

AFDS April 17, 2022
Story by Herb Haigh

A Celebration of the Life of Sarah
As recorded by Nancy Westin
Hyde Park, New York
December 27th, 1873

Recorders Note: The First to speak was Sarah's younger sister, Angelina Grimke.

Hello my name is Angelina Emily Grimke and I offer greetings to the Friends and family of my dear sister, Sarah Moore Grimke. Sarah was my older sister and role model. I loved so dearly that I often called her, "Mother." Today we are gathered here in our home, in Hyde Park, New York in the free state of Massachusetts to celebrate her life, as hers was a life of great consequence, a life of purpose, a life that left the human community far better than when she joined it.

I have asked Family and close friends to speak briefly of what Sarah meant to them. Please leave a moment for contemplation between speakers. At the close of this celebration some of Sarah's students have prepared a special presentation for us.

(Theodore Grimke)

I was the first child born to our family of fourteen, Sarah was the sixth and Angelina who has just spoken, was the thirteenth. Three of our siblings did not survive. After our father's death we learned that our he had three additional children that were born to one of his slaves. My sisters made certain, at risk of prosecution, that they be educated like the rest of us.

(Henry W. Grimke)

Our father was a slaveholder and when Sarah was just five years old, she saw a slave being whipped; she became so upset that same day she tried to board a steamer that would take her to a place where there was no slavery. She spent the rest of her life trying to right that wrong. God allowed her to witness the passing of the Emancipation Proclamation" to her great reward.

(Thomas Grimke)

Sarah wanted to become a lawyer and follow in our father's footsteps. She studied the books in our father's library constantly, teaching herself geography, history, and mathematics, but in addition to being a slave holder our father did not believe in women receiving an education; least of all his daughter; as a result, he would not allow her to learn Latin or attend Yale along with me. It's says a great deal when I quote my father as saying," if she had been a man, she would have been the greatest Lawyer in South Carolina."

(Wm Lloyd Garrison),

As editor and publisher of, "The Liberator" I met Sarah on her second journey to Philadelphia when she was just twenty-six years old. On her first visit to the "Quaker City" she had accompanied her father while he received medical attention which unfortunately was unsuccessful. But it was on that trip that she came to learn about the Quakers and what we were doing to further emancipation and woman's rights. The sisters had no sooner joined with us when; without gaining her permission, I published a letter from Angelina which caused she and Sarah to receive much scorn primarily from the Quakers. Quakers and Ministers alike complained that by speaking out politically these women were stepping outside the proper role of women. It came to a point when the sisters had to choose between Quakers and the abolitionist movement; they promptly chose the latter of course. Ironically from that point on they were even more widely supported by the abolitionists; outspoken women or not.

(Alice S Rossie),

(Pioneering feminist, 1922-2009)

When the sisters were rebuked by the Quakers it seemed to free both of them from many restrictions placed upon their lives. Not just as abolitionists but as women. It was a period of growth for them, it was personally difficult but the sisters stood with what they firmly understood as the will of God.

(Theodore Weld)

(Abolitionist and husband of Angelina)

When I met Sarah and Angelina, they immediately impressed me with their independence. I could see that if they were to understand and thereby accept their own importance, they could become a powerful force for abolition. I also realized that they saw themselves not as a servant of men, but as a worthy partner. I couldn't help myself and to my great joy Angelina and I were married. Of course, it was Sarah who gave away the bride.

(Maria W. Stewart)

(African American Abolitionist)

As a black woman I know what it's like to stand up in a Quaker Meeting for Worship and preach about the sin of slavery. I know because I have tried my hand at it a few times and I can tell you those Quakers really don't like it. They see it as stirring up trouble but Sarah Grimke, paid it no mind she just stood tall and said what needed to be said. As you could predict, again and again, the Quakers got upset and again and again but the sisters got more invitations to speak from everyone else. About that time and because of all the fuss, curious men started sneaking into their "woman's only" parlor talks. Soon they were challenging social convention by being openly invited to escape what they called a woman's, "proper sphere," (known by most as remaining silent and subordinate.) At great cost to themselves these "sisters" spoke their truth to everybody, no matter. They made it clear that as long as woman are oppressed, they could not address the wrongs of society and without them the wrongs would likely persist.

