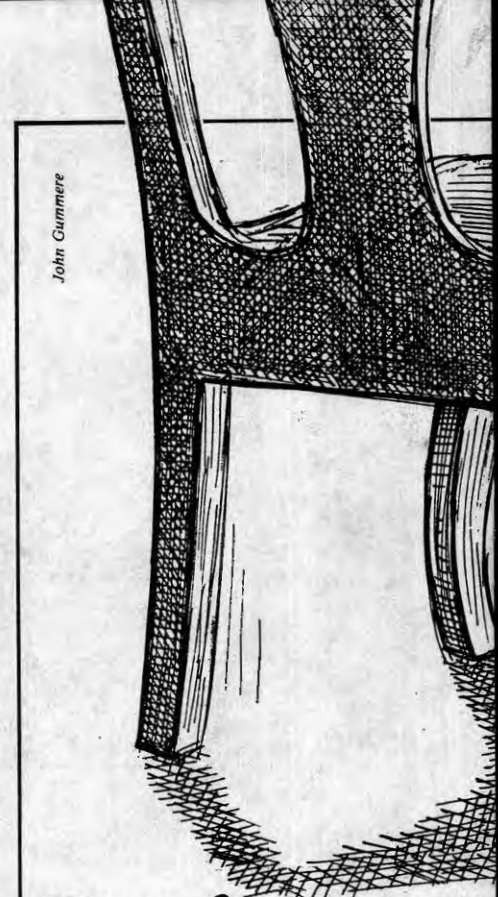
Everybody these days receives and discards those letters saying "Mr. X, you may already be the winner of half a million dollars." For some reason I actually opened one of these, matched up the numbers, and was startled to discover that apparently I was in line to receive a 25-inch color television. All I had to do was order something from the catalogue enclosed in the letter. As it happened, the catalogue contained an item, a desk-top pencil sharpener, that I'd been wanting but had never seen on sale anywhere. So why not send for it and perhaps get the television as well? Even though it seemed there must inevitably be some way in which the premium could be withheld on a technicality (one I could not detect from the wording of the offer), what had I to lose since I would have the pencil sharpener at what I considered a reasonable price?

But stay—I had not yet read all of the fine print. Come to find out, my simple order for the pencil sharpener, which might or might not also produce a free color television, had to be sent in on an entry blank for a chance at \$250,000. Of course, the odds against this actually

happening were astronomical—but what if I did win? Just imagine the headlines: "Little Old Quaker Lady Wins Quarter Million." I'd never be able to hold up my head in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting again.

The Society of Friends has a testimony against gambling. I began to ask myself, what does this testimony actually mean, in a world in which elderly birthright Quakers don't worry one bit about riding free on public transportation and accepting other benefits provided for senior citizens from the proceeds of the Pennsylvania state lottery? Other questions arise. Not long ago, a local civic organization with many Quaker members chartered a bus to take people interested in good government to see what legalized gambling was doing, for good or evil, to Atlantic City. They came back with better understanding but also, in some cases, with winnings gained through the use of the \$10 in quarters always handed out on these buses. Did that worry anybody? We ourselves don't seem to be tempted by bingo, but many of our fellow Christians look on it as the right and proper way to raise money for good works. And even highly respectable Quaker

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John Gummere

Profanity in by Lois I. Sink

Wooden swearing" was not permitted in our home when I was a child. You know the sort of thing I mean—slamming the door or kicking a chair when emotions

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schools have been known to give out door prizes on alumni day.

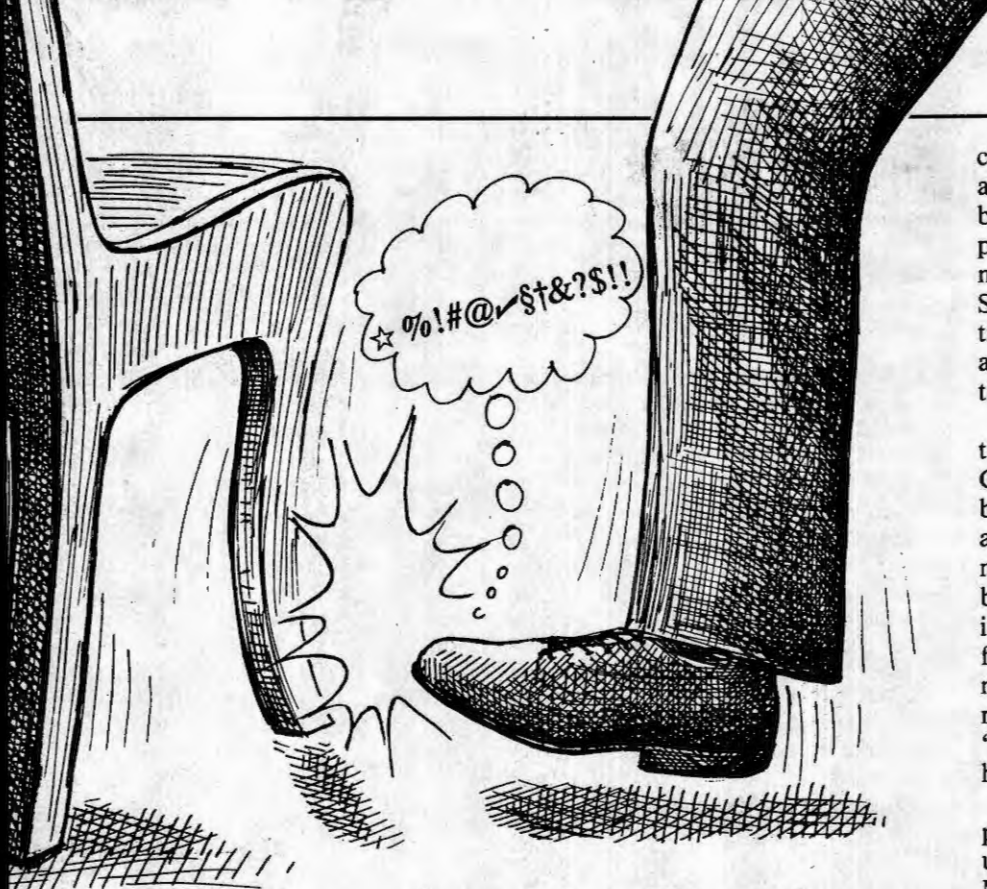
In these ambiguous days, perhaps it's time to give a little more thought to the current meaning of our traditional testimony; we seem to live in an equivocal world, depicted in shades of gray. Whatever happened to black and white?

