



I once showed him a black-and-white photograph I had taken of a boy of twelve or thirteen who had stopped to rest at a fence near the New Delhi Railway Station. His shirt was torn; he was dressed in rags. As he glanced back over his shoulder, I thought I saw a smile—that sense of inner energy and resilience that so many ordinary Indians bring to their lives. Ainslie wasn't so sure. He thought the boy's expression revealed not an inner smile but an inner desperation. That sensitivity to the potential underside

of every smile was a crucial part of what made Ainslie such a vivid interpreter of the present and the past—and the future. It was also what made him an extraordinary friend. How he will be missed! ■

Remembering Jean Elliott Johnson, 1934–2017

By Donald, Karen, and Mark Johnson



Jean Elliott Johnson passed away at the age of eighty-two after spending a lifetime advancing the movement of world history throughout her teaching and writing. She is survived by her husband and professional partner of fifty-seven years, Donald Johnson, three children, and three grandchildren. Jean will long be remembered for her commitment to teaching, students, peace, equity, and justice.

After graduating from Oberlin College in 1956, Jean taught in Turkey for two years, received an MA from Columbia, and taught at Mt. Kisco High School. In 1969, Jean and Don were hired by the state of New York Department of Education to develop curriculum materials about India. They spent a year in New Delhi working at the Educational Resource Center, writing and producing teaching materials to be used in American schools. During that time, Jean became friends with anthropologist and Presbyterian missionary Charlotte Wisner, and spent time in the small village where Wisner lived. Jean convinced Wisner to write an updated version of her book, *Behind Mud Walls*, which Jean edited. The pair also produced a companion filmstrip for the book.

In 1972, after her return from India, Jean launched the Asian Studies Curriculum Center (ASCC), with New York University's sponsorship, to handle and distribute teaching materials, which she and other teachers created and donated. The ASCC continued to collect and distribute materials for over two decades. Another result of Don and Jean's stay in India was the publication of *God and Gods in Hinduism* in 1971 and *Through Indian Eyes* in 1974. Jean was also a volunteer with the National Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) and was elected to be the Chair of the World Relationship Committee. She was active in the YWCA from her college years through the 1980s.

Beginning in 1974, Jean taught at Friends Seminary for twenty years, where she was instrumental in establishing a two-year world history course to replace Western civilization, a major curriculum change. A tribute given to her when she was named Faculty Emerita at Friends Seminary stated: "She alternated between a published textbook and her Xeroxed manuscript. This Xeroxed text eventually became part of the published textbook series, *The Human Drama* [a four-volume series covering 500 CE to the present], which she and her husband, Don, coauthored. Today, the book and other coauthored titles—*Gods and Gods in Hinduism*, *Through*

Indian Eyes, and *Universal Religions in World History*—are used at prestigious high schools and colleges throughout the country. Before *The Human Drama* was published, Jean met with students who were studying history for her manuscript at Friends to gather their feedback on the text. The dedication page for volume 1 reads, 'Dedicated to the ninth-grade students at Friends Seminary whose insights are incorporated in this text and whose lives are shaping the ongoing human drama.' . . . Jean's affection for [world] history and her ability to connect students to it are two of her greatest gifts."

Jean demonstrated a strong commitment to world history and a belief that thoughtful courses on Asia and non-Western civilizations should be taught with as equal importance as those about Western civilization. She insisted that everyone deserved a history and history belonged to everyone. While *The Human Drama* was the culmination of this belief, she also published numerous articles on how to teach about Asia and delivered several papers at the Association of Asian Studies and American Historical Association. Jean developed a set of slides based on her father's photographs of China in 1908, which she published in the spring 2006 *Education about Asia* in an article titled, "China 1905–1908: Harrison Sackett Elliott's Letters and Photographs" (article available at <https://tinyurl.com/ya3eg2d>).

In 1983, Jean won a Klingenstein Award, which included a yearlong stipend to research her lifelong intellectual pursuit, incarnations of the Mother Goddess throughout history. In describing *Shakti*, which is one example of this idea, Jean wrote, "The term shakti refers to multiple ideas. Its general definition is dynamic energy that is responsible for creation, maintenance, and destruction of the universe. It is identified as female energy because shakti is responsible for creation, as mothers are responsible for birth. Without shakti, nothing in this universe would happen; she stimulates *Shiva*, which is passive energy in the form of consciousness, to create."

In 1989, Jean was awarded a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship from Princeton University and became part of a study group to improve the teaching of world history. Building on this experience, she was part of teams that conducted workshops at schools around the country that promoted the teaching of an integrated world history that included Asia and the world beyond Europe. In 1994, she was a member of the team led by Ross Dunn that wrote the National World History Standards. She wrote a supporting letter to all fifty senators, but the standards were rejected because of conservative opposition.

After retiring from Friends Seminary, Jean worked at the Asia Society, conducting the Teach Asia summer institutes for teachers. As part of this project, five teams of teachers were selected from across the country to concentrate on the inclusion of Asia in their curriculum. Jean also spent several summers at the East-West Center in Hawai'i working with a number of school systems across the country. She remained active with the American Historical Association and World History Association, and continued to publish academic articles and produce teaching materials. During 2005, she was a member of a work team at the University of San Diego whose goal was to create a website called World History for Us All. The Association of Asian Studies awarded Jean and Don the Franklin R. Buchanan Prize for *India: History and Contemporary Perspectives* as the best curriculum project in 2005.

While Jean's professional accomplishments demonstrate her dedication to world history and Asian studies, they were but one part of her lifelong fight for justice and equality. She was just as likely to be found at a rally for civil rights as at an academic conference. She developed a class on poverty in the United States, and taught at Friends Seminary, in which students engaged with issues of inequality in society. She stayed active in the Student Leaders Program throughout much of her life. Whenever she heard about some injustice, her reaction would be, "What can we do?"

Although at the end of her life Jean lost much of her memory to Alzheimer's, teachers and students, as well as countless friends and family from all over the world, will hold enduring memories of Jean that will live on in the continuing human drama. ■