

TRAVELS IN THE  
MINISTRY  
in  
Canadian Yearly Meeting

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JOURNALS

By Margaret Slavin

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## STARTING OUT

January 9, 2004: Tomorrow I step onto the bus and head for Newmarket. I'm packed. The suitcase is too heavy (but should lighten as I go.) Today I sang with the Raging Grannies and helped with leafleting to inform people about the imminent danger that our prime minister will commit us to the US Anti-Ballistic Missile Defence system without a parliamentary debate.

"We'll send two billion dollars of taxpayers' money to California companies to develop a system that won't even work," I explained to one woman, and she listened, took the leaflet, and said "Thank you."

I wrote my first Granny song for this gathering, and wonder whether the song came to me because of the new mindset now that I am starting out on this uncertain but exciting journey.

It's late and I'm tired, but I want to start out by asking you to pass the word to Quaker kids aged 13-18 that there is a call out for submissions of poetry or essays from QUIP—Quakers Uniting in Publications. The deadline is a week from tomorrow—February 10. The details are on the QUIP website  
<http://www.quaker.org/quip/index.html>

This past Sunday, my home Meeting, Peterborough Allowed Meeting, met for discussion, and the basis for our discussion was a children's story written by Dale Estey, The Elephant Talks to God. The story takes some unexpected turns, such as when the elephant gives God a whole list of questions and complaints. "The answers to all that are in the Bible," says God. (Several Friends around the room sat up straighter.) "But I can't read," says the elephant. "That's not my concern," says God, and drifts off. Well!

We agreed we're going to study this book further next month, when we can also find out how the story ends. I hope somebody emails me and fills me in. We're a very small group, and like most such we have very little vocal ministry. Why is this? We sit in silence, waiting for the irresistible nudge to speak. It doesn't come. Is there a God then? If no one speaks? Are all the answers in the Bible?

My dentist made that point to me on Wednesday, when a front filling popped out just before I got on the bus, and I had to rush off to have it filled. The dentist wondered where I was going, and I admitted the truth. He seemed really startled. "I didn't think there were any Quakers now!" He was sympathetic and interested. "They ... fled to avoid persecution?" I knew he was thinking of the Puritans, who hanged some of us, and I knew I had at most two more sentences before he started on the filling and I couldn't speak any more. I blurted out that we don't have a creed, that when things are written down they tend to become codified, that we believe God is alive and well and if we are quiet still speaks.

"Do Quakers study the Bible?" asked my dentist. "Open a little."

"Quakers sometimes study the Bible."

"Ah," he said, sticking things into my mouth. "*That's* written down."

I didn't expect to begin these journals with all this talk about the Bible. It's the fault of the elephant.

As I've made contact with small groups across the country, I've discovered that it is common for a small group to sit in silence for the full hour. Much comes, but little in the form of spoken words.

In an article Gale Wills wrote after her own travel in the ministry, I found the thought that small groups like our own are the bricks from which George Fox built the Religious Society of Friends. We are Seekers. We sense that there is a mystery and we want to acknowledge that, but the people in these small groups usually feel they are seeking and have not yet found. In the silence we open ourselves to the Mystery we agree has brought us here.

In our discussion today, Mark said that the elephant was on a journey and Ruth protested that it wasn't at all—it hadn't done anything yet, gone anywhere. We discussed journeys, and arrivals. Does anyone arrive? I offered the image of the train track. We do arrive at destinations, and we can get off. But there is always another station down the track. Even as I said it, I thought that a more uplifting metaphor was the one about mountains; another range always reveals itself when you get to the peak. Anyway, our elephant did get moving, and was last seen crashing through the jungle towards another encounter with God. The elephant had requested an audience with a pope, and as God had a number of popes, God agreed to locate one. In our discussion, we were pleased to hear that popes had made it into heaven. A good book. The publisher was Goose Lane. After a long long silence today, there was vocal ministry. We were told that two friends are setting out on pivotal journeys. One was me. The other has cancer, and things are not going well. Hard to convey that moment as the silence goes deeper, and we share the sense of being held in the Light, for a moment a gathered community.

People say, "Where are you going first?" and I say "Newmarket," and they laugh. It's just that my destination is so close (4-5 hours by bus and GO train). I'll stay with Marilyn Church. I may go out with the children in the morning on Sunday—who are two teen boys and two little girls. We could do some journal-writing, maybe, or meditate on stones and grass I could collect from around Marilyn's place and bring in. [I could? A lot of snow has come down since I wrote this first draft.] Writing from objects of nature can be more profound than it sounds, especially in a world where so much is not nature but a computer game or a cool CD.

After potluck we are planning a sharing of some sort, so I suggested that people bring in things they've made. It could be a pie or a poem. I came across this quotation from George Fox, whom I bet didn't mean a pie or a cushion when he warned against "the idle lazy mind, that would go invent and make things like a

Creator and Maker." George probably did mean a poem, and he did preach against the making of images. Early Friends were death on poetry and dancing and plays—and sports! But George liked the making of spoken words—"The intent of all speaking is to bring into the life, and to walk in, and to possess the same, and to live in and enjoy it, and to feel God's presence."

Well, George, that's how we feel now about poetry, and the making of images; this is called continuing revelation!

At Newmarket we will likely share about things we've made and invented like a Creator, how that feels, and insights that pop up about the connections we feel between this joy and walking cheerfully, possessing the earth and feeling God's presence. I'm open to whatever.

There will be a midweek group also and some people are meeting one afternoon. Marilyn has work we can look at together, left over from the committee we worked on that disbursed the gift from the anonymous donor, and also some Religious Education files. I'm new on the latter committee and Marilyn has been doing great things there for years, and so I expect to learn a lot.

Next stop is Orillia. The children are preparing stories to "present" to me! Then I am to speak about my spiritual journey to all ages—THERE is a daunting prospect—and the adults will share stories, I think of spiritual journey, like the elephant. "I gave you memory," said God. The elephant said, "I didn't forget." I may pause in Orangeville next with the Laitins, if Donald is home and not off on his own travels. They'd like to share in worship around the state of this tiny worship group and how they are led.

In Guelph I'll just attend meeting and potluck, but at least one poet in the group wants to get together and talk poetry, and about basic Quaker ways and organization, our committees and so on. I'm really looking forward to that. Now I'll skip, so as not to bore you. In several cases, someone is driving me around for visits with individual Friends. Side trips are planned to visit Friends we don't often see. A public event is planned, perhaps the workshop on Artist/ Mystic/Activist. Some plan a retreat where they can invite isolated Friends. Writers are bringing out their work. One longtime attender noted that he has never brought his poetry to Meeting, never shared with his spiritual community. How about a party? he wondered. Everybody bring something to share, or come to see and hear what others bring? I do hope they have a party. Don't you think that's a way to possess our lives, George, and live in them and enjoy them?

I'll close with the gift of a poem handed to me by Charlie Diamond of Toronto Monthly Meeting. "At the 1978 Gathering of Friends I had a conviction experience. This is how I express that experience."

*All the barriers were down  
All the doors were open  
And we walked  
Back and forth  
Between and  
among Each other's  
Light*



Journal 2 YONGE STREET MONTHLY MEETING January 17, 2004

Dream: I am standing in a field and a train goes by. One car is white, fancy, with an effect of cloth pulled around it like a gift. This car has been added by a woman who was not supposed to travel this way; it was to be on foot; but somehow this is all right.

I am with a shadowy other.

Well, it was on foot just now, hauling my new suitcase through the Toronto mush, just from the St. George subway to the Toronto Meeting House. The little wheels on my suitcase are rolling along amazingly well, and the case itself seems lighter. This may be an illusion, or else there is more this time in my backpack. I left one copy of Waging Peace with Yonge St. Meeting, and mislaid my copy of Turning Pages/Seeking Sky at the workshop yesterday (it is to be mailed to catch me again en route) but in their place I acquired two new, bigger books!

All is well. The week with Yonge St. was satisfying to me personally, with the ongoing opportunity, through three sessions with Friends and deep conversations with my hosts, to open up whatever gift has visited me and led to this travelling. And to receive in warm measure, as Friends added unexpected and stimulating ideas and stories around this whole question of how our brains work, and our souls, as we address our complex world.

What we did at Yonge St. was this: after potluck on Sunday, a number of Friends stayed to share around "what I make;" they had been alerted ahead of time, and brought paintings, poetry, photographs and a small fabric quilt -- and stories about items too big to bring--circles of love, and a pool table lamp. Friends spoke of the sense of the Spirit moving in their lives as they find their way to these creations.

Some of the presentations felt themselves like ministry. The pool table lamp took years to make, step by step, finding this piece of wood and that, seeing how they might fit together. At one point it also took a nudge: a brother spied the pieces after two years of no further progress: "Aren't you finished that yet?" Out it came again, and as the story ended we all found out about the biscuit joint. Biscuits and violets were recurring images as we wove this sharing. Violets as intruders into a peaceful, different plan, and the uncomfortable decision to root out these seemingly gentle plants, as a "cover" which was a too-pleasant disguise for a darker and less tractable truth. Another Friend spoke of letting the violets be, and giving in to their blue idea of lawn. I was presented with a haiku which I had intended to include right here, but as it has turned out, I am typing in some haste at the Meeting House in Toronto, on my way to the next stop, and the poem collection is packed. So--- next time. Also Anna, one of the children at Yonge St., wrote a story during First Day School, but it was a story she wanted to keep. Everybody has at least two years to send their poems along and for the children, their stories. So perhaps I will have another chance to have a story from Anna.

Two other sessions carried these themes along, as we shared around images of doors and of walls--the wall in Israel-Palestine kept coming into people's thoughts, probably because Donald Laitin is recently back from a time there with Fellowship of Reconciliation, and had given a talk about his experiences. He had shown Friends a poster of a Palestinian girl sitting by the wall playing a shepherd's pipe, and in the picture, the wall has begun to crumble. At the end of the week, we spent a whole day (well, 9 to 3) exploring experientially the modes inside us of artist/mystic/activist.

Yonge St. Meeting has been in place for two hundred years, and the ghosts of old divisions still walk and creak when you are there at night, and shake Friends in the daylight too. The Children of Peace broke off from the quietist Friends, and old wounds can still fester. I sat once in another bus trip beside a woman whose grandmother had been disowned by Friends (not here--somewhere in the States--but the same thing happened here) for marrying out of meeting. I think in most cases these Friends were not completely shunned, and could still attend Meeting, but they were excluded from active participation in the life of their spiritual community. I remember the way this seatmate of mine said she still thinks of the Friends. We were not nice people, in the memory of her family. There was shadow there, and pain. It was the first time I wasn't proud to be us. This week I also heard that Friends in the Newmarket area were persecuted for refusal to bear arms during the Rebellion. Quaker farmers were taxed, sometimes into bankruptcy. Many farms had to be abandoned. I have never been much interested in history; but when we sat there in the evening in the old Meeting House, sharing about letting down walls and about doors that open and doors we may decide to close, a sharp series of creaks made our heads turn. It was only the cold, rattling the old wooden joints.

One Friend there has been led to begin a work of fiction for children, reconstructing the life of a little girl who came to Canada with one of the Meeting's founding families. The writer and I had a lovely session over the voice of this little girl, emerging onto paper. I know of another such project, involving another historical reconstruction of Quaker history through the eyes of a young girl, and I hope to put these two writers in touch with one another. It would be grand to have stories for children about our own history.

Deep conversations, a chance to see that writing, and to hear and see the creative work of others in the sharing and the workshop--it was a good week.

I stayed with Marilyn Church and Philip Smith, and their son Rob. Marilyn and I had worked together, with Andrew Gage, on the committee to disburse the gift to Canadian Yearly Meeting in the past three years. Marilyn kept excellent, organized files, which faltered when her parents had a car accident and her dad was killed. Still she had the email files intact, and it was not a big job at all to go through them and pull together a record to pass on now to the new committee. The donor is willing to give a second gift, and the new committee can now begin work.

But this year I am serving on the Religious Education Committee, and Marilyn's house has been the repository of the Adult Library. Boxes of carefully catalogued books and pamphlets for easy use by anyone wishing to borrow this material. The trouble is that no one does want to borrow it. I hardly knew it existed myself, even though a list had been put into my hands and conveyed to our little Meeting, and even though there is actually a link to the catalogue through [quaker.ca](http://quaker.ca). We talked about the fact that Friends don't use this material. I came to the conclusion that it looks as if we don't need it. Many or most Friends already have access to extensive libraries, either in private homes or in Meeting Houses such as in Toronto or Ottawa or Victoria. Perhaps it is time to distribute these books to those who can make them available, and fold up the Adult Library. Maybe. I set in to cataloguing the more recent acquisitions, and fell into the romantic mode so characteristic of librarians and booksellers--isn't this true? -who keep thrusting some shiny new volume into our hands: "You must read this!" I kept getting lost in the books, instead of dutifully typing them into the Excel program on Marilyn's computer. I don't know what the answer is, but if you had to look inside them to type in the title and author, you'd get lost in them too. There's a pamphlet in there by a woman of 70, writing a prayer for her own dying. I don't mean for her funeral, but for the kind of dying she hopes for. And there are collections of stories of Friends who are out there doing things for peace or the environment, very hard to put down.

I'm on page 3, and if you have persevered this long, I'm sure this enough.

Thank you to Kelly for driving me to the bus terminal in Peterborough, now one week ago and one hour. Thank you to Anne Trudell for turning up and taking photos of my departure, and for the gift of a warm bus blanket for my knees. Thank you again to Margaret Kanost of Michigan, for the camera in a purple case for recording my travels. Thank you to the Spirit of "travelling mercies" (an expression told me two Sundays ago by Bill McMechan) for providing me with Shannon as my first seat companion. Not only did she authoritatively inform me about the outrage of Canada's policies toward foreign-trained professionals (more some other time, maybe) but she took me in hand and guided me onto the right subway, and in return I hope I helped her decide by the end of our journey that she really ought to write the book she is eminently qualified to do. We exchanged email addresses--it was a very good way to begin. And thank you formally to Marilyn and to Philip and to Rob, for consummate hospitality, including being patient with my fumbling with unfamiliar technology (Phone! Dishwasher! PC computer!) and an unfamiliar kitchen. It took me until the last night to manage to get in there in time to wash the pans.

I felt quite fragile at the beginning of the week, all my little systems disrupted and not sure how it would all go. Now I am in my home away from home, the Toronto Meeting House, and outside this little upstairs office all is still. The executive committee of Canadian Friends Service Committee met this morning and has already finished its work. I have hugged my friend Orion and discovered that she and Janet are to be married in Victoria on May 30. I am smiling as I type this. Can I change my schedule to come back from Vernon and attend the wedding? Probably not, but all the other schedules are shifting, so

who knows. The week I was to spend in Guelph will partly be spent in Kitchener, and the week I am to be in Kitchener I am not certain where I will be or what will come my way to do.

But this week, I am on my way to Simcoe-Muskoka, travelling with Margaret Ford, and then a two-day retreat is planned by Barbara and Donald Laitin in Orangeville, and then Guelph.

I wish I could close with Gordon's haiku, but it is too complicated to get to it. Here is a quote from the other book I acquired, on loan from Barbara Horvath. I'll give you the title and the author next week, but it is about wrestling with a new language to describe one's spiritual journey, when the old, "triumphalist" language feels wrong: "I know only too well the pain and suffering which can result from the false labelling of experience, or from the very absence of an adequate language to describe both the ecstatic and the dark aspects of human existence."

Selah.

### Journal 3 SIMCOE-MUSKOKA MEETING January 24/04

I'm fulfilling fantasies here, longtime dreams, coming back to the Simcoe-Muskoka meeting house and then visiting Spring Creek Farm.

The story of the Simcoe-Muskoka meeting house is known in part to many Friends. Yearly Meeting Friends trekked there from Pickering one year to work on the renovations (I personally helped cart a small mountain of debris from the front side yard to the back, sorting as we went) and at other stages groups of Young Friends arrived to fetch, carry, hammer and paint. Ed and Vivien Abbott had already moved to Orillia and joined Rowanwood, a community founded by Gordon and Janet Keith and centred around a barn--it had a floor for dancing, and the Keiths had a ministry of circle dancing they brought far and wide.

In this story, Ed is driving over a hill when he spies a tumbledown red brick house, one of the earliest in the countryside just outside Orillia, and the hair stands up on the back of his neck (I made that bit up.) He parks the car and climbs up for a look. The house is in bad shape. It will take a lot of work to bring it back. He makes his way upstairs to the attic and finds, he says, that it is "built like a barn" and that in his opinion the job can be done.

Ed shows his find to Vivien and they both feel a strong leading that this indeed is the Simcoe-Muskoka Meeting House. They track down the owner and discover that if they buy the house, they also have to buy twenty acres of land. They make an offer they consider too low but it is all they can manage, and it is accepted! A year later, they sell half the land to a developer who pays them as much as they paid for all of it, and who promises them a road. Orillia extends hydro and sewage out there about the same time. It is a succession of miracles, of way opening.

Local Friends worked very hard and it seems Ed himself was tireless. When we sat together this past Sunday after potluck and I asked, "What do you make?" Friends laughed and gestured to ceiling and walls and said, "This!" Early in their process, someone discovered a figure sketched on an upstairs beam--a man in a broad-brimmed Quaker hat. For many who took the project on, that sealed it. It may be that Friends have been here before.

Now the place is sturdy and bright, and tight against the weather too--I admire the way no breeze at all comes in around the windows, an inspiring contrast to my own drafty house. Allan Millard is now Resident Friend, and has built attractive wooden frames to stretch and hold the clear plastic that is the final guard against leaks. Alan has also built shelves and for our sharing brings a great heavy crocinole board he made for his children out of a walnut table that had split. His work is practical, not creative, Alan informs us, even as we admire the polished sheen of the wood and the smooth shining beauty of the copper dividing lines he has made. He also brings in a piece he wrote for the paper, making the case that there is no biblical basis for opposing same-sex marriage.

Joleigh Commandant, too, shares an article that was published in the paper--a memoir she wrote of a local taxi driver who died suddenly after only a ten-month connection

which had become genuine friendship. He had been patient and helpful to Joleigh as she recuperated from hip replacement surgery. Her tribute to him is posted also on the wall of the taxi company where he worked. Joleigh herself remains thoughtful about his hard life, and the damage to him from experiences as a soldier in Viet Nam.

We listen to this, and to a statement written by Dorothy Burwell about the experiences which nurture her soul. She is going to try for a poem from this, I hope for consideration for the collection I hope we can make. Others share other work they have made--intricate wall hangings with silk ribbon embroidery, a syllabus for a course in economics!, a suspense novel that is to be published in July, a tale of homemade bread. Biscuits came up again, not in the bread story but as the name for the disks needed to play crocinole.

A theme that struck me was how often Friends report that they feel the presence of parents or other elders who have died, when they set out to solve a practical problem. One Friend had a dramatic story of this, a visitation or vision that showed him how to solve a complex and seemingly impossible task. But I've felt this thing myself, brushing it off as the kind of memory that is embedded in physical actions. Now I remember the Friend at Yonge St., smoothing the little fabric quilt she is making and saying, "My spirituality includes the ancestors."

Simcoe-Muskoka has a healthy First Day School and I met six children. Three had finished stories to give me for possible sharing with other Quaker children. All present wrote a communal tale and completed coloured drawings to illustrate it. They are making a totem pole and showed me the wooden forms they are creating to nail onto it. Several are richly painted to represent, they told me, "all the colours of the world."

On Tuesday afternoon we went to Rowanwood and continued our discussion in the Abbott living room. Margaret Ford brought her beautiful translucent banner that says EARTH IS GOOD--SHARE HER GIFTS and pictures a loaf of bread and a wreath of roses. I recalled the circle dancing when I met the Keiths. Gordie is ninety and gaunt with age, but smiled and invited me to come back another time, to join the dance.

I have to skip the great unstopping conversations with Margaret Ford and my delight in finally being in her and Derek's home in Orillia. On Thursday morning they drove me down to Cookstown through swirling snow and past sculptured snowdrifts. At the Cookstown exit, we went into the fast food place as planned, and there were Donald and Barbara Laitin, bundled against the cold and right on time--in spite of the strain and stress of constant partying to celebrate their 50th anniversary! :) The driving was all right and the weather cooperating. We transferred the heavy suitcase to the Laitins' car, I hugged Margaret and Derek goodbye and by yesterday morning I was sitting up in bed at Spring Creek Farm under a Mennonite quilt, finishing the first draft of this journal. A telephone shrilled and Barbara answered it; it was 8 a.m. and Barbara had been up since 6.

Donald had promised worship-sharing, piano-playing by Barbara and potlucks and we had all three, along with sing-alongs (I loved belting out "Summertime") and further music from the Friend who brought along a guitar and a violin. I met Anne Corkett and Anne's poetry, and our evening on the second night-- last night--was enriched by

several of Anne's poems. Yesterday morning Donald took me to the home of two friends (Jeanne and Murray) who are beginning a business from their home, selling harvest tables built by Murray and photographs in wooden frames, Jeanne's specialty.

Orangeville Worship Group is in transition and so are the anchoring senior Friends, Donald and Barbara. Time has passed; Friends have moved away; the magnetic pull of Yonge St. Meeting (and the disturbing power of its history--I marvelled to see Quaker ancestors walk yet again, as history from two hundred years ago came again into our current conversation); the Laitins are deciding to move on from their beloved rambling Spring Creek Farm for an as-yet vague "downsizing"--way will open, they both seem confident.

Both evenings with these Friends, we spent time talking about Friends' ways of dealing with change and with times we feel hurt and dismayed. I found myself saying, "Let me teach you something that you already know--to begin a sentence with: "I am uncomfortable." That old Friends' expression has the modern pop-psych effect of "owning" one's discomfort, and sharing it honestly with the person concerned. It still takes courage or, in Quaker terms, faithfulness.

I also found myself quoting Arnold Ranneris, and not for the first time. I think this ought to go into the new Faith and Practice, possibly modified by Arnold into whatever words he really did say. What I remember is: "Treat everybody as if they are having a particularly hard day, and you will get it about right."

Donald Laitin brings a lifetime of Friends' practice to his slow and considered speaking. In worship last evening, he summed up much in two Quaker verbs: "to labour with someone" and -- "to be tender." William Penn said it this way: "Our life is love and peace and tenderness."

Anyway, there we were, smiling at one another around the kitchen table at Spring Creek Farm. I wonder if I come back by next year whether the table will be in a different sunny kitchen, possibly in a bungalow in Orangeville. Much can happen in a year, especially of such great transition.

This rolling Friend gathers much books. Herewith, a spotty bibliography of the books that are accreting to these travels:

Summertime, Anne Corkett -- Sorry, I have lost the name of the publisher. St. Thomas something. Wonderful poems.

Between Seasons, Anne Corkett--this I have with me; the publisher is Borealis Press. The Collected Poems of Amy Clampitt-- a gift from Anne, publisher Knopf, NY. Telling Our Stories: wrestling with a fresh language for the spiritual journey, by Alison Leonard (Darton, Longman & Todd, London)-- lent to me by Barbara Horvath. Leonard turns out to be a Friend, and I am enjoying reading a voice that is saying what I feel myself, and saying it so well.

52 Peaceful Societies, by Matthew Melko, CPRI Press, 1973--probably out of print, but it leapt out at me from a shelf at Margaret Ford's. A clear-eyed study of peaceful societies throughout history. "Peace is normal. Conflict involving physical fighting is exceptional." Complete with maps and detailed historical analysis, and directions for further study of peace instead of war.

AND A CD!!! Yonge St. Meeting has just released "*The Trial of William Penn*," a dramatic reading of an excerpt from Penn's journals. They are accepting orders @ \$20, and the proceeds go to Camp NeeKauNis.

*The Butterflies' Secret*, by a young person from Simcoe-Muskoka Meeting:

*A long time ago when there were thousands of animals and plants, butterflies came in all different colours. The animals really liked the butterflies. But the butterflies had some trouble because they had a secret. One day the butterflies had an argument. The butterflies were magical so they had an argument who was the most magical. Suddenly a fish came up to the butterflies and said, "All of you are very special and you need to tell your friends."  
The butterflies stayed in silence for a moment. Then they went to the animals and told them they were magical.  
The animals were so amazed and told the butterflies that they had an argument like theirs.*

... Trouble and darkness have their gifts:

Haiku by Gordon Thompson:

*even winter sun  
chilled by the bitter  
cold hastens to  
darkness*



Journal 4 GUELPH WORSHIP GROUP January 31, 2004

Someone at Guelph Worship Group asked me whether I am discovering any unexpected themes as I travel. Yes, I responded: it is this matter of ancestors. I don't quite know what to make of it, this way that history I believed was ancient still affects our present decisions and disagreements, or reaches in to help solve problems that we thought were too hard. My own spirituality has not, at least until now anyway, included anything at all about ancestors.

Last Saturday afternoon, Donald and Barbara Laitin deposited me at the door of the last house on a dead end street in Guelph, the one with the big yard and the rope swing (sitting on the swing seat was an ice cream ball of snow.) True to directions, the front door was unlocked, and Donald carried in the heavy suitcase, gave me a hug and told me to watch my health, given the week ahead. I think he'd looked around at the posters plastered everywhere about the World Trade Organization and Quebec City and Close Down Bay Street, and decided I would be all right but that it would be lively. A hug from Barbara and they were off.

I hung up my jacket, trundled the suitcase to the comfy couch, and followed voices to the kitchen. The young couple there were organic farmers, in for the big conference, and other members of the household as I met them turned out to be working at the same conference as volunteers. Counting those in to staff the booths, I was told there were 3200 participants. I was impressed. I think they were impressed in turn when it turned out that I was about to be whisked off to dinner with several of the more legendary organic farming families who were presenting at the conference. One of their friends had spent a recent summer working with the McQuails.

Poet Cynthia Bragg from Guelph Worship Group took me under her care and chauffeured me that evening and the next day. I had dinner at the home of Cathy and John Prescott and their F/ friends the McQuails and the Laings, along with various grown children and other friends. After dinner, we all got a preview of Tony and Fran McQuail's slides. For the first time I grasped that they farm with horses. Beautiful photographs of green fields, small growing children, chestnut work horses, the patterns of ploughing in the brown earth. We also saw the slides they had taken recently in Cuba. I was falling asleep (although it was interesting, really!) and was taken back to the comfy couch.

In the morning I knew I was in a student house when I woke to a welcoming note -- from Naava, whom I first met in the fiction-writing class I taught at Trent three years ago, but who has kept in touch through email postings about the people being held on Security Certificates and other activist stuff. A demo was held in Peterborough at one point as a direct result of my passing on one of Naava's messages. Of course, I had the wit to pass it on to Carol Winter and Joyce Barrett of Kawartha Ploughshares!--and found I was invited to participate in a photo shoot that afternoon for Breasts in Canada-- "Faces to be covered." At that time I was still with Friends, having potluck Darn..

Guelph Worship Group was hopping, with 14 there, including 2 children. I soaked in vocal ministry and afterwards presented them with their copy of Waging Peace and

asked around to see what they make. Martha Laing makes organic food. I've forgotten other replies, but was struck by a statement from Ann Noice about visiting in prisons, and the necessity of being clear with oneself about one's beliefs and identity--that otherwise it is easy to be swept into the prevailing culture of the prison and the prison's administration, and not be so effective. Ann works with a group --a movement--that rose from the work of Scott Peck. It is similar in some ways to Alternatives to Violence, and uses the Listening Circle in its process, called something else (it's somewhere here in my notes.) In general conversation, people spoke of making bridges, making community, making peace.

After potluck, two women from the group and I spent the entire afternoon talking, about Friends, committees for clearness, committees of care, about personal history and their need in the group now for opportunities to go deeper, get to know one another. A discussion group may form. At one point, halfway through the reading of a poem, when a housemate came in, we decided to move on to the other person's house and see the white amaryllis which had bloomed that day. There we heard the rest of the poem.

That evening, further intense conversation with the students, including Corrie who had taken training with Friend George Lakey and was experientially familiar with the principles of non-violence as listed by Turning the Tide. They needed the comfy couch to watch a video but I could sleep in Ivan's bed--a room to myself! I slept in, finally stumbled out into the kitchen in the morning to find a guy there I hadn't met before--it turned out to be Ivan. He'd come home mid-video to be informed that there was a Raging Granny in his bed and he would have to sleep on the comfy couch. A really nice guy and he didn't seem to mind. At least I was up in time for him to grab a couple of books --he's studying to be an engineer--before he had to get to class.

But wait. Ancestors. I had hardly arrived when I heard a touching story of friendship between two women who had discovered that many years ago, their own two mothers were also close friends. As one mother had died at 18, the connection was lost until their two daughters met as mature women. Was that a coincidence?

My brother Steve picked me up and took me to Rockwood, where I saw the woodworking shop he is creating and visited the health-product factory where my sister-in-law works. Some of the implications of the WTO for workers seem to me to play out in concrete form in the work life of these people who are dear to me. Steve and I got into a neat conversation--we don't often have a chance to talk like this without various of our six other brothers and sisters and their spouses and offspring around. Donald Laitin had given me the little Peace Pilgrim booklet and I had re-read it and decided that Steve might like it and agree with it. "Have I ever given you my spiel about religion?" he asked, and gave it. I agreed with all of it and noted how much he mentions our father and mother--my biological parents and Steve's foster parents. He was adopted into our family when he was eight, and is part Mohawk. "Have you ever checked into, like, native spirituality?" I asked when he wound down. "I don't know much about it, but I hear how important Mum and Dad are to you, and I believe it has something to do with the ancestors." That's when my brother drew out an object from the window sill, unfinished, already the result of many hours of work. A peace pipe. He's just trying it out, felt an urge to do that, try to make one, see what's involved. I felt the smoothness of the soapstone bowl under my thumb.

Steve drove me through the snow the next day to Waterloo, lugging the suitcase for me, so that I could attend Peace and Social Action Committee which met in the living room of two Friends from Kitchener Meeting.

Wow. What an active group! They are breaking off many little bits of action that they consider do-able: a peace pole to be erected somewhere in Kitchener-Waterloo; a food bank box decorated by the children; kits for the Mennonite Central Committee with school supplies, and others for people who are ill with AIDS. Contacts with an inter-faith group which led to a lively discussion about, well, pluralism and how do you teach faiths in schools. As Wendy MacPherson commented to me later on, even one's language itself contains a cultural paradigm--these issues are relatively new and are a great opportunity, but we have barely begun. I gave them the brochures we prepared in Peterborough, about the oasis of peace being created by Ugandan Friends, with their hope that we in Canadian Yearly Meeting can help them feel less abandoned by North American Friends, and intervisit and also assist the completion of several projects that will lead to improved economic stability--tanks to collect rainwater and a roof for the Meeting House which is also school.

They also spent quite a bit of time discussing the Care to Care initiative, a model for taking teams of doctors to Iraq. One of the doctors concerned may be able to come to Kitchener to explain what they are doing.

I walked with Wendy around Luther Village, the seniors' complex where she lives. It includes a daycare; when we looked in, it was naptime--curly heads and little people limp on their mats, eyes closed, cuddled under their blankets. No, I am not going to make a connection with ancestors.

That night I stayed with a non-Quaker friend of 40 years. It was hard to come back there to a house I knew so well but where my friend's vibrant wife is no longer present. My last visit was in August, for her funeral. Of course I saw her everywhere. Her husband is researching his ancestors--he's a descendant of United Empire Loyalists. So is my brother Steve, and both of them mentioned to me that one has to trace this line (and Steve's Mohawk one too) through bloodlines only. Adoptions don't count. I can't claim to be part Mohawk or part UEL just because I have this adopted brother. I feel a bit miffed about this, to tell you the truth. :)

(If that smiley I just typed in appeared on your screen as gobbledygook, all I can say is that I know that quotation marks and dashes are doing that, and probably other stuff too, and my webperson in Victoria, Vicky Vickers, has sent along an email telling me how to avoid it, but I don't want to be known coast to coast as the Quaker who disabled all her hosts' curly quotes.)

Thursday I was back in Guelph to spend good time with Cathy Prescott and then with my sister Ruth's friend (and mine) Sue Wi-Afedzi. Cathy gave me the gift of a book written by John Prescott: *In Flanders Fields: the story of John McCrae*, published by the Guelph Historical Society. I was a little startled to find a Friend writing about this war poem we all had to memorize at school, but am now intrigued to see his reference in the preface to "this bloodthirsty little poem." The rest of the opening pages

promise that I am about to find out very interesting things about poet and soldier John McCrae.

My sister's friend and host told me a story from her day at work at the University of Guelph. A student had set up a number of drums and begun drumming. Others joined in. Sue could watch and listen from far above, looking down and seeing other students hesitate, hold back, then join in. At first it was noise. In short order the lead drummer had even the hesitant ones executing complex beats. We talked about how we all have it, this creative ability--to find the beat, to write the poem, to make music, dance, mix and match colour-- and the way we have let ourselves be intimidated by someone, something, into not trusting these gifts.

Yesterday, it was back to Waterloo on the bus (my pass has come apart on its perforations, but apparently that's okay) to Wendy's again, and further Friends and a drive through blowing snow to visit with Sheldon and Barbara Rahn. A treat, as we knew one another in the late sixties, when Barbara was the head (I think) of the local YWCA and I was newly hired to facilitate the Student Christian Movement activities, and we worked together to set up a drop-in centre at the Y for street kids. If I knew the Rahns were Friends then, it meant little to me. Now we went back and told our stories: How did you come to Friends? Sheldon's story brings a whole history with it, as he discovered within himself during seminary training (Methodist) that he was a Conscientious Objector to war. It was 1940. (I was one year old, I was thinking to myself). He and some other seminarians went to Coopersville (I think--I'll verify these references when I get home)--where Friends were running a work camp on a farm. Barbara joined in, trying not to be deterred by her parents' extreme approval of the young men who had just arrived at the camp. A month later they became engaged, and in due course they and their family joined Friends.

