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Fran Johns... A Wife Who Contributes



The young boy sat on the hard cot in his cell and stared at the plate of chocolate cake. He avoided looking at the girl who had just given it to him. She stood outside the bars and spoke to him. When she had gone, he realized he had not heard the words spoken, but he had been given the encouragement he needed. Only last night he had committed a reckless prank and now he was considered a juvenile delinquent.

Visits to the county jail were not uncommon for Fran Johns, wife of the Protestant Chaplain at USNPGS, when she was a teenager in Anna, Ill. She made it her business to find out about and visit youngsters who had gotten themselves in enough trouble to be in jail.

It did not take her long to discover that there are no gimmicks in dealing with delinquents. "Their problems start many years before jail," she said, "and it takes time to ease the problem. One of my theories is that parents of delinquents should be sentenced to group therapy—they really do care what happens to their children, but don't know what to do about it," she continued.

The first summer after high school graduation, Mrs. Johns enrolled at Southern Illinois University. Her plan to major in some phase of social work was now fairly definite. Since age nine she had felt she should be part of the answer to the social ills of the world. "I really don't know from where this idea came," reflected Mrs. Johns, "but count it no virtue on my part," she quickly added.

After three years at the University and two years of teaching, she decided to specialize in religious work and would accomplish this at William Jewell College in Liberty, Mo. She attended one term. On Easter Sunday she met a strong-minded young man who convinced her that one missionary in the family was enough—and H. D. Johns said he was going to be the one. So at the end of the term she returned to her hometown to teach for a year.

"We had a fast courtship," explained Mrs. Johns, "the year of waiting helped us to make sure this was the real thing."

Perhaps not realizing it at the time, their decision not to rush to the altar was exactly the kind of advice that Chaplain Johns would someday give to many couples in his capacity as a marriage counselor.

"My husband says that many people rush into marriage too fast," she pointed out. "They get married at a turning point in their lives or a crisis—for example, graduation, a new job or war—something that threatens to separate them."

After a June wedding in 1947, Mrs. Johns returned to SIU for the summer term. In the fall they made their first home in a basement apartment in Mexico, Mo., where Chaplain Johns was pastor of the Littleby Community Church. They both taught school that first year so this left nights and Saturdays for sermon preparation and study.

"I learned to sleep with the lights on and the typewriter clicking," recalled Mrs. Johns.

In June 1950, the Johns and six-month-old Susan moved to Denver, Colo., where Chaplain Johns was pastor at the Alameda Community Baptist Church and studied for his Masters Degree at Iliff School of Theology. It was during their fourth year in Denver that he became interested in becoming a Navy Chaplain and Mrs. Johns agreed it sounded like a marvelous plan.

Since that decision ten years ago, the Johns have had duty in Norfolk, Cherry Point, N. C., and Topeka, Kan., where he was sent to the Menninger Foundation for postgraduate study in marriage counseling. Prior to Monterey they lived for three years in Sasebo, Japan.

Mrs. Johns said she can think of no favorite duty station—she has enjoyed all of them. "But I think in Japan I matured a great deal in my ability to understand life. Living in a culture where material things are at a minimum, I thought in terms of ideas," she explained. A constant idea and belief of mine is that one should see things as they really are."

Mrs. Johns has never abandoned her original ambition to work with delinquents, but said, "I need further training and time for my children—Susan, 14, and Doug, 3, to be more independent." Since the Chaplain's duties require him to be away from home at all hours she feels it is important for her to be a dependable factor in the home. She quoted from Winston Churchill who said, "It makes no difference whether the mother is wealthy and away from home doing charity work or poor and away from home earning a living—the child is neglected emotionally."

Mrs. John said it is especially important for wives of PG students to have strength

and contribute as much as possible to family life. "Husbands in this learning situation are unable to give as much time to their families as they would like. Wives can see things as they are or they can try to escape with illusion and glamour," she said. "A little of this is healthy—too much can lead to disillusionment," she added.

Is the role of a Navy Chaplain's wife similar to that of a civilian minister's wife? Mrs. Johns, who has played both roles, thinks it is quite similar. "I have written a book analyzing the role of a woman married to a minister," she said, but she doesn't think the time is right to send it to a publisher.

Like most ministers' wives, the Chaplain's wife finds there is a great deal of entertaining to be done. The Johns enjoy this by giving small dinner parties. She explained this way stimulates good conversation and talk about books. "Our books mean more to us than anything else," she said.

Her hobbies include sewing, cooking, and golf. "I bought a set of clubs in 1957," she said with a laugh, "but I can't tell any scores."

She also likes to write, and admits she carries a notebook around with her from room to room. Although she has not tried to have anything published, she hopes to accomplish this someday.

With an amusing smile she added, "I really like to think of myself as a writer, sociologist and philosopher without credentials."

—Anne Smith

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