

Dear Friends,

In light of our approaching 18th birthday, my male peers have been required by law to fill out a selective service form, and many have considered conscientious objection. Although I am female, and am not required to do either, I am interested in doing so to take a stand for males and females alike. I write this letter to show through my faith and personal mind that I have no wish to see myself, or others of my generation engaging in any conflict simply because my country calls it my "patriotic duty." Though I am only 17, I have lived long enough to see the violence and destruction, and I do not wish to take part in it. I am stating now, to the Friends meeting that I am personally opposed to any participation in a war and would seek claim as a conscientious objector.

Saying this I would like to explain why. Since my father met my stepmother Robin, my sister, my father and I attended her place of worship. I was six. This was The Society of Friends-Quakers-or the "oatmeal people" as my friends sometimes joke. Since then I have grown into their beliefs, finding pieces of myself along the way. We are people of peace and simplicity, and a society that does not believe in violence. Yes, it is true that I have not held these beliefs my entire life, and though I may still be searching for myself, I do know that I agree with what Quakers stand for. It was not until I found this faith, I was able to put a name to my beliefs. But even before I found my place in this faith, I have been a non-confrontational person-except maybe to my sister, but that is a different story. I was never someone to fight or get in an argument; in fact I find I try to avoid it. My nature was never one of destruction or violence. This is one reason I found the Society of Friends receiving.

I find that I am very thankful to live in a land of the freedom and home of the brave. But as such, I do not understand why we must kill in the name of that? Why gain things by fear and brute strength, rather than by words of wisdom and empathy. Why must we pretend to be "God" to these reduced oil countries, when at home we cannot even agree on a bill to help our sick and elderly? We may have fought for our freedoms not so long ago, but why must we continue to fight when our freedom is not even at stake? When I hear on the news that these men and women give up their lives to protect our freedoms, I am confused. Our freedom is not at stake, our dignity is.

I do hope that our country never returns to the draft and that we realize there are other ways then asking for our sons and daughters to fight. I live for the day that this country is able to look down on war and violence just as we looked down on prejudice, apathy and inequality. So let this be letter and this committee be my witness, that if the day were to come when the names are drawn and the weapons are ready, I will fight to open the eyes of America, not to take another life in the name of America.

Sincerely,

Jessica Harper

Chapel Hill, North Carolina

November 20, 2011