Q: What was Sheldon Rahn doing at the moment that Barbara first knocked on his door?

A: Carving a bar of Ivory soap.

False advertising, says Barbara, as he hasn't ever done it since. But one of their daughters is a sculptor, and Sheldon has built various practical wooden stools and things around their house. Barbara makes quilts. She showed me photographs of her work, and laid out squares from the quilt in progress. I sucked in my breath at the beauty. Maybe this is what I'll do, then, after this journey, instead of finishing the stories and all--learn to make quilts. What a perfect thing to do for the people one loves.

Back through the blowing snow, to dinner and a ride here to Cambridge, where I am happily ensconced in a garret, perfect for an aging poet, and with an electric heater to keep me warm. My hosts are the age of my children, and are landlords to boot, and so our conversation so far has been alive with great hints from them about what to do about my drafty house. I am staying here with Karl Amdur and Jennifer Sanders for a whole week, hallelujah. I loved the connections this past week but I'm tired, and glad to stay put for a while. This afternoon we even went for a swim at the local Y, and I feel my soul catching up with myself. This morning I woke from a dream of a bookstore as huge as my sister-in-law's health-product warehouse, with a black cat stalking about

and a thin man picking up scribblers and pencils (no doubt to put into one of those kits the Kitchener kids are about to put together and pack.) This s/Spirit sending me along must be working overtime, trying to integrate it all, do you suppose with help from the ancestors?

Journal 5 KITCHENER MONTHLY MEETING February 8/04

Dear Friends and my sister Kathy, Kristin, Shirley in Mission, B.C., Heather, Hallie, Linda and--if this Journal isn't caught in your spam filter--my son Ted,

Happy Birthday, Ted, and may the next 40 years be as amazing as the first!

I'm a few days early on the birthday wishes, but my son has been much on my mind this week as I've been treated to challenging and insightful conversations with Jennifer Sanders and Karl Amdur, my hosts in Cambridge. Karl and son Ted knew one another twenty years ago, as young anarchists, and now they are both reading Jane Jacobs on economics. Karl --and Jennifer-- have me reading *Systems of Survival*, with its argument that societies operate under two systems, "Guardian" and "Commercial." The chief end of morality is to keep them sorted, and not mix them. I want to know, though, how they do mix, how I can live in but not of the world, keep centred and still keep open, be a solitary, guarded writer and a community-oriented activist. Say my prayers and get the dishes done.

Kitchener Monthly Meeting is facing the dilemma vividly as they respond to vandalism and other acting out from the young men in the halfway house directly adjacent to the Meeting House. A window has been broken. The probable target, if any at all, was the John Howard Society, the current tenant during the week. This Meeting has a long history of involvement with aspects of the justice system. In recent days, someone was kept from parking by a defiant young man who stood blocking a parking space (she waited; he moved). The boys go onto the Meeting House porch to have a smoke. Is this okay?

The new tenants soon to come in likely won't think so.

Some in the Meeting say: wait--it's too close; we are too vulnerable. Let us practise our social engagement a little farther from home, away from these troubled teens--have some sense. Others say: oh, let them be. Can we invite them in on a Sunday to join us for lunch?

Karl says we need to sort out Guardian from Commercial. ("Commercial," by the way, is the friendly syndrome of kindly social interchange--it arises from a society's need to exchange goods and services in order to survive.) Keep the kids off the porch.

Boundaries, I think. Friends aren't good at boundaries (maybe I mean that I'm not, haven't been.) We're good at offering long-term faithful love and support, but when the disturbance can't be healed by this and structure is needed, with limits and spiritual discipline, we often don't know what to do except close down or else get hurt.

I myself cannot believe it's sensible or helpful to encourage anybody, really, to smoke on the porch. But there's more to it than this. In Peterborough the halfway house for juvenile offenders is contracted out to a private company, and so I suppose that's true across the province. What kind of contract is the house next to the Kitchener Meeting House running under; who are the staff, and to whom is everyone accountable? These are questions that have answers.

The Meeting will speak to the staff of the home, see what can be done. It is a startlingly similar question to the discernment that Yonge St. Meeting has entered into, about their stance in the larger community and the future use of their Meeting House space, positioned as they are right next to a courthouse.

Who are the "criminals"? Are they our own brothers, husbands, sons? Canada's rate of incarceration is third, I think, among developed countries. Friends have been involved with prisons ever since we were thrown into them 400 years ago, where many of us, including some very young, died. But where do we go from here?

Kitchener Meeting, like so many others, feels stretched. They are doing a wonderful amount of thoughtful work together, given their few numbers. They are able to tap the energy of several younger (younger than age 50) members. But everyone is busy, and some are on the move. There is concerned talk (as there was in Orangeville) about "critical mass"--when a group is too small, it can hit a downward spiral in its growth. Attenders come once and drift on, not finding enough to hold them. In particular, there are not enough children for them to make Quaker friends. The Meeting has a dependable and well-run program for children once a month, on the first Sunday. This past Sunday, the theme was "being helpful" and each of the three boys present was able to tell stories of how he himself had been helpful lately. During the coming month, they and their families will gather the notebooks and other supplies (a ruler that bends!) for the school kits organized by the Mennonite Central Committee. Next month the children will stuff the bags.

The boys told a communal story (taking turns with the sentences) and made a little book of it. I have it with me, a special treat to share with other Quaker kids across the land. Here it is, minus 8-year-old Aidan's lively illustrations:

*HAPPY TIMES!*

*Steve was in Guelph and Kitchener. He went for a swim. He saw a little girl who was in the water but couldn't swim.*

*Steve thought the girl looked like a nice girl, so he decided to teach her to swim. Her name was Susie Jessica.*

*After the girl learned to swim, she thanked Steve.*

*Susie gave Steve a little seashell.*

*Steve gave Susie Jessica a book about swimming.*

*They exchanged phone numbers so they could keep in touch.*

*They were best friends forever.*

*Written by the children of Kitchener Area Meeting*

*(signed) Sawyer, Gavin, Aidan*

*about the authors: we are all Quakers and have fun!*

After potluck, adult Friends shared about creative gifts, including a discussion about the changing views towards the arts in the course of the history of Friends.

Karl and Jennifer had taken me under their wing and proceeded to make sure I was happily fed, and driven places I needed to go, all week. On Saturday they had already taken me to the Y for the first swim since I left home. That evening they made space for a searching conversation between another member of the Peace and Social Action committee and me. Michael and I both call ourselves Christians. Michael uses the traditional language more than I do, and worries about my sense that "God is in the darkness too." But we exchanged views honestly, and I wrote in my journal afterwards, in some bewilderment, that I have encountered something new, a non-rigid fundamentalist. Michael seems clear that the same Spirit moves in all and that not all will name it Jesus Christ. I think we do differ, but not as much as appeared likely when we began. And I think we both appreciated one another's courage in entering the conversation at all.

Monday I tramped through snowy fields for two hours with a hardy bunch of women who regretted their "short walk" --usually they keep going for three hours. Two was enough for me! Afterwards, I enjoyed a wide-ranging further two hours' discussion with Inez, the Friend who organizes this healthy hike.

Tuesday I wrote a complicated letter to some east coast Friends, sharing plans to date for fall travelling there. The Atlantic islands are eluding me, as both PEI and Newfoundland are postponed to the spring. But maybe I will be able to attend the New England/ Atlantic Friends gathering in the fall--we'll see.

Wednesday was lunch with poet Kristin Lord in Waterloo, and Thursday a foray to Fergus for lunch and worship with Lionel and Joyce Sharp.

Lionel and Joyce gave me a copy of a short introduction to Friends that Lionel put together for Yonge St., but could be of use to other Meetings too. He has lots more if you are interested in seeing it. They also gave me a copy of a Christmas poem they cherish by Sheldon Clark.

That evening our guests included Aidan and Gavin, two of the authors of "Happy Times!" After dinner we had a rambunctious round of telling the story of poor Psyche, lost in the dark woods, who faced her fears in the form of an alien with a mouth in his belly and big green feet, who not only became her friend but provided her with a home and direction--a nice concrete walkway, easy to shovel off (mouth in belly thanks to Aidan; gross home in said mouth thanks to Gavin; concrete walkway thanks to Karl).

There Psyche sits with her snow cleared, having worked out one system of survival. She reached out to the alien, accepted unlikely treasure, and made a friend.

Now I need to think about all this week of ideas. It's not just a matter of the two economic systems of survival, is it-- supposing Jane Jacobs is onto something, and likely she is. It's about growing our Meetings--a proposal came in today from Sheldon Rahn, suggesting an experiment of putting money into paid staff at the level of the Monthly Meeting. He dreams of 100 families in a "Quaker-Friendly organization." Is that a way to turn around the downward spiral and tilt it the other direction? Numbers don't matter, Friends are fast to tell you, and I agree. But people do. For me and for all of us still hanging in, the Friends' community is a treasure most of us would really like to



share with people who are out there floundering around, unsure where to go with the leadings of spirit which keep saying--not there--not there--but SOMEWHERE.

Lionel Sharp told me that he flew RAF in the Second World War and toward the end, he asked himself why--why was he doing this. The given reasons no longer made sense, and he felt certain the war had done no good. He knew war was wrong and he knew he would never fight again. Lionel said he hadn't known what to do about his spiritual journey, where to go with it. His doctor was Fritz Hertzberg, and Fritz and Kathleen became friends. Joyce and Lionel attended Meeting for thirty years before they sat down and had a good talk with themselves and applied for membership in the Religious Society of Friends.

We sat in silence together today in their home in Fergus, looking out at Joyce's garden, deep in snow.

It's never going to be a popular thing, I suppose, opposing war and stitching together community, sharing silent acknowledgement of Mystery.

But why not?

Journal 6 LUCKNOW WORSHIP GROUP February 13/04

February 11, 2004: I am back from a walk along snowmobile paths and a time of meditation and journalling. I've come to rest this week in the countryside near Wingham, in a hand built timber frame house built and lived in by Brent and Carol Bowyer. In the evening I have Quakerly company in the very best sense as Brent and Carol make me welcome here and share their lives and thoughts. During the day there is the thunk and crack of the woodstove, reminding me it's time to poke up the fire and put on another log. I'm impressed by how long a piece of wood lasts, though, before the flames finish turning it into warmth.

These are good folk and a good place to be for these few days. The notion of mixing art with spiritual journey is close to the heart of this family's life together, I gather, from our conversations but also from the books on the shelves and my growing understanding of the interests of their four children, now all grown and launched. The plan is that one of these evenings I may speak by telephone with Teresa, who is studying Fine Arts in Montreal, and possibly also with Christopher, whose work and art is landscaping and whose poem "Spirits of Maitland River," has gone into the folder with my growing collection of Friendly poetry.

I've let myself fall into the first volume of William Horwood's Duncton Chronicles, an allegory Brent loves and believes needs to be more widely known among Friends. So now my head is filled with the murmurs of a community of moles who have given in to an evil and violent government and need to rediscover the power of the Stone, with its centre of light. Well, you may have to read it but I am far enough along now to recommend that you do. Brent has written a review which may come past you with more information. Meanwhile, it feels right to me to be lost in a fantasy during this week inside a house which eight years ago was a mere dream, and in a snow-covered countryside which I am not the first person to notice suggests magic.

One night we had dinner at Gordon Chuddick's hand built house, with his son Elias and Tony McQuail. A relaxed evening, which included ineffective attempts to help Elias with information he needed for a grade 9 project (describe the landforms of Terra Nova Provincial Park...) and more knowledgeable remarks about the future of electric power. Tony and Fran have photovoltaic cells at their farm and "it works!" I explained about my drafty house and got more advice. Wind power was mentioned (not for my house, not this year) —but primarily the fact that electric energy can be produced from the sun and from wood as well as from water and wind, and that the billions that have been poured into the nuclear power plants could have moved us by now into a much more workable scenario. The main solution is conservation. It's not hard for me to agree with that: the Green-Up assessment I had done on my own house revealed total leakage equal to an opening over a foot square—big enough, they said, for a dog to jump back and forth through—all winter. These people I sat with have devoted their lives to showing and telling that we can still take steps to avoid ecological disaster. Give me one more year of ownership of my house and there'll be no cold air blowing in at my windows and doors either. But I'm quite a few steps yet from photovoltaic cells.

On one level, the seminar on economics that began last week has continued with scarcely a break. My suitcase and I were transferred from Karl and Jennifer's car to that

of Gordon Chuddick of Lucknow Worship Group, who had motored down to Guelph after a day of teaching school, to pick up his elder son, Ethan, who is studying Computer Engineering at the university. I gave the secret Quaker handshake to Ethan and Gord, the secret Quaker hug to Jennifer and Karl, and the economics discussion rolled on. Soon we were north in a landscape of white fields, black strokes of fence lines rising and falling across dunes of snow. Across the fields, stark lines of farmhouses and barns.

I'm glad I came here in winter, although everybody agrees I took a chance, and still might get snowed in before the end of the week. CHUNKS of snow sit on the trees, here and there dipping down a toe like a three-toed sloth trying to ooze back onto the branch. The prediction as we drove here was for freezing rain, but we were lucky and the highway stayed clear.

I explained to Gord and Ethan about Jane Jacobs' two systems of survival, as far as I understand it thus far. Gord had read Jacobs' earlier work about the ecology of cities and had opinions about that. He has taught ecology, and is certain that no city neighbourhood can approximate the complexity of ecological systems in nature. For one thing, he pointed out, cities are dependent upon agriculture. He gestured to the fields flowing by on either side of the highway. Beautiful, yes, but not all that long ago these fields were forest. Agriculture itself, no matter how practised, may not be sustainable. We were talking large concepts here, zooming down the highway in an unsustainable car. Ethan in the front seat, computer exams ahead the following week, was silent. I remembered the comment in my favourite book on mythology, to the effect that as long as humankind was hunters and gatherers, we listened all the time to the telltale signs and signals from plants, weather and animals. Once we began to hoard seed and sow it, the natural world fell silent, the animals no longer speak. Hmmm.

The books that changed Gordon's thinking are novels, perhaps surprising in a man with a lifetime of working with his hands (artist, blacksmith, teacher of welding and industrial design). The novels are by Daniel Quinn, beginning with one called Ishmael. The latest one is *Beyond Civilization* (I think), a response to the question of what vision can replace agriculture--and cities.

We turned down country roads and then into the Chuddick lane to let Ethan out, and I saw a lilac-coloured house of a neat and attractive design, and the barn where they lived while they built the house. From there it was a short drive to another lane, barn, house, where the Bowyers live. A grey cat scurried across our paths, reminding me of my cat, but I didn't see it again--it was a barn cat. I walked into a house of books, and have been reading ever since. Books fill an end wall--and many other nooks--lined up on wooden shelves built in under wooden beams and struts and posts. The ceilings and the smooth floors are white ash, the beams pine. All stained with linseed oil which gives the whole house a warm ruddy glow.

In a trice, Carol had shown me a photograph of their children and introduced me to each of them. I realized that I met their son Don when he was Associate Resident Friend at Toronto Meeting House. Their youngest, Marcus, is studying to become a police officer, and this is the second Quaker offspring I've heard of so far who is following this profession. As the mother of children who were arrested many times at demonstrations,

I'm really grateful that some of our police officers are raised in homes that believe in non-violence. There are not many Friends who, if push comes to actual shove, will not call the police.

Brent teaches woodworking when he can, and in the past loved to teach industrial design, until those courses were cut back. Now he teaches lively grade fours, and Carol works as a companion and helper to the elderly and ill, in their homes. We talk about people we both know, some of them Friends, who in their eighties and nineties have moved OUT of seniors' facilities and back into homes of their own. Is it a trend?

The Bowyers tell me that when I see the Laings' house in Sparta, I will recognize the original of this house plan--the Bowyers borrowed it. I could write a poem here, maybe, about dark knots and wood grain patterns that grew in the lives of the trees that frame this house. The chair I sat in while I drafted this is wood too, but a cushioned, comfortable easy chair. There's a wooden rocking chair, solid wood coffee table, wooden desk, square box of a footstool made of wood with a cushion on top. Things we make with our hands. Sitting amidst all this wood, heated by a log I rolled in myself, first poking up the live ashes, I felt a bit of a fraud with my flimsy poems and my internet journals. Brent and Carol were out working and I was working too, making marks on a page.

Sunday was discussion day with Lucknow Worship Group, and in the flow of good conversation (the continuing seminar) I missed the fact that this group has discussion once a month INSTEAD of Meeting for Worship. The way it turned out was great from my viewpoint and as far as I know from theirs. I have seldom felt so centred and gathered as we first sang (they always do this) for half an hour, Jeanette accompanying us on the violin, and then moved into silent worship, with 3-year-old Karsten wandering in and out to collect hugs from Dad and to hand out large bright oranges to selected others, then some improvised harp music from Jeanette, some vocal ministry, the return of the children (and of Brent, who had been reading them a story) and the holding of hands, and then sharing about what they make. Jim had brought a wooden music stand, one of twenty he has made for various folk, Janet brought thoughts about the diversion of creative energies into homemaking and the raising of children, and Roger, who is in the midst of it with work and three young kids, shared similar thoughts and concerns. There are times when our creative energies do have to go to survival and loving care. There are times when the best we can do is to keep the memory and intention alive, of time to oneself, quiet time, time to nourish one's own soul. As in every sharing so far, someone spoke of "getting lost" in creative work, of losing one's sense of time.

I'm at that place, actually in Duncton Wood. Two moles follow a leading or call to the Stillstone of light, and a state of loving grace. There they stay, losing track of time, until //<sup>1</sup>... just as they had moved with one accord on their journey there, so they simultaneously began to be restless....They began to feel the love they had touched slipping away..., fleeing to some world they could not reach, whereas, in truth, it was they who were fleeing away from it as they returned to the world of time and worry, fears and fretting heaviness."

At Meeting we stayed, I felt, a beautiful long time at the centre. Brent showed us a wooden bowl he had turned which included worm holes. Carol had to work that day, but we brought one of the quilts she made for her children as they went away. She intuitively sought out scraps of cloth, design and colours to suit each personality. This was Don's, and I expect that the reason he doesn't have it with him is that he's in a warm place down south. Roger and Jeanette's two daughters had written stories, but waited until everyone had gone except me to bring them out. I stayed overnight, to enjoy the girls' stories and Karsten's openness and energy. I had forgotten how complicated parenting is when all your children are bright and beautiful, and it was good to be close to it again for a while. Roger went out and located a DVD he likes which has sections on themes such as God and Money and Inspiration. We adults watched most of it in the evening, two of the sections while cuddled on the sofa with the two girls before they went to bed. The DVD is *One Giant Leap*, and features interviews and amazing music from around the whole world, all recorded *in situ* on a laptop. Many of the musicians on it spoke of the sense of the divine flowing through them along with the music. They said it many ways. They spoke too of the sense of Spirit within oneself. One chap from East India said he wondered one day "Who is the guy who is awake while I am asleep?" Clearly, he said, there is such a guy, monitoring heartbeat and breath (and dreaming) while he sleeps. He told of speaking with this fellow until gradually "he" and "the guy" merged into a sense of connection.

I'm here to tell you that folks get up at 6 a.m. and by 9 are at work, with the children at school and the child seat moved into the other car and breakfast and a blur of other tasks smoothly done, including in this case helping the travelling Friend to post her latest journal on the internet site. Roger deposited me back here at the timber frame house (the journey was from Clinton to Wingham, stopping to pick up and let out two other carpoolers) before 8:30 a.m. We talked some about teaching. I babbled on about the classes I'd taught at Quinte Secondary School 34 years ago, and our Friend paid me the courtesy of saying my ideas might still have some relevance. I was sharply aware of the fact that when I taught high school it was pre-computer, pre-CD, and that when I held the box that *One Giant Leap* came in, that was the first time I'd actually seen and held a DVD.

That morning I curled up in the easy chair in the Bowyers' living room, drafted all this and still it wasn't noon. Last Saturday night seems a long time ago, but that night was lovely dinner with Lucknow Friends, John and Wendy and their daughters Kate and Angelica. I look forward to seeing Wendy again this coming Saturday morning, when I can hitch a ride to London, where she takes the girls to have lessons in Chinese. Just another dream going on here in the snowy fields. For Thursday, Carol has invited me to go with her to one of the series on mythology as presented by Joseph Campbell.

I know that sometimes the economics around here can be harsh, in part because, especially for city dwellers missing a sense of community and ecology, this countryside is such a place of dreams. Right now for me it feels the right place; I am feeling held by a group that immediately welcomed the idea of this visit, so involved are they all in their own versions of spiritual journey and creative vision. The time here has freed me to revisit some dreams of my own and take time to hold them in the Light. It includes this whole leading, this two-year journey. How to keep testing the leading? Pay attention, comes back as a response. Today I went for another walk down the snowmobile

trails. I am struck by the fact that at a crossroads, two well-ploughed roads end abruptly in NO WINTER MAINTENANCE PAST THIS POINT and a wall of snow! I was frying my five-part prayer and was still in the first part: confession. My thoughts were about limitations, mainly my own. A yellow aspen leaf lay, fresh fallen, in the tread marks of a snowmobile. Delicate, translucent, perfect in its veins and shape. If it stays there, it will be crushed. But even if a breeze turns it and lifts it further on, it definitely has no more future as a green leaf. What's it doing at all? Giving me pleasure, for what that is worth. Further on, I am stopped by the rattle of a woodpecker. I scan the trees, unable to see the bird, even though it ought to be so obvious. Then I do see it, right above me. It is pecking at a narrow limb; if it goes right through--do they? --it will cut off its own perch. Perhaps it intuits on my criticism, because it hops around and pecks facing the other way--that's much better! I forgot just then, standing on the road--paying attention, I thought--that it doesn't matter if the branch falls from under a bird's feet. It can fly.

Journal 7 COLDSTREAM MONTHLY MEETING February 19, 2004

Here is a poem written last week by Cindy Walters of Coldstream Meeting. Its title may be:

*I woke up this morning with a poem...*

*I sit in quiet  
...waiting*

*Waves of light flow  
...washing*

*Darkness and stones of pain  
...tumbling*

*Sand runs through my fingers  
...pouring*

*Water fills my footprints  
...nothing*

Today I stumbled into the bitter pain that followed from a decision I made with others many years ago, when we could not become clear to take a marriage under our care. Right now I am feeling shaken. Of the three times that I have personally been involved in difficult and painful matters with Friends, two of them were over marriage.

Tony and Fran McQuail offer weekends for couples, and Ministry & Counsels everywhere respond when it is brought to them that a marriage is in trouble. But when a couple comes to us to seek clearness for marriage, perhaps we should stop right there--at the clearness. Clearness is hard enough. Let the marriage find its own way to its care. I looked at the new brown Organization & Procedure, and it almost says that. Perhaps its not the discipline that needs changing but our expectations or the words: " married under the care of the Meeting."

None of which refers to the current life of Coldstream Monthly Meeting, where I have been all week, and where the poems at the beginning and end of this journal were written. I wish every Canadian Friend and maybe some of the beleaguered Friends from the U.S., too, could spend a week like this one, in a meeting steeped in living history, with Friends born and raised in its tradition and still living only a few roads over the fields from Quaker Lane.

In the home of Carl and Marilyn Thomas, I've been looking through scrapbooks prepared for the Coldstream Sesquicentennial. The rustle of the long skirts worn by the Quaker women and the twinkle in the eyes of the Quaker men under their broad-brimmed hats feel like the sounds and sights from this past weekend, when we stood on the same porch, moved through the same doors, sat on the same narrow benches.

Chuck Fager was here from Quaker House in Fayetteville, N.C., where he coordinates counselling for U.S. soldiers who want out of the military and need help. One such has come to Canada in past weeks with his wife and child, seeking refuge. He may be the first of a new wave of refugee claimants and eventually draft resisters. The rules have changed since the Viet Nam war, and the penalties for both the refugees and for those who shelter them are expected to be more punitive.

In the opening moments of his presentation, Chuck Fager painted a dark picture indeed of the aims of the current U.S. administration and of the loss of freedom that has already taken place. We know about those people held here in Canada under Security Certificates but may forget that in the States things are even more grim. Fager told us of one group that had had its computers and files seized without any charges, and of the way the process into the courts was delayed until the group collapsed. The case had made him aware that this could happen to any Friends' group as well; he values the freestanding organization of Quaker House, which is funded by Friends but is not attached to other Quaker entities. He wishes for many more such projects, structured the same way, so that if one is closed down, the others still would survive. He called on us to set up, say, twenty of them here in Canada, each one taking on some long-term goal, with paid staff. (I heard an echo of the proposal now circulating in Kitchener Meeting, and wondered whether there is some basis for looking at such projects at the level of the Half-Yearly Meeting.)

Chuck Fager was candid about the effect on his thinking from living where he does, right next to the U.S. military base of Fort Bragg. He feels he is caught in a war and "war is hell." This writer who is known for his collections of Quaker humour and engaging essays on Quaker themes, announced that at present he cannot tell jokes, cannot see what is funny about the New American Century, the U.S. intention to Rule the World.

So it was not a complete surprise-but still a shock-when he proposed we begin now the 100-year War of the Lamb, taking the term from the Bible and ancient Friends, and our cue from the U.S. military. Like them, we should plan ahead, train vigorously, and secure our base. The military are very good at what they do, he stated, and here some Friends rolled their eyes, thinking of the continuing carnage in Iraq. Like many others, I squirmed at the metaphor of war. I felt I knew what Janet Hawksley of Victoria MM would have to say about this, she who stops us from even using the word "march." (If it's for peace, it's a "walk.") I bought his book, *A Quaker Declaration of War* (Kimo, 2003), and found that the gist of what he had to say made sense to me.

As Coldstream member George Webb summed it up in the discussion after Meeting on Sunday, Fager was saying, "We have a job to do." We were challenged to get clear about our long-term goals, to stop being buffeted about and distracted by issues raised by the media, to keep focused and keep going. To accept that it will take 100 years. He invoked the ghost of Lucretia Mott, who wrote little or nothing about electoral process but worked tirelessly for equality for women. Major social change does come about, but only after focused, long-term, faithful attention.

He suggested three long-term goals, but Canadian Quakers are likely to think of different ones. His were: 1) bring the U.S. back to being a law-abiding nation; 2)



encourage reconciliation and trust among the three monotheistic religions of Christianity, Islam and Judaism; 3) let Friends become major players for peace.

In the gatherings throughout this week at Coldstream, the impact of these ideas returned, weaving through our conversations about creativity.

At one point, as we mused about creativity and social change, I heard about a public event held at the Coldstream Meeting House as part of the larger campaign against landmines. A dinner was prepared with dishes from the countries most infested by landmines--Afghani food, Cambodian cuisine. On the floor were paper circles reading "Don't Pick Me Up."

I heard about this over dinner at the home of Svetlana MacDonald, a lawyer who with husband Ross has raised four handsome sons (according to the framed photo on the wall.) Among us was young mother and writer Cindy Walters and her son Aaron, two, self-contained, with a round face and innocent gaze. At the landmine dinner, Aaron had gone around picking up the paper circles. On the other side they read "Boom!"

This image of the beloved child, picking up what children will, clearly was etched on everyone's mind and heart.

I think I see a connection between Chuck's call to us to find our true leadings and to stay faithful to them, with long-term goals, and my own sense that if Friends can speak of our deep passions for writing, for poetry, music, dance or making things with fabric or wood or paint, that we come closer to what has moved and led us, beyond the sway of the latest media craze or fad or even of the latest flood of emails from the peace movement. And then, in a creative flash we cannot always control, comes the image or other perception that effects indelible change.

Here is the bit I found most provocative: if I heard him right, Chuck Fager said this: if you think you are concerned about the Middle East and you have not learned Arabic or visited there, think again. Look at what you HAVE done--where you have already taken steps--signed up for a course, made a friendship, taken a journey. What is calling you? Get clear about this and then check it against the long-term goals discerned by you and the Society of Friends. (Subject to continuing revelation, I expect). Focus and move forward.

Well, I think that helps.

What else happened this week? Further walks in the snow with Marilyn and Carl, including the historical tour down Quaker Lane. Looking into the photographed faces of those Quaker men and women of not so long ago, so recently sitting on the benches of Coldstream Meeting House. Delighting in the pictures of Quaker children, who look bright-eyed and unburdened by Quaker restraints. Just like Quaker kids today, in my experience at our gatherings. A series of gatherings over morning tea, dinner and dinner again, lunch, afternoon tea and again dinner. At each gathering, a few Friends, bringing paintings, reservations, good things to eat, quilts, poetry and tales of housebuilding and gardens. I met one Young Friend, Matthew, who told me about a play his theatre class takes next week into the schools. They've written it themselves, if I

have this right, and it portrays violence. They act it twice, once with the violent scenario and then a second time when students can interrupt, come onstage and "fix" the story line. Then they go on until interrupted again--an interactive, vivid lesson in alternatives to violence. Matthew called it "forum theatre."

At week's end I stayed with Mary Petrie, who started the week last Saturday when she met me in the parking lot of the school where Katie and Angelica from Lucknow go for their Chinese lessons (we had shouted Chinese phrases in the car, following the rote lessons on tape, much of the way down the highway to London) and drove me to the retreat with Chuck Fager.

Long-term plans: My preferred name for the Lamb's War is the Flowering of the Blessed Community. Listening to these Friends spend their creative time in their gardens, I want this metaphor that leaves me room to grow. I do recognize the need for discipline, for right ordering, but also for flexibility as we see what is growing and what must be pruned and all the organic needs of the different kinds of people who are attracted to our communities. Let our roots go deep, intertwined like those violets in the poem from the Friend at Yonge St. Meeting. When you're here at Coldstream, Quaker roots are visible, still walking around in descendants, and in that quiet "Yes" or "No" as a Friend nudges the conversation into accuracy, into plain speech. The meeting here feels healthy and loving and committed, and happy to have found themselves here. The Meeting House, incredibly, is left unlocked.

Coming back to marriage for a moment, another thing that happened this week was talking with Marilyn and Carl about the end of my own marriage, the way our meeting handled it, some insights I came to last week, and all the ambiguities. Maybe when a meeting takes a marriage under its care, it should just mean the wedding itself, the meeting where the couple declare the commitment they feel led into, before all those assembled. Let us take under our care the provision of a scroll and of plates of squares and cakes. Let the rest fall under existing pastoral concerns, the fumbling care we offer one another anyway in any attempt at community.

On my last evening with Marilyn and Carl, I took a photo of them dressed up to go dancing, Marilyn in a skirt as long as her Quaker ancestors. The square dancing and round dancing they enjoy so much takes them out to another discipline, learning the steps, and as time has passed, another community. Not the same as Friends, but nevertheless with care towards one another through life's transitions.

This week's bibliography:

Would You Believe? By Tom Harpur (McClelland and Stewart, 1996) and also For Christ's Sake!--which keeps turning up in the homes I am visiting.

Without Apology: the heroes, the heritage and the hope of liberal Quakerism. Chuck Fager (Kimo Press, 2002) "a theological treatise complete with jokes"

The Harlot's Bible & Other Quaker Essays. Chuck Fager (Kimo, 2003) with a chapter on "Divorce as a Spiritual Passage"

Spinning Tales/Weaving Hope: stories of peace, justice and the environment (New Society Publishers, Gabriola Is., B.C., 1992)--looks great for First Day School (Apologies to those Friends who feel that "First Day" is unnecessary Quaker jargon!)

This week's quote: from Telling Our Stories, Alison Leonard, on finding words for spiritual experience:

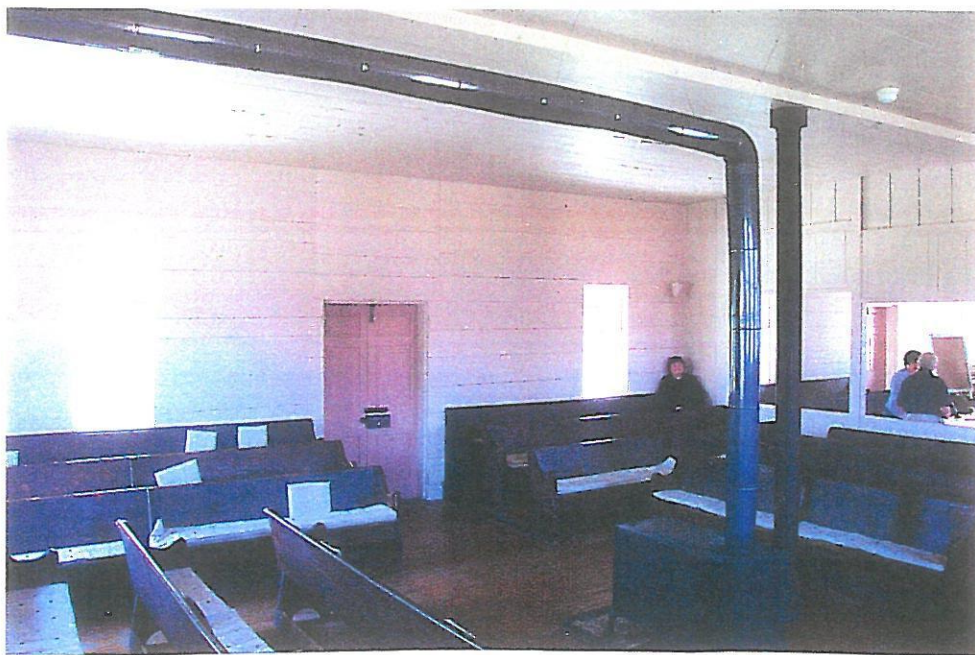
"I might want to say, 'I saw a tree, and I knew it was that tree, and I wanted to hug it.' What? I can't say THAT. What shall I say? I'll say: 'We ought to feel at one with Nature; in our day and age, the environmental problems are such that we must develop a spiritual awareness of ecology.' .. It takes all my courage to own my experience, to accept it as real, however strange or difficult it is to explain.." pp 91-92.

