THE SACRIFICE of NORMAN MORRISON

Thirty years ago a Baltimore Quaker set himself on fire to protest the war in Vietnam. Did it make a difference?

Alice Steinbach, THE BALTIMORE SUN

*Dearest Anne:*

*For weeks even months I have been praying only that I be shown what I must do. This morning with no warning I was Shown as clearly as I was shown that Friday night in August, 1955, that you would be my wife. ... And like Abraham, I dare not go without my child. Know that I love thee but must act. ...*

*Norman*

On the last afternoon of his life Norman R. Morrison stopped somewhere between Baltimore and Washington to mail a letter to his wife.

The evening rush hour was in full swing that chilly Tuesday on Nov. 2, 1965, when Norman, driving an old, borrowed Cadillac with his infant daughter behind him in a car crib and a gallon jug of kerosene beside him in a wicker picnic basket, paused briefly to post the handwritten, one-page letter. It was the next-to-last stop on Norman's short trip from living to dying.

The final stop for the 31-year-old father of three was a small plot of ground just outside the Pentagon, some 40 feet below the third-floor window of Robert S. McNamara, then secretary of defense.

What happened there, in the gathering dusk as thousands of Pentagon employees poured out of the building, heading for home, was, and still is, inexplicable: a public act that in many ways remains a mystery even to those who knew and loved Norman.

But the bare-bones facts of what the young Quaker activist did can be telegraphed by stringing together a few of the front-page headlines that appeared the next day in newspapers around the world:

*BALTIMORE MAN BURNS SELF TO DEATH IN VIET PROTEST.*

*MORRISON GAVE WIFE NO HINT OF PROTEST-DEATH PLANS.*

*HUMAN TORCH AT PENTAGON, BABY IN ARMS.*

*PACIFIST RELEASES GIRL AS FLAMES ENGULF HIM IN FRONT OF BUILDING*.

Those, more or less, appeared to be the facts. But facts had no dominion here. They were powerless in the face of such an impenetrable act, stunned into silence by the urgent questions that had no answers:

Why did Norman do it? Was he mentally unstable? Depressed? A religious fanatic? Was it a carefully planned act? Or a sudden, despairing impulse that demanded release?

And then there was the question that defied understanding: Why did Norman Morrison take his child with him?

Unlike Norman, his 11-month-old daughter, Emily -- the child he "dared not go without" -- survived, unharmed, spared at the last moment like Abraham's son Isaac in the Old Testament story of a father commanded by God to sacrifice his child as a burnt offering.

When her mother picked her up that night at the Fort Myer dispensary in Virginia, Emily was wrapped in an Army blanket, her diaper replaced by a hospital towel. Some who were there say the distinct smell of kerosene clung to Emily. Others are less sure.

Either way, her survival only added to the horror of Norman's act: When he struck the match on his shoe, had he intended to take Emily with him in that final, 7-foot-high pillar of flame?

"There's a mystery implicit in what happened to Norman that I don't think I'm ever going to understand," says his widow, Anne Morrison Welsh, who is married now to a schoolteacher named Robert Welsh. "And I think that we all don't know why Norman took Emily. But he felt compelled. And like Abraham who took his child to the mountain, Norman wouldn't go without his child."

But of all those who sought answers then, and seek them now, as to why Norman took Emily with him, it is Emily herself who seems most certain of her father's intentions:

"I know," she says now, "that I was there intentionally for many reasons -- but ultimately to be a symbol of the children who were suffering in Vietnam. And through my father's love for me and his love for these children, I was a comfort and inspiration for him."

Still, 30 years ago the significance of Norman's act was anything but clear. In 1965, when the Vietnam War still seemed like a storm off in the distance and the body bags coming home hadn't yet reached the thousand mark, most Americans were not yet ready to hear the message of a young Quaker from Baltimore.

But some were.

One week after Norman's self-immolation, a physician from Walnut Creek, Calif., wrote to Mr. McNamara and the Joint Chiefs of Staff, explaining the meaning of his death:

"What he [Norman] was trying to say was: 'See what it is like for a man to die by fire. See it for yourselves. You, who make the impersonal war, devising strategies and tactics in your air-conditioned offices, look and see!"

