

WFNH Founders
Charlotte Fardelmann

Charlotte Lyman Fardelmann remembers her father's advice clearly, and she remembers just as clearly how she came to ignore it. The connecting link is in the strength of silence.

"Don't spend or give away principal," her father, Ted Lyman, a grain merchant in Minneapolis, said years ago to his young and potentially-wealthy daughter. "Use the income and keep the principal to pass down in the family."

That's what he had done -- passed his money, some of it inherited and some from smart investments -- down to his family. That's not what Charlotte Fardelmann is doing; she's giving it away.

"Have you given away a lot of money?"

"I have."

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To understand the Charlotte Fardelmann who became a devout Quaker, a founder of the Women's Fund of New Hampshire, a freelance journalist, a teacher and creator of her own charitable foundation, The Lyman Fund, it is necessary to take a look back.

She grew up in an affluent corner of Minnesota but skipped what she called the "high society world ... the showy parties, the formal gowns and social drinking." After graduating from Wellesley College, she shared an apartment with college friends in New York City and then married a young med student. But all along the way she said she was uncomfortable with the money that enabled her to live in ease. Even when she got a job, she knew she didn't have to work to get by.

"It wasn't a lot of money," she said of her wealth. She was sitting in her pleasantly cluttered home by the Piscataqua River in Portsmouth. "It just was more money than my friends had. It made me uncomfortable. I didn't want to talk about it."

Time passed. Her doctor husband, Dale Fardelmann, became a urologist. Charlotte became a mother of four children in five years. In the early 1960s, the family moved to Portsmouth to this house once known as the "hennerly" or hen house for the Wentworth Coolidge mansion next door.

Charlotte described the place lovingly in her book, *Nudged by the Spirit*: "My home stands at the confluence of two rivers near enough to their ocean mouth to be filled by the strong currents of the salt sea tides twice a day." She loves the river, and regularly hauls her kayak out for spin.

In 1970, the Fardelmanns divorced. When her own Episcopal Church turned its back on divorcees, Charlotte searched elsewhere. She meditated. She tried transcendental meditation. Then in 1977, she turned to the Religious Society of Friends, the Quakers, in Dover. She described herself as a "high-pressure, fast-paced, achievement driven" journalist and writer. The problem, in the early 1980s, was that she developed a writer's block just as she was supposed to produce a book about the islands of Maine.

"I panicked," she said. She went to the Quaker meeting with a cry for help: "How do you get your priorities straight?" In the silence that followed, she said she found her answer. She heard a song in her head: "Slogging along ..." She finished the book. And

she made plans to attend a Quaker center for study and contemplation at Pendle Hill. It was, as she said with the calm assurance of the faithful, “an incredible spiritual transformation that changed my life.”

From there, Charlotte Fardelmann went on to tackle the demon of her own wealth. She studied money, and “sensed” she should start giving it away. She defied her father’s advice by dipping into principal. The largest single contribution, \$500,000, went to The Lyman Fund, which she created to help people, mostly Quakers and mostly women, “take the next step on their spiritual journey.” Other projects -- like the Women’s Fund -- have benefited as well. She likes to be in at the beginning of things.

Her life has become a mix of quiet time (she leads “stillness” retreats), prayer, music (she’s in two singing groups -- the Shanty Singers, who are marine docents of the Great Bay Stewards, and the Voices from the Heart), travel, daily entries in her journal, and philanthropy.

“It’s been very rewarding for me to give money,” she said in an interview. “Giving and receiving are two aspects of one whole, like yin and yang. If you give with the right spirit, you are receiving as you give. If you receive with the right spirit, you are giving to those you receive from ... It’s just wonderful.”

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-by Shirley Elder, a former reporter for The Washington Star and the Boston Globe's New Hampshire Weekly.