This week's poem, written in a workshop year before last, led by Caroline Balderston Parry:

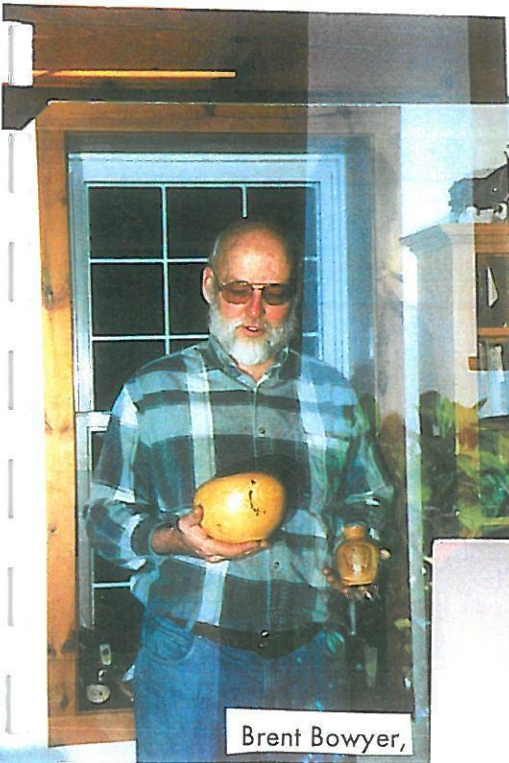
*Breathing*, by Tina Downham

*The important thing about breathing is that it's easy!  
It makes good things happen.  
It doesn't cost anything.  
You can do it anywhere.  
You don't have to learn it.  
It is true that it keeps you alive  
But the important thing about breathing is that it's easy!*



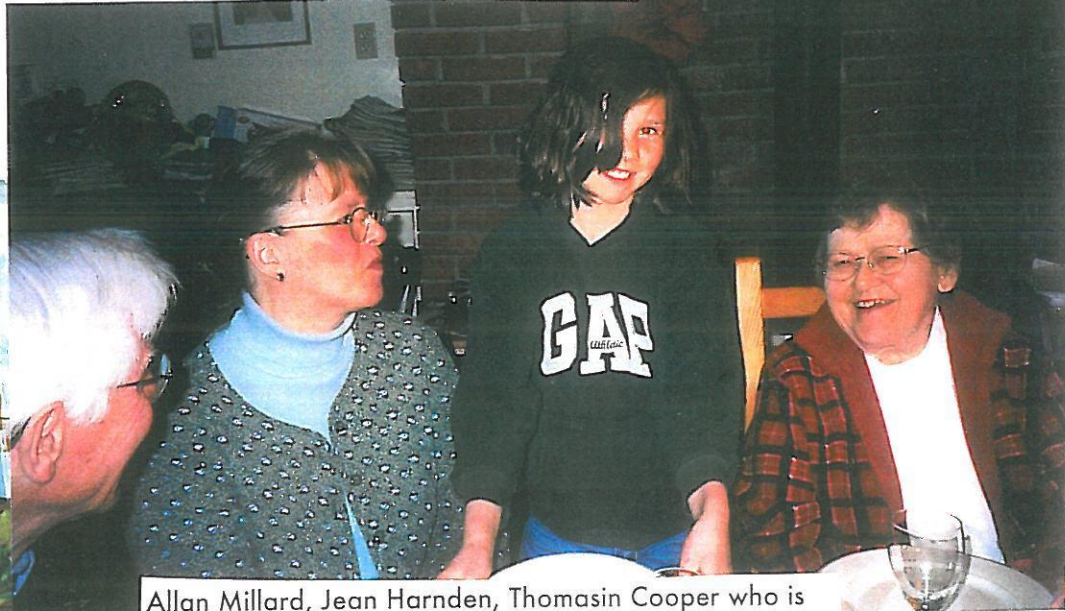


Inside Yonge St. Meeting House, Newmarket, ON. Sue Starr is the one in the corner.



Brent Bowyer,

Lucknow Worship Group, ON,  
with and inside  
creations made of wood.  
Feb./04



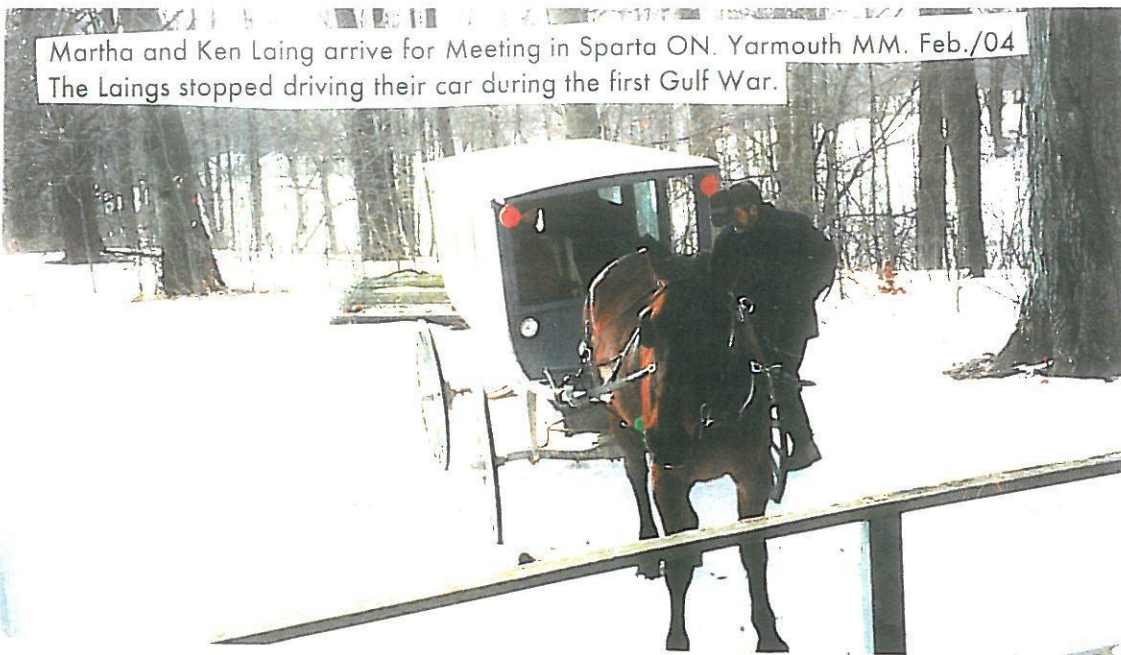
Allan Millard, Jean Harnden, Thomasin Cooper who is Margaret Clare Ford's granddaughter, Dorothy Burwell.  
Simcoe-Muskoka Meeting, Orillia, Ontario. Return visit, March, 2005.



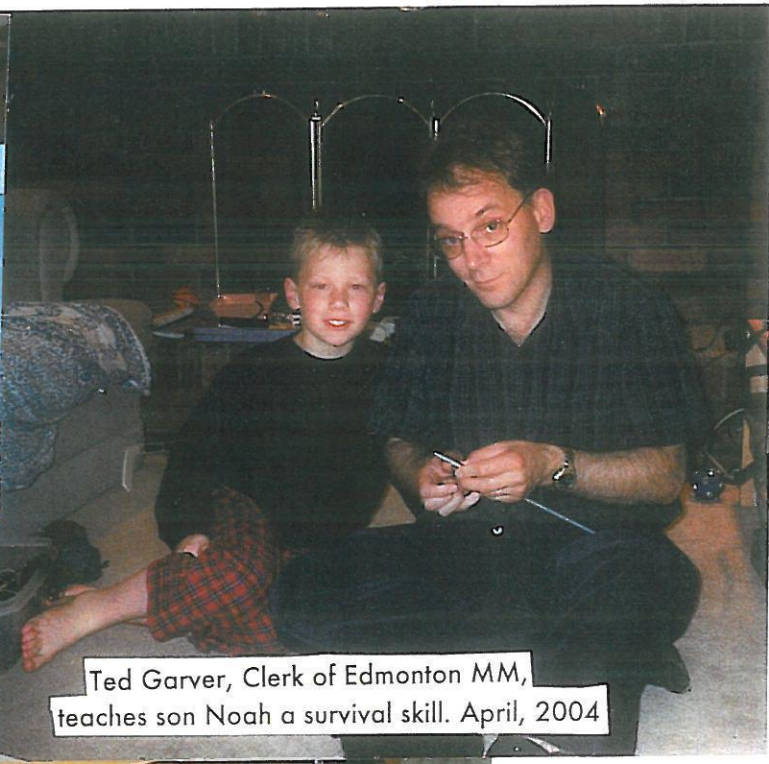
Musical evening at the Laitins, Orangeville Worship Group, Ontario. Ann Corbett, Elizabeth Horvath, MS, Donald Laitin, Barbara Laitin, Murray Roe January, 2004



Martha and Ken Laing arrive for Meeting in Sparta ON. Yarmouth MM. Feb./04  
The Laings stopped driving their car during the first Gulf War.



Pelham Executive, St. Catharines, ON. RoseMarie Cipryk,  
Maria Hopkins, Maxine Kaufmann-Lacusta. March/04



Ted Garver, Clerk of Edmonton MM,  
teaches son Noah a survival skill. April, 2004



Winnipeg Friends chat after Meeting. April, 2004

## Journal 8 YARMOUTH MONTHLY MEETING February 26/04

I'm at Yarmouth Monthly Meeting, so named because settlers from the east coast brought the name of Yarmouth with them, and Friends settled and built their Meeting House in Yarmouth County, on another Quaker Lane. I'm typing away in the basement of Kathy and Ed Wilson, where there is a super computer set-up. Breakfast will be ready upstairs once this revision and review is completed, and so I'm motivated! These lovely folk are then going to drive me to London to catch the bus to Friends at Pelham Executive, and so the first section of these travels is coming close to its end. At this point, ideas and images from past weeks crowd in, and the journal this time will keep slipping back to last week at Coldstream too--this is appropriate, as they are sister meetings. The Willsons were married 50 years ago in the Coldstream Meeting House, and still hold dual membership in both Meetings.

Inevitably in these journals, much gets missed. I hope they will serve to deepen our understanding of one another, and to raise a few ideas as I encounter them that may be of interest to some of us. This week for me has had a particular theme, and I imagine what follows as a little essay in a way, showing and telling an idea that formed this week. In the initial flush of enthusiasm for it, I saw it as THE way to grow our meetings, THE main way to reach out to everybody who is really a Friend but doesn't know it yet, and probably THE way to save the world. I've calmed down a bit, but still want to share this with you!

First, though, I need to catch up a bit and say that both these weeks, both here and at Coldstream, were prefaced with a jewel of an overnight stay, embedded at the start of a week that then flowed differently. Last week it was an overnight stay with Kay and Dereck Collins-Thompson, and the opportunity to view Kay's vibrant work with fabric, which transformed my understanding of what this can mean. Kay's quilts and other work has entered shows and has won awards, and glows from the walls in their home. The most cherished part of that visit was an evening exchanging poetry, one of several such that have happened on this trip, which feel almost too intimate to comment upon.

Similarly at the end of last week was the very special visit to view the paintings of Jean Hay, other visual work which will live in my memory and my private journals, but which did not find its way into this public reminiscence about my week. So much happens, and I thank all of you for all of it.

This week might have been all about organic farming, since it began with another jewel of an overnight in the home of Ken and Martha Laing, eating food that is almost all homegrown and sleeping again in a hand built timber frame house, the original of the one I visited in Lucknow. I slept in the same bedroom, but it wasn't the same bedroom.... I looked out of the window in the morning and a horse was watching.... And then Martha invited me to spend the day in "the cabin," and I am very glad I accepted. In that space of retreat, I finally drafted a new story towards the collection I am slowly writing, the first "private" creative work of these weeks. Then I refilled the woodbox, visited the outhouse one more time and made my way back to the house past the barns and sheds housing horses, chickens and two happy pigs.

The rest of the week has been spent at the home of Mary Edgar and two young organic farmers, Ian and Jocelyn, ending up for the last night at the Willsons. Yarmouth Monthly Meeting, and in particular Mary Edgar's home, is on the very shores of Lake Erie. At the moment its white ice is receding quickly, leaving beyond it an expanding shimmer of blue to the very horizon. I would think I was on Dallas Road in Victoria, except there is still snow on the ground, and no mountains across the strait. It's a freshwater sea with not an island or a vessel or farther shore in sight. Over there is not Japan or Seattle, but Pennsylvania. I did sit on the bench that Mary has set up above that drop off to the water, and I did miss Victoria. Shadow, the black Lab-type friendly dog who lives here was off hunting mice and he and I wended our way back to the house that day just in time to meet Mary, who'd gone out on an errand.

We parked Shadow and without taking our jackets off slipped into Sparta, where I bought fudge and checked out Christine Lundy's bookstore, which was closed on winter hours, (but on Friday I was able to get in, and buy Charlotte Gray's book about Susannah Moodie and Catharine Parr Traill). I also checked out the complicated sign in front of the city hall. It has a map of the historical sites, mostly Quaker ones, with drawings of some of them. In the fudge and candle store we picked up a copy of the Sparta historical tour, written by Jane Zavitz-Bond, and I learned that in 1839 Joshua Doan was hanged for treason, and is buried here in the Sparta cemetery. Now I have on loan from Jane a precious copy of Joshua Doan by Gladys Francis Lewis (Bouregy and Curl, 1956) and can continue my practice of taking in Friends' history through fiction. I've been warned that some names are changed because Gladys preferred the sound of the one that is historically incorrect.

Mary Petrie of Coldstream Meeting drove me here last Sunday to the Yarmouth Meeting House, a historic building that is pictured on the sign I saw in Sparta. We brought along Katie, the golden retriever who shares Mary's address (along with Misha the cat, whom we left behind in charge of the butter). Katie ran joyfully around outside the Meeting House until Martha and Ken Laing trotted up the lane in their buggy, drawn by Mandy the horse. Katie had never seen a horse before and was quickly bundled back into the station wagon to wait until after meeting. She had other dog adventures that day, but I had better get back to the people.

On the wall of the Meeting House, where it can be read during meeting as a useful reminder, is a statement from Friends General Conference:

*We meet in a great task when we meet in worship, no less than to realize the Divine Presence and to create an atmosphere in which that Presence and Power can touch us into fuller life.*

*Once we remember this, we cannot but approach the occasion with reverent humility and the desire that nothing on our part may hinder or disturb. It is something holy and wonderful we are trying to build up together--the consciousness of the Presence with us here and the reality of communion with God.*

In the Meeting House we found Jocelyn and Ian hastily stoking the woodstove, having been inadvertently locked out earlier. The Meeting House was cold. At first everyone sat close to the stove but soon we quietly moved back as the room grew toasty. I felt



some leading to speak, while the children were still there, about the sun and the wind and their competition to make a man take off his coat. But I didn't, the children left, and I took off my coat and then my cardigan and then my scarf, and pulled up my sleeves and was fine.

Meeting was silent except for one message just at the end, remembering 'stewards' in the Meeting who have given it care and in past winter times, before the woodstove was installed, a place to meet. At the end of Meeting, clerk Kathryn Willson made a few announcements and invited Friends to choose songs from the song books provided on the benches. Rosie, who is about eight, chose the first one, the Allelulia song which has the men and women leaping up and sitting down again to sing their different parts. This certainly livened us up, and after a few more songs, meeting rose and Friends moved about shaking hands. Rosie clearly has many friends in Meeting, most of them grown up. Later I had the chance to ask her a little about her relationship to the Meeting. There is one other child who comes who is about her age, but Rosie appears comfortable with her experience on Sundays, even when she is the only child there, or almost. And I have some questions now that I can ask the children I meet from now on, and start hearing more from them as well as from their parents.

Which brings me close to the main point of this week's journal, this question about the future of Friends (and perhaps, really the future, period.) Not to put too fine a point upon it, it is children. A quote here is relevant, from the past clerk of the Religious Education Committee of Canadian Yearly Meeting: 'I wish we had the resources to put into RE that, say, the Unitarians do. Their emphasis on educating the young attracts people to the church.'

When I was in Coldstream, I was struck by one page that Marilyn Thomas had included in the scrapbook for their Sesquicentennial. She had taken the information from the history of Young Friends compiled and written by Kyle Joliffe. Here it is, and if you know the meaning of 'Olio,' you're a better scholar than I was when I first saw this:

The 'Olio,' a literary and debating society was organized by Coldstream Friends in 1875. It remained active for 25 years [<sup>11</sup> HI] and was acclaimed far and wide and drew an attendance from the teens to nearly 200 people. [As this is worded, it's not quite clear whether the audience was all teens or whether they just turned out for it along with everybody else. But apparently it was a Society organized by Young Friends, who can be up to the age of 35.] 'An evening might consist of four readings, six recitations, two essays, three speeches, one dialogue, one piece of music, a criticism of the previous meeting and a discussion. The speeches--some are impromptu on subjects furnished by a committee. The discussion is conducted by one chosen at the previous meeting and is generally on some scientific subject. The essays, criticisms and speeches call largely on the native talent and will nurture 'the gifts that are in us.'

Are you ready for the definition of 'olio'? Well, in the Thomas' dictionary the primary meaning is a mixture or pot-pouri, and the second meaning 'a collection of artistic or literary pieces.' I put the exclamation mark because HOW could I have missed knowing this word all these years that I have been promoting open mike events everywhere I can? The root of the word is from the Spanish and it means a stew. Or a stew-pot, but presumably holding a stew. And stew any of us would, if we had to listen



through 4 readings, 6 recitations, 2 essays, 3 speeches, 1 dialogue and a partridge in a pear tree! The scientific slant probably comes from the strong suspicion still current at that time among Coldstream Friends against fiction-- only non-fiction was allowed into the local library started by Friends, and various stories are still extant about the devious ways Friends managed to sneak in some fiction.

I was going to put this next at the end, but it seems to fit in here, and for the historians and musicians among you may add a little depth to this discussion:

From the diary of James Bycroft (NOT a Friend, but whose children were, and who visited Coldstream in 1910): *June 15: After dinner off to meeting but not a single note of music or singing. Discussion being invited I put in a plea for music. One or two present seemed to agree with me though it soon became manifest the majority disagreed. Although Isaac Wilson, about the leading man among them, had decided leanings my way, said it was it was an entirely optional thing, any Society could have music that wished, there being nothing in Friends Discipline prohibiting it.*

Up to 200 people, eh, for 25 years, many of them teens. But this was before television and computer games and whatever other nefarious activities teens find to do on Friday nights. So here is my ministry to Friends, from my personal experience: open mikes still work. They exist in many towns today, and could exist in many more. They could be started or sponsored by Friends and they could look more like Family Night than like the Olio Society. And they would attract young families, give an intergenerational event for all ages, and they would be fun. The only rule would have to be respect. I don't see these as replacing the literary open mikes in the places where they exist. If children and dogs are present, it may be necessary to watch one's language. But that still leaves room for hilarity and seriousness. They need organizers who can sweetly haul somebody off stage who outruns their measure, and who can book in a great draw or two as the featured event. Maybe the one-act play that won the prize from the local public school, or the African band from the university that brings that continent back alive.

I presented this idea to Jane Zavitz-Bond yesterday afternoon over lunch and tea here in the warmth of Mary Edgar's fireplace, and Jane's blue eyes were snapping and sparking as she imagined all the ways this idea might work for Sparta (an interdenominational event, as she saw it, held downtown, not in the Meeting House). Then she proceeded to suggest another idea, and clearly Jane was not brainstorming but has been thinking about this a long time, and it is Summer Workcamps. She outlined at least three exciting possibilities and I took notes. One is gigantic: summer workcamps at the Sharon Temple, rebuilding the old Meeting House which used to be there and has disappeared (another historic puzzle which some Friends believe is more interesting than may appear). Jane knew why it is needed, and how it could be built. She invoked Danish Work Camps, which were a new concept to me, but which included the arts, with folk dancing and you name it. Rosemarie and Bill McMechan met each other in such a camp (or something like it) in Germany. The other ideas involved repairing and renovating Camp Neekaunis before it all falls down, and a possible cultural exchange and workcamp project on Christian Island. I went on taking notes.

I had two questions: 1) How can university students these days afford to spend a summer in a low paying or volunteer work camp, given their expenses? Jane's response:

maybe the age range we should be looking at is 14-18, and we need to consult with Dee Reynolds to find out what is possible. 2) What possible route would such proposals take through the many committees and so on of Friends? I guess I'm on one of them, which is Religious Education Committee, which meets next month in Toronto. Jane is going to draw up a budget in her spare moments, consult with Dee Reynolds and the Camp Committee, and see whether they feel led to prepare a minute. I am spreading the word that the wonderful anonymous donor is offering a further \$50,000 for projects to grow the Religious Society of Friends.

But you know, maybe we don't want to. We Friends are mightily protective of what Friend Sheldon Rahn calls the Small Group Model. I personally don't want to attend a meeting of 200, not on a regular basis. But I'd like 50. When Peterborough Allowed Meeting outgrows the lecture hall we meet in now, I promise to bud off a new worship group and start in again to growing. The thing is, we can still have the Small Group Model and at the same time relate to a larger group.

But why should we. You each have your own response, but right now mine is: for the children. Rosie is fine right now and is an independent Quaker kid. Maybe she'll be independent enough to want to sit through meeting for worship when she turns 13. Or maybe she'll sleep in on Sunday mornings and find her peer group friends at Yearly Meeting or --if we have them--youth retreats. It feels as if most children who grow up in our meetings do not attend as adults. Some do. Some come back. Others who did not grow up in a meeting make contact with us and inquire whether we have anything for children. Some of these we see and some never get so far as to attend. Many drift on, looking for something solid for their kids. Helen, who is three, doesn't like to come to Meeting, according to her mother. I kind of think Helen does like to come to the meeting once a month where she is usually the only child and has a special adult friend who loves her and takes her upstairs to play with a doll's house and some other special toys. But what Helen likes best is to visit a bigger meeting far away, where the family travels to once or twice a year, and where there are two other three-year-old girls.

Peterborough has lost the attendance of one Young Friend who still comes to our discussion sessions and may participate in a workcamp this summer with Friends in Uganda, because the Unitarians have hired her to coordinate their program for children and youth. She's really busy.

From my notes with Jane:

Pendle Hill offers an excellent youth program and we could send young people to it. A summer music program is offered by Friends at Oilie which costs \$800/month and includes shared work.

Friends could pair families e.g. rural / urban and encourage intervisiting, starting with families which have children.

The Leaveners: youth theatre which takes a theme and travels with it.

Can we develop centres in each region of the country suitable for youth retreats, Quaker study and for CYM?

To which I can add:

New initiatives for travel exchanges and letters with Ugandan Friends

I'm collecting stories and poems by and about Quaker children until the end of 2005, and then hope with help to develop Religious Education material as exciting as the

book Yarmouth Meeting published last year, The Creation Story, with text by Patricia Watt, design by Ted Goodden , and illustrations by the First Day School of Yarmouth (Sparta) Monthly Meeting.

Here at the Willsons, Ed has also reminded me of Nature Walks as a Quakerly activity that can attract all ages, including youngsters.

I was presented with a copy of The Creation Story at the gathering we had on Wednesday night, which turned into a kind of olio. I was also presented with a jar of red currant jelly made by Rosie's mother as part of her sense of spiritual connection with the earth and its gifts. And Friends shared: 1 set of new lyrics to Let us Study War No More ("let us unfurl the wind machine"); 1 meditation on knitting and massage and how it feels to give to others from a place of experience and centredness; 1 presentation of drawings and stories by a Young Friend; 1 nice professional summary of fantasy novels completed by the Young Friend's older sister; 2 poems well worth hearing, about divorce and new love; 2 woodcraft items, a useful box and a funny one with a poem about cows; 1 historical article; 1 song beautifully sung; 1 tale of yogurt and another of a cap knit from wool spun from Jacob sheep who live a short distance from the computer where I'm drafting this journal; 1 nude that is the "cartoon" for a 7-foot painting and a bursting career; 1 more story of spinning wool and of knitting for people one loves; and 1 shy but clear statement of the creativity required to make a home. And more!

An olio indeed, and a precious one, around the old woodstove--no, the new one: the old one is on the other side of the partition that used to separate the women's meeting from the men's.

It partly turned into an olio because we can't sit in a circle in the Yarmouth Meeting House, but a sort of square around the stove, and Friends naturally came forward to present, from, in effect, the facing benches, and people broke into applause at the wonderful presentations, and here we were, having an olio.

I really do have to go and have my breakfast, so will end here. Perhaps next week will be able to add in references to some of the other great books Friends showed me this week, and a quotation brought last evening by artist Jackie, suggesting that creative work makes one less likely to go to war!

More soon...

Journal 9 PELHAM EXECUTIVE March 8, 2004

"We are to be whole-hearted and half-sure." Quoted at the Faith Fair, Brock, 2004.

On Friday, March 5, a few Friends gathered for potluck at the home of Rosemarie Cipryk and Don Alexander in St. Catharines. The mood was sombre.

We set out extra chairs. We put the food on the table, lit candles, and waited. We knew that a young man was crossing the border between his country and ours and that he knew he might never be able to go back. We knew he was AWOL from the US military and that was just about all we did know. We knew that Canadian Friends Service Committee is not recommending the action he was taking, and that Friends' sources do not counsel soldiers to break the law. They do counsel them to pay heed to their conscience. A phone call from the peace organizer travelling with him let us know that they were on their way, and that they were bringing with them a journalist from Indianapolis-- and a crew from the CBC! [try: [www.cbc.ca/disclosure](http://www.cbc.ca/disclosure) ]

In the car approaching the border, the young journalist was praying. It seemed the right thing to do, she said, as she sat beside me later, both of us balancing plates of food on our knees. I remembered then our mood at the time of her prayer.

The CBC crew set up for interviews in the basement bedroom. A fellow came up the stairs, apologized, and said that our conversation and footsteps were being picked up by the sound equipment. "Let's go into silent worship," said Don, and we did. The worship felt immediately gathered--we needed it, after the excitement of the arrival of this lanky, polite young man, who has so recently turned 18. The deep silence was just right for us and just right for the crew downstairs. As Rose Marie joked afterwards, now would Chuck Fager say that we were following our own leadings or being led by the media?? We hadn't planned this potluck as a welcoming committee, but when the boy came into his first home in Canada, it felt good that he was greeted by eight Quakers, sitting in candlelight, sharing a Meeting for Eating.

A legal defence fund is planned as the young man sets out to struggle for the right to remain here and not to be shipped to Iraq to fight in a war he believes ought never have been begun. Actually, if he goes back to the States now, his immediate future is prison.

The entire week with Pelham Executive Meeting, even before the phone call came announcing this unexpected guest, had a theme of crossing borders, of cross-cultural encounters and the difficulty and joy of welcoming strangers into our midst.

I spent the first few days with Maria and Paul Hopkins, who met across the Polish-English-speaking borders through Esperanto, a movement whose goal is

worldwide peace. Maria and I talked about the immigrant experience, and the balancing act required to fit into a different culture and yet remain fully oneself.

When I first arrived on Saturday night, I was whisked off by June Etta Chenard to "Revealed By Fire," a performance at Brock University by Lata Pada, the Canadian choreographer of East Indian descent whose children and husband were killed in the Air India bombing. The ancient dance language of Bharatanatyam was used in this performance differently, not to tell a mythological tale, but to trace a personal experience. The dancing was disciplined and beautiful, and I had tears in my eyes at the point where the dancer moved through her searing grief and began again to dance. She has created from her terrible experience a work which speaks to others who have grieved.

On Sunday I entered the Quaker culture of Pelham Executive, which has been meeting in St. Catharines for 202 years. I met Mildred Nelson, whose life spans more than ninety of those two hundred years. I met Barbara Smith, another descendant of original Friends' families from this region. (Barbara explained to me the Quaker meaning of "Executive"--it refers to a meeting whose meetings for worship for business take place at the call of the clerk.) I met Barbara Bucknall, author of eight published books, who participated in the writing group that met throughout this week, and who wrote a poem about crossing the borders of aging and illness that blew us all away. I'll slip it in near the end of this Journal--I want to keep on with the events of this amazing week. Perhaps it was my imagination, but when I entered the Pelham meeting for worship, and later in the week when I was questioned closely about my travels, I could almost see and hear the Friends from two hundred years ago, questioning about committee of care, leading, pastoral concern for other Friends known to them, and a general sense of spiritual oversight towards Friends near and far. I was still under the spell of the novel lent to me by Jane Zavitz-Bond in Yarmouth, the fictionalized story of the life, and the death by hanging in 1839, of Joshua Doan.

"I know this guy is going to be hanged really soon," I told Maria one evening as I read on, "and I need to find out how it happened and what exactly he did." In the magic of Gladys Francis Lewis' prose I came to care about these Friends and their strong faith, even though the novel is frank, too, about the restraints and constraints of being a Friend such a relatively short time ago. In those days elders sat at Meeting on the facing benches, and kept an eye on the flock. It's probably truth, not fiction, that after one meeting they recorded that one Friend "allowed his eyes to close overlong." !!!

Friends, I am here to tell you that if the novel is anything close to the truth, Joshua Doan is a Canadian Quaker hero, flaws and all, and somehow we should find a way to reprint this book in paperback and get it out to ourselves. It's dated but it's really well written, and you'll love it.

On Wednesday I attended a Faith Fair, a new initiative at Brock and one I hope is also happening elsewhere. Booths were set up with information about various faiths, including one by my own other faith group, the Student Christian

Movement, who were giving out very cool posters. I picked up one of everything, hoping the handouts might inspire something like this at Trent. The theme speaker was Edmund O'Sullivan of the Transformative Learning Centre at the University of Toronto, [\[www.ticentre.org\]](http://www.ticentre.org) and the theme for the day was "One World: Faith and the Environment." Through the prism of concern for the earth, disparate faiths readily looked beyond differences to a profound commonality.

The student who spoke for Islam said, "I was born in Canada. I can't imagine not living with people of different faiths and cultures."

Don Alexander spoke on behalf of Friends. Don is a member of Quaker Environmental Action Network and quoted from its mission statement. He spoke of earth as a "sacred place," and in particular of the Niagara escarpment. One of the exciting developments in Pelham Executive this week has been Don's appointment as a commissioner on the body which has care of the escarpment.

Another was the opening of a juried exhibition of art for International Women's Week, which included a piece by June Etta Chenard. Inspired by "Revealed By Fire," the piece is a vivid sunburst or bomb-burst against a background of fiery red, with a central core of images of missiles and of human beings, and rays holding the names of women who have died in non-violent struggles for peace. I recognized the name of Rachel Corrie, the young woman from Seattle who was killed by an American-made bulldozer driven by an Israeli soldier as she attempted to stand in the way of the demolishing of a Palestinian home.

The conflict over those particular borders came home sharply with a visit midweek by Maxine Kaufman-Lacusta, fresh back from her latest time in Israel-Palestine. On Thursday night the sharing around "things I have made" was made a public event, attended by five Friends and five non-Friends. Maxine told a story that happened at one of the gates in the wall between Israel and Palestine. The part I remember is the moment when, as a Jewish person who could speak in Hebrew to the soldier blocking their way, Maxine was able to ask him how he would feel if this group he was blocking had been members of his own family under the Nazis in Germany. Apparently startled, the soldier replied, "I'll have to think about that."

Among those turning out for this sharing were two women who have married husbands from the Middle East. By the end of the evening, they were sharing mother-in-law stories! Other sharing included a photograph of children, quilts built around memorial blocks for a beloved friend and quilts made for tucking around babies and around children with cancer. The backs of the quilts were lined with cosy flannelette. There were fairy tales for the young at heart, a knitted sweater, a poem, a collage, a painting, and Rose Marie's big empty plastic bottle, representing space she has created for herself and her soul since her recent retirement. The library we met in was in part another of Rose Marie's creations, as she was the school librarian there at a time when there was money for books.

I've left out a border crossing of yet another sort, as I went into a grade four classroom for the first time to teach poetry. Now I know I can do it--with the help of bright, responsive children and THREE teaching assistants! Rose Marie collected their poems, but I forgot to "borrow" a few for this account. Maybe next time.

So there we were, after a week of crossing over, after faith crossings and special moments around youth and aging, illness, culture shock and culture transformation into art and healing. The phone rang, and the question was whether a young man just turned 18, who has already completed his basic training since he signed up at 17, and who now has researched this particular war on the internet and come to his own conclusion that it violates international law and he won't go--whether he could land with our Friends. There was no hesitation. Friends would be having a potluck, he was warned.

And so another border was crossed.

Now I'll give you Barbara Bucknall's poem, and the quotation I had to miss last week, and maybe a book title or two before I sleep. I'm home for a week, and there will be no journal until after next week, which is my visit to my home meeting here in Peterborough--which really ought to be Executive, but we didn't know, and so it's Allowed.

*The Scarab*, by B.J. Bucknall

*In ancient Egypt, it is said, They often  
placed beside the dead Scarabs,  
whether carved or real, To be there  
when the dead must kneel Before  
their judge, to show the soul And  
represent it pure and whole. Another  
scarab rolled the sun Across the sky  
when night was done. What does the  
scarab mean to me Now that I am  
quit and free Of struggle, urgency  
and strife In these, my closing days of  
life?*

*It rolls its ball of shit and mould  
Which somehow looks like glistening gold  
Across the day from dawn to dusk  
With nothing strange or odd or brusque  
Except perhaps the car won't start.  
O scarab beetle of my heart  
Forget those many younger days  
When me myself I did amaze  
With many spurts of good and evil,  
Uncertain whether angel or devil.*

*All emotions are fleeting and brittle.  
I have found peace with my pet dung beetle.*

!!!