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On the first night of her widowhood, Anne Morrison, calm and composed on the outside but as shocked on the inside as the rest of the world, issued a statement to the press:

"Norman Morrison has given his life today to express his concern over the great loss of life and human suffering caused by the war in Vietnam. He was protesting our Government's deep military involvement in this war. He felt that all citizens must speak their true convictions about our country's actions."

Now, 30 years after the first combat troops were sent into Vietnam and 30 years after Norman Morrison's death, someone else has come forward to voice his true convictions about his country's actions in Vietnam. And suddenly Norman, along with the restless ghosts of 58,000 Americans who suffered and died in Vietnam, is back in the news, resurrected in a recent memoir by none other than Robert S. McNamara.

The passage of time, it seems, has brought the two men -- the young Quaker and the aging architect of the Vietnam War -- to the same conclusions about that war.

Today, at 79, Mr. McNamara is delivering the same message in his best-selling book, "In Retrospect: The Tragedy and Lessons of Vietnam," that Norman Morrison and thousands of other anti-war protesters tried to deliver three decades ago.

"We were wrong, terribly wrong," he writes of the United States' growing military involvement in Vietnam. And, Mr. McNamara now concedes, he knew at the time that the policy he helped create under Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson was wrong.

He also invokes the name of Norman Morrison and writes of how deeply he was affected by what this man did on the evening of Nov. 2, 1965.

"At twilight that day," writes Mr. McNamara, "a young Quaker named Norman R. Morrison, father of three . . . burned himself to death within forty feet of my Pentagon window. . . . Morrison's death was a tragedy not only for his family but also for me and the country. It was an outcry against the killing that was destroying the lives of so many Vietnamese and American youth."

"I was horrified, horrified by it," Mr. McNamara says now of Norman's public self-immolation. "And I was also quite aware that my own family was deeply disturbed by the event, and many other members of the public were."

Still, the defense secretary did not attempt to call Anne Morrison. didn't know what I could say that would comfort her," he says. "Because, about a month after that, in December, I didn't think there was a chance of winning the war militarily. And I didn't see any way out, . . . anything I could say . . . that would console Anne Morrison."

CHOKED BY EMOTION

Anne Morrison Welch, on the other hand, wrote immediately to Mr. McNamara after last April's publication of "In Retrospect," a book that caused hate mail to pour into Mr. McNamara's Washington office. Enclosed was a copy of a statement she released to the press in response to his book:

"To heal the wounds of that war, we must forgive ourselves and each other," she wrote. "I am grateful to Robert McNamara for his courageous and honest reappraisal of the Vietnam War and his involvement in it."

Mr. McNamara carries with him a copy of the public statement from Norman Morrison's widow. He often reads aloud to the press, in an emotion-choked voice, the paragraph expressing her gratitude to him for coming forward to set the record straight.

"I have it [her statement] right here before me on my desk," he says. "She is a noble woman. That anyone could have gone through what she did and then write the person who, in the mind of her husband, was responsible for the actions that resulted in his killing himself . . ." His voice trails off.

"I was deeply grateful to her for expressing forgiveness . . . and I was deeply moved."

This time he called her. And this time he knew what to say: "Thank you," Robert McNamara told the widow of Norman Morrison.

"We had an amazingly relaxed and personal conversation," Anne says. "Almost as if we knew each other, almost as if we hadn't been on opposite sides of the chasm that split our country apart three decades ago."

A DEATH IN CONTEXT

With the publication of Mr. McNamara's explosive book, Anne Morrison Welsh and her family suddenly have been thrust back into the public eye.

The renewed media scrutiny is a painful experience for this very private family whose past contacts with the press, says Anne, have made her hesitant to speak publicly anymore. But her reticence about being interviewed, she says, also has to do with the "incredibly emotional impact on me" of Mr. McNamara's book.

"Making myself accessible to interviews and talking about these very, very personal issues," says Anne, now 60, "is more of an emotional upheaval than it ever was. I don't know why. But it's all right up there in my throat."

Still, she responds to the suggestion that, given Robert McNamara's attempt to "put Vietnam in context," it might be equally appropriate to place Norman Morrison in context, both historically and spiritually, for those who lived through the turmoil of the 1960s.

And, just as important, for those who didn't.

