

### **J. Quinn Brisben**

J. Quinn Brisben was active in the civil rights movement of the 1960s in both the North and the South. He took part in the Mississippi Freedom Summer of 1964, where he was briefly jailed, and in several SCLC-sponsored activities in Alabama from 1965 to 1967. He was also active in the anti-Vietnam War movement, served as a boycott captain for the United Farm Workers, and has been part of significant progressive movements of all kinds since the 1950s. He brought a caravan of seventy multiply-disabled persons to the Twentieth Anniversary March on Washington in 1983. In JUL 1990, he helped smuggle 3,000 condoms donated by ACT/UP Chicago to the Moscow Gay and Lesbian Union.

He was a high school history and social studies teacher for 32 years until his retirement in 1991, mostly in Chicago inner city schools. He served several terms as a union delegate and grievance handler and on strike committees and won awards for his innovative teaching techniques and community activism. Some of his views on education and other issues can be found in interviews with him by his friend Studs Terkel in the books *The Great Divide*, *Race, Will the Circle Be Unbroken?*, and *Hope Dies Last*.

Brisben was the 1992 nominee for President of the United States of the Socialist Party. He campaigned in 40 states and received media coverage on several dozen tv and radio stations and in over 100 newspapers and magazines. His campaign was endorsed as an educational effort by folksinger Pete Seeger, cartoonist Art Spiegelman, and Dr. Benjamin Spock. Earlier he ran for Vice-President of the US as a Socialist in 1976 and as a write-in candidate for mayor of Chicago in 1975. He joined the Socialist Party in 1959, is a frequent spokesperson for socialist issues, and was honored with a banquet at the party's centenary convention in Boulder CO in OCT 2001.

Since beginning his presidential campaign by spending three days in jail Orlando FL in OCT 1991, for participating in a disability rights demonstration, the cause of the disabled has been a chief focus of his activism, particularly the effort to re-direct a portion of medicaid funds to home attendant care and away from incarceration in nursing homes. His most recent arrest for this cause was in Washington DC in MAR 2004. It was Brisben's 14<sup>th</sup> arrest on behalf of disability rights. He was arrested 21 MAR 2003 for taking part in a Chicago antiwar demonstration, one of his 22 arrests in various social causes since 1963.

Brisben has traveled to all fifty states of the United States, to all provinces of Canada, to Russia, Belarus, and twenty other European countries, and to Egypt, Turkey, China, India, Thailand, Cambodia, Japan, Cuba, Belize, Mexico, Guatemala, Honduras, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, to Israel/Palestine as part of a Christian Peacemakers Team in MAY-JUN 1999, and re-visited Central Europe in JAN 2002 and Greece and Turkey in SEP 2003. He defied the US government to make a peace pilgrimage to Iraq in OCT-NOV 2002 with Voices in the Wilderness and Christian Peacemaker Teams. He frequently writes and lectures on his travels, and has spoken to church and political groups and to Chicago's College of Complexes on various subjects such as "Dracula and Nationalism", interrupted by official Romanian hecklers in 1995. He visited Ireland in 2004 and returned to England in JUN 2005. He went to Chile, Argentina, and Brazil in APR 2006.

Born in Enid OK in 1934, he received a bachelor's degree from the U of OK Norman in 1955 and did graduate work at the U of WI Madison. Prior to his teaching career he worked as a farm laborer, factory hand, truck and cab driver, journalist, radio announcer, and comedian. He has published articles, reviews, stories, and poems in a variety of publications including *The Nation*, *The Progressive*, *Monthly Review*, *Ragged Edge*, *Mouth*, and *The Socialist*, of which he is a contributing editor. He wrote the article on disability rights for *The New Encyclopedia of the American Left*, and contributed several items to *America in the Fifties, Sixties, and Seventies*, all published by Salem Press. His book of selected poems *The Significance of the Frontier*, was published in AUG 2002. A new poetry volume, *I Saw This*, was published in 2006. He has lectured in over 100 universities, speaks frequently at Chicago's Open University of the Left, and talks to schoolchildren on the history of the civil rights movement. He served as dramaturg for the New River Opera CO of Independence VA and spoke frequently to the Polish Arts Club of Chicago on contemporary Polish writers. He defended the *Communist Manifesto* in Chicago's Bughouse Square on its 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 1998. He makes appearances for the Socialist Party in several states each year, and spoke on 1 MAY 2004 for the Haymarket Memorial Association in Chicago at the College of Complexes. His "big history" lecture was a hit there in JUN 2005. He talked on Latin America there in SEP 2006.

He has been married since 1955 to Andrea Brisben, also a retired school teacher and negotiator for her union local and a member of the board of the housing co-operative in the predominantly African

American Chicago neighborhood where they have lived since 1966. She designs needlepoint canvases which are in over 200 shops nationwide. They have two children and three grandchildren.