Quotation from Brenda Euland, found p. 4 of Julia Cameron's *The Artist's Way*: "Why should we all use our creative power...? Because there is nothing that makes people so generous, joyful, lively, bold and compassionate, so indifferent to fighting and the accumulation of objects and money."

Title recommended by Mary Edgar:

*The Kite Runner*. Khaled Hosseini. (Doubleday, 2003) Afghan novel of friendship between two boys growing up in Kabul.

Title recommended by Jane Zavitz-Bond:

*The Barn at the End of the World: the apprenticeship of a Quaker, Buddhist Shepherd*. Mary Rose O'Reilly. (Milkweed, 2000)

Query from Chuck Fager:

"Spirit-led" versus "media-driven"? Is this a meaningful or important distinction? Can you identify a personal experience that helps explain the difference? What about an experience in your meeting?



Journal 10 PETERBOROUGH ALLOWED MEETING March 21, 2004:

Personal Responsibility and Structural Injustice—that was the Big Topic of a lecture series this past week at Trent University, Peterborough, where I am. I didn't attend the lectures, but a friend/ Attender (Dhoog) who did gave me the gist of it. The topic had reared its head at the beginning of the week and has not gone away. Over lunch with an African-Caribbean student last Tuesday, I explained that I feel disempowered if I feel personally blamed for systemic racism. It's not my fault, personally.

Well, according to the philosopher, get used to it. It is my fault, and yours. We are not to squirm out of the fact that every social injustice—and justice!--is the collective result of personal decisions. If they call a war and nobody comes, there is no war. I am not to take this personally, but neither am I to believe that I can live so lightly on this earth that I can pretend I am not here. I am here.

Arriving home was stressful. I came back to find that my tenants were all leaving, thrusting my financial future into upheaval, and that the ruckus included bad feelings. The structural injustice was and is all mixed in with my and their personal responsibility.

My cat, though, wasted no time on abstract theories. She jumped onto my lap and proceeded to purr loudly enough to be heard. She's a silent cat normally, perhaps because of being born in the Friends Meeting House in Victoria. Her name is Fell.

I had a joyful reunion also with that other all-important being in my life, my home computer, which still remembered everything I had told it two months before.

It felt so good to slip into Meeting that first Sunday, still shaky from the return the day before and all the tenant bad news, and find the Friends. I can't help counting. We were 11 and then there was a sound at the door, and we were 12. Often lately we have been 12. I want a Meeting in my home town, and it is a relief to me to come home and find we are 12.

Sunday was intense. After Meeting, our Clerk informed us that the main speaker for the Africa event planned for Saturday was refused a Canadian visa. The new border "security" suddenly was landing in our laps with an embarrassing and frustrating and offensive bureaucratic stop to our careful plans.

Let me go back a step or two and say how this all unfolded.

First of all, Bill and Rosemarie McMechan have spent time in Africa for thirty years, most recently visiting the Mbale region of Uganda, with Alternatives to Violence Project and with the African Great Lakes Peace Initiative of Friends' World Committee for Consultation. There they have formed real friendships, and discovered an "oasis of peace" in this war-torn land, where live an estimated

3,000 Friends. These Friends belong to Ugandan Yearly Meeting and a breakaway group, the Evangelical Friends Church of Uganda. Through The Uganda Project of the Canadian Friends Foreign Missionary Board (the title of this board will not be reassuring to the African students we are working with at present, but is fine, apparently, with Ugandan Friends!) practical support has begun for several community projects, and further intervisitation is being encouraged.

Actually, the visiting thus far has been one way, with some of us from the west going to Uganda.

Out of this leading on the part of Friends in our Meeting, St. Lawrence Regional Gathering has committed itself to a partnership or "twinning" with the Ugandan Friends, and our own Meeting organized this weekend's event, bringing information to Peterborough about initiatives for peace and hope in Africa. The Meeting invited other groups to participate, and the resulting event was called Grassroots Afrika: Initiatives for Community Wellbeing. It had workshops on self-empowering grassroots initiatives in regard to AIDS education; African spirituality ("how Afrikan spirituality is negatively portrayed in the media and practitioners are stigmatized all over the world.... Will address the problems of how Afrikan traditions have been deliberately eroded by colonialism, particularly Christian proselytisation and how this process continues to do damage today"); working with children and youth, including in this a group of local high school students who are going to be travelling to Sierra Leone; and the African Great Lakes Peace Initiative, "projects designed to support local initiatives and to give training when required in non-violence as well as technical support....These communities are intent on being as self-sufficient as possible and through local partnerships we help support this process."

So far so good. Some of the African (Afrikan) students were nervous that we were not going to emphasize enough "Western Responsibility," and some westerners wanted to spell Africa with a "c"--but the event came through to a poster, a time, and a theme speaker who could pull it all together. Adrien Niyongabo, Burundian worker in trauma healing and non-violence work with the African Great Lakes Initiative, is currently visiting in the States. For various good reasons, he had been unable to apply for a Canadian visa in Nairobi, but careful checking by the organizers at this end made it seem certain that our speaker's visa to Canada could be arranged in Washington after he was on this continent. For one thing, surely if he was good enough for the United States, he would be accepted by Canada. An earlier attempt at this end to bring in a young woman who works with the Peace Centre in the Mbale region had come to nothing when she was unable to obtain a visa to the U.S. We are not likely to be able to afford the money to bring in speakers ourselves all the way from Africa. Now Friends in Orillia and in Ottawa were also expecting Adrien Niyongabo.

Well, it turns out that if you are Burundian and you show your invitation from Trent University and the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) of Peterborough (and of Orillia and of Ottawa), you can be told that the Canadian border people

think you are looking for an opportunity to seek refugee status in our country. You can't come in.

As someone said on Sunday, what if he HAD sought refugee status? Aren't we proud of Canada's history of welcoming refugees who face danger in their homelands? However, this man has profound commitments to return to his own country and continue his work for peace.

Our Clerk remarked that this puts a chill on much that is precious. How can international conferences take place in North America, if we can travel there but they can't travel here? How can we hear the voices of people from these countries if they are not allowed in? This border policy flies in the face of the other stated policies for Canadian foreign affairs, policies endorsed by all political parties. We lost our chance to hear from a person who has just come from Africa and will return to it, and can speak of his own land with expertise.

We will go on attempting to clarify this matter. We hope for a follow-up event in a few months. But meanwhile, because we naively invited him and believed we had covered all the bases, a good man now has this refusal on his record. The simplest, no-brainer reason that border officials now use to refuse visas is that you have been refused before.

Things were solemn after Meeting on Sunday.

I went off to a restaurant to have some soup and write thank-you notes, and wait until my next meeting. It was an initial, exploratory meeting called by a Trent professor because someone had stumbled on the fact that apparently there are 13 Pakistanis in the jail at Lindsay, and nobody knew they were there. It is thought that they are being held on immigration violations. Some have families in Toronto, but perhaps none have strong social networks, especially if indeed they are here illegally. Now even their families have lost track of them, months are passing by, and they do not have formal charges against them, legal counsel, or any way forward at all. How many other pockets of lost souls are we going to discover stored away in jails around Canada? What is going on? A committee formed to try to find out the names of these men and to get in touch. What is wrong with this, legally, may not be the arrests themselves, but that no path is placed in front of them to make a next step.

A different group was discovered last year in Toronto, picked up on a "security" scoop called Project Thread. A well-organized support group has now formed, calling itself Project Threadbare, and one by one it is succeeding in getting these young men back into their lives. It appears, from what I have heard thus far, that there is no way whatsoever that these young men had anything to do with terrorism, real or imagined. They were picked from a list because their first names were Mohammed.

Yes, there is more to it, but not a lot more. Yes, our officials have become panicky and yes, pressure may be being applied from the States. But what if they picked the names from a list that were Margaret? Michael? I get an echo of Bonhoeffer in

Germany under the Nazis, saying something like, first they came for the Jews, then for the homosexuals, then for the gypsies, then they came for me...

On Sunday it was hard to avoid the idea that my own government is seriously racist. In the evening I went off with family to view "The Corporation." Sunday was a day of the exposing of structural injustice.

My Meeting hadn't really asked me to attend the session about the Pakistanis, never mind the film. I realized I was structuring my "visit" to Peterborough more than I've done in the other places. The postering I did the week before was part of the planned activities of my visit—the posters advertised Grassroots Afrika, and featured the name of our intended speaker.

When we organized this event for March 20, we hadn't noted that it was the one-year anniversary of the invasion of Iraq, with world-wide demonstrations planned.. So here was our peace event on Africa conflicting with local peace rallies about Iraq. I'm proud of the way it has come out: in Peterborough this weekend there were 4 peace events, all advertised together on the same little yellow flyer. First a panel on Friday night: Michelle Strutzenberger from the Peace Builders Project in Peterborough, David Milne of the Christian Peacemakers Team in Iraq, someone from War Child, and at the last minute I was invited to speak as well, in the place of a guest who had to cancel. The invitation was to say something about the U.S. soldier who arrived in Canada when I was in St. Catharines, another illegal border-crosser, this one seeking to not fight in a war which contravenes international law. I did speak, and felt as if suddenly I have a Message: that we can no longer afford the luxury of demonizing any group, and in particular that it is time to move into solidarity with Americans, who need to get through this time and come out the other side with a better sense of how to wage peace. Saturday's final event was a presentation of strong scenes from Brecht's play, *Mother Courage*.

If Bill and Rosemarie McMechan had not followed their leading faithfully, and if the Meeting had not as well, there is no way that the international day of peace here in Peterborough would have included visions of peace and hope coming from Africa. It feels good, the way it has turned out.

And the event itself was a great success. Close to one hundred people took part, and bridges were built and real questions raised. Rainos Matumba from Zimbabwe told us that most African languages need "k" to suggest the "kah" sound. And there is another meaning, he said gently—"kah" in some languages is the life force. Friends might call it Spirit.

The rest of the days before the weekend events were far from politics—or were they? Following Angie and Bryan Clarke around in an overnight in Lindsay felt like Grassroots Kanada: More Initiatives Yet for Community Wellbeing. Bryan was out when I got there, part of a team giving palliative care. Angie was home, getting supper together in time for us all to hop over to the Hort Society. I would never, ever, left to my own devices, have visited a horticultural society. The only plants who survive my ministrations are ones that thrive on neglect. So I would

not have discovered a lively community organization with sixty people (easy—I think there were seventy) there, all paying serious attention to a master gardener lecturing on shade plants. Shade plants grow bigger leaves when they don't have too much sun. There's a moral in there somewhere.

But the real moral for me was watching Angie up at the microphone and Bryan over by the door welcoming people in. They've decided to nurture the Hort Society, and it has put out fresh leaves and sent down new roots. Angie's energy and Bryan's easygoing humorous friendliness clearly are helping the group grow.

The next day, Bryan went off to the computer centre (once the ground softens, he'll be off to the five gardens he services, plus his own.) Angie and I put up posters for an event co-sponsored by the Friends and the Sisters of St. Joseph—The Practice and Spirituality of Non-Violence, with Len Desroches—(April 24, if you're close by)—and looked in on an exercise class (Angie goes to it on different days) in the Armouries. Was this swords into ploughshares, I wondered? In the background, tables were set up, where every Wednesday a local woman offers a hearty home cooked "seniors' dinner" for up to 50 people, for \$5 each. The program appears to be her own leading, under the aegis of no particular organization. Bryan started attending when Angie was away last year in hospital, and now he's part of a "table" and still likes to go. Upstairs in the Armouries is a seniors' centre. On Friday nights there are singles dances. So, does the army still march there? Angie said she'd never seen them, but somebody else said yes, sometimes there are still sightings of military uniforms. But the Armouries has become a vibrant community centre too.

The Clarkes took a full year to choose Lindsay. They wanted a downtown that was still working well; it had to include a big grocery store; and they wanted a doctor. In the end they bought their house without having found a doctor. They have one now, but also they know about the acute doctor shortage. Angie has got herself onto the municipal search committee for doctors. I remembered the conversation all my travelling began with, the woman from Manpower on the bus to Toronto telling me about foreign-trained doctors working as taxi drivers and receptionists. But even if we get that one sorted out, what about the fact that we are draining the countries they come from? Is this another piece of "Western Responsibility"?

I thoroughly enjoyed watching this couple I thought I knew, in the context of the community they have chosen. We ran into a couple Angie knows from square dancing. We bought soil for a repotting session she planned to have the next day with the neighbours' children. We took a tour of the downtown health food store, bigger and brighter than any I've seen anywhere else. We went over to the palliative care offices so that Angie could water the plants— "I sure am glad I'm retired!"

In spite of several nice times out together, I thought of Angie as somewhat quiet, I guess because I usually see her at Meeting. Not. For our evening sharing with the Meeting, she brought a big leather hat and proceeded to turn into Sally Jo

Mae. Two courses in improv under her belt, she's signed up now for clowning. Bryan's choices are as eclectic but focus more on singing—he's in two choirs.

In the evening, after one of Ruth Hillman's gourmet dinners—"In honour of our travelling Friend, we will have a simple meal—just three courses this evening, not seven!"—we shared about creativity: "What do you make?" Ruth borrowed the line I'd already told her from Margaret Ford at Simcoe-Muskoka: "You've et it!" But Ruth also drew our attention to two baskets heaped with Ukrainian-style Easter eggs—the dots in the design are for Mary's tears. Mark read three of his poems, and gave out copies as well, to everyone's pleasure. Bill McMechan told a strong story I don't have room now to retell, and showed us a plate he has carved with an intricate Celtic knot (it was St. Patrick's day—Ruth had prepared a chocolate dessert with one shamrock for the rest of us, and seven for Bill!). Rosemarie read two stories from "The Nine Lives of Rosemarie." Bryan told the entire story of his life, winding up at his respect for plants. They're living beings, he said. They respond to care and to being spoken to... Lawrence surprised us by speaking not of his music or his flying but of his photographs. Don told about woodworking and about counselling. Anne rose and unfurled a schematic from her work at the Ministry of Natural Resources and said, "I'm in charge of the Big Picture!" We looked on in awe. John spoke of his creative parents and his creative wife, and had to be coaxed to admit that he'd made the bookshelves, for starters, in the room where we were.

The night was late. I wasn't sure what had just happened, but we had laughed hard and found out much we hadn't known. I reached for the book of poems I'd just presented us with, and closed with Elizabeth Brewster's "Prayer for Peace." Later in the week, someone chose that one again, to read at the rally.

I've left out the part where some of us had seen the film "The Corporation" and one of us suddenly waded in and said that in his opinion there is nothing inherently evil about corporations, that many do a lot of good. Look at Esso, he almost said. My heart was pounding. Is this really my group? But Quakers do look at all sides, seek reconciliation.

On Thursday morning I entered the Ministry of Natural Resources at the invitation of Friend Anne Trudell. Anne wanted me to see what she does. She made us green tea and led me on a tour of the huge posters in the halls, starting with the schematic she had brought to the sharing the night before.

Now, how shall I say this. I stood in the road at Clayoquot. I don't trust government officials, especially ones who tell me that sometimes clearcuts are the very best thing for trees. I figure they're in the pay of the corporations, or caving in to the pressures of politics. As one of my brothers joked the other day, "There's been too much transparency lately in politics! I'm seeing more than I want to see!"

Yet here was Anne, fairly bouncing up and down with excitement at what is happening in her job. "It's about Care and Conservation!" she smiled, and I agreed that for her it's a perfect fit. What she is doing is compiling and

organizing data. If you get your facts right, nobody can protest a decision. But you have to get it right. The basic premise is that if an organism, plant or animal, is endangered, it must be protected. If you live in Ontario, did you know that you don't have to persuade the Ministry of that? That is its basic premise. The only question becomes whether or not this is the best place to do the protecting. If there are more of whatever-it-is elsewhere, with a better chance of survival, it will be done there.

Anne's overlays of data include soil, rock, aquifers, moose resting places, moose mating places, you name it. Now she is working on caribou. It dawned on me that the data is still being collected, is still incomplete. And everything connects, affects everything else. Wells affect aquifers affect tall prairie grass affect field mice affect my sleep at night. When we were protesting at Clayoquot in B.C., and the government and the logging companies were arguing different points of view, we were right but so were they—I mean, nobody really did have truth by the tail. Now, maybe, they might, but not then, ten years ago. If you have your facts and if the government agrees with Ontario's premise that endangered species must be preserved, it appears that nothing can stop you from success.

I kept asking Anne questions and she kept giving me honest and excited responses. She loves her work. This project even came intact through the reign in this province of Mike Harris. We finished off with a plan to meet before I leave again as the committee of care. Just let us sit in silence, suggested Anne, and let you leave in a burst of Light.

I wandered on out into the almost-spring day, leaving behind the agency that governs 80 percent of Ontario (the crown land). I'm boggled with overlays of garbage dumps, rocks, fish, wolves, parks, beetles, fires.

There's government that stops a trauma healer from coming to teach us about Africa, and there's government that protects the nuisance bears.

This just in, from Don Alexander in St. Catharines, formerly from Peterborough, presently the new commissioner of the Niagara Escarpment—Don was in on the organizing committees for two universities in his lifetime so far: Trent and Brock. How many can say that? Anyway, tonight he's into nostalgia—here's some more data for the MNR:  
"nonsense gibberish written by Lloyd McQuiggen 1957"

*I see Otonabee  
I see the lift lock and Westclox  
My home Peter-bor-ough  
Choked up with ice and snow.  
There is no place for me,  
'cept to be in the  
Kawarthas Down by Lock  
22  
Or 23 Ske-doo.*

Wait a minute— isn't Westclox a corporation?

Journal 11 WOOLER MONTHLY MEETING April 5, 2004

I'm writing this while reaching over a bowl of hot cabbage soup and it's bedtime, but I want to report on last week with Wooler Monthly Meeting before too much else fills up the picture, and especially before I get back on the bus. Tonight I was off to a local political convention for the party of my choice, and my activist sister-in-law, Linda, won the nomination by a landslide, over four other worthy candidates. One of the best parts was hugging Linda's 85-year-old mother, Norma, who, with bright pink spots in her cheeks, exclaimed, "Isn't this exciting?!!!"

This Journal begins with an Animals section. Those of you without Animals may skip it, although you never know—it could give you a handle on thinking about the latest awful news from countries at war.

I spent last week in Belleville with four dogs (and their owners, of whom more later.) The dogs were: warm-hearted Homer, my favourite, a mutt; very intelligent tall grey poodle Jed; smart-as-a-whippet China, who kept sticking her long nose into my suitcase and removing my vitamin pills, my wet facecloth, my package of prunes—her nose is like a human hand, sliding in and stealing things when I'm out of the room; and her brother Zeus, whose hard early life has damaged his mind, and so he watches his sister to figure out what to do. These creatures shared my space all week and impressed upon me their various personalities.

When I came home again, my cat Fell hid under the couch and peered out with a completely uncharacteristic worried look. At first I thought maybe the very nice multifacially-pierced student who had given her care all week had done a bad job, and then I looked around and realized that Fell had had wonderful loving care, and her problem was that the Margaret smell was all mixed up with Dog.

We reunited, and now I wonder whether in her little cat mind she has developed a notion that maybe the combination of Margaret and Dog can still result in a safe place for Fell. I dunno.

But I notice that I myself am sensing the dog personalities passing me on the street—and greeting me today in the bike store, too. When my horizon widens to include new experiences and new forms of life, suddenly I feel connected to people and situations that passed right by before. In the travelling thus far, I've stayed with quite a few dogs, but this was the first I stayed with four.

Anyway, Fell's on my lap wanting to go to bed, with her chin hanging over my right wrist, and it's time to get on with the section about humans.

Wooler Meeting House was built in 1897, replacing the former Cold Creek Meeting House, which I think burned down. It is on a side road of the countryside town of Wooler, Ontario, 25 minutes from Belleville and an hour from Peterborough. This Meeting House shows signs of the Methodist Revival, with curves in the top of the windows, and some panes of blue and red stained glass. It has a raised dais at one end and until fairly recently the pews were in rows, not, as now, in a square. (Members all



remember "the day they turned the benches.") For twenty years or so, one to five Friends sat in the Meeting House on Sundays, keeping its use alive. Charlie and Allie Nelson had married in Wellington Meeting House (now a museum) and moved to Wooler, just down the road from the Meeting House, which is where Allie still lives. The others were Harry Parry and Cora Valentine and her sister. Decades passed.

Then one year the McMechans began coming once a month with four children, and then the Bensons with three daughters. A year later, the Hoidens arrived, with four children in tow. In good weather all met in the Meeting House but in winter at the Nelsons'. In 1971 the Rolstons and their three boys sought the Meeting out. They hadn't contacted the Meeting, but they asked directions in the village and found their way to the Nelsons' door. Allie opened it and said, "I knew you were coming."

Elizabeth was born into Friends in Bloomfield, attending the Meeting House in Wellington, but on her return she felt like renewing her membership. She and Rick applied for membership and then to be married under the care of the Meeting. These were the first such requests in "years and years." The warm stories tumble out as Elizabeth Rolston fills me in on the history of this Meeting which is technically my home Meeting but which I visit only two or three times a year, as I meet with the Allowed Meeting in Peterborough which is under Wooler's care.

I asked how they managed when so many of the children were so young. "We all had Meeting bags"—bags filled with stuffed animals and other quiet toys, such as foam puzzles. Some Sundays an adult would go to the front and read a story.

The children grew. They would stay for a while in Meeting and then run out to play among the tombstones behind the Meeting. In spring, some graves collapsed and made deep dents in the grass. As the lively Rolston boys barrelled out, Charlie Nelson warned, "Don't fall in!"

The children moved on. Once more Wooler Meeting has shrunk to a few mostly graying heads. The Little-Leering family joined when Jessamyn. (yes, named after Jessamyn West of *Friendly Persuasion*), now 15, and Lindsay, 14, were toddlers or not yet born—I'm not sure which—but definitely before the advent of Mieke, who is 12. The girls now rarely attend, but they have recent fond memories of FGC (Friends General Council) gatherings. A new family with two children is in the process of transferring membership, and a handful of others attend from time to time.

Members are widely scattered, with Caroline Holden driving the hour and a half from Kingston, and others from Hastings, Peterborough and Belleville. Meeting is on second and fourth Sundays. Six years ago, an addition was built to accommodate potlucks and an indoor humus toilet. There is electricity but no running water, the big old ticking clock was stolen several years ago by someone who broke in, and the woodstove, which still functions well, can't be used because of rules about insurance. There is a new woodstove but no one now to come in early and light the fire. Lately they have taken to meeting in the addition, warmed by a noisy electric heater. Paint hangs off the walls and the next challenge is to give it attention.

During Meeting, spills of blue and red light dance across the floor, and cluster flies swarm up the old windows and spin on the hardwood floor.

Money and labour continues to flow into the upkeep of this building, but by and large members do not feel it as a burden. Deep shared personal histories and a mystical sense for the space itself draw them across the miles to this place. Ghosts walk here as I found they do in the other old Meeting Houses in our land. Lay lines intersect at this spot; there is a "sink" which is the still point.

If Coldstream members can keep their Meeting community vibrant, and they do, even though for many it requires a longish drive into the countryside, likely Wooler can too. Commitment is built in to these country meeting places—there is no such thing as the casual way I first attended Meeting in Ottawa, just walking down the street and in at the door of the building that had become familiar to me through readings there of poetry. At Wooler you have to make arrangements, get directions, find out which Sunday they meet, and drive.

The town of Wooler itself is well aware of its little Meeting House, and fills it to bursting for a candlelit Christmas carol service and when it is the Friends' turn to host the World Day of Prayer. The neighbours who crowd in, however, have their own faith community—mainly the local United Church and its full program.

Some Friends fret a bit at their need for more—for a discussion group, a chance to go deeper and get to know newcomers more than is possible at Meeting for Worship plus potluck. A discussion group has happened from time to time, but not recently. A midweek meeting is impossible.

For my visit, after the Sunday sharing around "what do you make?"—I was sent into Belleville for the rest of the week. I was to have another "what do you make?" session with a group of Bloomfield women who attend the United Church there; I was to teach poetry to a class at the Quinte Literacy Centre; and I was booked in for an entire morning to do creative writing with a class of grade eights. When I had offered to do public events, I thought of it as raising the profile of the meeting in the local community. This seemed more just doing it because it was a good thing to do, and because Elizabeth had to do something with me for a whole week. I was puzzled, but game.

On Monday I went to court to watch Rick Rolston at work. He is a lawyer and justice of the peace. I watched bail hearings and two sentencings. Every time I come near the justice system I am filled with confusion about how unjust it is and how irrelevant to the actual situation. A woman who already had a restraint order on her not to go near a Walmart had gone anyway into the local Walmart, taken about \$130 worth of foodstuffs without paying, was chased by security guards who actually reached in through her car window as she was getting ready to flee, whereupon she took off, hurting the guard's finger, drove crazily across the parking lot, fortunately not killing anyone, and crashed into another woman's car. She was arrested, and had so many different charges against her that I lost count. As she stood in the dock, an ordinary youngish blonde woman, a bit dumpy and frowsy but otherwise normal-looking, she covered her face for a moment with her hand. Life was not too good. Her lawyer, Rick, noted to the judge the

woman's need to continue with prescription medication for her ongoing condition of anxiety. The court did not hear at that time that the anxiety tells her that consumer goods are going to disappear from the stores and she must load up now. The judge agreed that the medication ought to be given; the case was remanded to the next day.

When these dramas were ended, I went out to the Cosy Grill on Front Street of my home town. I opened my journal and wrote: "Legal matters are complicated in the extreme." Then I sat and looked into space.

After a while, I wrote down a description of the Coke machine in the Cosy Grill and the server who had curly hair and wore a substantial gold cross. I was just beginning to describe the man at the counter who had just said "no relish please" when I realized he was a former lover of one of my sisters, a self-made philosopher, and so I took my coffee cup over beside him and inquired about the state of his universe. He said several hard-to-understand things and I asked him to sum it up in two sentences. "All right," he said. "There is no present, and there are no persons." We entered into animated discussion over these two points, people glanced over at us uneasily as words such as "solipsistic" bandied about in the Cosy, and he paid for my lunch.

I walked back to the Rolstons through streets I had known well as a teen, and somehow spent Monday night and all day Tuesday just sharing stories with Elizabeth and getting to know the dogs.

Wednesday it all fell together. Elizabeth drove me to Bloomfield, where a friend of hers is the minister in the United Church. We sat in a circle with eight women who had all brought quilts or stories of gardens and knitting to share. Eight sets of eyes turned to me, ready to believe I must be a Slaven from the county. No, I said, the spelling is different and anyway my dad was adopted. Eight pairs of eyes turned to Elizabeth. Boy, was she in. Her family is from Bloomfield. One of the women lives in the house built on the site of a house where Deborah Haight used to live. The Quaker names came thick and fast. One woman said, "My grandmother was a Quaker." Of course she was. There were 2200 Quakers in Prince Edward County, and TWO Meeting Houses in Wellington, the one that is now a museum, and another one because of a painful split.

Elizabeth drove me around to see the Quaker sites: the house where she grew up, houses where other names I recognized had lived. "Wait a moment, Elizabeth," I said as we drove down a county road: "The Friends Hicksite Cemetery???" Elizabeth pulled over and we went in and looked at the tombstones.

Later she took me to Hay Bay cemetery, which Friends maintain (Rick is one of its trustees) and I finally saw the Hay Bay church, which has some Friends' connection but I don't know what it is.

It was a wonderful afternoon. Arthur Dorland, author of the history of Friends in this area, was a far-flung cousin of Elizabeth, and she remembers "Cousin Arthur."

Back at the Rolstons' house, I held the Dorland books in my hands, read bits of them, looked at photographs of Elizabeth's relatives in bonnets and long skirts.

Former Days and Quaker Ways: a Canadian Retrospect, by Arthur Garratt Dorland, MA., Ph.D., L.L.D., F.R.S.C. Originally published in 1965 by the Picton Gazette, republished by Mika Studio, Belleville, 1972. In shaky handwriting, an inscription from Cousin Arthur.

Along the Trail of Life: A Quaker Retrospect. Mika, 1979.

There's another, duller book, but these came alive for me after my afternoon in the county.

Thursday I did teach poetry with the literacy class, which included one smiling aboriginal woman who had come to class in a chicken suit. It was April 1. She took it off during class, and during discussion said firmly that she likes to write humour because the world is too sad. I got a photo of Noreen in her chicken suit during the break, leaning seductively against a booth at the nearby farmer's market. At the end of class, a man said, well, I still don't like poems, but now I've written one.

In the evening I went off to the Little-Leerings, for our very own olio. Mieke gave the speech she had done for school, bright and funny and well-researched. Jessamyn shared a monologue she had written for theatre class, also funny and fun to listen to. Lindsay held up, one by one, a number of paintings she has done which show real talent. She also read a poem she had just written, and I hope to get copies by email of both the poem and Jess' monologue to carry with me to share with other teens.

Later their mother showed me the results of a remarkable project she has initiated in the legal advocacy service where she works. Called "Fire in the Belly," the project elicited from legal workers a recognition of their original motivations for getting into this work. We talked until we both drooped about the project and about how to get out a report about it so that others can share the findings. David was off teaching Law for Social Workers, and the most creativity I saw from him was his extremely artful performance the next morning of Breakfast for Five Women. It included cappuccino and a poached egg, and was well-received.

Not fitting in except to the Animals section was a magical early-morning visit to the old barn with Mieke, who fed two motherless lambs with bottles, scattered grain for the hens (less the one we'd eaten the night before), and introduced me to the new litter of barn kittens, as well as to the rest of the sheep and the pet goat and the friendly brown cow who turned out to be a steer intended to feature in future meals in the Little-Leering household. But I have a memory of early morning light slanting in against the stone foundation of the old barn, and the baas and lowing and cackling, and a dark-eyed girl saying that she loves animals. The goat stood and glared as goats do, with sunlight shining through its long tangled angora hair.

The session with the grade eights went fine, I think. We told the Psyche story I am bringing around, invented by Dana Lynn Seaborn of Victoria as a generic myth of the human soul. This time when Psyche brought back the treasure, she brought back a prince as well. I'd forgotten to allow for the grade eight arrival of hormones. I had one heck of a time nudging them to invent one ending to the story that did not have Psyche rescued and taken care of forever after by the prince. Luckily she had some bubbling

green potions, and was able to cure him of the bowel problem endowed him by a particularly voluble young woman in a front seat, and the class reluctantly sent him off to discover whether there is anything else worth searching for in this world besides girls.

A precocious boychild hurried in after the class and showed me his very good poems. "I was wondering whether you could have these published?"

Later that afternoon, Rick drove me back to Peterborough, where he was connecting with Tim Benson to drive somewhere else to the meeting of the CYM trustees. They too brought back treasure, arriving on Sunday morning at my door with the cheque to support the next leg of my journeys.

So now I just have to finish my income tax and decide what to do about the squirrels in the attic and which clothes to take for spring in the west.

The visit to Winnipeg was in a way a test of this leading. I arrived on a Monday after an overnight on the bus, and was warmly met by Pamela Leach and her five-and-a-half-year-old son, Paul. Dad Kwame is in Alaska, doing geophysics. Pamela wafted me to their big beautiful house which at present also serves as a meeting space for the Friends' group; I gazed with wonder at the wood paneling and hardwood floors, and then quickly got used to it--it was lovely to have a room of my own on the third floor, and to have email access all week made the transition from home anxieties much, much easier.

The quiet week in general smoothed that transition, along with the distraction of playing games with Paul, who beat me at table soccer and table hockey and snakes and ladders. I may have held my own at his small indoor basketball game and at Crazy 8's, but I did better when the deciding factor was luck, not skill. It was fun getting to know a 5-year-old again, and especially the modern version, with the major family tension being to bring him back to the real world and away from the wonderful educational computer games which I watched over Paul's shoulder with genuine awe. How can First Day School drawing and writing on paper be interesting when you are accustomed to creating complicated art work and stories at the stroke of a key?

Yet when we finally did get to First Day School, all went quite well.

Before that, though, were more than 5 days of this "visit to Winnipeg Worship Group," during which I didn't really meet Winnipeg Worship Group, who were all off having their lives. We had intended to get together on Wednesday evening for the sharing around "what do you make," but the decision had also been to make it an adult event, and this group is happily in the midst of a growth spurt that includes a lot of little kids. Some of the older Ontario groups I visited remember this phase with nostalgia; this group is living it, and loving it, but wondering when on earth to find time for the adults to get to know one another more deeply without flying kids landing in their laps. The answer might be: several years from now!

Anyway, on Wednesday night, Cate Friesen came, leaving her two boys with partner Al, and nobody else managed to make it. So that evening became an intense sharing among the three of us, about creativity but also about much else, including the life of Winnipeg Worship Group.

There's an archetypal story about the life of many of our groups, and part of it goes like this: some saintly Quaker keeps the seed alive over many years, meeting in a group of one sometimes, but holding the space. In the case of this group, Joe Ackerman told me, the credit should go to Paul Trudinger, a U of Winnipeg prof who held the space for perhaps 20 years, and was still doing it when Joe and Sharon began joining him. Paul moved to Australia, and Joe and Sharon decided that they would hold it in their home, since daughter Jane came too, and "that was where the toys were." Sometimes they would start in the kitchen, but then more people began coming, including Pamela and Kwame and Paul, and later Cate and Al and sons Sam and Chester, and Meeting was

usually held in the bedroom. Then the decision was made to move to Kwame and Pamela's living room, where it now stays. An upstairs room is dedicated to First Day School, and I saw the way the children headed for favourite markers and activities. Clearly, as the group took over the ground floor after Meeting, with games of ball rolling in the hall and lively conversation all over the place, the new space is working. But the group retains a sense of gratitude and history for those who held the space through the years when there were no young families and few attenders, so that eventually there was a place to come, and a beginning for the next phase of this group's life. In its further past, it was a Meeting, and I won't be surprised to find that sometime before too long it becomes a Meeting again. Right now it all feels new again.