So, with some reluctance, Anne Morrison Welsh and her two daughters, Emily and Christina, agreed to an interview -- but only if it were done letter to letter rather than face to face.

Her own emotional reckoning with Norman's death has been long and slow, she says. Only in the past few years has she felt more free to talk about it.

"Naturally my life and the lives of our children were severely impacted by the loss of Norman and the nature of his sacrifice," she writes. "A great weight came down upon us, creating a Before and After in our lives. Over the ensuing years we have suffered greatly, and still suffer to this day."

REMEMBERING THE MAN

Here is how family and friends remember Norman Morrison, the man:

He rode a second-hand bike and liked to wear a beret.

He was fond of carpentry and gardening and ice hockey -- a sport which he played hard; once in a casual, pickup game he came close to cracking his opponent's rib.

He liked to clunk around the house in the morning wearing only boxer shorts and big, black shoes.

He delighted in frugality -- bought his suits for $2 and $3 at rummage sales -- and was fascinated by the stock market, although he never bought a stock in his life.

He liked to dance -- had a natural sense of rhythm -- but had some misgivings about it. He could even wiggle his ears to a beat. He liked to hold his 5-year-old daughter, Tina, and swing her round and round to the music of Scottish reels.

The son of an Erie, Pa., dentist who died when Norman was 13, he was strict with his own son, Ben -- just as his father had been with him.

He earned degrees from the College of Wooster and Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh. He planned to enter the Presbyterian ministry but instead became a Quaker in 1959 and worked professionally in the Society of Friends. His salaried position as executive secretary at the Stony Run Friends Meeting in Baltimore included attending committee meetings, visiting homes and ministering to its 420 members.

He could be very distracted and often seemed to have his mind focused on something other than the task at hand. At the same time, he took pleasure in finishing a job in half the time it might normally require.

He was frustrated by his inability to communicate as a public speaker and was not always at ease socially.

Each year he withheld $5 from his income tax as a "token protest" against the federal government's military budget.

He was an introspective person, sometimes eccentric and indirect in manner and overly critical of himself. An achiever -- once an Eagle Scout -- he was intense and idealistic about life, religion, politics and society. Some found his intensity unnerving.

TRYING TO LIVE A MORAL LIFE

"A person who does what he did is not going to be like everybody else."

John Roemer, a Quaker who belonged to the Stony Run Friends Meeting, is speaking, trying to describe his close friend Norman Morrison. Thirty years ago both men were deeply involved in the civil rights and peace movements.

"He was a very intense person. He certainly had a sense of humor, but Norman lived and thought about life at a moral and religious level that most of us don't," says Mr. Roemer, now a librarian and teacher at Park School. "The pain of other people affected him more deeply than it did most people. . . . And that means that the universe hurts you more than it hurts other people.

"Most of the time if I were to read in the paper about somebody doing this I would say, 'Oh, boy, there's some history of derangement here. I bet all his friends knew he was a nut, and they're not talking about it.' I just don't see that here.

"Norman's act cannot be seen primarily as a public protest. He died for his beliefs. . . . What guided him was a personal moral imperative that said, 'It must stop. I cannot any longer be in complicity. I must do whatever act is necessary to say to the universe: No, no, no.' "

Sam Legg, another member of the Stony Run Meeting, remembers the growing frustration he saw in his friend:

"Norman had been praying and seeking and trying to find out what was God's will for him -- and he was lost and he was frustrated. He'd been writing letters to editors, to congressmen, to the president and the Pentagon; he'd participated in demonstrations and protests. He felt he had done everything that he as an individual could do to try to convince people that what we were doing in Vietnam was wrong. And he felt he was having no impact.

"I think he felt some dramatic gesture must take place to call to the attention of the American people the folly of what were doing. . . . I don't believe for a minute that he was leaving the world because he didn't want to be a part of it. I think he very much wanted to be a part of it -- a constructive, positive part of it -- but he felt he had tried that and it hadn't worked. And now he had to do something else."

THE FAMILY'S FATE

So much has happened to the Morrison family -- a lifetime, really, has passed by -- since Norman ended his life by fire:

Anne Morrison Welsh has remarried twice since the event that bisected her life into a Before and After. Still an active member of the Society of Friends, she lives now in a small community in western North Carolina. A Duke University graduate with a degree in psychology, she works part time with the developmentally disabled. She also writes a human-interest column for a local paper.

