

Patricia Moles: Lifelong Quaker Activist and Advocate for Social Justice

Who is Patricia Moles? Why is Chicago Friends School naming their scholarship fund after her? Patricia Moles was an activist and advocate for social justice. Raised in New Jersey and Connecticut, Moles experienced both the privations of poverty and the prejudices of an exclusive community. College experiences taught her still more about prejudice. Moles took advantage of multiple opportunities in her lifetime to fight prejudice and advance the embrace of diversity.

Patricia Fleigh Moles was born in 1934 in Paterson NJ during the Great Depression. Her father's work as a radio repairman was not steady and the family lived in several poor quarters. To save money they decided to rent a summer cottage near Paterson shortly after Pat was born. They lived in this cottage on Preakness Mountain for almost six years. A stove was their only source of heat. Water came from a spring some distance away, and the cottage had no electricity. After a time her father made a generator from scrap parts and they had electric lights! They were so far from neighbors below that when a fire broke out nearby some said to let it burn because nobody lived on the hill.

Just before World War II, Pat's father found steady work and after living several places in Connecticut the family settled in Darien, CT. Her mother chose the town for its good schools, and they found a nice house on the edge of Darien where Pat lived until college. While Darien did indeed have good schools, this town is where Pat first experienced discrimination against non-whites and non-Christians. When graduation came in 1952, Pat was ready to leave Darien.

Pat's older sister attended Ohio Wesleyan University in Delaware, Ohio, and Pat chose to attend this school as well, forgoing her interest and talent in music to major in sociology and religion. She joined a sorority as most co-eds did at the time. As chaplain in her junior year, she was preparing for fall rush activities when she came across unpublished discriminatory bylaws. She at first thought they were obsolete but, when she was told they were still very much in force, she resigned from the sorority. Pat then joined other co-eds in a social club called Cosmodelphia which had no bars to membership. Pat became a Quaker during her college years and also met her future husband, Oliver Moles, there.

Following graduation, Pat worked directing youth activities for a downtown Congregational Church in Columbus. At the same time Ollie began graduate school at the University of Michigan in a social psychology program. The following summer in 1957 they were married and Pat moved to Ann Arbor. She found work as a psychiatric social worker at the nearby Ypsilanti State Hospital handling the mental problems of veterans. She continued that work until daughter Elizabeth (Betsy) was born in 1959.

Pat and Ollie attended the Ann Arbor Friends Meeting. In 1960 Pat was approached to work with the high school students in the Meeting, and she readily accepted. Son Stephen was born in 1963. With graduate training and two years on a Detroit school research project finished, Ollie took a research job in 1964 with the federal Health, Education and Welfare Department and the family moved to Falls Church, VA. The civil rights era was an exciting time to be in Washington DC, and Pat and Ollie were happy to be part of this movement.

Ollie managed evaluations of federal anti-poverty programs and later managed research projects in the U.S. Department of Education. He worked especially on the involvement of disadvantaged parents in their children's education and student discipline issues. The family attended Langley Hill Friends Meeting in McLean VA.

Pat applied her skills and interests to a new hospitality center on Capitol Hill, William Penn House, where she was director of youth programs organizing seminars for high school and college student groups around international affairs and public policy. In the early 1970s Pat volunteered at the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL), a Quaker lobby that advocates for just and peaceful solutions to foreign and domestic problems. She became a research assistant to the FCNL lobbyist on foreign affairs, Frances Neely, as she prepared to discuss foreign policy issues with members of Congress. At the same time, Pat was a member of the executive board of the Mid-Atlantic Region of the American Friends Service Committee. She became the board specialist on program evaluation at a time when evaluation was a contentious issue.

From the mid-70s on, Pat also worked for the Montgomery County (MD) Public Schools in their appraisal and assessment department. She applied her program evaluation skills to develop surveys on educational issues, and in particular a new system called mutual and reciprocal evaluation. At about the same time, she also became active in the Wheaton MD chapter of the Business and Professional Women's Clubs. She became its president in 1980.

For her last few years Pat was a trustee of Sandy Spring Friends School. She was an active member of the board's diversity committee, which considered how students of all backgrounds and orientations were treated on the campus.

In early 2010 Pat was diagnosed with amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), also known as Lou Gehrig's disease. She continued her work with Sandy Spring and personal activities, but her energy level began to sag. Pat took comfort in the words of early Quakers, including this one from George Fox, the founder of the Quaker movement: "There is no time but the present time...." Her muscles steadily weakened, and she passed away on July 23rd 2011.