I heard about this but didn't see it, because here it was Thursday and the only people from the group whom I had met were Pamela, Paul, and Cate. The conversations each evening with Pamela ranged all over the map and I thoroughly enjoyed them. Pamela is teaching Politics and also Human Rights at the Mennonite University which some of you will remember because Yearly Meeting has been held there twice. Pamela told me fascinating facts about the "long conversation," as she calls it, between the Mennonites and the Friends. I had thought our chief difference, aside from different histories, was in the centrality we give to talk of Christ, but it is also in the different approach we have to politics. Friends have historically opted again and again to remain in the world, searching for our spiritual journey within the real society around us and working with a premise, sometimes discouraging, that society is redeemable. Or, if that's not the right language, that the Blessed Community is indeed among us, and can be seen and manifested. I didn't consult any Mennonites, but I gather that there is a stronger sense that the spiritual journey lies within, and apart from the "world," and that the appropriate response is to enlarge that community which attempts to manifest the Blessed Community, and to reach out with compassionate assistance to the pain around us. Thus we see their admirable activities through Mennonite Central Committee, some of which I saw taken up by Kitchener Monthly Meeting, providing bags of school supplies to children who need it, and other kits for people with AIDS and so on. The long conversation has included many such joint actions between our two faith communities.

Pamela is enjoying the challenge of teaching politics within a Mennonite context. Her approach to those who say they are not interested in politics (and that includes some Friends, I think, too) is: Are you not interested in how communities set their agendas? Most of us ARE interested in that, (and so are most Mennonites!) and the setting of agendas is the place where Pamela begins to explain politics. Who is in charge, who can divert energy differently, what are the constraints--well, this is not my field, but the discussions were extremely stimulating.

During the week, first telephone contact and then internet visual contact was established with Kwame, which helped ease a little of the loneliness that was being felt by his family.

However, Pamela's mom in Toronto, who is ill, took a turn temporarily for the worse, and, instead of feeling I was in the way, I felt glad to be there to be someone to talk with, and I appreciated Pamela's levelheadedness. In general, we found out much about one another that we hadn't known and were glad to find out. I even got to go out to see

Paul play a live game of real soccer, and to take a photo of him kicking the ball, maybe even in the right direction.

But should I have been phoning around, trying to see whether Friends would like to take an hour for tea or--something? A writing group almost happened, but didn't. Something said no, keep on with what is happening, this is all right.

I went for long walks and discovered a path by the Assiniboine and got mud on my new walking shoes. The water in both rivers was high—way up above the walkway at the Forks where I had explored after CYM two years ago. But it wasn't flooding, and it was going down. The river, like worship groups and Meetings, has its flood and its receding, its, like, ebb and flow. And we are at spring, in spite of the freezing rain that happened one day and the snow I had seen still lying among the endless trees as the bus had rolled along the highway to Winnipeg.

Then came Sunday morning, and suddenly it was all happening after all. Pamela spent the morning getting ready, puttering about, as she said, which included fixing some munchies and Cate also brought good things to eat, to encourage people to linger. Altogether 13 adults arrived, and 6 children!

Joe and I went out with the children, and Cate came and went, riding herd on her youngest, Chester. We sat in a circle and said names and a few had stories to tell from their week, Paul's of course about his new computer game. I had made blank postcards out of Bristol board, and Pamela had also contributed some with pictures already on them of Winnipeg. We had a great little 15-minute video from American Friends Service Committee, about two little Quaker girls who conducted a very impressive postcard campaign against the sanctions against Iraq. Although those sanctions are bloodily ended, other sanctions still occur, and this is a very empowering video for kids who are thinking of mounting their own campaign. (Which may be exactly what I have landed amongst here in Edmonton, but if so that will be for next week.) The idea yesterday was just to encourage the kids to make postcards which I could take to other Quaker kids as greetings, and I do now have some to show the children here. This postcard idea may be the main one from now on if other Quaker kids like the idea. Paul immediately invented a new thing, a postcard book. He didn't want, I think, to be outdone by the boys from Kitchener Meeting who had made a book. Paul's story in his book goes as follows:

Title page: Once upon a time,

Page One: a boy lay on the floor, trying to get an idea what to do.

Page Two: And then he had an idea he could go shopping for some of his favourite games! He had a dog,

Page Three: and he was walking it in the store, and he didn't see the sign that said: NO DOGS ALLOWED

Page Four: And then there was a bird and the bird looked like he was making it very wet. But really it was just trying to make him and his dog go out of the store.

Page Five: (This isn't the last page) and then the bird kind of ran but it was too heavy. They were chasing the bird and the bird's foot almost got hit but it raised its foot at the right time. The boy and the dog just went



shopping and shopping and shopping! (Not the end, but I couldn't do it all at First Day School!)

By Paul

From Sam: *Hello! Bienos Dias! Aloha! Jambo! Howdy! Bonjour!*

From Ethan: a picture of a skull in a box, a person with a pocket, and a pot of gold. [Editor's note: months later, a Friend somewhere else in the country identified Ethan's skull in a box as a warning against watching too much television, and they could be right!]

From Kate: *Hi! Hello! Aholo! BonJor!* and a picture of a girl with big eyes.

Kate told me that at her school they are doing a campaign to save the rain forest. It cleans our air, she told me, and several other good points I wish I had written down, and they are sending postcards about this, so Kate--who is about 7? --understands about campaigns.

Back upstairs to the Meeting I went, leaving Cate and Joe with the video and the kids. There are exercise bars on that ceiling, and the boys were literally hanging from the rafters when I left.

Up to the quiet Meeting, and then the sharing afterwards. Well! Suddenly there it was, happening again, and without detailing all of it, here are some things I heard: that sometimes creativity moves "magically" through community, creating a radio program or architectural design which could not have happened through one mind and heart only; that working at detailed, repetitive creative work is like meditation; that there is the familiar feeling of being lost in time, but also the feeling (from two musicians) of being consumed--that the creative work and one's identity sometimes are inextricable; that there is an uneasy and interesting issue in creativity around the question of control--when you make something, do you feel you are in control? What, then, is the feeling of being out of control? What role is played by the sense of risk to one's identity, to the outcome? What does it mean for you to live adventurously? One Friend said he wanted to make an anti-creativity statement, that his desire is to avoid the feeling of being in control, but to enter the feeling of being fully present, just to be.

I listen, hearing the Spirit behind our words. We can't pin this down in words any more than we can pin down a creed. But to share our experience opens doors for me, and for the person speaking.

From the sharing with Cate and Pamela on Wednesday night, I want to give you some notes I took then, when our smaller group let me focus on two women's experiences.

Cate seems to me to epitomize a person who has followed her creativity and allowed it to lead her in directions that have been good for her, for her audiences and for the people she interviews or puts into her songs. I asked her about this, about the satisfaction and clarity she must feel about her work for the CBC. Cate noted how important it is for her to feel that she must honour the stories that are told to her. When she feels she has been able to do this, and when she also sees a connection with building and honouring community, she feels satisfied. At other moments, as with any work,

she wonders why she is doing this, why spend her time this way. Her own music keeps alive with a women's group that is working on a show, and jam sessions with friends.

Both women wanted to talk about being a working mother with young children, and the choices they make so that they keep the all-important creative connection with their kids.

At one point, Cate invited Pamela to show us what she had brought for the sharing session we had intended to have, [and which on Sunday we did have] and for a while then we heard stories from Africa, caught and grounded in the bright fabrics of a quilt Pamela made when she live in Burkina Faso and was ill. Each fabric design has meaning. One shows little hibachi stoves, teaching people to use stoves instead of open fires, to save wood and lessen deforestation in the Sahara. Another design is of red peppers on a yellow background, and the peppers represent the tears of Mariam Sankara, weeping after her charismatic leader husband was killed.

Most relevant to Pamela's work at that time is the fabric with letters of the alphabet. She and Kwame had curtains made of this fabric, and when they arrived the letters were upside down. In an illiterate society, the letters are simply an element of the design, with no up or down. In such an illiterate society, other priorities shift too. Pamela was working in a prison, with young offenders. Initially it was a literacy project. Later she found it more important to teach care of animals, basic business principles, and other useful life skills beyond or different from literacy.

That was my week in Winnipeg--6 days of healing and one glorious burst of meeting Friends. Then back on the bus. Things happened on the bus that are still in my head, but maybe this one will do to end this tale. A young mother came aboard carrying a baby, and wearing the Mennonite black cap on the back of her hair. Someone near her was very interested in her faith, and her confident voice went on for some while, telling their history in a way that I wish I could do so well of Friends. I perked up at the beginning when I had barely settled and then heard behind me: "Our roots go right back to the Anabaptists." Why, that's us, I thought, and then realized, no, it's part of the long conversation.

Journal 13 EDMONTON MONTHLY MEETING April 28, 2004:

I hadn't been in Edmonton before! My first glimpse of the vista of the river valley came as a moment of surprise and delight. A few days later I stood in the valley bottom, in front of the Kinsmen's Pool (I got to swim in the long lanes!), with Peter McLure pointing out landmarks and filling me in on some of the geographic bearings. Before this, the best I'd managed was the first morning, when Ted Garver took time off work to drive me around their neighbourhood and orient me to the bus system. In the end I didn't use it, but it was empowering to know that I could. Peter explained to me outside the pool that all of Edmonton was built after the advent of the motor vehicle, and this, plus the prairie surround, means that the city is bigger, physically, than Toronto, and public transit is expensive and inadequate. Parkland, however, is extensive--miles of it, mostly along the river. You may have to get to it by car, but once there, you can run or walk or bike for as far as your heart desires.

For most of the week, my experience of Edmonton was based on the neighbourhood where I had the privilege of staying, at the home of Ted Garver and his wife Colleen Halloran and their sons Max, 11, and Noah, 9. The whole family gathered me into their life and made me feel welcome, even as everybody raced off to work, lessons, school and games. I had caught a cold on the overnight bus from Winnipeg (darn it--the plan was to stay healthy for two years) and again really did need that quiet time when everyone was elsewhere. Walking the dog turned out to be a win-win job some of those days.

On one local adventure I gathered "objects of nature" for the Children's Meeting Friday evening. The sky was big, the air fresh, and warmer by the day. I could see, looking for pinecones and grass and stones, that the earth had of course all been moved around when the subdivision was built, and that growing things and even stones were mostly there because they were intended. For a long while I saw no stones at all, other than decorative collections artfully placed on some lawns. Then there was one lone stone in the gutter, and I picked it up. Later, in our sharing, Christine who is 3, I think, or 4, drew it very accurately and named the type of rock. I picked a long blonde grass with a live root, took an exotic pine cone with a dark, tight spindle looking as if it had been burned, a few dry leaves dramatically curled, and an evergreen sprig which later was discerned to look like a young man leaping for joy--these filled my second plastic bag (the first one was for contributions from dog Shelley, who trotted along proudly as if she understood that this was her neighbourhood, and she was showing me around). As I turned back into the Garver/Halloran driveway, I found a curved branch with a network of twigs, later transformed into a sketch by 7-year-old Nicole of a human figure with a mythical branched head.

This has been a political week, a week of conversations with young boys, and another week indicating that it is better to arrive on Sunday than on Monday, probably even when I need time to get over the trip. The idea of a children's meeting seems really interesting, and I hope that other Meetings may feel led to try it. In Edmonton we had a pleasant and at times insightful time with the children, but the only Quaker kid who attended was one of the two who were in-house. Three girls arrived with their dad, all non-Quaker friends of the family. Young Noah did a superb job of keeping the evening moving along; he said all the right things when the girls produced their stories and

drawings, and by the end of the night I had quite a fine new accumulation to add to my collection. I showed them the drawings the children made in Simcoe-Muskoka, and the books made by the 3 boys in Kitchener and by Paul in Winnipeg. Paul had drawn abstract illustrations, and the children could see the bird Paul had seen in what some adults might have perceived as a scribble. They were puzzled, however, by Paul's reference to "First Day School," not having had anything like that in their experience; Noah goes to the Baptist Sunday School, not Meeting, and so he too didn't recognize the expression. But I explained it, and they read all the Hellos from Sam and from Kate in Winnipeg, got inspired and really went to town on stories of their own. Noah finished his in the last moments before I had to leave, and now I have another book by a boy with me, a moral tale called "Home Alone."

Perhaps you will enjoy reading the text, although I regret you can't see his hasty but cheerful cover drawing of a house and a kid waving hello or goodbye. I saw this story grow, as Noah first drafted a short version, and then realized he could add in details:

#### HOME ALONE

*One summer day a boy named Joey and a girl named April were left home alone. [picture of them smiling and waving goodbye, perhaps to their parents. sun in sky, cloud, red roof overhead. This illustration, at Noah's gracious invitation, was contributed by his friend Stephanie.]*  
*April thought she was perfect, beautiful, smart, good at sports and funny. She was fun to be around even though she was a little arrogant and irresponsible. Something that only she knew she had a secret pinecone that was magic. [pic of spindled pinecone shedding light and a smiling April, drawn by me]*  
*Joey was nice, smart and funny he was the exact opposite from his sister. One thing he knew that no one else knew was that he was not very smart. [drawing of Joey by Stephanie's dad Ron. Joey looks cheerful and not very smart.]*  
*When their mom left April was happy. Joey on the other hand was very sad because he couldn't sing and play the guitar with her. April was happy because she was older and got to boss Joey around. They both knew they would have to do their chores which made them both sad. [By this time, two days had passed and Noah was feverishly trying to finish writing the story and so, although there is room for pictures at the end, he filled up all the pages with text. He had intended to thank the artists at the back, which is why I am letting you know who they are.]*  
*Joey was responsible so he quickly walked their dog and cleaned his room (it wasn't very messy because he always cleaned it when his mom told him to.). Joey decided that he would help his sister because he was kind and she was lazy. It was about time their mother came home and April hadn't done her chores but she wasn't worried because she had her magic pinecone. Quickly she sped up to her room and wished her chores were done, Magically they all were done. Soon their mom came home.*  
*She inspected what the children had done. She gave Joey his allowance but she knew April used magic and so she didn't get her allowance.*  
*April had learned her lesson and never took the lazy way out.*

Noah might have put in more details there at the end if I hadn't been on my way out the door with my suitcase, but I thank him for his thoughtful story. I asked him at one point whether Joey had any faults. He grinned and said firmly, "Not in this story!"

As the week turned out, older brother Max was often away with friends, but I had lucked into Noah's ninth birthday and into other opportunities for conversations with him. The big opportunity for me for a window into Max's world came one noon when he arranged for FIVE buddies from school to come home for lunch together. Like his brother, he played host with ease, introducing me to his friends, and opening cans with different titles: The Simpsons, Zoodles, Scooby-Doo, Arthur, but the same subtitle: pasta shapes in tomato sauce. Dessert was brownies left cooling by Mom Colleen as she took off for work. The boys discussed the writing of stories, which they had just come from in class, and whether or not fantasy writing has to be based on something possible. There seemed some attraction in the freedom to invent just anything you want. Then we got off onto sports and also other places they all had lived. They all like Edmonton because it is BIG. They trooped down to a viewing of Max's room and then out the door. Not sure what exactly I learned, but I felt honoured.

The boys' father and I both took photos of Noah on his birthday trying out his new skateboard, and I think I also got a good shot of both boys and Colleen in a jam session with the guitars.

A serious place is given in this household to visual art, music and time to write. Colleen writes articles and advertising for the Creative Arts program at the local college, a room of her house is a studio for her visual art, and a few of her very good poems are now with me for consideration for the collection which I hope may be produced in 2006 or so through the Pamphlets Committee (to be seen). Ted's work is in scientific research, but he too has written poetry, and after a meditation in our "children's meeting" on a tightly curled leaf, Ted drew a sketch of it and wrote this:

golden brown dried leaf  
desiccated memory of  
energetic summer days  
cocoon of life  
fragile beginnings of spring

I hereby remind Ted and all others reading this that you can continue to send poems for possible publication here or in the not-yet-certain collection until the end of 2005. Also poems, stories and drawings by and for children. The purpose of the children's material is more amorphous--we'll see what we have, and then see whether it is possible to make a book or collection of it for use in First Day Schools. For now, it is enough to invite Quaker kids to send work to me to show to other Quaker kids as I travel for the rest of this year and next year to other Friends' groups and meetings.

The book of the week in Edmonton was The Pig Who Sang to the Moon: the emotional life of farm animals, by Jeffrey Moussaieff Masson. "Just read that first chapter," Colleen requested, mere moments after I had arrived, "and tell me whether you think there is anything to it." Over the next couple of days, I read most of the book, and,

yeah, I do think there is something to it. Pigs in particular--but also chickens and cows and sheep and goats--do have feelings. They know we are going to kill them, for one thing. Cows bawl for their calves when we take them away from them in order to give us milk, and bacon comes from an animal so much like ourselves that we use some of its organs as human transplants.

Noah was considering mounting a campaign. Mainly he thinks it is time to stop eating pigs. I explained to him about the aboriginal way (so I am told) of apologizing to an animal and then using every part of it. I had Shelley on a leash when we had this conversation.

"Why not," Noah demanded, his voice tight with passion about this, "kill Shelley right now, apologize to her and then use every bit of her?! Tell me--do you see any difference between killing pigs and killing dogs?"

Well no, I don't. But do I think there may be more to it.

The conversation continued, off and on, all week. Added to my list for personal shifts in 2006, when all this is over, is: look into more and better recipes for tofu. And learn to play guitar.

On Wednesday evening, the political focus moved to the abolition of nuclear weapons. The mayor of Hiroshima was in town, and an audience of about 150 turned out to hear him. It was an evening of celebrities. He was introduced by the mayor of Edmonton, who gave him a soapstone polar bear to honour the endurance of the people of Hiroshima, and received in return a silver folded crane, which is made by coating a paper crane with silver, and then burning the paper out in fire. Doug Roche, respected activist senator now at retirement, introduced him, and Mel Hurtig thanked him. A representative of a multi-faith council moderated the evening, and did a smooth job of coordinating the questions afterwards from the microphones. I was driven to and from the event by Patti Hartnagel of Edmonton MM, who recently received the mayor's award for her work for peace.

Not only was it made crystal clear that the time is NOW to oppose the so-called antiballistic missile program, but the mayor of Hiroshima also succeeded in putting the abolition of nuclear weapons back into my mind and others as an identifiable and necessary goal.

He was impressive, that man, in his clarity and in the graceful way he responded to questions. He has a plan. I expect you can find it on the internet under Mayors for Peace. His main point is that the last survivors of the bombing of Hiroshima and of Nagasaki are now turning 60, and most have died. As a group, they have taken a stand of non-retaliation, and of saying that no one else ever again must live through the horror that engulfed them. Of course present-day nuclear weapons are many times worse than the ones we dropped in August of 1945. The horror would be that much more unthinkable.

And likely most of us do agree that if a weapon is kept in development, it will indeed eventually be used. The place that nuclear weapons will be used is a big city. I have

seen my brother Alan, a physics teacher at Trent, throw the transparency onto the overhead projector that shows what happens in Peterborough when the epicenter is in Toronto. Most of us would die.

So the mayor of Hiroshima has decided that the people he can approach are mayors of big cities. Their cities are targeted. This is not an international issue only, but a matter of the safety of civilians in any large city.

I apologize here for the fact that I haven't told you the name of the mayor of Hiroshima, or given you the internet site for his plan. I may know these things soon and if I do, will slip them into the next journal. I've deliberately not taken notes so far, wanting to give you the experiences filtered through my memory--but memory is faulty and now all I can recall is that the mayor's name starts with 'A.' I have seldom heard a speaker deal so well with questions from the audience. It was a truly inspiring evening, and as of here I have begun taking notes! [Later: His name is Tadatosh Akiba, and the website for Mayors for Peace is: <http://www.mayorsforpeace.org/english/index.html>]

On the way home, Patti and I talked about the challenge of keeping a balance in one's life, especially when one feels called to activism at the level that has engaged Patti. For her, the balance comes from the making and selling of raku pottery, workouts at the gym, and time with grandchildren. Yet in the build-up to the Iraq war, the balance collapsed and she spent 16- or 20-hour days, just opposing the war. No, she said, she did not feel all that depressed when the war began. (I told her I had gone to a presentation by Kawartha Ploughshares, and, during footage shown of the explosions of the invasion of Baghdad, had found myself weeping hard in the darkness.) She said that the emotions I felt were healthy ones, and in need of being expressed, but she herself had not felt the urge that I had, to withdraw for a while and reflect. But she did feel a real need to return to the balance she had lost, and feels much better now with this back in place.

Suddenly Patti said something that was a piece I have missed. I have been asking HOW we can move from our strengths, especially as expressed in our creative passions, INTO the future we want to build, the social change. I had been excited by the vision brought in the workshop led by Chuck Fager, about the connection between our deep leadings and the long-term blossoming of future society. Patti's remarks showed me that this process is parallel, or identical, to the process of seeking the deep spiritual place and the still place the artist enters intentionally at the beginning of a creative act. We face work which calls us, such as for instance the abolition of nuclear weapons (or what to do about the animals we betray and kill) and what we need to do is to focus (go into the silence), find the piece that is truly ours (the ministry rising, the creative vision) and then it's a matter of being faithful, of doing it. We can't take on the whole world. But we CAN enter the process. It takes courage, in my experience, but the alternatives-- unfaithful living, avoiding the call--aren't fun either.

Is this what Friends call "discernment"? It sounds to me like every meeting for worship, every creative journey, poem, pie, birdhouse, illustration or matching of colours for a quilt.

The rest of the visit until the burst of activity at the weekend was sparked with intense conversations with Colleen, who reads voraciously, asks very hard questions, and has been putting me through the mill around: religious education for children; oppression of women; vegetarianism; welfare recipients and economic realities; corporations and in general, evil; Quakers and Baptists and the raising of kids. I probably forgot something from this list. I want to wonder to Colleen whether she and I could write a book together, called something like: From the Heart Land. Compassion is very high on both our value systems. I found myself attempting to defend the notion that maybe there's not so much difference between a pig and a carrot, if only you could hear the carrot scream (I don't eat pigs, but I do want to go on eating carrots--and yogurt); and I was quite proud of myself when I discovered, I thought, a parallel between the Moslem insistence of covering their hair and our own inane commitment to not letting women expose their breasts.

Colleen handed me Alice Walker's *The Secret of the Possession of Joy*, about female circumcision, not only in Africa but on this continent too. I read it.

Then came the children's meeting, and then a quite wonderful gathering of adults and kids, when I finally met a dozen more members of the Meeting. They had brought things they had made. We did it as an intergenerational sharing, and then Noah did his usual great job of relating to the other kids while this time the adults were able to go deeper and say a few things we needed to share. Lonna arrived with a big basket of knitting, and in the course of speaking of it, her son Nolan modeled a bright red jacket with hood that he particularly likes. Nolan, who is 8, is known in this Meeting as the kid who usually comes and sits quietly colouring, and so it was a joy to receive his written statement about what Meeting means to him:

*I like meeting because it is very peaceful for me. I am a member because I believe that you don't have to sing to pray.*

Nolan followed this during the evening with an abstract drawing in very bright "Meeting colours" that could be looked at it from many different perspectives.

Jeff and Julie were weary after a week of moving house, but came anyway, and were still able to receive the lively wiggles of son York, who is 3. Julie is a poet and will send some poems for consideration for the collection (couldn't find them in the boxes in time for this session) and Jeff, like a few other teachers in my travels, at first stated that he is not creative at all. (In my own experience, during the years I was teaching in the classroom, I wrote almost nothing--all my creative energy went into the challenging intricacies of those classroom relationships.) Hilary Hallam came to this sharing, a Friend who has attended here for a long time (most others are new to the group) and Hilary spoke of music. There is a moment, she said, where it all comes together... and then it communicates too, at and from that moment. I heard perhaps epiphany, and then perhaps that outward movement many others have noted. Sometimes the creative journey (and the spiritual one, and the political one????) are only for oneself, and that is all right, and indeed wonderful. But at other times, one rises to speak, and ministry flows out to other lives, other listeners. The knitted sweater goes on keeping someone warm.



On Sunday, a few hours before I was back on the bus, Ted drove me to Meeting. It is held at L'Arche, at one end of a large bright room where creative activities clearly occur all day. To my utter amazement, almost everybody there was new to me. Hilary and Ted were the only ones I knew from the gathering the night before, and I had met Peter for our swim and intense conversation afterwards. Patti Hartnagel was off in Vancouver taking a workshop in Turning the Tide, the British Friends' non-violent training that is now being introduced into Canada. Also present was Janine Bandcock, who attends Meeting in Victoria, and her dad Ted, whom I had met at the evening for the mayor of Hiroshima. But here were 8 more people unaccounted for.

We settled into worship, and the stillness grew. Some vocal ministry did come, and at 20 minutes to the end, a Friend named Andrew announced that it was time for worship-sharing. I was ready for this, as Friends had mentioned it the evening before. The Meeting has introduced this to encourage Friends to share more freely than feels okay in the solemn silence. However, most Friends stay still to the end. This time I did feel free to speak, telling of my week, using the trust we give one another about our journeys. And Hilary spoke, noting that Merrill Stewart had only one more Sunday with them, that he will be greatly missed, and that he is moving with his wife to Belleville! My home town! And will be worshipping with Wooler Meeting. A big shift here, for both groups.

Meeting ended. There were no announcements, except that it was Earth Day. I was invited to say a little about my travelling, and I presented the Meeting with their second copy of Waging Peace-Peter, who is the brother and son of the two Friends who did this project, had already presented the Meeting with a copy a year ago. Some left to walk in Earth Day, and others lingered a little to talk with one another. Janine took the opportunity to lift the lid of a piano and practise a piece she is to play soon for some public event. Her dad joked that if she continued that perhaps he and I could dance, which might have been another good moment, but it was indeed time to go.

Goodbye Edmonton, and thank you, and I hope our paths cross again.

Journal 14 SAANICH PENINSULA MEETING May 5, 2004

Friends, this will be a long one. A small Meeting on Vancouver Island sent their clerk to Representative Meeting to take the message that they feel it is time in Canada for two yearly meetings. Their thinking was seasoned in various ways, including letters to western meetings and a discussion at Western Half-Yearly. When I heard about this from a Friend in Edmonton, the remark was that it sounded like typical western alienation. "I don't think so," I said, "knowing some of the Friends it is coming from." I am disturbed by it, though, and perhaps my take on it will help your own take, until we come through to How We Are Led. Last week in Edmonton felt political, but this week with Saanich Peninsula Meeting, the politics became personal.

It's the cost of the travelling that is at the nub of this issue, and its impact on the environment. The spectacle of Friends hopping into airplanes and scouring trails of pollutants across the sky as we converge on Nova Scotia strikes some Friends as, at best, blindness and at worst, perhaps (no one has actually said this) hypocrisy.

Bob McInnes hands me an article from The Guardian Weekly: "With Eyes Wide Shut," by George Monbiot. He refers to "our deep semi-consciousness that projects our future lives as repeated instances of the present." He then lists the facts as understood by most climatologists: average rise of 0.6C over the past century... water in rivers declining up to four times as fast as the percentage reduction of rainfall... The article concludes: "So we slumber through the crisis. Waking up demands that we dethrone our deep unreason and usurp it with our rational minds. Are we capable of this, or are we destined to sleepwalk to extinction?"

That statement feels almost the opposite of my own leadings to affirm the unreason of creativity. It seems to be saying that the intuitive "knowledge" that rises in us (that the earth will forgive and will always be able to sustain us) is just plain wrong. Saanich Peninsula Meeting wants us to wake up, use our God-given reason, and show forth our understanding of the true situation by NOT attending yearly meeting, NOT travelling across the country in the name of Friendship. For them, I think it is like the testimony of wearing plain clothes, or as for John Woolman, refusal to wear cloth dyed by slaves.

Wars are being waged for oil and still we Friends drive our cars, fill in the empty spots on yearly meeting committees and apply for travel assistance to fly.

Among us are a few Friends who have quietly stopped attending Yearly Meeting gathering at least in part in protest against the consumption of oil and gas that is required. And of course since the first Gulf War, two other Friends, Ken and Martha Laing, have been driving their horse and buggy for all local trips instead of driving their car.

Keith Helmuth will give the Sunderland P. Gardner lecture this year at Canadian Yearly Meeting, and I wonder whether he would have accepted this invitation except that CYM is being held this year in the Atlantic region, not far from where Keith and Ellen used to live, and close enough to where they live now in the States. We may hear more of this--at CYM.

Committee travel is another sore point for Saanich Peninsula Friends. Solutions I've heard are: committees can meet by email; committees can be eliminated and let's see if there's anything we actually miss; local committees in a Western Yearly Meeting would spend less even if they do travel to meet. Of course, supposing that the committee work really is needed, we'd have two of them, travelling twice. Instead of six (once we find 3 more) members of Religious Education committee thinking about what programs might nurture young families who come to Friends, there'd be twelve.

Which raises the second compelling reason in favour of this split: if Something is local and affects your own life, you are more likely to feel ownership and to take part. The past split of Pacific Yearly Meeting into a gathering south of the 49th parallel and a gathering north of it, which became part of Canadian Yearly Meeting, has been beneficial for all concerned. It led to a significant growth in numbers in both groups.

It depends, of course, on the nature of the split. Saanich Peninsula broke off amicably from its parent meeting, Victoria MM, and both groups thrive. Whereas I am still a little stunned by my tour of Prince Edward County back in Ontario, across the bay bridge from where I grew up, Belleville. At one end of a street is Wellington Museum, formerly the Meeting House of the Conservative Friends. Just down the street is or was another Meeting House for the Hicksite Friends. Some time not that long ago--1900?--there were 2200 Friends in Prince Edward County. Now there are NONE. So splits don't always lead to an increase in numbers.

Anyway. All concerned are clear that this split would be amicable... "NOT a spiritual split."

Let us agree that if Something affects our lives, we are more likely to take part. Out there are zillions of Quakers (I really do believe this) who don't know that they are, because they don't know we exist.

What is the Something?

To suggest two possibilities: 1) is it the power to make decisions? 2) is it Friendly gatherings with no "business" and lots of worship-sharing, play and study?

What I am hearing is a strong sense of wanting Choice Two--more gatherings, no business. Not just here but all across the country, the longing for spiritual nurture is almost palpable.

Of course I want to come back to Choice One if I can, but let's switch here to a helpful conversation I was able to have with one Saanich Friend. Dee Heston is in unity with the Saanich proposal for a Western Yearly Meeting, and a seasoned Friend who has been part of Edmonton MM, Argenta, the South Kootenay Worship Group and now Saanich. Interestingly, Dee is also a longtime Unitarian, and divides her time between the two groups, finding special nurture in both communities. (I am following this Unitarian thread in my travels, too, another "long conversation" like the one with the Mennonites.)

Dee has been very much involved in a process in the local Unitarian Fellowship (more than 200 members and a strong program for children), out of which has come a program of small groups. Most members have now committed themselves to meet for at least six months, once a month, with the same group, "whatever happens," to discuss a range of topics of their choice, but beginning with a mandatory topic, "Covenant." This means that they begin by defining what they will be for one another, their commitment to the larger fellowship and their commitment to the community (and world, I suppose) outside the Fellowship.

"This," said Dee, spreading her hands in the gesture of giving a gift, "is what Friends need."

I sat bewildered, memories of all the small groups with Friends I have attended over the years, worship-sharing with Ottawa Friends, with Victoria Friends and at Quaker gatherings. But also I remembered the loneliness I felt when I came to Peterborough, and at first I was not able to attend the once-a-month discussion group, and there was no mid-week meeting, no deep sharing of journeys. Now the discussion once a month has moved to a time when I can be there, and that helps a lot, and also after silent worship we have "Afterthoughts," when suddenly we feel ready to share, and not just on the surface either. It is usually all Ruth Hillman can do to persuade us to come and have tea. Sometimes she has to bring it around.

And I remembered the afternoon in Guelph with two Friends saying--Meeting for Worship is central but--I need Something more.

What we seem to need, in a phrase, is a sense that others are accompanying us on the journey. I doubt we need to split our yearly meeting to get this, since Friends are in unity that our spiritual life and nurture begins in the local group with local Friends.

Aware and experienced Friends at the local level also know that some decisions have to be made--where and when to meet, whether to have a bank account, or a children's program, or a delegate to CYM. In some Meetings, a few seasoned Friends take on responsibility for these arrangements and relieve the others of having to attend to "business." The others are rarely grateful. They want to be in on decisions about Something that affects their lives. Friends have a treasure, Meeting for Worship for Business. When we ignore and override this treasure, eventually somebody says: "The same few people are making all the decisions, and I feel excluded."

And of course by that time the whole idea of sitting in worship and listening for the guidance of God has gone out the simple Meeting House window. So surely we need BOTH fellowship AND decision-making. And surely spiritual nurture comes from both the gathering with Friends AND from doing the "business."