The "great weight" of her husband's death was not the only test of Anne Morrison's faith. Five years later, Ben Morrison, the eldest child and only son, 6 years old when his father died, was diagnosed with Ewing's sarcoma, a rare form of bone cancer. Ben died at 16.

His mother remembers him as a strong little boy -- at the age of 2 or so, he amazed her by picking up a whole crate of Coca-Cola bottles -- who often helped his father in the garden and around the house. The two were very close.

On the morning after Norman's death, they found Ben sitting alone in the garage, sitting alone in his grief.

"He was a very private person," Anne says of Ben. "And while I think we all internalized our grief, I think Ben may have internalized it more than most of us."

She says she wishes the family had talked more about Norman's death at the time.

"We did talk about it -- the kids would ask questions -- but if I had to do it over I would have made time every day to talk about it. But I was so caught up in the public demands following his death that I had to divide my time between meeting those demands and the family. In hindsight, if I could have obtained it, I would have had all of us go for family counseling."

Christina Morrison was just 5 -- they called her "Tina" then -- when her father without warning turned her world upside down, changing her, she writes now, "from being a very happy and outgoing person to a relatively numb and repressed person. Fortunately, I have learned to express my feelings and am returning to my happier self." Today she lives on a 90-acre farm and nature preserve near Austin, Texas, where she, along with a few friends, runs a retreat center. Only in the last five years, she says, have she and her mother and Emily been able to express with one another their feelings and their pain about Norman.

"I actually don't think I even felt my sadness, anger or fear, because I never let myself think about how I felt," she says. "This was relatively easy since no one ever asked how I felt until I got to high school. We were too busy trying to figure it out and explain it to others on intellectual, political and spiritual levels. We were also denying or hiding our feelings.

"I have often felt that, in a sense, my father sacrificed all five of us in hopes of saving the people of another country. As a child, I wondered if they were more important to him than we were. I still wonder if he had any idea how much his action would hurt us and would he have done it if he had known.

"I wonder if he gave any thought to Ben and me as he drove to Washington. Did he think we wouldn't miss him? That we wouldn't care? . . . Did he think we'd be just fine without a father or even a farewell? How often I have wished I could tell him to his face just how much we cared. That to have had one word of love and farewell scratched on a napkin would have changed my whole life. It would have become my most precious possession."

But Christina, a certified massage therapist and rebirther who describes herself as "a healer of others," also says this of Norman: "I now know that he loved me and that we will always be connected. I am very proud of my father. He was an extremely empathetic, sincere, intelligent, caring person with very high ideals. . . . My father gave the greatest gift -- himself -- in a way that very few people would ever have the courage or conviction to do."

DEVOTION UNQUESTIONED

And what of Emily, the one who was there with Norman?

Emily Morrison Welsh (she assumed her adoptive father's name years ago) is 30 now, almost the age of her father on their last day together. She is a professional actress -- has been since the age of 14 -- and after graduating from New York University with a degree in theater, worked in New York and Los Angeles.

She's gotten some good reviews for her work but writes that she is "not interested in fame," had "enough of it at age one to last a lifetime." What she wants instead is to do "conscious, responsible and inspirational projects in which [she] shares her gifts as an artist and firstly, her heart."

Unlike her older sister, Emily has never questioned her father's devotion to his own family: "He did what he believed he must do, to be true to his heart, to be a light in the midst of our darkness. And I love him for that as he loved all of us completely."

And unlike her mother, Emily questions the depth of Robert McNamara's Vietnam mea culpa.

She writes: "As you know, McNamara has only been using a few lines of my mother's press release -- those that are complimentary to him, or his book. My mother's press release is firstly about Norman and the immorality of war. This he does not or has not truly addressed."

It troubles Emily that so much emphasis has been put on her presence at Norman's self-immolation. She feels it has obscured the spiritual meaning of his act.

"Norman's clarity and purpose was clouded by the press and even now by McNamara's and others' accounts of my presence," she says.

"His act stands alone, regardless of if he had intended to take my life or not. He didn't. No onlooker could have stopped him from taking me if he had clearly decided to do so. If he had thought he was asked to take me, he felt relieved of doing so -- and no one will know at what moment this occurred.

