

J u a n i t a N e l s o n

P r a c t i t i o n e r o f N o n - V i o l e n c e
D e e r f i e l d

Juanita Nelson is a nice elderly woman. Juanita's presence in a room makes you feel the comfort and warmth of your own home. She makes you feel like no matter what you do she will still be kind to you. She speaks with the tone of a woman with experience and strong beliefs. She speaks loud and clear in everything she says.

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I t isn't easy living without electricity. Sure there's work to it, but I'm not working any more than anyone else who has everything. I just have two gas lamps for lights, so I don't have to pay much to live. I grow my own food, have a well, a solar powered oven, and an outhouse. I use a washing machine at the Woolman Hill Conference Center, but in Mexico I used to wash my own clothes by hand and dry them too.

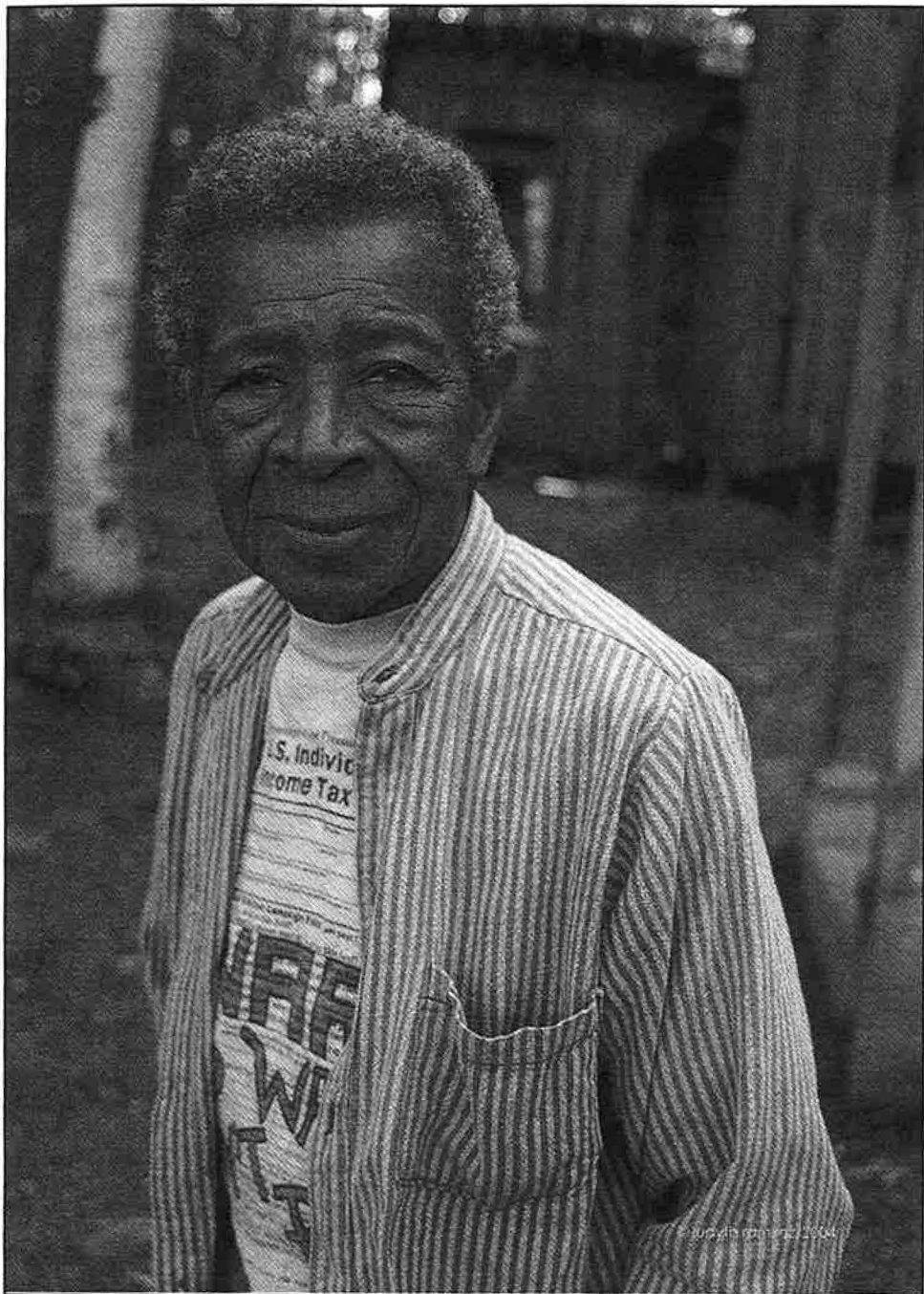
If I could choose a title for myself, I think it would be a “want to be” practitioner of non-violence. I think Gandhi said something like, “Non-violence is not a garment that you put on and off, it's something that you try to wear all the time.” In 1943 when I was a sophomore, I was arrested for the first time in Washington D.C. for trying to eat in a restaurant. I went back to Cleveland where I was born and founded the Cleveland Committee of Racial Equality and worked on various projects along with a man named George Houser.

I have been a member and am now sort of an honorary member of the Commonwealth CSA (Community Supported Agriculture), a group of farmers who offer locally grown produce to subscribers who pay in advance for a “share in the harvest”. I am also one of the co-founders of the Pioneer Valley War Tax Resisters

in Massachusetts. During the Vietnam War my husband and I began to feel that more was required of us than to be tax-refusers, though we helped out the United Farm Workers. We were enmeshed in a system that really required -requires- war. I shouldn't put it in the past tense. I knew I couldn't get out of it, but I wanted to do a little bit more than we did. And so we went to New Mexico in 1970 from Philadelphia. We lived in an adobe house in a village of 500 called “Ojo Caliente” where we had an outhouse and cooked and heated with wood. We had the most wonderful garden we've ever had and used irrigation that came from the mountains and at least we were supplying our own food. I learned to garden with a book in one hand and a hoe in the other, but we learned to love it. It was very beautiful.

I'm a city person originally. I was born in Cleveland, Ohio, never did any farming or anything like that. I was from a very poor family anyway. My mother always tried to garden a little wherever we were, but I was not at all interested in helping her. But when we lived in a community outside of Cincinnati, I did a little gardening. I wasn't too interested in it, but I did a little bit. I just happened to be living here when they started the Farmers Market in Greenfield, which is of great importance to us.

My husband had been in prison during WWII. He had



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registered, and then he walked out of camp. When he got out of prison he said that it didn't make sense to pay someone to do the killing that he wouldn't do himself. And so we became tax-refusers. We were interested in how we lived everyday, not just going out to a demonstration, not just voting, and not just writing letters. I'm not an activist in the sense that most people talk about, I'm not even sure exactly what that means. I don't go running off to Washington and this and that. It's just not my style anymore. I used to be in many more demonstrations. But I like this thing that a friend of mine in California does: she's been a tax-refuser for quite some time. And she goes to demonstrations, but instead of walking, she just stands there with a sign: "Don't like war? Then don't pay for it! Refuse to pay war-taxes! I haven't bought a bomb since 1971!" That's more my style.

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