Saanich Peninsula arranged a potluck and sharing for the Tuesday evening after my arrival. We met in the home of Pierre and Elizabeth Beguin, who give a gracious European flair to an otherwise normal Quaker potluck. I think it's that tea tray on wheels beside the table, ready to bring food or cart dirty dishes away. Really it is Elizabeth and Pierre themselves, and the intermingling of English and French. I always love too the formal portrait on the wall of Elizabeth as a young girl, being raised in her

father's mansion protected by kind servants and a loving family. The war changed all that. Elizabeth became a nurse and practised her profession under the most rugged conditions, in the interior of B.C. Pierre's role became in part to drive her over the treacherous mountain roads. Pierre is a respected visual artist and Elizabeth is the author of a number of books, including her engaging autobiography and a new one which is a collection of fragments from her journals, tracing her spiritual journey. She writes as Elizabeth Resford, and seems most proud of a book she wrote on multi-faith issues, at a time when, as she says, "there was a lot of silliness about people wearing turbans and carrying knives."

Pierre has a habit, more pronounced with age, of booming out announcements of fact and of personal truth: "I know there is nothing spiritual in my paintings, because I had nothing of that in my mind."

Fran Wood of this meeting was fretting aloud that she wished I would "define creativity." To Pierre she asked, "Couldn't spirituality be more a matter of feeling than of mind?"

Bob and Betty McInnes, separately and together, professed that they were really not very creative. Except, they both allowed, their creativity had found an outlet in the raising of their four children and relating to their continuing extended family and friends. Fran burst out with a strong statement that Bob and Betty weave a wonderful fabric of welcome and support for so many of us, and that this is surely creative. Bob admitted bashfully that music is important to him, and that he plays the harmonica. (I knew he had it with him, but it wasn't the moment to put him on the spot.) Betty said she dabbles.

Ruth Brown sat smiling with her eyes closed for a long time, then spoke of the breakthrough for her when she discovered the teachings of Meister Eckhart, and the idea that we are engaged with the divine in a process of co-creation. For Ruth this co-creativity is experienced as "freedom and delight."

"Margaret, is it ever right," asked Elizabeth forthrightly, "to choose one's duty over one's art, or one's art instead of one's duty?"

"Elizabeth," I said, "you will not hear the answer to that from me." I referred everyone to Corder Catchpool in the blue Faith and Practice book -- the part in italics just before #109. For those readers who don't have it right with them, it goes like this:

*At the age of 28, following a period of frustration and misery, he was led to 'alter his whole conception of the way in which divine guidance may be sought and found. He came to see that God did not make our decisions for us, or give us special infallible directions for great occasions, if we prayed hard enough for them; that a feeling of certainty and joy in making a critical decision was no guarantee that it was going to work out well; that God could teach and lead us through frustration as well as through success; and, in sum, that no one could rightly understand or talk of Divine Guidance except one who had sought it daily in the smallest concerns of life; and so grown gradually to live more and more in the "mind of Christ" until his decisions in greater matters also were such as flowed out of a settled loving character, and were for that very reason in accord with the Will of God.*

Dee Heston had looked at the page of queries I had prepared, where I ask us to explore our personal moments of creative change with the idea that there may be a connection with more effective action towards social change. Dee noted that for her, raised in the Church of England, religion has always been mixed up with politics. She then spoke clearly and touchingly of "transformative moments." "Personal change does happen," she said, "if we can accommodate it" and "Everything is potentially spiritual." She spoke of the gardens she has known, and in particular the garden she has now. Later in the week I visited it, and saw how Dee has taken out dark corners and let in light.

Pierre too had been examining the queries. "Cherie," he said, and asked Elizabeth whether, when she is writing her books, she experiences joy. Elizabeth said that she did, really, because she loves words, she does love working with words.

Pierre does too, which I know from the experience of working with him at CYM—we were on the epistle committee together for several years running; the epistle committee is often made up of Friends who do love the use of words and enjoy the work it is asked to do, catching the sense of what has happened in that gathering.

When all had a chance to speak and the meeting had closed with silence, I showed Pierre the photos I've taken so far, including the inadvertent artsy double exposures of Coldstream Friends and Wooler. (Coldstream people lined up smiling, and fading away to one side, sunlit Wooler Meeting tombstones....)

A few Friends couldn't make it that evening and I met other members of Saanich Peninsula Meeting, including some younger members, at Meeting for Worship on Sunday. They meet in a bright, very suitable building which during the week is a drop-in centre run by the Mental Health Association, this one mainly for seniors.

The clerk of Saanich Peninsula Meeting is Muriel Sibley, and Muriel and I have been dear friends now for quite a few years. We went out for dinner together before she flew off to Representative Meeting to present their proposal. She and I were not in unity about this. I don't want CYM to split. I want us to keep a national entity, to have the opportunity for a national voice. It's fine with me if we lay down CYM gathering every other year. No Friend I know will be upset if more decision-making devolves to local groups and regional gatherings and half-yearly meetings. This is already happening anyway.

And everyone wants to keep Canadian Friends Service Committee, and to keep an annual gathering for Young Friends and children. No one is quite ready yet to rent a bus and take a month to travel to and from Canadian Yearly Meeting. Few seem aware that as a yearly meeting we have established an international office in our nation's capital, which is doing exciting and significant work, using the resources of its location in the country's capital, Ottawa. We have a broad country, stretched thin in the prairies, and the sprinkling of prairie Quaker families have worked hard to maintain connections. No one wants to abandon those tenuous small meetings to uncertain support.

Yet our consumption of gas and oil is a seed of war and of global warming.

Muriel and I face each other over the delicious East Indian meal she insists on buying for me. It is so good to see one another again, but this Saanich proposal leaves both of us shaking our heads, me because I don't understand it and Muriel because she passionately believes it is inevitable but does not want to get on the plane and expend herself on the trip east. Many people, she fears, may be upset about it and this does not look like fun. We are both women who know what it is to be in the grip of a leading. Mine right now is to visit all these precious groups in our country and through these journals perhaps to reveal us a little one to another. Muriel's leading before the first Gulf War was to put her life on the line, literally, as she travelled to take part in an international peace camp on the border of Iraq. From their desert camp they saw the first missiles of that war streak through the night sky. It is from Muriel that I first heard and understood about the UN-supported sanctions against Iraq. We Canadians took part in a holocaust directed at children under five and the very old. That the main victims would be little children was well known before the sanctions began, and yet we continued with the sanctions for more than ten years, and only stopped when the west again rained down bombs. It is far too easy to say that Canada did not invade Iraq. We did the first time. We did attack Afghanistan. We would have gone into Iraq if the UN had agreed. Our Prime Minister is now promoting a different way of making these decisions, so that we won't get so far out of line again with "our most powerful ally."

Muriel has mothered five children. We both know that the obscene race to keep supplying oil and gas kills. I remember how real and personal that first Gulf War became for those of us here on Vancouver Island, knowing that our Friend Muriel was there. Now it is other Friends, including Jane MacKay Wright.

I waited to post this journal until Muriel returned from Representative Meeting. It turned out that Muriel didn't mention the Saanich proposal until near the end of a worship-sharing session in which other voices spontaneously spoke seriously of the possibility of splitting into two yearly meetings. The reasons were financial and environmental. The committee on restructuring has been instructed to continue its work, without, I gather, any clear direction...yet. "We'll still be Canadian Friends," Muriel said. "That doesn't change."

Saanich Peninsula Meeting has made a proposal. 'Better listen, Friends. Listen expectantly.

Journal 15 VANCOUVER MEETING May 17, 2004 Haiku by

Marilyn Pollard:

*Spring rain falling*

*Traffic swishing*

*Memories of beach and ocean surf*

I took a few days "off" last week, when the visit to Bowen Island Worship Group had to be postponed, to linger on Vancouver Island (near my own memories of beach and ocean surf.) I stayed one more day with Bob and Betty McInnes, and then three days with Constance Mungall and two days with my sister Ruth. I popped in to the James Bay Inn reading and got introduced to the audience (in spite of trying to hide behind somebody's beer) as Margaret Dymont, founder of the Victoria School of Writing. It felt odd indeed to slip into that persona I left behind four years ago when I moved to Peterborough and began using my birth name again. My 65th birthday arrived and was celebrated with handmade gifts, a brooch from Constance and chocolate cake from my sister, made from our mother's recipe. I met again with 4 members of Saanich Peninsula Meeting, and we discussed creativity and despair. Muriel Sibley told how she feels in her pottery studio, "contented as a cow in her stall," and we talked about how to keep that feeling when we walk out of our stalls and encounter the pain of the outside world.

The week ended with the Literary Info-Fair, also founded by MD., with much help from D.B. and K.R. and F.G. and A.J. (Actually the week began with a chance to help F.G. move house, and included lovely long coffee times with A.J. and with K.R.) One workshop leader had been stranded in the Kootenays, and I was called upon to pinch hit. No problem--I'm carrying around with me my various workshop kits in case of call by the Friends. So we announced The Creative Journey, and I had the great pleasure of leading 25 people who really had turned up for children's writer Nikki Tate through storytelling about the spiritual / creative journey of Psyche. I couldn't resist telling them that my brother Bill had just won a B.C. Book Prize for his illustrations for Stanley's Party by Lynda Bailey, and enjoyed watching people write down the reference to presumably run off to buy a copy. It's about a dog who has a party, in case you're wondering.

Then I hugged my dear sister one more time, hard, and her dear husband drove me to the bus.

So here I am, and have been, in Vancouver, since last Saturday night. I got off the ferry at Tsawwassen, actually, and found Ellen Pye rushing through the parking lot looking for me. Perfect timing, and Ellen whisked me off to their house and a good vegetarian supper and reconnecting with her and her husband David. We talked about the Meeting and about things we make, and Ellen showed me a work in progress, a blanket she was knitting out of odds and ends of leftover wool. She's Dutch and met David in Africa, living for a while after their marriage in Zimbabwe. Themes of lost friends and grief over



lost opportunities for people they used to know and care about, black and white, wove through our conversation, along with hardheaded resourcefulness and adapting to different cultures and making a go of it. At moments Ellen is almost intimidating in her scholarly knowledge and her gift for metaphor. That blanket was a metaphor in the making, the creation of beauty and comfort out of what is left.

Ellen drove me to Meeting and arranged to move my suitcase to the back of the Pollards' station wagon. This may be the only Meeting where I can be there for two Sundays. I was introduced, found I'd left my travel letter behind with Saanich Peninsula, let people know that I was open to conversations or whatever through the coming week. I stayed through Meeting for Worship for Business, and found Vancouver dealing with many substantive issues. The neighbourhood of the Meeting House is protesting the creation of a bus parking lot on a piece of waterfront land, and Meeting members are supporting the idea of creating a public walkway instead, or as well, I wasn't quite sure. But it did sound friendly.

Maxine Kaufmann Lacusta is a member of this Meeting, and presented a proposal from Canadian Friends Service Community that Vancouver MM support the International Middle East Media Centre. Several Meetings are needed to give this initiative support. Friends were a bit wary, in spite of long-term warm support for Maxine's leadings for reconciliation in Palestine/Israel. Friends wanted to know whether the Media Centre would report peaceful initiatives in Israel as well as in Palestine. They also wanted reassurance about the amount of commitment they were being asked to give. The answers sounded good, but final decision was deferred until the June Meeting, when the exact request will be more clear. It sounds as if the main need is to locate media contacts everywhere in Canada who are willing to receive the information generated from the Media Centre. Its mandate is to send out accurate reports "from the ground" in Palestine, with emphasis on non-violent initiatives and work for reconciliation. The sense is that this is not receiving adequate coverage in our media. I believe this myself--I have rarely, if ever, seen media accounts of the many wonderful actions I now know occur regularly in this region, as Israelis and Palestinians work together to save olive groves or keep movement possible through the checkpoints in the growing wall.

Plans for my visit were on the agenda with further weighty items concerning support for a family from Kenya, response to a U.S. reservist who is inquiring about fleeing to Canada, treasurer's report and the usual urgent stuff about house and grounds. Joan Strauss clerked the meeting with care and afterwards apologized for its length, but it seemed to me that the time was needed. Anyway, it came out just right for me, as my hosts had been visiting Victoria and were just back home at 4, when Marilyn and Don Pollard drove me to their door. I settled in on the couch in the living room of Grace Wolf and Andrew Gage, where I still reside.

This visit is more than a week, and we are all still really enjoying each other's company. I bet it will be nice for them, though, to get their living

room back to themselves. Grace let slip yesterday that my suitcase is sitting right on their meditation corner! I was here for the moment of celebration that Grace has been accepted into the UBC Education program--a nice segue from anthropology. The Meeting has passed on a dinner coupon to us and tonight we'll make the celebration official at a fancy restaurant.

Andrew is an environmental lawyer, and has published a long article about the legal recourse offered by the Charter against pollution, and the effect of pollution on public health. He's also on Vancouver Meeting's Ministry & Counsel and we kept getting into abstruse discussions on points of theology where Grace would politely excuse herself and move on with her excellent life.

Unexpected connections started up, as happens other places too. Marilyn put me in touch with a special person who hasn't been to Meeting in a long while because of life circumstances "but would appreciate a Friendly visit." My, I enjoyed meeting with a person as centred and engaging as this person was in her quite difficult situation! There's some trick to it, some spiritual learning, that takes constrictions uncomplainingly and finds the gift in it all. I just soaked it in.

I'd been carrying around an email from another Friend who lives farther out, in Richmond, and that phone call also was illuminating, at least for me. Again there are constrictions, reasons both emotional and physical why coming in to the central Meeting is difficult or impossible. But we seemed quickly to see a bright line of movement forward, which is to put aside all the difficulties and to focus on the children. Come to think of it, that is definitely part of the secret in the first person I met as well. What will nurture the spiritual path of the children? Find the answer to that, and much else falls into place. There's a fledgling worship group in Richmond, and I hope to visit there when I return to B.C. in the fall of next year.

Dorothy Stowe had contacted me after Meeting and invited me to come to her house later in the week to meet Isaac Romano from Nelson, who wants to revive the Fellowship of Reconciliation in Vancouver. When I accepted, I didn't know that Dorothy and her late husband Irving were the founders of Greenpeace. I didn't know that on Tuesday afternoon I'd be sitting in the very living room that was the birthplace of Greenpeace. But there we were, and beside me on the living room couch was Rex Weyler, who has just written *Greenpeace: Inside the Story--How a Group of Ecologists, Journalists and Visionaries Changed Our World* (Coming in September from Raincoast Books.)

Across the room was Isaac, an enthusiastic bearded fellow with a vision for renewing the FOR across Canada, starting with a series of Jewish-Muslim Peace Walks. Watch for one near you. The idea is that the FOR has faith affiliations such as the Jewish Peace Fellowship and the Muslim Peace Fellowship, and that these groups organize the walk. However, we are all invited to take part, as a sign of multi-faith (and no faith) solidarity. So far the walks have been led by Rabbi Lynn Gotlieb and by Abdul Rauf Campos Marquetti. All our activities start from a sense of hope and joy and trust," said Isaac, sparkling behind his

glasses. "Then people will keep coming. And then they feel cared about. And then commitment comes as well."

There is a photo of him in a recent FOR Witness, wearing a tall white toque and collecting signatures opposing the Anti-Ballistic Missile program, at an outdoor table in the middle of an "icy" Kootenay winter. "When all was said and done and thawed, more than 14.5% of the total populace had signed." The only Canadian FOR site so far is [www.kootenayfor.org](http://www.kootenayfor.org)

When we'd finished hearing about FOR, I asked Dorothy whether she would tell me the story she must have told very many times, of how it came about that a small group of people really did, in Margaret Mead's phrase, change the world. Dorothy started talking, and in minutes I could see the twenty people crowded into this living room in 1970, the wild idea to raise \$18,000 to buy the first Greenpeace ship, their young daughter saying, "My father's gone mad!" as he sent off invitations to Phil Ochs and Joan Baez (who couldn't make it but referred them to Joni Mitchell, who did come), and a group called Chilliwack and a then-unknown named James Taylor. Tickets sold for \$3 each, 10,000 people came, the concert went on till 1 a.m, and Dorothy has the tape.

The issue that started it had been nuclear testing in Amchitka, Alaska, which threatened to eliminate a species of sea otters and to set off a tsunami to engulf Vancouver. The first two tests went forward, but the third was cancelled. "Trudeau sent a lovely telegram to the crew of Greenpeace" and much later, when taped conversations between Nixon and Kissinger came into the public domain, the Stowes' daughter found the place where the two men complained to one another about "these lousy groups" who had raised a public outcry against such tests.

Another invitation came in from Friend and writer Gail Harwood. I am to visit the adult English class Gail teaches, Grade 10, tomorrow, and lead them in adventures with creative use of language. It should be fun, and it will be good to see Gail again.

The official Meeting events were, first, to sit in on an open discussion with the Religious Education committee on the topic of how to deal with difficulties in Meeting for Worship. A hot topic, as it turned out, with hot emotions shattering our surface calm. I got led twice into vocal prayer, a first for me. I remembered this: one time I dreamed I was climbing a giant bookcase, making my way successfully from shelf to shelf. Finally I stretched out on the very top and looked down. I was many storeys above the ground. There was no way to get down by myself. I felt frightened by this dream, wondering why my subconscious was telling me that I had reached the limits of what I could do by myself. I told the dream to a Friend who said, "Why, that's a spiritual dream."

The second event was the sharing on Sunday around what we make. About 12 Friends stayed for it, and I still feel nourished from the ministry that flowed. Friends shared poetry, sketches, a handmade doll, knitted sweaters (this was Andrew, and one of them was knitted from wool Andrew had spun), Ellen Pye

brought her beautiful blanket, which she had finished in time to bring it in, Sheila Brown unfurled two lists of Scottish country dances, done in gorgeous calligraphy, Kirsten spoke of her calling to the theatre and her sadness at losing this for a long time but at the end of this sharing came a glimmer of hope that the calling may find her again. Joan Strauss too had lost a calling as a classical singer, and has found it again. She stood behind her chair and opened her mouth and from this small and quiet person there issued a large and wonderful voice. Friends asked her to please sing it again, and was it all right to join in--a song of praise. Ruth Walmsley too brought a song, about friendship, and we sang along with that one too: "...Wrap my arms around you/ Be there for you...." Don Pollard said his creativity goes into machines, and told us about several of them, past and present inventions. Again life has not given much opportunity for this engineer to use his inventiveness, but clearly the creative gift is still there, and still finds its way. Three children had also shared while the adults were in worship upstairs. Shaun brought a wooden house he had made with his dad, complete with an elevator. Thea brought a smooth grey pot she had made on a wheel and carried in a decorated box. Bram, who is 3, made things with the Meeting's Leggo--a train carrying an oversized dinosaur, and then a larger project, a "round thing"--Shaun found the right piece so Bram could complete the circle.

I've left out so much (fancy breakfast in Victoria with a friend; dinner and tea at the Pollards'; riding in the horse-drawn carriage with Grace, around Stanley Park; images from the sharing on Sunday of tapestry and politics and the entire thing Barbara Bazett said about Natural Grace and Finding Patterns, from a Friend who has meditated long about creativity, spirituality, co-creation and love; much else!)

*Books Friends have Pressed Upon me this week (and which I am reading with pleasure):*

Writing for Your Life: a guide and companion to the inner worlds. Deena Metzger. (Harper) ISBN 0-06-250612-9 Recommended by Marilyn Pollard

Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order. Lloyd Lee Wilson. (Quaker Press) ISBN 1-888305-72-X Recommended by Andrew Gage and I am going to get me a copy. We both disagree with the part about not being possible to have mixed-faith Quakers, but even that, as Andrew said, is at least well-articulated and thought-provoking.

Left out too is the account of a touching meeting with a Vietnamese writer I had come to know by email and letters over many years, and finally got to talk with face to face. Thuong Vuong-Riddick gave me a copy of Two Shores /Deux Rives, a collection of her poetry published by Ronsdale Press. This too I am reading with much pleasure.

*Provocative little quote from Lloyd Lee Wilson's book: he worries about the loss of the term 'Social Order' in our meetings, replaced often by 'Social Concern': "The change — seems to me to express a loss of vision concerning gospel order and a*

*subsequent transformation to an essentially negative perspective, in which things look awful and Friends must do what they can to ameliorate the worst situations." Whereas: "In Quaker eschatology the gospel is always breaking into our lives now, in the present moment; early Friends were not waiting for the Second Coming at some future time, but joyfully and publicly witnessing that the Kingdom of God had come among them already."*

**Vision Statement:** The Fellowship of Reconciliation envisions a world of justice, peace, and freedom. It is a revolutionary vision of a beloved community where differences are respected, conflicts addressed nonviolently, oppressive structures dismantled, and where people live in harmony with the earth, nurtured by diverse spiritual traditions that foster compassion, solidarity, and reconciliation.

*Poem by Thea:*

*lin jour une papillon regard  
vole dans le ciel il est  
heureux parcequ'il a un  
nouveau ami. dans le bois it  
fait un ami avec un ors. ils  
sont des bon ami et ils sont  
toujours les amis.*

Journal 16 May 27, 2004 WESTERN HALF-YEARLY MEETING etc.

I've spent so much time the past week "being in my body"...what with balancing at Western Half and then hanging out at a softball practice with Friendly athlete Joy Conrad-Rice--that it's hard to go back into my head enough to write this journal. Friends are a people of books and paper, accustomed from maybe the very beginning to communicate via the written word, and to keep journals that apparently were intended to be seen by the outside world. And maybe right there is a problem, right there in that wonderful testimony of integrity, with the idea that anything I say, do, write and feel is all in the Light and all honest and of one piece with the person you see sitting there in Meeting. I believe this and aspire to this, but I do not aspire to keeping a journal that is open to any eye, at least not today, thank you. Maybe after I'm dead—when nobody will be interested anyway. I think the spiritual process and the creative process require some darkness to grow, some privacy, some sense that the spirit may be speaking but that I do not yet comprehend what it says. I am not yet ready to say it to you because words may fail me and, well, I'm just not ready. Body knows before mind, sometimes.

The journals that appear from these travels are the result of reflection (much of it hasty and on the road) and of some censorship--not of honest detail, I hope-- but of unready thoughts and incomplete understanding. What is going on in my head is not the whole story. The nonverbal knowledge of feelings and bodily perception has to gestate for quite some while before it pops up as a verbal insight, maybe a leading or opening or...that lovely old Quaker word--opportunity.

I left Vancouver on the bus to spend one overnight in Mission, with Friend Chris Ullmann. Chris is a retired university professor of comparative languages, who taught at Mt. Allison and has deep F/ friendships in the Atlantic region but has returned to her roots in B.C. Her mother was clerk of Vancouver Meeting at the time that it acquired its Meeting House. Chris grew up in Germany. Her father, although raised totally Christian, was ethnically Jewish, and it was Friends who spirited him out of Germany and saved his life. From the time Chris was eight until the family was reunited when she was sixteen, she lived without her father, and the whole family had to live very discreetly. Her mother was involved with Friends (their other denominational background is Lutheran) but all concerned agreed that for her to seek membership would jeopardize the work Friends were doing to protect Jews, and so at that time they were not members. Chris has a gift, well-developed from her professional career, for research and scholarship, for "getting to the bottom of things" and then spelling this out in careful letters and speeches, as and when she can. Her ongoing identification with the Jewish community has led her to continue to read and listen to the pro-Israel literature that animates those big marches we see in major centers, which cry out to the rest of us to remember the suicide bombers and remember the holocaust and not to fall into anti-Semitism in our haste (as they see it) to sympathize with the plight of the Palestinians. Chris says things such as, "The fact that the Israelis elected Sharon shows how pushed they must feel." She tells me things I didn't know before and maybe you didn't either, such as the fact that all over Germany neighbours continued to feed their Jewish neighbours until such time as their neighbours were hauled away. It was only when they were outside the care of their communities that they fell into real danger. Of course this is anecdotal, but Chris has run into the stories so often that now she believes it was the norm. What she remembers is her mother's account of a neighbour named Sophie. When food rations to Jews were cut off, the neighbours said, "We can't let Sophie starve!" When Sophie was taken away, the women of the village sat together and cried. They felt helpless to do anything more.

Another thing Chris told me which I have read before but forgotten is that the population of Israel originally, at least, was almost exactly the same numbers as the population of the Jewish ghettos in Arab countries, which have emptied. There is a point here which I recognize, and whatever the future brings, it seems that the only solution now to the Israel/Palestine conflict is the creation of two states.

If you've read this far, you likely have opinions. What I see here is a seasoned Friend who holds open a space for hearing the "other side." It is easy to slip into taking one side and seeing the other side as the enemy. Here is the seed of war. The gift that Friends bring is to affirm peaceful and non-violent approaches always, and to oppose violence in every form. And to remember to be empathetic to the pain of other people, beyond all differences. Hard to remember right now during a federal election!

The focus on children helps a great deal. It can become sentimental, but it can also go deep and can heal. At Western Half-Yearly we had the usual complement of children and of Young Friends, and in particular the ministry of Gabrielle, who is just old enough to toddle and is the daughter of Kate Holden and Julie Paradis. At meetings for worship which included Gabrielle, I was not able to go into my head or my heart or wherever I like to go during worship, far away from the chatter in my head or even my immediate surroundings. Instead I was called over and over again to a gurgle of delight, the pattering of exploratory footsteps, the need to reach out a steadying hand as this bright-eyed little girl came temporarily to a stop right in front of me, and reminders of my own emotions as she suddenly wept in frustration and then \_cheered up as way opened, or whimpered herself to sleep in one of her mothers' arms. I was reminded that I kind of let go myself, as I'm falling to sleep. I couldn't get into complicated thoughts, but I did feel called away from head-chatter too. I stood in vocal ministry, bringing the thought that a mother in Vancouver had said to me: If we can find our way to the spiritual nurture of the children, we will find our way also to nurture for ourselves.

And then there was balancing. I hadn't really intended to come for the full day of balancing on the Thursday, but circumstances shifted and there I was. I want to step back one step, though, to Chris Ullmann's garden. Sometimes, she told me, she feels the call to do her scholarly thing and research Bosnia or Iraq or Israel. But more often, as she grows older, she prefers to be in her garden, moving plants, nurturing others, checking with them as to whether they are happy where they are, and dreaming new arrangements that will please her eye and soul--and with luck distract her from the neighbour's shed, which means a lot to him but which blocks out some light from her, and also blocks the fabulous Mission view. Here is where her creative energy likes to flow. I took a photo of Chris in her garden, in the corner which right now is working best. It is beautiful.

Chris drove me to the downtown Greyhound stop and off I roared to Sorrento, and balancing. Sam Stevenson and his friend Julia were on the bus already, coming from the intentional community they live in, in Oregon. They were looking forward keenly to a whole day spent "in my body."

Out there in the early dawn on the wet grass next morning, I saw the crew from the community and from yoga sitting, already into their bodies and practicing mindfulness.

Mindfulness is not the same thing as intellectualizing, which is probably my own favourite place to go. Mindfulness may be what happens when Gabrielle cries out and reminds me I have sorrows too.

I guess you can read the minutes from Western Half-Yearly, at least if you're a Friend, and there may be a report in Canadian Friend. It was its usual very happy time, with close friendships renewed and new friendships begun, and the children doing their sloppy and beautiful art on a theme of Peace. Once in a while there is this sudden veil of paint that looks like butterfly wings, and I wonder--did that child intend that effect or did it just happen? Of course, I ask that stupid question of adult work as well. What matters, Margaret, is that it is there.

I did go out to the balancing. I didn't want to. Phys. Ed in school was my least favourite subject. I've long since stopped doing things I know I'm not good at, and fill my life with things I love to do. It's plain astonishing the layers of inhibition and resistance and fear that I had to wade through just to put on my stretch pants and show up on the field for the balancing. And I wish I could tell you that I really persevered and found a whole new side of myself and ended up doing an Angel Out at the top of the pyramid the way Madeleine Sherwood did last year at age 81. Well, not the pyramid, but on top of two other people. I did do a basic Angel Out, thanks to the support of David Stevenson, and am so pleased that I did. I'm told there is photographic evidence. I didn't want to do it again. Tom Findley did it too and he kind of stayed out after that as well. But it wasn't a failure, folks. It was a Really Good Thing. In the afternoon, I went back to the cabana, and slept all afternoon. My body must have needed it.

I'm in Vernon now, and beginning the visit to Vernon Meeting. Here in the Okanogan and next week in the Kootenays, the meetings and worship groups are far flung over mountains and valleys. The week began in Kamloops, visiting in the home of Joy Conrad-Rice and Graeme Hope. They live half way up a wooded mountain, in a microclimate several degrees cooler than downtown. Behind the house is a green wild place with a little creek running through, with resting places for deer, coyote, black bear. This whole part of the country has the feeling of frontier. When Joy drove me here to Vernon yesterday, we came through ranch country and western towns with facades on the stores and tiny complete houses like doll houses scattered here and there, the homesteads of a previous generation, uninhabited now.

In addition to climbing down the slope to the creek with Joy, I accompanied her to observe the ladies' softball practice, an exciting team of older women, some of whom really do know how to throw a ball. Joy and I talked a lot about this business of being in one's body—or maybe I talked a lot. Occasionally there would be a silence, and I would look around and notice I was being driven down Kamloops' main street, or past a butterfly garden. One time I started musing about body and soul, about the way the Hebrews didn't make that distinction and it was brought in by the Greeks. Joy said that kind of language doesn't mean much to her, that for her body and soul are one. In the evening I had the pleasure of listening to her play old waltzes and other good tunes on the piano. In the evening we also watched the U.S. news. My goodness, are they ever worried about s-s-s-security. Even the Democratic candidate has to campaign on fear, calling it Homeland Security and I think meaning more guns in the streets. But Joy lived most of her adult life in the U.S. and feels compelled to keep that space open, to continue to hear the U.S. view on events. She switched back and forth between the mainstream news and the publicly-funded channel where intelligent men asked hard questions and I could



remember the America I still respect. The past few years have been tough on this essentially American Friend who struggles to keep hearing both sides.

We do need these Friends who remind us that Friends' leading as a society is not to take sides, but to watch, listen and witness. All parts of that process are important, and at Half-Yearly we sang again the song about "live into the Light you have."

Which brings me to the final bit I wanted to send you before I start into the bed-hopping through the interior which will be my perambulating visit to Vernon and Argenta Meetings. Let's cherish our practice of discernment of gifts. The Spirit moves in wonderful and mysterious ways and, believe it or not, has no political agenda. I find it easy to receive the gifts of Friends who are working on treaty negotiations or with mental health issues or affordable housing. Or reconciliation of all sorts. It's harder sometimes to stay with the message brought by the baby, the message of emotions and of openness to whatever comes, not taking sides.

Robert Barclay, 1676, warning about the spiritual pitfalls of theatre, laughter and, hey, sports: "It is not lawful for Christians to use games, plays, comedies, or other recreations which are inconsistent with Christian silence, gravity or sobriety. Laughter, sports, games, mockery, or jests, useless conversation, and similar matters are neither Christian liberty nor harmless mirth."

Rufus Jones, *The Double Search*: "You have in you a spiritual gift which was given to you when the prophets spoke and the body of leaders laid their hands on you; do not neglect it." . Lloyd Lee Wilson, *Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order*: "God bestows on each faith community the spiritual gifts that community needs to do God's will."

FQA stands for Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts. As far as I know, there's no Fellowship of Quaker Athletes. I'm still in Vernon. Yesterday I met Pat Black's grandchildren, including Connor, 7, who presented me with a wonderful painting in pastels and was interested in the photos of Noah of Edmonton on his skateboard and of Paul of Winnipeg at his soccer game. Today is Connor's soccer game and I may get to take another photo of a ball being kicked in the right direction. Before I left Kamloops, Joy drove me to their Olympic pool and I had a rare opportunity to swim. It's a form of meditation, without complicated thoughts.