"The fact is I am alive, and regardless of any onlookers, or stories, or kerosene, or 'throwing down,' it was his choice to have me alive. That to me is all that really matters. No one seems to have given him credit for making this choice on his own."

It has taken Christina, on the other hand, many years to work through the puzzle of why Norman took Emily with him.

"When I started to understand the larger picture of my father's death, I came to learn that Emily had actually been there with him," she says. "As a child, it never occurred to me that he might have intended to sacrifice her as well. Only in the last few years have I recognized the horror that it must have been for her to witness his death, and to try to figure out what his intentions were regarding her.

"At first I was incensed that he could even imagine sacrificing a child in following his own vision. And he did sacrifice her in a sense by requiring her to witness his death and by leaving her there without him.

"My anger has now turned into amazement. The odds are very small that he would have logistically been able to have her with him, that her presence would represent so powerfully the children that he sought to save . . . and that she would come through physically unharmed. And yet it all happened. The success, if you will, of their incredible story tells me that he was indeed divinely inspired. Strangely enough, I now realize that it must have also bonded them in a way that very few people will ever understand or experience."

Those who knew Norman agree he was that rare person who did not make the usual distinction between the obligation to his own family and his responsibility to the rest of mankind.

After his death, it fell to his widow to interpret to others -- including her children -- such a view of the world; to explain how completely committed Norman was to the idea that we all belong one human family.

"I'm sure he recognized the human and psychological loss his death would be to us, and that must have made the decision very difficult for him," Anne Morrison said just a few weeks after Norman's death. "But he must have weighed this against the suffering of the people of Vietnam. The loss of the Vietnamese is really so much greater than my loss, and I keep telling myself this. It's a comforting reminder."

LIVING FAITH

On the last morning of his life Norman Morrison called in sick. It was just a cold, he told the office secretary, but he'd decided to work at home on a lecture for a class at the meeting house:

"The church of the Spirit is always being built," he wrote. "It possesses no other kind of power and authority than the power and authority of personal lives, formed into a community by the vitality of the divine-human encounter.

"Quakers seek to begin with life, not with theory or report. The life is mightier than the book that reports it. The most important thing in the world is that our faith becomes living experience and deed of life."

But another piece of writing was also on Norman's mind.

Just before lunch, sitting on a stool in the kitchen with Anne and Emily, he discussed with his wife an article quoting a French priest whose church in Vietnam had been bombed by U.S. planes. "I have seen my faithful burned up in napalm," the priest was quoted. "I have seen the bodies of women and children blown to bits. Always before my eyes were those burned up women and children."

Norman was deeply moved by this account of the suffering of innocent Vietnamese women and children.

But then over lunch the conversation turned to less distressing matters: plans for the family, a suit that Anne wanted for Christmas and other casual talk.

"His mood was quiet and reflective, not at all morose or depressed," Anne recalls now. "I had absolutely no idea of what would transpire later that day, nor that he had ever before contemplated such a thing."

And somewhere in the conversation she remembers Norman saying this: that he had never felt better or more right. She later interpreted that remark as Norman's way of letting her know that he was sane in what he was about to do.

"Of course, if I had known I would have done everything in my power to stop him," Anne says. "After his death I heard that he had discussed forms of dramatic or sacrificial protest of the war with a couple of friends."

At about 3 p.m. Anne left in the family's Volkswagen bus to pick up Ben and Tina from Friends School. When she returned home an hour later, her husband and baby were gone. The only message from Norman was a note saying a neighbor had called.

WHAT THE WITNESSES SAW

To this day, eyewitness accounts vary as to what happened about 100 yards from the main entrance of the Pentagon on November 2, 1965. But those who were there reconstruct the event in "Rashomon"-like fashion, each offering his own version of Norman Morrison's last moments.

Air Force Staff Sgt. Robert C. Bundt, now 60, retired and living in Michigan:

"We had just gotten out of work, and I was standing there at the River Entrance waiting to be picked up. I looked up and saw him [Norman] walking along in quite a hurry on the other side of the drive. He was carrying a small child.

"Pretty soon I heard yelling, and then I saw this black smoke rising from below this wall, maybe 4 or 5 feet high. So I jumped onto the wall and I saw this person on fire. . . . I didn't see the " baby at that time. But I heard people yelling at him, 'Drop the baby!' I jumped down. Colonel Johnson was already down there trying to put out the fire."