Friends testimony against gambling has always been consistent and clear. *Faith and Practice* of London Yearly Meeting put it very well as long ago as 1911:

We believe that all forms of betting and gambling, and all merely speculative means of obtaining money, are contrary

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the Preacher's Parlor

reached the boiling point. Nor were we allowed to use modern "slanguage." "That, too," admonished Mother, "is just another way of taking the Lord's name in vain." "Gee" was considered an abbreviated form of "Jesus," and "heck" was banned as a shortened version of "hell." Our conversation not only as Christians but also as PKs (preacher's kids) had to be blameless and above reproach; therefore such

phrases as "doggone" and "by golly" were akin to profanity and frowned upon. After all, as a minister, Mother had a sense of duty toward her family and must also ensure that its conduct be exemplary in the community.

Father's sense of humor, however, could not always be contained within the bounds of Mother's propriety. One lunch hour he was relating an incident concerning a particularly exasperating

client who just that morning had been at the lumberyard where Father was bookkeeper. After wearing everyone's patience thin with unreasonable demands, the customer departed, leaving Sam, the owner, fuming with indignation. His livid face revealed his rage as he spat out venomously, "I hate that man!"

Although Sam attended a conservative church and his wife was a devout Christian, his spiritual experience had been somewhat in question for years among the community at large. Father mildly reproved him, "Sam, the good book says you've got to love everyone if you want to get to heaven." Shamefacedly Sam said nothing for a few minutes; then stung by Father's quiet reproach, he grudgingly conceded, "All right, I love him, but doggone his hide anyhow!"

Two pairs of astonished young ears perked up as this forbidden word was used so casually. We girls anticipated Mother's reproof that we were certain would be forthcoming. From the twinkle we detected in Mother's eyes and the smile that hovered around the corners of her mouth, we knew she would not chide Father this time.

With the relating of that incident, though, two impressionable youngsters, as well as Father, learned the perfect way to handle "wooden swearing" in a minister's home so that even Mother had little or nothing to say. Whenever we were perturbed, the standard phrase at our house from that day on became, "I love him, but . . ." □

to the spirit of Christ. . . . In addition to the material ruin of both individuals and families in all sections of the community, the moral and religious fiber of the people is seriously affected. The prevalence of sweepstakes and of lotteries for charities, however disguised, is a disquieting symptom at the present time.

But as some of the examples above may suggest, the issue nowadays is not always entirely easy to distinguish.

Going back to our beginnings, George Fox seems to have been very much opposed to "games," though I'm not quite sure whether his objection was to any form of gaming for money, or simply to entertainment as an end in itself.

There were certainly lotteries in his day; the *Britannica* informs us that the first English lottery took place during the reign of Elizabeth I, with the queen herself as patron. Here is *Britannica's* definition of gambling: "Any gaming, wagering or undertaking (whether or not lawful or respectable) whose determination is controlled or influenced by chance or accident and which is undertaken with consciousness of risk." What seems oddly lacking from this is any mention of disproportionate rewards, which one might have thought the very essence of the matter. And "undertaking" is a real portmanteau word. Am I gambling if I buy a monthly commuter

train ticket at a reduced rate, even though my health is dubious and I may never get to use all the trips on it? And what about my Social Security? Essentially, like life insurance, it's a gamble on how long I may live. I may lose out completely, or get back many times what I put in.

Well, I said to myself, let's not drive this into the ground. After all, I do want the pencil sharpener. But suppose, just suppose, that by some extraordinary fluke I did actually win that quarter million? What a lot of good I could do with it! At that point, enlightenment came suddenly. Get thee behind me, Satan! I tore up the form. □