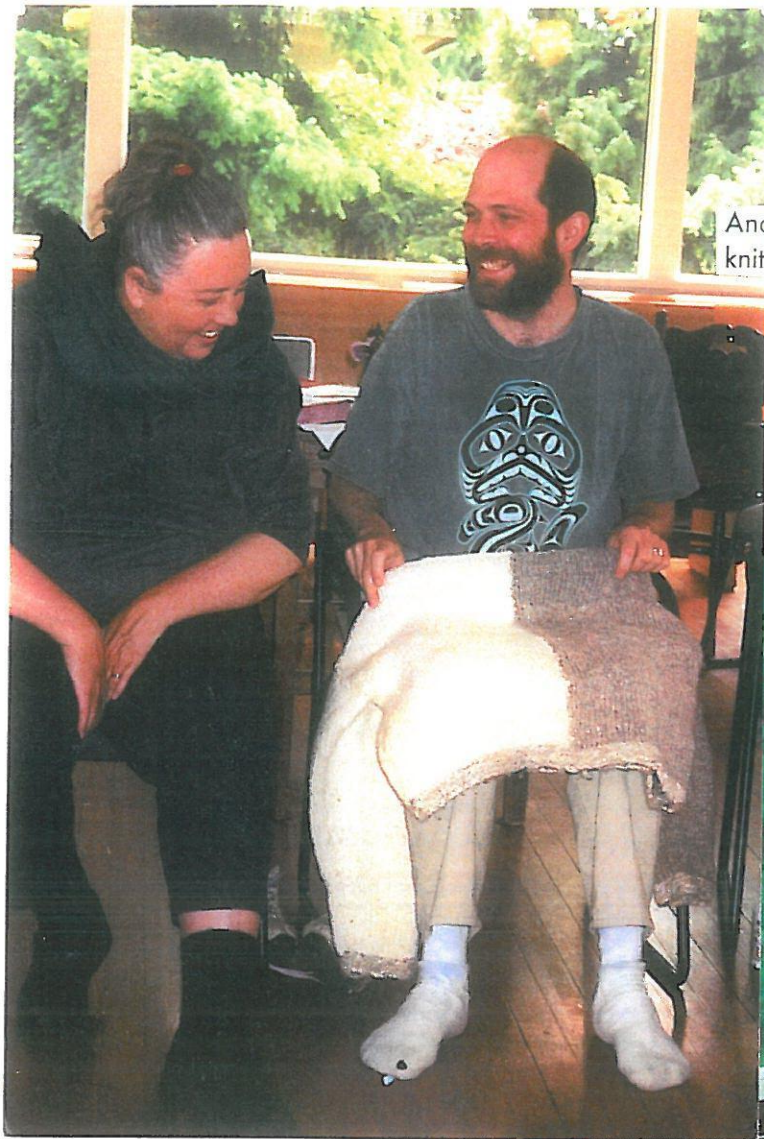
CHOICES by  
Pat Black

*Reeds bend low in the heavy storm  
Hardwood saplings crack and die, Going  
with the wind, bending as it soars To fit  
the travails of life  
Watching with wise eyes*

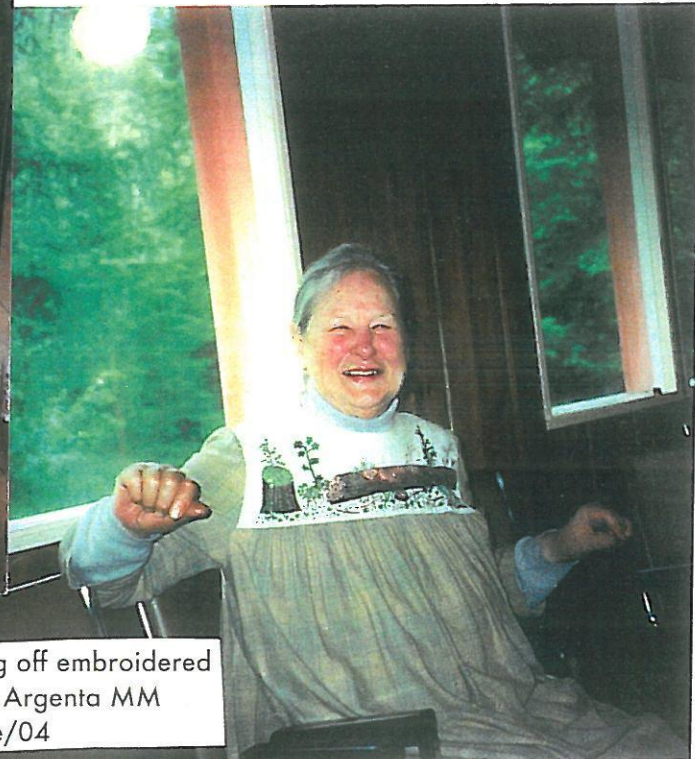
*Lifepaths, merging with others at times,  
Remain our own singular trail.  
It matters not how short or long this course  
It is how we walk our path  
That enriches our soul and gives us worth.*

*The strong oak struck by lightning still dies*

*While the fragile willow bough bends and swoops  
Dancing in the wind to survive the devastation  
Walking our path like the willow bough  
Makes more sense.*



Andrew Gage shows sweater he spun and knitted, to Marilyn Pollard. Vancouver MM May/04



Dottie Ross showing off embroidered nurselog design, in Argenta MM meetinghouse. June/04



Regina Friends, June, 2004, in outdoor meeting space. Nathan, Catherine, Pat, Alison, Pat.



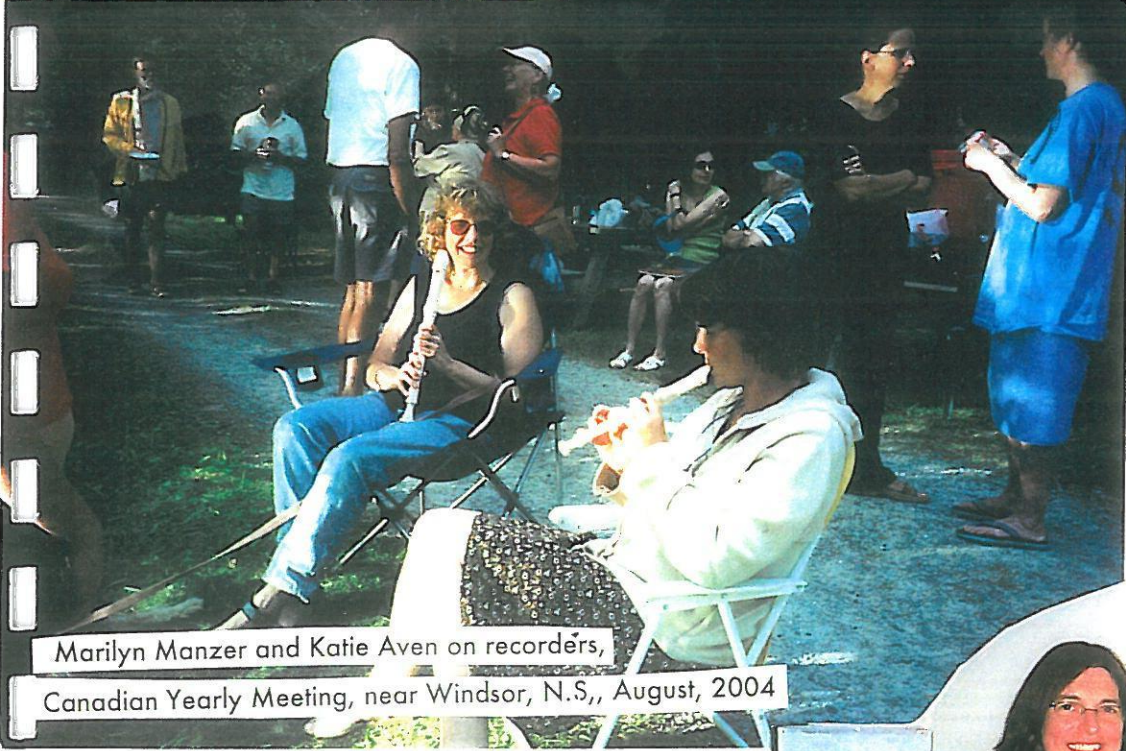


Maida Follini with quilt made by her Quaker grandmother.

Sackville WG, Oct. 2004



Carole Langille with driftwood stick man, South Shore WG. Margery Dahn looks on. October, 2004



Marilyn Manzer and Katie Aven on recorders, Canadian Yearly Meeting, near Windsor, N.S., August, 2004



Nancy Clark keeping up her spirits in a hard time, with Mary Louise Hill, Mary Pat MacDonald. Thunder Bay Worship Group, January, 2005



Journal 17 VERNON and ARGENTA June 5, 2004

So much has happened that I wish I could write this in hypertext--you know--click here on: [Shirley Lewis' funny story](#), on [Pauline McKenzie's quote about activism](#), on a nice graphic of [Connor's pastel painting](#), on [Dottie's wisdom](#), [Tack's latest poem](#), [Lesley's bird](#), [Nola's opinions](#)---and then there are the beds, all comfy, all offered with generous hospitality and towels and stimulating conversation. This comfy spare bed in Fernie is bed 37 since January 10, and is in the home of Sydney Paschen and Janet Leyde. They've had the WHYM bug (a bad cold with coughs that originated at Western Half-Yearly Meeting and was taken home by Friends, cancelling my visit with Mary Sturgeon and reorganizing several other details of the recent travelling. I got the cough-only version, and it is nearly over) and WHYM visitors--Helen Martin was here and I wish could have still been here so that we could have an instant little Meeting in Fernie--and Janet and Sydney seem up for more--visitors, not bugs. There is to be Meeting tomorrow, though, Sunday, as they have connected with two other Friends in Cranbrook. Sydney told me that they've decided that everywhere they live they will try to form a worship group--for their own spiritual nurture, which makes sense to me.

Anyway, instead of hypertext, I'll try point form, realizing that as usual so much has to be left out.

Joy drove me to Vernon, where a potluck and sharing happened at the home of Pat Black, with a group of women--whew, I said to myself afterwards, that was one powerful group of women just now in Pat Black's house.

I stayed with Pat for three days, and got to meet her grandchildren and to finish out some conversations about most everything under the sun. Pat's career has been in mental health, and I did feel healthier by the time I left.

Ron and Morgan who are building a berm house drove me to Kelowna to the home of Lesley Robertson, where we had Meeting for Worship (I cough-coughed into the silence) and then we potlucked and then Ron climbed onto the roof to insert a screen into a hole where a squirrel had been getting in, and Morgan and Lesley dug up extra plants from Lesley's garden for replanting beside the berm house, while Ron recovered some glass from the garage that is now ready to install--Practical Help, I thought--maybe this is the going to be the theme of my next journal....

- Lesley and I had a quiet time together at 3 p.m. to be with Jane Orion and Janet as they married in Victoria. Then we hiked on a nearby ridge, with truly spectacular views into the valley, and Lesley had brought her binoculars and directed my attention to birds.

We went to the Kelowna symphony orchestra for a truly enjoyable evening of wonderful music, which included bird calls. The stage was FILLED with musicians, and they were GOOD.

Lesley and I sat in the sunshine outside her cosy house and in view of her drought-resistant garden, and talked about Vernon Meeting, how scattered it is, with

only one or so people in any given centre, and how important it is to meet from time to time in retreats.

Nola arrived, driving 1000 km from a yoga weekend in Vancouver and thence to Trail, where I slept on the princess bed about 4' off the floor, with a little step stool to climb that high. Nola is living in her parents' house with neighbours who have known her since she was a little girl. Her mother, who was in on the founding of many or most of the Trail arts groups, is still living, but is now in a seniors' facility, and Nola is staying near. I got a photo of Nola in her yoga studio, and in the morning, while Nola was still sleeping off the WHYM bug, I did my own whole yoga routine in her living room, in front of the Buddhas and Shiva and Jesus and Mary, along with several little statues I didn't recognize and a stuffed teddy bear holding a tennis ball.

Lynne Phillips came and drove me to Rossland, to the new home that she and Michael (publisher of Root Cellar Press) had moved into the DAY BEFORE. They were tired from the move and from the WHYM bug, which hit them both hard. But the house looked amazingly ready to be lived in, and lunch--leftovers from the moving crew--was exotic and yummy. We talked about Argenta Meeting, and how scattered it is, and how there are only a few people or one person in each of several towns, and Lynne handwrote an invitation to the Argenta Friends to join the South Kootenay Friends in a retreat.

Nola drove me to Nelson and walked around the Kootenay Co-op murmuring "Argenta" until a dark-haired young woman turned from choosing vegetables and said, "Are you Margaret?" With Julie Davis, maker of organic cotton towels and ponchos, thus identified, Nola gave me a hug and tootled off, and Julie drove me to Argenta, stopping at the chainsaw place, and to the Meeting House, where Friends were potlucking, followed by a sharing around creativity, and Garrett showed off the Angel Out he can do with his mother Rosemary as base. I met Anni Valentine and her son Misha and saw the weaving they are doing. Later Anni gave me her poem about weaving, which begins: *I am the spider/weaving my own garment/it's magical/it's mysterious/it's unpredictable/it's unknown....*

Betty Tillotson took me home and the true magic of Argenta engulfed me. This story is too big, I told myself the next morning as I woke upstairs in Betty's log house, shelves of books above me and around me, everywhere. This story goes way beyond Practical Help. This is a community of hand built houses and the odd trailer who are manifesting with their lives Simplicity, living close to the earth, living lightly, leaving as small a footprint as they can. The contradictions are present, but not jarring. People travel by car to Nelson, but almost always with other passengers and with errands to run for other people too. There is no bus to Nelson. Cars are shared among friends and so is almost everything else. The Meeting House has the community photocopier, and the fax machine is at the community centre. Sean Hennessey has a computer set-up and I was able to get my email there, but he and his partner Ulrich also run an organic farm, with vegetables and chickens and, in the summer, WWOOFers (willing workers on organic farms). I saw the "Wwoofer Palace" a loft above a shelter with stacked wood, with a royal view out into the sharp mountain peaks that thrust into the sky, and a view down into the Kootenay Lake. I was dazzled, completely.

Sean took me into the Argenta Press building, and so I finally saw the place where Canadian Friend is printed, and the pamphlets, and the Smallholder, which is a separate point. Guess what???!!! 150 copies of Turning Pages/Seeking Sky are still available!! If you send \$6 to cover the pamphlet and the shipping, it's yours. I thought it was out of print. This is the collection of Friends' poetry which I had the privilege of editing ten years ago. Many other good pamphlets are also available, and Sean is completing a website for the Press to let us know what is there.

I saw the community post office and the community refrigerator (a small building) and I walked through a field where two llamas raised their heads and looked at me, and a herd of deer came close to the road, so tame and so numerous that I stood there trying to tell myself that they must be goats. Then they saw me and in a blink disappeared into the forest.

Argenta Friends and I met around the need for clearness about the future of the Meeting House, and of the Meeting. Much much talk both that evening and everywhere else I have stayed about why is it that people are not flocking to our Friends' Meetings, when the world is the way it is and Friends' ways mean so much to each of us. No conclusions, but much insight. In Argenta there came a moment when Friends said "We've got this wrong. We're talking about the Meeting House and we need to be talking about the Meeting."

For more than 30 years, Betty Tillotson, Dottie Ross and many others have been producing *The Smallholder*, a funky little magazine which is still typed and then waxed (remember waxing, those of you who have done graphic design?) and then turned over to Argenta Press for distribution. Their subscribers come from all over the world. The content is mostly letters sent from subscribers, giving tips about living simply. The current issue has tips from Dottie Ross about making things easier for a disabled family member (e.g. dowels screwed in along one edge of the table, so that Jack can grab them as he moves about), advice about woodpeckers (try tabasco sauce--or was that the green worm problem--better subscribe and find out), and bits on clutter, labyrinths, grandchildren. Subscriptions are \$14 for 6 issues, sent to The Smallholder Publishing Collective, Argenta, B.C., Canada V0G 1B0.

I spent a morning with Jack, working on the poetry which is pouring from him, inspired perhaps by his illness and also by the publication of *What Can I Do?* Root Cellar Press, Trail, B. C. ISBN 0-9732793-2-X, which is dedicated to his daughter Lisa.

Lisa drove me to Nelson, in Anni's car, with Lisa's daughter Silver and mother Dottie. We all attended a rehearsal that evening in a school room, where Silver with her violin is the youngest member of an orchestra. We sat observing, about in the middle of the brass section, and the music was good and the teacher seemed to me terrific. Some guest musicians arrived to supplement the students, and I recognized one young member of the adult orchestra I'd heard in Kelowna.

I slept in the Dancing Bear Inn hostel, waking frequently to check my alarm clock's time. But I did sleep, and did enjoy this excellent hostel--recommended! At 4:45 I crept downstairs and called the Glacier Taxi, and he was a little late because he had to

get another passenger from a nearby town, but we were still all in good time before the bus arrived on time at 5:20 a.m. I got on, and then I SLEPT!!!

Janet and Sydney both managed to get off work to meet the bus at 12:30 and I arrived to warm hugs and an invitation to attend an arts event that evening with a decorated hat. During the afternoon I decorated one of Janet's straw hats with lilac leaves and off we all went. Saw a quilt made out of T-shirts.

Pauline McKenzie on activism:

"Social action isn't just protest; it's trying to do things differently."

Shirley Lewis' funny story: This will be hard to do justice to, but I think is worth trying, as it resonated through many of the conversations we've had since, in all the places. It's one of the insights: It seems Shirley is a person who has thrown herself into many, many useful social actions all her life, and is still able to do it and yet to question herself, which I appreciate. Recently, she told us, she decided that the thing she could do about the Vernon homeless was to make cinnamon buns. Downtown she went with her fresh-baked buns and located a couple of actual homeless, sitting by a building—a girl with stringy hair, and a man. Girl took her bun, man also grateful for his. "Can I have another one?" asked the girl. Shirley said, "No!" At this point in the story Shirley cracks up, letting us know that this reaction on her part revealed her whole action as Lady Bountiful. The way Shirley said it was, "I won't get to heaven for this!" But, still with more buns in hand, she trekked on down to the shelter and inquired, "How many people come through here in a night?" "100." "Well!" says Shirley, "I knew that was it for my project! I can't make a hundred cinnamon buns!"

So much has happened these past few days, not least meeting this intelligent, funny woman who could take this skit on stage, laughing at ourselves for our attempts to be of help to those we see as less advantaged than ourselves. And catching our mixed motivations.

As one Friend said at WHYM, there can be no them without us. It's really us and us. Which has something to do with growing Meetings.



Journal 18 REGINA ALLOWED MEETING June 17/04

*Spiritual awakening does not place us beyond temptation, difficulty, or behavior hurtful to others.*

-- From a review of *After the Ecstasy, the Laundry*, by Jack Kornfield (Bantam, 2000) in a newsletter called *What Canst Thou Say? Friends, Mystical Experience, and Contemplative Practice*-info [at WCTS@mail.com](mailto:WCTS@mail.com)

June 7: The lakes I'm passing are emerald green.

The peaks are breathtaking, brushed with snow, clouds drifting against their flanks, black-green slopes that look soft but must be almost straight up. More appear. MOUNTAINS. Tops shrouded. A green ridge flows past the window and a white peak thrusts up--then a whole range of white peaks, enormous, halfway up the sky.

On the ground, here, a few houses and stores: Frontier Plunder - Closed. A little town below -- Coleman. Green slopes and shelves of land, close in. The highway winds down into another cluster of homes. It's Crow's Nest Pass.

I'm in Alberta. Beef cattle out there. I'm assured my suitcase is under this bus, but after my mistake, staying on the bus to Lethbridge and then having to come back, I'll be anxious until I actually see it again.

In Alberta the driver kind of apologizes as he announces "No smoking *now* on *any* Greyhound bus."

June 13: On the bus, still in the terminal, 12 minutes to 9 p.m. in Regina. This will be a long haul, not quite 2 days. I am in my grandfather's and grandmother's province. Around midnight we'll cross the border into Manitoba and move clocks ahead one hour.

. . . .  
We're out of Regina now and prairie sky is shell pink to my left with mother-of-pearl, a pink lower edge to clouds, as if painted by someone trying to make it really, really pretty.

We're an experiential religion.

In Winnipeg--We are now nearly 15 minutes late leaving. Someone is in the washroom and won't come out. The person's distraught father is outside the bus. Driver was outside a long time and is now talking to the young person, who did open the bathroom door. "Do you want to speak with your father?" Now the driver is outside again, presumably relaying info to the father. Girl came out of washroom--I glimpsed her--she's now in a back seat. Father can be heard shouting.

Here we go, leaving the father--another man is with him there--we're 21 minutes late.

We're an experiential religion. This is the idea behind travelling ministries--that we can't just email one another about what we believe or even what we experience. That we need to see one another and share experiences. Where have you met God today? What was she wearing?

My cousin Glen in Regina asked me thoughtful and interesting questions about Friends, ending with "So... you believe in one God, don't you?" "Yes," I said, laughing: "We're okay!" But later I wished I'd said, "It's not so much a belief as an experience."

I left the last stop before Regina after deep conversations and two good sharing sessions, plus meeting for worship with East Kootenay Worship Group on Sunday. The Fernie arts community has taken over the former train station as "The Arts Station"; visual artists such as Janet use the drop-in studio and support one another's work. Two of Janet Lehde's friends from there came over on Friday afternoon, intrigued by the invitation to "bring something you've made." One woman talked about the way she paints through old feelings of fear and of disgust, and the process creates renewal. She knew it was good for her personally but this experience seems different to her from her understanding of spirituality. "Listening in tongues," we responded to that. I remembered Pierre Beguin's very similar statements when I was at Saanich Peninsula. And I felt sad wonderment again that a few days after that good sharing, Elizabeth Beguin was dead. I have sent Pierre a copy of the photo I took, with the two of them posing in front of Pierre's painting. I had been going to take a picture of the artist and his art, but "Come, Cherie," he had called, "Margaret wants to take a picture," as if he could not imagine having one taken without both of them in it.

In Fernie, taking turns, we retold the story I've brought along, about the soul's journey. We each had one piece of it, and built on one another's details. Afterwards a woman who is a storyteller commented, "I don't have to know the whole story." It had become an exercise in trust.

Janet and Sydney arrived in this part of the world only about a year ago, drawn by an opportunity to work around a wind power project which has turned out to be a disappointment. But in terms of finding and nurturing a new worship group, they could write a manual for others about success. The East Kootenay Worship Group is fledgling and fragile, but it usually meets twice a month, alternating between Cranbrook and Fernie. On Sunday there were seven, a dizzy high, but with regular meeting times and potluck and discussion there is something to invite folks to. Anybody else out there in sight of the Three Sisters, missing Meeting?

I took a photo of Louise from Cranbrook holding the bowl of fruit she had brought, before we ate it and destroyed its perfection as art. Among other creative expressions brought by this group, a couple of the more dramatic were Gina's embroidered Metis shirt, and her daughter Reya's full-length cape. We took group photos out beside Sydney's red canoe.

Next day and night I travelled through the mountains to Regina. [We're well into Ontario now, and the trees. The woman behind me is singing quite loudly, lost in a world with her headphones on. I've been mostly asleep most of this day. Really hope I can locate my earplugs before tonight.]

On Tuesday morning I arrived in Regina at 6:35 a.m., and a short taxi ride through the early morning streets brought me to the home of Catherine and Arthur Verrall, with Catherine herself out front to welcome me, wearing a deep blue dressing gown. I hadn't slept much, and tucked myself into the cosy bed provided and slept like a log until 11. I woke to a bright day and a belated breakfast with Arthur, who is a retired United Church minister with a career behind him in downtown urban ministries. There is a low-income residence and drop-in centre named after Arthur, in was it Toronto or Hamilton? Anyway, the Verrall Residence. Catherine is a minister's daughter and a minister's wife and ex-kindergarten teacher and mother of four children and grandmother of several more. Catherine is also a Raging Granny, a member of Intercultural Grandmothers' Uniting--working in schools in teams of aboriginal and white grandmothers--and a list of progressive groups and memberships too long to remember or name. She was very involved in the recent "library issue," where Regina's library board announced, without public consultation, the impending closure of several libraries located in less affluent parts of the city. A public uproar ensued, building up to a direct action sit-in that didn't take place because the board announced a delay in their decision (until December) and an intent to undertake a review.

Grannies often sing about a clover lawn, but Catherine actually has one.

Over the next couple of days, we talked about water conservation, about use of the Bible in worship, about multi-faith inclusivity, about Quakers and singing,— [The woman behind me is slouched down in her seat, singing "Neon Rainbow!" in a wavering voice. Lake Superior is to my right, with a spectacular cliff caught in the long late-afternoon rays] --and just about every issue under the sun. All of which Catherine is quietly but firmly shoving along in the appropriate direction, smiling and without judgement. I tried to learn from watching her how to take sides without having to make other people feel guilty or wrong. I had remembered a small woman with bright eyes, and I was right about that part. It's what makes her so effective. Catherine looks like a minister's wife, and she's fearless.

Catherine showed me hymn no. 394 from the United Church hymnbook, which includes: "The Maker calls creation good, so let us now express/ with sound and colour, stone and wood, the shape of holiness." We belted it out, singing at the kitchen table.

I attended a potluck event the evening of my arrival, with Raging Grannies. On Wednesday I sang with them at the Farmers' Market, and then proceeded to a park where Regina Friends like to meet, near the Science Centre. Look for a circle of lawn chairs there on 2nd and 4th Sundays, those of you who live close and want to join in. Bring your own chair. We told stories about what brings us to

Friends and what keeps us here. I began to realize that this group is in a time of resurgence after a time when sad feelings plus people moving away had broken it apart. Time heals.

I went home with Pat Lemke, a new and enthusiastic attender from the attractive small community of Lumsden. I have long since observed that the landscape near Regina is flat as a pancake. I didn't know that hidden in the pancake are green valleys with winding rivers. "It's like a gift," Pat said.

My, I had a lot of fun that evening, after I'd met Pat's family--I don't mean to suggest that they weren't fun too--husband Ted and daughter Sarah and three dogs (four other mostly grown children are now elsewhere) --and had a bite to eat. Pat's involved with Communities in Bloom, a community pride initiative that gives points for heritage buildings, tidiness, cultural activity and flowers. Five or six local subversives connected downtown, including two town councilors and a talented gardener/ stained glass artist. And two pick-up trucks. Up the main street we zoomed, dropping barrels on street corners and at people's driveways, apparently only sometimes with permission. It felt like--was, really--direct action. The judging is in August and by then this group will have the dead wood cut out of downtown trees, flowers blooming in the barrels, and maybe some guerrilla-action paint jobs. I loved it!

Pat and I discussed God and life and illness and family and community, and she drove me back into Regina on Thursday in time for lunch with Dean Johnson of [www.angelfire.com/dc/universalism/horrie.html](http://www.angelfire.com/dc/universalism/horrie.html) and Robert C. Cosbey of several books, including *Watching China Change* (Between the Lines Press, 720 Bathurst St., Ste. 404, Toronto ON M5S 2R4). I had read part of the China book at Catherine's, and found it engaging and informative--easy to recommend as a book that might actually make modern China real to you. Bob also has a new book out, telling us what to do about education. Dean and I mostly listened, finding Bob's conversation as spellbinding as his books. Really.

Later in the car, Dean and I discussed the calling he feels to reach out to people who identify as Christians and share his excitement at finding a community with Christian roots that sees Jesus' message as inclusive, not the one narrow way. I bumbled on to Dean about the dance I enjoy so much, between individual leading and corporate discernment. I urged him to look around for a clearness committee and so on to season the ideas on his website. "I thought I was doing that," he said in a puzzled way, and suddenly I realized that younger Friends and computer-savvy folk who inhabit those Quaker listserves I keep hearing about think they are engaged in corporate discernment. "*That's* not in Organization & Procedure!" I blurted, and started to think that maybe one day it *will* be.

Thursday night at the B'hai Centre was a multi-faith sharing that went deep, and included Dean's Christocentric poem, and a circle dance around a sculpture of a naked woman with lizard skin.

Friday was an all-day workshop on Artist/Mystic/ Activist which took us to several edges, from which people brought back personal epiphanies and poems,

and a few tears. We snagged, though, in the last hour on someone's poem I had brought which spoke angry truth about the deaths caused by recent years of US foreign policy. One stanza hit a nerve in one participant and seemed to her to be anti-Semitism. She took her leave. Shaken, we sat down, stopped reading the poem and spoke out of our experiences, including brokenness. There are no slick answers to conflicts as deep and convoluted as Israel/Palestine. We are just people with human hearts and heads, seeking creative responses which the whole community can embrace. Spirit moves, nudges, sometimes cuts right through politeness with pain. Keep holding the space open to hear all voices, all suffering. Without judgement. Violence begets violence, period.

I wanted to note the recital on Saturday (I was now with fiction writer and musician Alison Lohans) and to say something about the need for a better network to inform ourselves of Friendly Fiction. But these themes are bound to return. Yesterday, Sunday, Regina Allowed Meeting met in Alison's living room for worship—the park was too wet. Eleven people came. Alison and Stewart's 17-year-old son Chris stayed out of sight, although he'd been very helpful about cleaning up for guests and helping with my computer difficulties. Fantasy series Chris was reading: Philip Pullman's *Dark Materials* trilogy. All concerned say that this is a "must read."

After Meeting, Catherine passed around copies of hymn no. 394 and everybody sang—a first.

Tuesday morning, June 15, and the very worst food ever willingly consumed. The coffee was exceedingly bitter—I put in two sugars to get it down. The fried egg sandwich was slathered with mayonnaise axle grease. There are good places to eat in Sudbury, but the snack bar in the terminal isn't one of them. The singing woman has gone on via North Bay and Ottawa toward her destination in PEI. Think of me, she told her newfound friends as she left, when you're showered and sleeping in your own beds tonight-- I'll still be on the bus.

Next stop TORONTO!

And I'm fine, really fine. No germs. Journal drafted. Goin' home. Till when? Till a week from tomorrow, then to Montreal.

The girl with the father surprised me by leaving the bus at the Delta stop, heading for an airplane. So she didn't just run off to Toronto! Away she went, shouldering her backpack and moving fast.

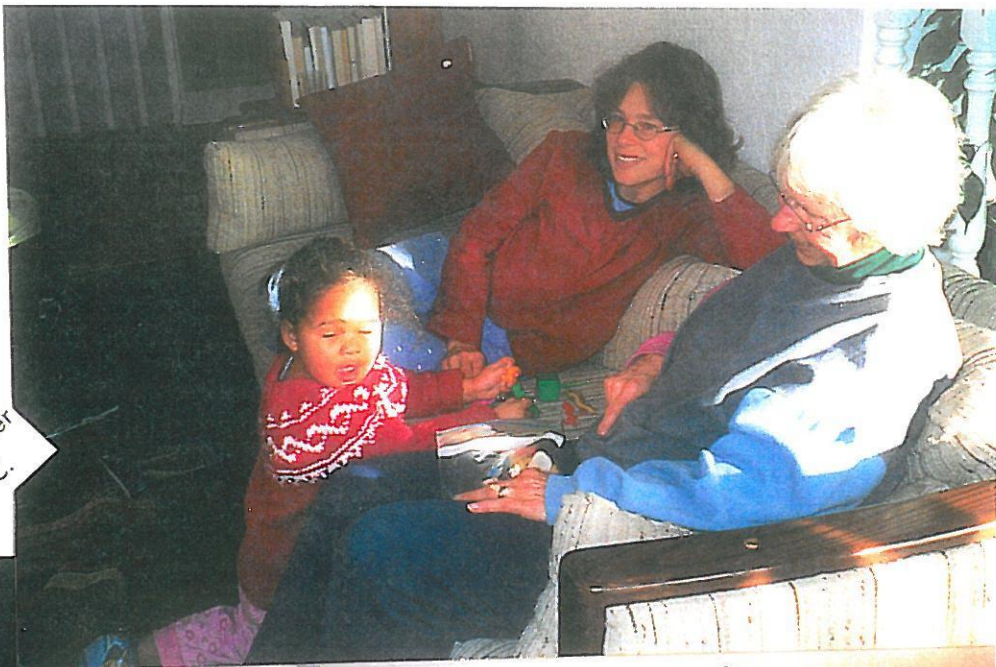
June 17: In the Toronto bus terminal I was delighted to run into Rosemary Gulley, assistant editor of the feisty *Catholic New Times*, on her way home from editorial duties, to Peterborough. I told her about various exciting multi-faith initiatives I've run into so far: the Faith Fair at Brock University, new energy in the Fellowship of Reconciliation. Rosemary filled me in on the latest radical Christian feminism, and news of my sister-in-law's campaign for the federal NDP. I missed both national debates, but have been listening to the radio since I've been home, and I'll vote tomorrow in the advance poll.

*One cannot explore the meaning of the Cosmic Christ without a living cosmology, a living mysticism, and the spiritual discipline of art as meditation. The holy trinity of Science (knowledge of creation), mysticism (experiential union with creation and its unnameable mysteries), and art (expression of our awe at creation) is what constitutes a living cosmology.*

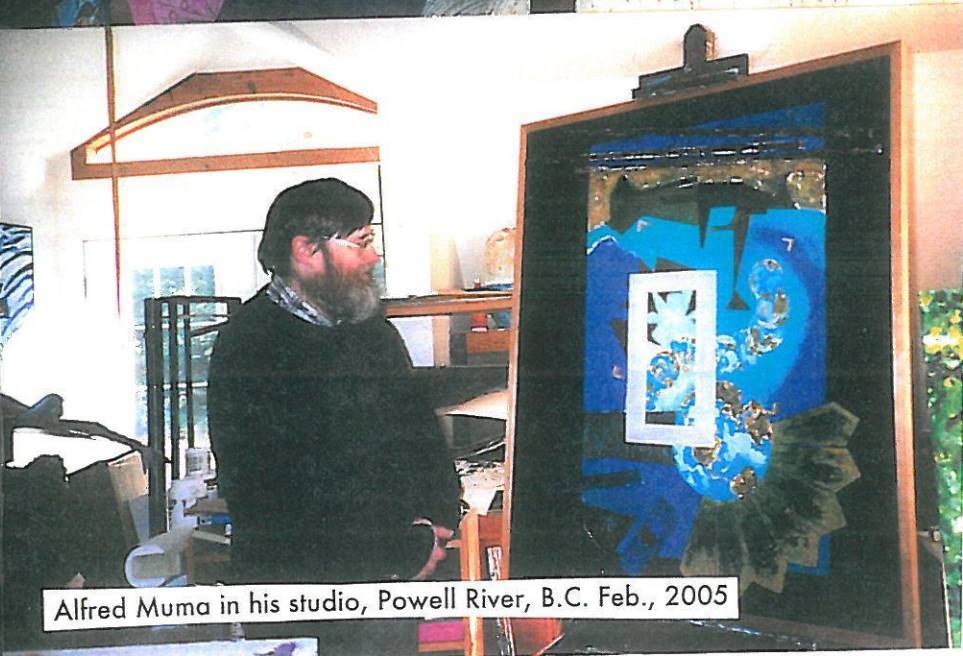
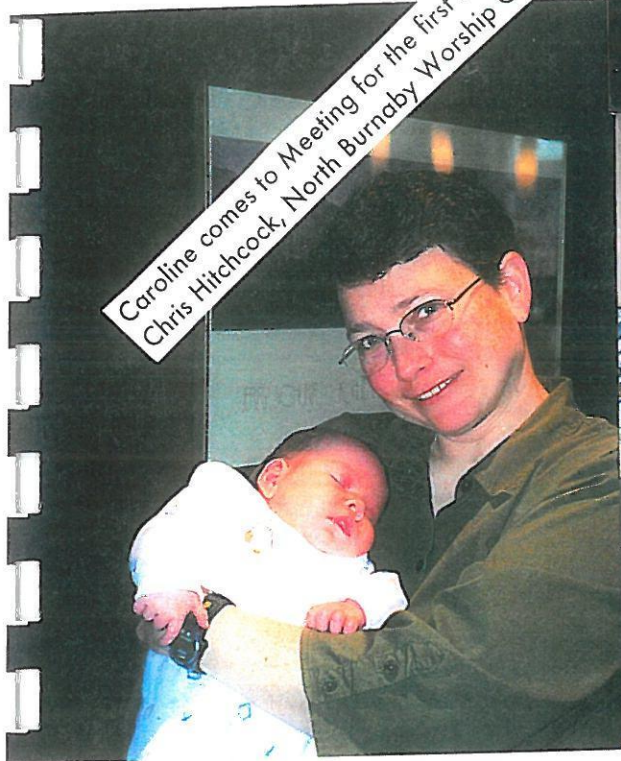
*--Matthew Fox: The Coming of the Cosmic Christ*



Grandmother Lynne Phillips,  
with Thea and Gyllian,  
Rossland, B.C., January 2005



Caroline comes to Meeting for the first time, with mother  
Chris Hitchcock, North Burnaby Worship Group, B.C.