Army Col. (then Lt. Col.) Charles S. Johnson, now 74, retired and living in Massachusetts, was the first to reach Norman Morrison:

"He was standing up, his face to the wall, his body sort of frozen and rigid. His hands were locked on the wall and there were flames coming up from one side. And there was a baby. The baby was making no sounds. I swung at the child to push the child away from the wall and away from him. To put some distance between she and Morrison.

"I saw his face. It was blank. He was alive but there was no indication of pain. No indication of anything.

"Eventually I wrestled him down to the ground and started beating the flames with my hands. . . . I was trying to pull him down to get his face out of the flames so he could breathe. . . . Then Sergeant Bundt yelled for people to throw us some coats. Coats started flying down, and we covered him up with them and tried to beat out any flames that jumped up.

"He was still pretty hot. The heat peeled my hands and part of my face. . . . At about this time the medical people showed up."

Army Maj. Richard V. Lundquist, now 64, retired and living in North Carolina, was leaving his job in the Army's office of personnel at 5:15 p.m. on his way to a night class in economics:

"I saw this well-dressed man standing behind a retaining wall near the river entrance. He had a baby in his arms and was shouting something out as the people came out of the building. I looked away for a minute and when I looked back I saw him in flames.

"People were shouting, 'Drop the baby.' I don't know if he was holding the child or not. I climbed over the wall, and the first thing I saw was the baby on the ground, several feet away from him. He was staggering backwards. I couldn't see if she had fallen or been placed down by him.

"Then I picked the child up. . . . There was no sound coming from her. She seemed oblivious to what had happened. . . . She smelled of kerosene, but she could have gotten that by being held near his coat. Because when I carried her over to the guard -- just that little way -- I noticed my uniform blouse smelled of kerosene all night."

Capt. Robert Ruderman, the Pentagon physician on duty that evening, was 27 then; he now practices hematology in Riverdale:

"When I got there, just looking at the state of the man, I knew he wasn't going to make it. The fire was out but he was totally burned from top to bottom. Unconscious. . . . There was nothing anybody could do for him.

"He died officially within two minutes of taking off in the ambulance for Fort Myer. I was there with him. . . . I was told the next day that he had a baby with him and he was holding the baby while he was on fire. But I never saw the baby."

MCNAMARA'S ACCOUNTS

Robert S. McNamara is no longer sure of what he remembers about Norman Morrison's self-immolation. His accounts vary.

"I watched it," he told Larry King on the April 28, 1995, broadcast of "Larry King Live."

But when asked again, for the purpose of this article, if he personally witnessed the event, he says: "My memories of the event are confused by what I've read and what I've been told since that time, in contrast to what my own personal knowledge was. . . . When I was writing the book -- because that event stuck out in the mind -- I asked my researcher to search the newspaper files. Which he did."

And, Mr. McNamara says, when the researcher presented him with articles on Norman Morrison from the Washington Post and the New York Times, "Both articles indicate that I did not see the event. I was not sure of that until I read the articles."

Still, he also says: "Perhaps I could have seen it myself and asked what was going on. My secretary might have told me. I think that's what happened."

THE DAYS AFTER

When Anne Morrison received the first phone call at about 6 p.m. on that Tuesday evening in 1965, it was from a Newsweek reporter. "Do you know what happened in Washington?" he asked.

She didn't. The reporter stopped short when he realized she didn't yet know about Norman and Emily, telling her only that her husband and child were involved in some kind of protest.

The next call came immediately after; it was an official from the Pentagon who told her what had happened. "However, I was not told at that point that Norman was dead," Anne says. "I was assured, however, of Emily's safety and well-being."

George Webb and Harry Scott, two Quaker friends, accompanied Anne to the Fort Myer dispensary and, later, read her statement to the large group of reporters and photographers assembled there.

"Anne was very composed on the ride over," Mr. Scott recalls. "She was quite cool. At least outwardly."

At Fort Myer a nurse brought Emily to her mother. "She seemed calm and normal, not at all upset," Anne says. They also handed Anne a diaper bag that was found in the Cadillac. It contained a couple of bottles of milk, pacifiers and diapers.