(Elizabeth Cady Stanton)

I sent my children to Angelina And Theodore's private school because I had read many of the writings of these two sisters. It began with Angelina's first tract, "Appeal to the Christian Woman of the South." In it, in plain language she encouraged southern woman to join the Abolitionist movement for the sake of white womanhood as well as black slaves. She pointed out to all of us that, "Duty is ours; events are God's," which I thought to be particularly profound."

Not to be stopped by public scorn Sarah then published, "Epistle to the Clergy of Southern States." Almost immediately Angelina published her, "Appeal."

Those writings caused the sisters to be simultaneously ridiculed for not behaving like "proper women" and at the same time receiving many offers to lecture because so much of the public wanted to hear what they had to say! When Sarah published, "Letters on the Equality of Sexes" in 1838 the dam broke and thousands of people flocked to their Boston Lecture series. Their speeches seemed to be even more powerful than their writings.

(Francis Grimke)

Hello my name is Francis Grimke I am the illegitimate brother of Angelina and Sarah. The Grimke's present lost their mother our father, Henry Grimke, had three sons by my mother, Nancy Weston who is recording what is being said in this service. These three sons are; Archibald and John who are not present, and myself. When they learned of us, Sarah and Mrs. Weld made certain my brothers and I went north to receive a proper education. As for me, they made it possible to attend Lincoln University and then Princeton Theological Seminary which allowed me the privilege of becoming the Presbyterian Minister I am today.

I have read many times the writings of the sisters concerning the story of Adam and Eve. Sarah was the one that started the discussion and although they shared the same reading of the story, they each they analyzed the message of the story differently. Angelina used her interpretation of the creation story creation to support her position that women were not created as a gift or for possession of men but rather as unique, intelligent, capable creatures deserving equal regard, rights and responsibilities with men.

Sarah went much farther. While both stories emphasize the equality of men and women's creation, Sarah assigned greater responsibility for their transgression to Adam because he was tempted by a mere mortal while Eve was tempted by the supernatural.

Sarah made it clear that what was meant by the story is that women were not "cursed" into subservience but that the Bible had simply been prophetic. Sarah said," they both fell from innocence, and consequently from happiness but not from equality." Women should cast off this yoke and be, "Bound to God Alone."

Recorders Note: At this point in the service and one by one, students from the Weld-Grimke Boarding school stood and repeated various quotes taken from writings by Sarah Grimke. The students were asked to recite a quote that stood out to them personally, they choose;

(Student one)

"I know nothing of man's rights, or woman's rights; human rights are all that I recognize."

(Student Two)

I ask no favors for my sex; I surrender not our claim to equality. All I ask of our brethren is that they will take their feet from off our necks, and permit us to stand upright on the ground which God has designed us to occupy.

(Student Three)

I am persuaded that the rights of woman, like the rights of slaves, need only be examined to be understood and asserted.

(Student Four)

"Whatsoever it is morally right for a man to do, it is morally right for a woman to do."

(Student Five)

"Intellect is not sexed; strength of mind is not sexed; and ... our views about the duties of men and the duties of women, the sphere of man and the sphere of woman, are mere arbitrary opinions, differing in different ages and countries, and dependent solely on the will and judgment of erring mortals."

(Student Six)

"Good and evil, as we term them, are not antagonistic; they are ever found hand in hand. Humanity has never achieved a single conquest without the aid of both. Indeed, how can she? What adds to moral strength, but a grappling with temptation?"

(Student Seven)

[Women] are early taught that to appear to yield is the only way to govern.

Recorders Note: After an extended period of silence the attendees rose and retired to the Parlor for a brief reception.

References: Wikipedia: Grimke Sisters