Found in Norman's pockets at the time of his death were some scribbled notes referring to Buddhists and Vietnam and a month-old lecture notice on "The Ordeal of Peace in Two World Wars."

He was also carrying a wallet. It contained $10, a laundry ticket and a draft card.

The draft card was not burned.

Back in Baltimore, as word began to spread about Norman -- "Is it our Norman?" one member of the Stony Run Meeting plaintively asked another on the phone -- the Quaker community began to close ranks around Anne and her family.

"The overriding impulse of the Meeting was to take care of Anne and the children," recalls Eleanor Webb, a friend who helped take care of Tina and Ben on that first tumultuous night. "To organize food and to see that that kind of practical, loving care was just done."

Another close friend, Nancy Clark, remembers the scene at the house in Govans that night: "There were reporters all over the place, spotlights on the house, people calling constantly. What we mainly did was to protect her from that kind of publicity and set up a system where she would not have to answer the door or the phone."

Christina, just 5 then, has her own memories of the night her father died:

"I remember lots of people and lots of confusion suddenly appearing in our house. I didn't know why. In the midst of it all I vividly recall watching my mother stride out the door like a queen on a mission to save her country. I didn't know where she was going. I just huddled on the couch with my brother. We must have felt quite abandoned. I'm sure no one knew what to tell us.

"We were told of his death the next morning. I have no memory of that whatsoever, which tells you how shocked I was. Mom tells me that I said, 'Daddy has died, and now his love will spread,' which she found very wise and poetic.

"I think I was desperately trying to make sense of it, . . . to make it okay on some level so that my world would not completely fall apart. Unfortunately, I didn't know that the best thing I could do was express my feelings."

Two days after Norman's death his final letter to Anne arrived.

"It was an incredible shock to receive that letter," she says now. "It was, in a way, somewhat helpful to read. . . . On the surface of it, that Abraham-Isaac story goes against all sorts of rational reason. But I think [Norman] used it as a spiritual point. It's a faith parable. And it was mysterious.

"But who knows why he went? There are probably a hundred reasons that took Norman to Washington."

Other letters began pouring in to the tidy, brown-and-yellow shingled house after Norman's death. Some contained money for the Morrison family. Unlike the letters received recently by Robert McNamara in response to his book, most expressed sympathy and admiration.

A letter of condolence arrived from Nguyen Huu Tho on behalf of the South Vietnam National Front for Liberation and the South Vietnamese people:

"We express our admiration and gratitude towards the sublime self-immolation of Norman Morrison, his family for the cause of justice of our two nations and for peace of progressive mankind."

In Cambodia the Benedictine monks offered a Mass for the repose of Norman's soul.

And in North Vietnam, Norman Morrison was, and still is, regarded as a folk hero.

The Vietnamese, who accept self-immolation as part of the Buddhist tradition, named a street after him and issued in his honor a commemorative stamp. Poems and songs were written about him. One poem, written by a group of teachers from Nam Dinh City, begins:

One morning, the loudspeakers announced

Throughout my homeland, the news

That, from far-away U.S.

A holy fire was set

Lightening a corner of the sky.

Morrison! You heroic son

Defying bombs, swords and guns,

Made your body a living torch.

His widow was invited by the North Vietnamese government to visit their country. She declined.

"I did not want Norman's sacrifice and our protest of the war to be considered as partisan," Anne says now. "Neither of us favored a military victory by either side in Vietnam. We wanted the war to stop. We felt the United States was wrong to be engaged militarily in any way in Vietnam."

But in the weeks and months after Norman's death, there was a wide division of opinion in this country regarding his action. In letters to newspapers and magazines, many derided his action as "crazy" and contrary to the best interests of the country; some called it "macabre," and deplored his act of "suicide" as "sacrilegious."

There was also marked dissension among the 420 members of Baltimore's Stony Run Meeting regarding what their fellow Quaker had done.

"There were members of the Meeting who were horrified, scandalized and very strongly opposed to what Norman had done," says Sam Legg, who is still a member of that Meeting. "As Quakers, we don't believe in the taking of human life. Anyone's human life -- including one's own. So we were all agreed that we wished Norman had not done this and that he had committed an act that went against the things we hold very dear."

"I don't think as a Meeting we were taking sides. We were hit hard by this thing, and we talked about what was good, if anything, about it and what was bad about it. We tried to talk all around it so that various points of view could come out. Which again is the Quaker way of doing things: throw it all out there and hope you can get some leading from God that will come to a decision that everyone in the group can accept."

At a gathering several months after Norman's death, members of the Stony Run Meeting held their first formal exploration of the reasons for his self-immolation and the value of such a course.

"It gets back to your basic conception of what life is all about," concluded Henry E. Niles, who led the discussion. "Why are we here anyway? Do Quakers really believe in the Inner Light? Do we really get spiritual guidance? What is our scale of values? Do we believe there is anything more important than living?"

SUMMING UP

Robert McNamara admits he weeps in public occasionally when he mentions Norman Morrison and the letter from Anne. "I get very emotional," he says. "I get very teary. I consider it a weakness. And those particular words -- the words of forgiveness Anne wrote -- do make me emotional."

In his book, Mr. McNamara writes some words of his own that are likely to elicit emotional responses from at least 58,000 American families; words that if followed by deeds would have changed their lives. And that of Norman Morrison's family as well.

"I believe we could and should have withdrawn from South Vietnam either in late 1963 amid the turmoil following Diem's assassination or in late 1964 or early 1965 in the face of increasing political and military weakness in South Vietnam," Mr. McNamara writes now of his beliefs.

Thirty years ago, Norman Morrison wrote this of his beliefs: "Quakers seek to begin with life, not with theory or report. The life is mightier than the book that reports it. The most important thing in the world is that our faith becomes living experience and deed of life."

Thirty years ago, Norman Morrison acted on his beliefs.

"Norman Morrison was right; there are enormous evils that we should be doing something about, and we don't," says John Roemer, who teaches a class at Park School on the ethics of violence and nonviolence. "When he did this, most of the people who died in Vietnam had not yet died."

Occasionally, in his class Mr. Roemer uses the example of his old friend to explore how far one should go in protest.

"I tell the kids here that at some point you may be required by the exigencies of your time to come down from the mountain and sacrifice yourself -- or at least part of your life -- because there are certain moral evils that cannot be countenanced. Norman saw them acutely. The rest of us tried to ignore them. We refused to accept his challenge.

"We've got to come to some kind of accommodation where we say, 'I can't do what he did, but I've got to do something more than what I'm doing.' I think that's his message and his meaning."

Emily, the child who was there when her father allowed his life to speak for him, sums up Norman's act this way:

"I do not believe in suicide, and I don't believe in war where we torture others and ourselves for the sake of some belief that death will bring a better life. But soldiers believed that and committed 'suicide' every day in a different way. They gave their lives for what they believed and for 'their' country.

"Norman was fighting his own war, for all of our countries and yet not fully recognized for doing just this. . . . He fully deserves our love, respect and compassion, as we remember and go forth. I think he might be happy if we just tried to love each other a little more, all of us."

A sampling of letters received by the Morrison family after Norman's death.

FROM HENRY WEAVER IN WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.:

"I am a U.S. Marine Reservist and may well someday be called to fight in Vietnam. I will go and I will fight, but my heart will contain many of the thoughts and feelings that Norman was so very concerned with."

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FROM ERNO KERTESZ IN BUDAPEST, HUNGARY:

"Our little country stands in awe before the heroic self-sacrifice of your husband. May the thought console you that his deed has awakened the conscience of hundreds of thousands of indifferent people and set them to work actively for peace."

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FROM DAVID TODD IN WORCESTER, MASSACHUSETTS:

"We all of us have to make these difficult choices of responsibility in life -- and I for one would like to feel that all those who cared for people as much as Mr. Morrison did will remember his sacrifice by helping his family. I enclose $10 to add to the contributions that will doubtless be coming in. I have five children of my own -- but now I feel I have eight."

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AND FROM RENA W. HANCOX IN TROY, N.Y., CAME THIS LETTER ADDRESSED TO 11-MONTH-OLD EMILY:

"I believe that your father loved you dearly to share with you his ultimate service to his fellows, whom he also loved. . . . By holding you, he made his point; by dropping you he spared a life to continue, carrying his name, to work for peace. Honor his acts and love his memory. No medals for Norman Morrison could reward his death as you can, living."

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