Alfred Muma in his studio, Powell River, B.C. Feb., 2005

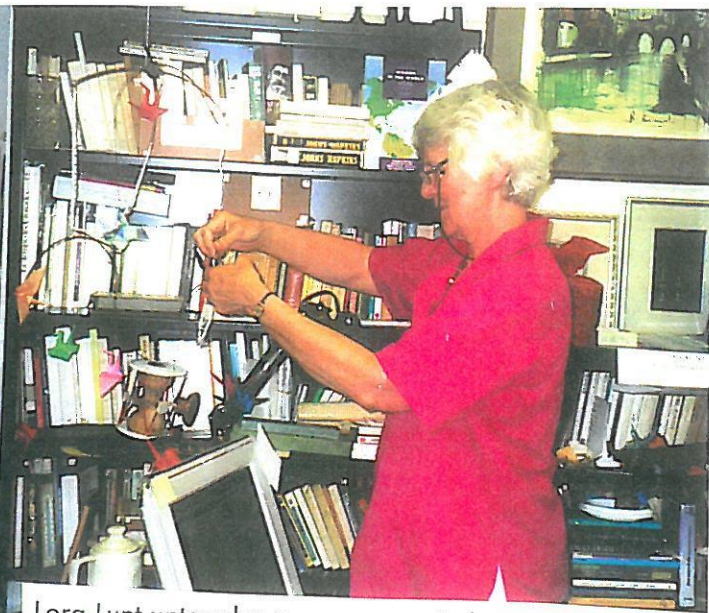


Calgary MM Spring Retreat, March, 2005

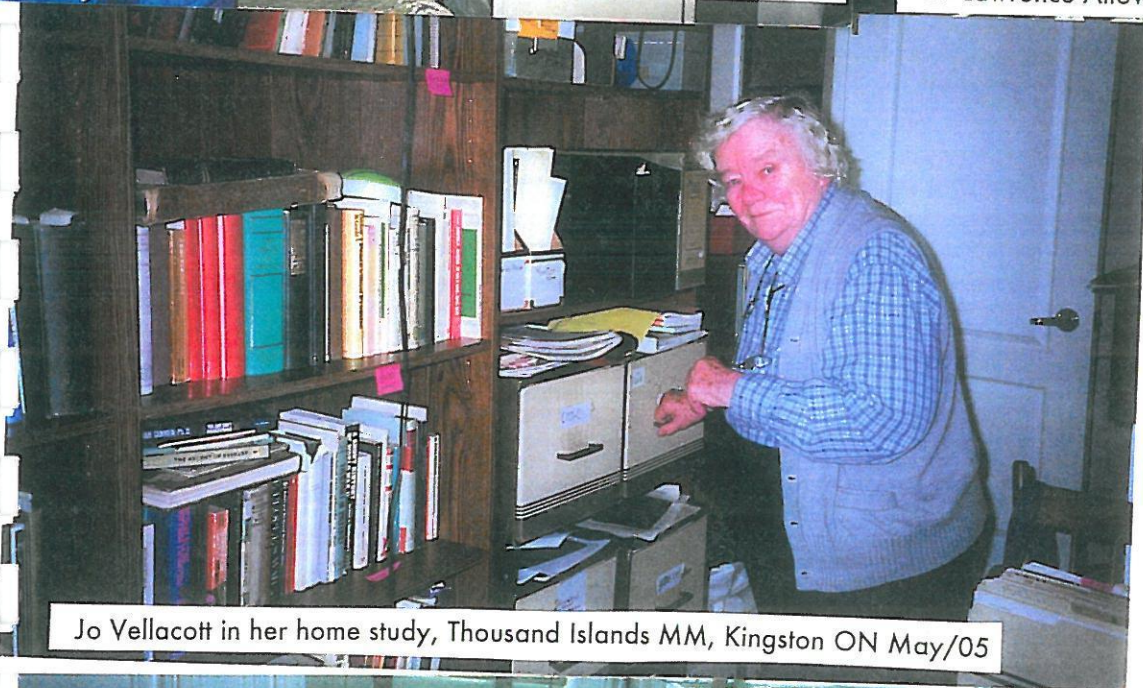




Betty Peterson in her home study, Halifax MM, October, 2004



Lora Lunt untangles paper cranes in her university office.  
St Lawrence Allowed Meeting, Potsdam, June, 2005



Jo Vellacott in her home study, Thousand Islands MM, Kingston ON May/05



Jane Orion Smith in Canadian Friends Service Committee office,  
Toronto MM meetinghouse, April 2005

Quaker  
women  
in their  
offices and  
studies



Journal 19 MONTREAL MONTHLY MEETING and LAURENTIAN WORSHIP  
GROUP July 8, 2004

I'm back home in Peterborough for two weeks, surrounded by people who know what to do with summer. As I'm at my computer trying to collect my thoughts, various young tenants are collected on the porch outside my window, enjoying a smoke and their very cute kids. Another lovely boy of ten is still asleep here in my apartment, where I have been thrust into unexpected care-of-kid. My grandmother hormones are calling and wondering why I consider the nicest things in life to be silence and a computer screen and my own thoughts. But I do. So here I am with earplugs in and low music playing and the fan turned to the window to blow the smoke back out, and the fond parental remarks are fading to a sound which registers as farther off, not 5 feet from my ear. I did take my breakfast out on my own deck and did look up from my book (*A Student of Weather*, by Elizabeth Hay, borrowed from Fran Benson of Wooler Meeting. When I was in London, Ontario, last winter, I had the honour and pleasure of viewing the paintings of Jean Hay, Elizabeth's mother) and took in the green of my own back yard. My inner world expands, even as the need to shrink away from the daycare on my porch grows stronger too.

The fall visit to the Atlantic Friends is taking shape, after a confusing time trying to understand the relationships and bus connections. A Friend from Halifax Meeting is helping me work it all out, and has warned me that the main busline on the east coast is Acadian, and my Greyhound pass may not be of much use. I'll have as much of it figured out as I can before I'm there. The internet helps.

Meanwhile, these are precious days at home, before the itinerary's "silly bit," where I ride with my brother Jim back out west (I was in Regina only last month) to Saskatoon, and a celebration of the same family on the same farm for 100 years. My grandparents are long dead, and of course my great-grandparents, Edwin and Annie Rugg, who were the original settlers. But my mother's youngest brother, Barry, and his wife Betty (I knew them when Betty was the girlfriend, not yet the wife!), together with their son Bob's family, are still actively on the farm. They're seed growers, and I cherish a memory of visiting there some years ago and accompanying Barry to his work of sorting seeds. We climbed a ladder nailed to a wall inside an outbuilding and looked around expectantly, to see only a panel of buttons. With an impish smile, my uncle Barry pushed a button, machines behind wooden walls swung into throbbing motion, and we climbed down the ladder and continued with our walk!

But it is not all so easy, as any family near a farm knows. Right now Saskatchewan is saying "Enough rain!" and thinking anxiously of soggy fields.

After the reunion (over 80 cousins are signed up to come!) I'll linger to visit with the few remaining folk in town who attend Saskatoon Worship Group, be with them when they gather on Saturday to worship, and then grab either a bus or a plane--another point to determine over these next few days--and head for Canadian Yearly Meeting in Windsor, Nova Scotia. So this will be a long stint

away from home--once I leave on July 24, I don't expect to be here again until the end of October.

So much gets left out of these journals, and sometimes I mention them later on but more often they are just written out of this history. The extra days in Victoria, a visit in Mission with a writer of Norwegian descent, a surprise barbecue in Vancouver with two of my brothers, at my niece Charlotte's home. Charlotte also accompanied me to the sharing around creativity with Vancouver Meeting Friends, and took photographs for me. Then there is this upcoming family reunion, and in my recent visit to Quebec, the writing workshop with women from New York and New Jersey, a paid gig I'd committed to before this travelling began. But the women writers came to Meeting last Sunday with the fledgling Laurentian Worship Group, and the Friendly visit overlapped with the writing gig. Four Friends from Montreal Meeting drove to Lac Comu to join us for Meeting and discussion. We saw the writers (and actors, actually) off for their long drive back across the border, then lingered to swim and sun and talk through a beautiful summer afternoon.

Before the workshop time, I had visited Montreal Meeting, staying with Molly Walsh. Unexpectedly, the visit to this large and diverse city was an oasis of calm. I slept on the spare bed in Molly's computer room. I did some writing on the patio table in the exquisite garden she shares with the main gardener, Maureen, who lives upstairs. Colourful Buddhist prayer flags brighten one corner of this garden, reminding me of the similar cloths in the porch window in Nola Landucci's home in Trail, B.C. Delicate red and yellow day lilies make an extravagant starburst near the patio, and yellow snapdragons and pansies and red impatiens and purple forget-me-nots and petunias, nasturtiums, deep red zinnias--up at the back lush pink roses--and vegetables, too, and striped grasses, all doing their diverse and special thing. The house is one in a row in Notre Dame de Grace--a neighbourhood that is supposed to be more "English," but to me seemed as diverse as the garden. Molly shops for groceries in an Iranian supermarket, and our snacks included stewed eggplant, and jam made from rose petals.

Into this lovely space, as the days fell into a rhythm, dropped Voices. A diversity of voices, and I want to reflect this to you if I can, both as part of the experience of Montreal and as it affects the life of Montreal Meeting. On Sunday we did meet for worship, in the regular place in the "Green Centre"--I still need to find out what exactly that was, that building with the sunny room and circle of chairs. Friends there had let me know that they felt wary about such a touchy-feely subject as "creativity," but most stayed after Meeting and brought forward their responses to "What do you make?"

Claire Adamson, architect by profession, brought along a few of her cards with charming watercolour drawings, including one she designed to welcome Friends to the last St. Lawrence Regional Gathering. That one included a little first aid kit of 2 bandages, needle and thread. Not a bad metaphor for the urgent needs of many of us in our Meetings, healing small wounds and stitching things back together.

In that sharing after Meeting, Margaret Watts spoke of the history of displacement carried by herself and her Scottish neighbours. The Highland Clearances still live out in modern psyches in the countryside north of St. Jerome. Some Friends worry that Margaret is isolated where she lives, but she says she feels surrounded by friends, Friends and neighbours. What she makes is visits to prisons. Displacement and incarceration wind together for this Friend.

Lark was there, recently transplanted from Vancouver. We spoke later about the hope that Montreal Meeting might again begin a francophone worship group. Most of the Friends there speak French well, and for a few it is their first language.

For Bimal Thambyah, originally from Sri Lanka, the experience of displacement remains acute, but out of pain comes creative insight, and Bimal writes a regular column for a United Church publication, *Aujourd'hui Credo*. Later he shared several of these columns with me, and I enjoyed his interweaving of political discontent and spiritual insight. Trained as an engineer, Bimal feels stymied by various factors in our society, very much including racism. "It is very subtle but it is there." He writes his columns in English and a colleague turns them into elegant French.

The federal election campaign was drawing to a close. On my first evening in Montreal, Molly and I went out to a pub to meet Jack Layton, leader of the New Democrats. We drank beer, chatted with a young Montrealaire who did not intend to vote, Molly turned down an invitation to be a scrutineer, in part because she was still deciding how to vote, and I accepted a placard for Maria Tia Chavez, one of the local candidates, and got up on a barstool to wave it and yell when the N.D.P. types and cameras finally arrived. On our way out, we had an opportunity to meet Maria in person and she had a chance to try to persuade Molly to cast her vote in her direction. It was fun.

The next morning, Molly fell on her back porch and sprained her knee; one use of my visit over the next few days was running a few small errands for the household. The master gardener upstairs had already slipped and broken bones in her garden, before I got there, and subsequently I myself tripped on bare pavement and skinned one knee. "Fall on Your Knees," we decided, was the theme of these days; we kept appropriately humble as we healed. Actually, I was fine and Molly was getting better, but Maureen was an inspiration as she bumped up and down the two flights of stairs on her behind, laughing and saying she felt "like a bug."

Because of her knee, Molly stayed home the second evening, but I was able to go out with Leisl and Jay from the Meeting, to attend a panel with AWOL soldier Jeremy Hinzman, along with a charismatic Muslim woman from England, Salma Yaqoob. Listening to Salma, one could begin to believe that the anti-war movement has indeed accomplished "great achievements." "Because we marched," she said, "the United States and Great Britain have had to be more accountable." "Families are alive today because we marched. Iran and Syria

would have been invaded by now if we had not marched. In an antidote to the false doctrine of 'clash of civilizations,' the world saw that Egypt, too, marched. We have shown," she said, "that humanity comes first!"

Jeremy's message was as accessible and direct, but understandably more subdued. By the time you read this, his application for refugee status will have had its first hearing. Probably he will still be in this country and probably you can still help. The two addresses we are asked to write to are: the Prime Minister [at pm@pm.gc.ca](mailto:at pm@pm.gc.ca), and the Immigration Minister, Judy Sgro, [at sgroj@parl.gc.ca](mailto:at sgroj@parl.gc.ca). I've just now gone into Jeremy's website [jeremyhinzman.net](http://jeremyhinzman.net) and also Brandon's: [brandonhughey.org](http://brandonhughey.org). Brandon's site is very accessible, with clear links and info. Right at the moment, Jeremy's is not letting me into the links, which makes me wonder whether there may be just too many people trying to find out how the first hearing went. Anyway, on Brandon's site are wonderful and thoughtful letters of support from around the world, but also a link to a selection of the hate mail that Jeremy has received. I can't help but feel and say again--these guys really do need our support, if you feel the least bit led. It's not just these two young men, but their case itself. If Canada sends them back to incarceration in the States, we are dismissing their courage in following a leading most Friends can admire, and also admitting that Canada cannot speak its own truth to its friend, the United States. Perhaps we can, and perhaps you and I can have something to do with that. Anyway, if you have good internet access, a few minutes spent on Brandon's site will fill you in. Also please note that on the quaker.ca site you can follow the link to Canadian Friends Service Committee for a briefing paper with updates, letting you know what to do and what you need to know if and when an American soldier contacts you or your group for assistance. The basic message is: refer him or her to Canadian Friends Service Committee.

The two Friends who took me to the Hinzman event are committed activists. Leisl's leadings have ranged far, but lately have been around affordable housing, while Jay's life has led her into deep involvement with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. She participates in the Women in Black, a worldwide vigil which remembers the dead in all the conflicts. It began in 1988 with Israeli women who protested the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, with all the associated deaths. Their motto is: Standing Together We Can Make a Difference. Women in Black is a movement rather than an association. I also heard about Montreal initiatives to bring together Muslims, Jews and Christians, multi-faith initiatives to form understanding across the borders which exist in our own society.

Leisl gave me a copy of an article called "Despair and Christian Hope," by Douglas John Hall, writing in the United Church Observer. "In our modern world, many suffer from secret despair. We must admit to it before we can find hope." In Meeting that Sunday, I had offered my Pollyanna rediscovery of the eschatology of early Christians and of early Friends: that the Spirit is alive and well and within us and among us, and that we can begin with each moment, starting now, to live in the Light. Friends seemed to listen, but I wasn't sure whether this was the good news they also experienced or whether they were willing to wait for me to find my own way to admitting my "secret despair."

When I first asked Jay "What do you make?" she said, "I make trouble!" In the circle after Meeting, she spoke of her "deep passion" around injustice to Palestinians. Her former husband was Palestinian and through their children she has a direct emotional connection with this issue. It is difficult, she admitted, when the deep passions of others take them in different directions, and when she feels little support in what for her is a spiritual journey.

Once more I wondered to myself about discernment of gifts, and whether we Friends can better value the voices in our Meetings which remind us that there is another side to every issue, that all of us are called into existence by a Spirit of healing and wholeness and peace, and somehow there must be a way to seek reconciliation and speak truth without falling into judgement. I don't say it is easy, or that I've found the words yet to say this right.

As I have come to expect in the homes of Friends, at Molly's a small pile of books soon appeared near my bed--books I might be interested in, books Molly felt I might want to read. Among them was a collection of poems in French by a sometime attendee at Montreal Meeting, a poet and playwright from the Congo named Reginald K. Kambalek. On the cover is a lament which forms the theme of some of the most moving poems from "Les poemes de la colombe." "I hear the echo of my voice," it translates, and the voice becomes that of children who have experienced war, and who have voices now only to weep: "des enfants qui n'ont plus des voix que pour pleurer."

I didn't meet Reginald, but at the event to hear Jeremy Hinzman and Salma Yaqoob, one man at the microphone afterwards was also from the Congo; he identified himself as an artist and then asked a question that keeps coming back in many forms: why is it that we are becoming aware of the Iraqi dead but we know nothing of the 4 million dead in the Congo? Africans were used, he said, to kill other Africans. I suppose he meant that they were used by the west, by western interests. He was starting a new group to try to bring these concerns to public consciousness.

An email arrived from the Jewish woman in Regina who had left our workshop because a poem mentioned the Palestinian dead but not the dead in Israel. Of course this is anti-Semitism, she wrote, because only some of the suffering is acknowledged--the media and the peace movement pick and choose. She too mentioned as examples the carnage in Africa: "Sudan, Rwanda, etc." Why mourn, she asks, only over Iraqi dead and not the UN personnel or "the powerless low-grade American soldiers who go to war because they don't have other career options?" I cannot dismiss a voice like this; I have to become more certain within myself why it is that I feel personally responsible about the deaths of the children and old people, and of course others, which were the result of the sanctions against Iraq. I think it was because my own country supported them, through the U.N. I feel little implication with the African conflicts, or indeed with those dead in Israel. I feel sad, but not responsible. How to act, and not be overwhelmed, and not be part of the problem?

I am clear about listening.

On my last day in Montreal, I filled in for the Raging Granny with the broken leg and went with Molly and other Grans both anglophone and francophone to a CEGEP where there was a three-week conference going on concerning Human Rights. I was very impressed by this event. Over one hundred participants, almost all from Asia, Africa, the West Indies and India. Among the few from Canada were Friends Marc Forget and Sarah Chandler. We Grannies were to give songwriting workshops. We were sent first to a large room where refreshments had been set up and women of a certain age were donning flowered hats and aprons. After enthusiastic kissing on both cheeks by the francophone Grannies (the Wales Dechenees) and smiling nods of the head from the much more subdued anglophone Grans, the conference participants poured in for their snacks. Marc and Sarah both spotted us and came over for hugs. During the first week of this conference, Sarah's home town of Lillooet had been under threat of evacuation because of a forest fire. The immediate danger was now over, and Sarah more able to enjoy being at this amazing conference. I didn't find out exactly who funds this gathering; the t-shirt I was presented with says "Fondation canadienne des droits de la personne--Canadian Human Rights [Foundation--www.chrf.ca](http://www.chrf.ca)."

In our group were several from Indonesia, a woman from South Africa, another from Les Maldives--where is that?--and several other countries whose names I didn't recognize. Most were young. We split into two groups of about 15, and my group unhesitatingly chose as the theme for its song, "children's rights." A fellow from Bulgaria whistled the tune of "Camptown Races," and looked startled when I broke into the words I know. I think he may not have known it as a racetrack song. Away they went:

*We have the right to  
learn Children! Children!  
We have the right to play  
Children of the world.*

Then they composed a chorus, and I thought we were done. We started to rehearse. Some of the women suggested choreography: arm-in-arm dancing, like children at play. But a serious fellow from Indonesia came to the front and said he thought we should first finish the "content" of our song. Yes, said some women, children have a right to love! And to care. To protection. They all sat down again and looked into their notes: "A right to education, protection from war..." other long words, so that they burst out laughing as they thought of trying to fit them into the short lines of the song. Then they got serious again, and five stanzas later, it was all in. "An end to tears" was the last bit they had to get in.

Back in the other room, Molly's group was unfolding differently. The challenge for multi-cultural groups is to find a tune that everyone knows or can learn really fast. Half an hour into it, they had their theme (interestingly, they too chose children's rights) but had 9 different tunes and as many different ways of approaching their theme. (I'll probably never know why "Camptown Races"

caught on in my group--it certainly was not among the easy tunes we had worked out for ourselves as possible back-up.) Molly says she had to be directive, but she must have done it as the sweet old gran too, because when we all got back together, I was blown away by both presentations. Molly's group's own collaborative approach, I heard, had suddenly gelled, and the creative moment arrived. They belted out a gospel sound complete with counterpoint calling in the back. When I asked later, Molly said, "They didn't rehearse *that!*"

I was profoundly impressed by these young people coming from what I am sure are in many cases situations of extreme danger. "Will you be able to use this technique when you go home?" I asked some of them. Yes, they really did think so, "especially with children." I said not to forget that adults like to have fun too.

Truly it was a week of voices, ending with voices of laughter and hope.

I took the Limocar Laurentides to St. Jerome and for the next three days lived in impossible luxury, as Pauline of the Laurentian Worship Group--but also coordinator this year of the writing workshop for the Madwomen of Lac Cornu-- had booked us into the Auberge Lac Morency. For three days we were presented three times a day with gourmet meals, light, tasty and exquisitely presented. I got used to tangy coloured syrups in decorative designs all over my plate. One dessert had hardened chocolate strings stuck on the inside of the glass dish, and eventually I had to give up digging at it and rejoin the real world. I slept in a double bed in sight of a two-seater Jacuzzi bathtub and with a view outside the window of the forested Laurentian and the silver and green lake. I kept trying to keep it all simple.

The writing was startlingly good--these women had been meeting in New York during the months since our last encounter, and their writing had bloomed. Two are in the throes of writing plays which almost certainly will find their way to the stage. I've worked closely with them, and some of you have heard me tell about the American women I have met and the way they, too, are dismayed and distressed by the policies of their government. Two of them live in sight of where the twin towers once rose, and I am touched by the fact that they are not living in fear and not falling into kneejerk patriotism. However, at our last meal the talk turned to the possibility of the return of the draft, and of nephews and other friends and family who are likely to be called up for service in Iraq. I recognized the personal fear that is rising among them, as people they love move increasingly into danger. These are grounded, lovely women, each with a profound sense of some form of spirituality. Nevertheless, once more I personally had an exercise in listening. One woman had attended a Quaker Meeting soon after Sept. 11, 2001. A Friend had risen to say that we were remembering the many who had died, but that we were forgetting the 19 who hijacked the planes and who also had died. "Right there," said my friend, "I drew the line." She has not been back to Friends, except for the end-of-the-workshop gathering at Lac Cornu. Her voice stayed with me, a particularly intractable moment for me, for listening without calling out "BUT. ....till WHAT ABOUT....???" I did say, "Were they not children of God?" and she did shake her head. But these are words....

Madeleine Sherwood was shaking her own head over an exchange she had had with a couple staying a couple of doors down from our workshop room at the auberge. Somehow they had all got talking about how can it be that the world, which looked so peaceful at Lac Morency, could be in such pain and turmoil. To the woman the matter was very clear, and she said so. "It is because Adam and Eve sinned." Madeleine's news to us was that in spite of her strong reaction inside herself, she had listened, she had managed to hold her tongue.

Julie and Terry from Montreal Meeting came out for the worship, and Jacques, who is clerk, and Molly, still limping, both arrived shortly afterwards, for the picnic and swim. Julie is a cabinet maker, and brought with her a panel of wood with a delicate design she had made on it, in contrasting veneers. She explained how one uses a mirror to "see" the design as one works. The central pattern was almost mauve, four very thin slices from the same piece of wood, repeating the swirls of the pearl-like grain. Julie spoke of becoming "self-absorbed" when she was doing this work, "but that might not be the right word."

Jacques enriched our discussion with insights from Alternatives to Violence Project, from Twelve-Step programs, and from his studies in anthropology. Among much else, we talked about Self and Ego and the sense of becoming lost in one's work. What exactly does one lose? I keep thinking about the two quotes from Robert Barclay, early Friend, that have come my way on this journey. In one he rants against things I love: theatre, sports, games, laughter and "useless conversation." In the other, he says profound and helpful things about letting in Light by laying aside Self. I assume that for him there was a connection, and I struggle to understand it. Something about being so "full of oneself" that it is impossible to let wood speak, colours, Voices.

Excerpt from a column by Bimal Thambyah:

*"The communal troubles in my country Sri Lanka started in 1957. I am a Tamil. My community was at the receiving end of the violence. One of the first incidents was on a train. Some Tamils who were on it were beaten up for no other reason than that they were Tamils. My Father who worked for the Railways happened to be on the train. He luckily escaped. My Sister in 1987 was not fortunate, she was shot dead by a so called 'Peace' keeping force....*

*...So what to me is the 'Good News'--the Gospel for our world today? My understanding is that God 'knew' that we cannot achieve real lasting peace by ourselves. God broke into 'our' world in the person of Jesus--the Prince of Peace. Jesus for us is the light of the world. If we look directly at a bright light we will get blinded and we may not see the suffering around us. ...[Yet also] Light reveals. When we turn our eyes on Jesus things on this earth actually become clear--this is the irony."*



Poem written by Claire Adamson in Sept. 2001:

MIND THE MIND

*A stressed mind balks  
Busy, it survives  
Restful, it creates  
Centred, it flows.*

Poem sent to me in the mail in careful pencilled lines, by Rosie (9) and Mary her mother,  
Yarmouth MM:

SILVER MIRROR

*Silver mirror in the sky,  
Hanging up there so high.  
Shining down upon us here,  
Making dapples on the Spear.*

*Is it a spear of blood and war?  
Or is it a Spear of green that we adore?  
Growing in the garden green,  
That remains to be seen.  
It is up to us to know,  
And choose the way to go.*

Journal 20 SASKATOON ALLOWED MEETING August 8, 2004

Swirls of pink gauze, a sunset's notion of the spiritual. I lean forward to the airplane window, taking it in. I'm consuming a \$12 dinner I decided to purchase, not sure why but it will be a long night. I expect to be home at about 3 a.m. Now my jacket pockets are stuffed with airplane treats, and so are my insides.

The visit to Saskatoon Allowed Meeting was the shortest yet, but I'll be back again next year, possibly to coincide with Prairie Monthly Meeting, possibly just to visit again properly. A family reunion pulled me out to Saskatoon this week, just a month after I'd already visited Regina. This is the jet set bit of the travelling, as I hurry in the direction of Nova Scotia. After this, it will be ground travel again until the end of next year.

I'd been forewarned that only three Friends were left in Saskatoon in midsummer — Laurel, Jane and Dave. In my rush to pack for the reunion, I left some contact info behind, and so the first part was locating people and then arranging to touch base. Suddenly there were four of us fitting snugly into a restaurant booth, eating Asian food and talking poetry, leadings, conflict resolution and the importance of using one's creative energies to make space—for oneself and for other people.

Three snippets from three Friends keep returning in my mind today:

Dave, after studying many academic views of the world, sums up his philosophy as: EARTH. Move the last letter to the start, he notes, and you have HEART. In the middle you have ART and HEAR. That's enough to go on.

Laurel quotes from a women's Christian gathering she is helping with: "Who are you? What is your work? Are you doing it?"

Jane speaks of the message or mission of Friends as "widening our vision."

Today we met for worship in the Unitarian Fellowship Hall—a quiet, reverential space. A good clear notice outside announces that Quakers meet here on Saturdays at 10 a.m. We are seven, in the end, with new attender Daphne, and Jay and Lois, who were still in town too, not having quite left yet for Canadian Yearly Meeting.

We talk a little about the AWOL American soldiers, and about Friends' history of underground railways and also our history of reconciliation. People linger to look at photographs I have brought of Friends from across the country. Jane drives me back to my sister's house and we wonder together whether the prairie meetings will be abandoned if a western yearly meeting does form, and some alternatives.

We talk too of the fear we have both experienced at times when we felt we might lose the respect and love of our sustaining communities. This whole question of following leadings is both simple and complicated. I think my pioneer

grandfather was following a leading one hundred years ago, walking out onto the bald prairie, seeking the survey stakes put there by others who had gone ahead. But I have visited the medicine wheel too in the Moose Mountains near Regina, where people have lived on these prairies for millennia; my grandfather was a newcomer. At the reunion, his grandson my cousin who now farms that land confessed regret that he himself had broken some of the virgin prairie that was still left; he said he will not do that again.

That was the visit so far to Saskatoon. I got off the plane and into the Toronto night. I'd been too casual about checking my bus information, and at 1 a.m. found I had missed the last bus home and that the next one would go at 7. I settled in to sit up all night in the bus terminal. But a cleaning woman told me they were closing, and that I had to go out into the Toronto night. "I have nowhere else to go," I told her, and said it again to the young woman at the 24-hour Coffee Time on Bay Street. She said there was a 20-minute limit, but in the end let me stay. "There's no sleeping allowed here." So I stayed awake, along with the other homeless people that night in Toronto. I felt fairly safe, but not if I had to go outside. As the hours dragged past, my pen scribbling kept me awake, I finished the two coffees and muffin I'd bought, and surreptitiously went on to eat up all the treats from the airplane. I wouldn't need breakfast.

On the bus home, finally, there was Friend Alan Dixon, who filled me in on his life since the last time I saw him quite a few years ago. He gave me good advice about my computer problems at home. Where I am now, and leave again the day after tomorrow to drive with Alan's parents to Nova Scotia.

Dave Greenfield of Saskatoon Allowed Meeting published a collection of his poetry in 2001. I have a copy now of Warm Snow, Silent Music, and have Dave's permission to share this one:

#### CONTEMPLATON

*If I were a blade of grass  
People would walk on me  
But I would bounce back.*

*I would be cut down to size  
Six or eight times a summer  
By a loud motored hand pushed machine  
But I would keep growing  
And insist upon it.*

*I would lay my head down to sleep  
Under layers of snow sphere  
For several months of the winter  
And then awaken crying "Remember!"  
"New spring, New day, New summer."*

*If I were a blade of grass*

*I would have nothing to do all day  
But sense the Divinity in the wind  
And on the sweet sunlight  
And dream the Kingdom of Heaven  
In my secret inward temple  
Of grass green.*

*There would be no universities  
Seeking to hire me on  
To give lectures on contemplation  
Or for that matter, on condensation.  
Freedom would be the name I'd give  
To the breeze that stirs me  
Along with my fellow  
Truant Mystics  
Across the summer plane.*

Journal 21, Bed 50 CYM and a week to unwind in Fredericton August 28/04

I arrived in Fredericton during the zucchini season. I am told that the only time people here lock their cars is to keep their neighbours from filling them up with zucchinis.

I look over my notes from the gathering of Canadian Yearly Meeting last week and it might as well be a carload of zucchinis. I don't know what order to make of them.

From Bible Study, for example:

In Hebrew, God is not Alpha AND Omega, but Alpha TO Omega. The whole alphabet.

The Thunder-Perfect Mind: title of a gnostic poem

The larger middle: some kind of holding together of opposites

There is a whole continuum of behaviour *before* violence.

Discrimination in scripture is often based in fear--that someone we know may become like *that*. You don't want your child to intermarry with the poor.

TABBYS are Temporarily Abled Bodies--a different way of viewing one's (temporarily) healthy body

The theme was diversity, which fits in with my increasing sense that what Friends have to offer is our insistence on listening to diverse voices.

I drove with Ottawa Friends John and Carol Dixon to Kings-Edgehill School in Windsor, N.S. I entered the silent retreat, took spiritual direction for the first time, attended meetings for worship for business which approved minutes on Iraq, the environment, housekeeping and the Earth Charter. We heard a presentation about Friends' work resisting the patenting of life forms. In the food co-op, I squeezed lemons and chopped veggies and got to know people. I sat through meetings where the diverse voices appeared to have lost their God-given ability to hold one another up tenderly, and I took part in faithful listening even when the long meetings made my TABBY squirm and lose my centre. I didn't really relate much to the children and teens, but enjoyed having them around. Paul from Winnipeg turned 6 and I made him a card and toddler Liam took it to look at it and the last time I saw it, it was under a table. But Paul did have a good birthday, it looked like, with 150 of us in and around his celebration. I collected drawings from Ben and Paul. I had a wonderful swim at the picnic. I got inspired by the work Friends are doing in economics and the environment.

Out in Victoria, three Friends died inside one week--Edith Adamson, Geoff Johnston, and Win Awmack. That is a lot of passing, a lot of change.

Then we were saying goodbye, and I was taken home to Fredericton by Martha McLure and Vince Zelazny, where I got to hang out in their spare room and in the dappled shade just past their zucchini patch--for this whole week.

On Sunday we had Meeting for Worship at the home of Edith and Michael Miller, and on Tuesday we went back there for a presentation by Maxine Kaufman-Lacusta, about her work in Palestine-Israel. The good news is that Canadian Friends Service Committee has taken on support for the International Middle East Media Committee, a journalism project to get out a more balanced story from that region.

And I wrote a piece for Canadian Friend and a long report about CYM for my little Meeting. I wandered in downtown Fredericton and loved the human scale that results from their decision not to allow any building higher than the tip of the cathedral steeple. It felt like prairie, there was so much sky. Today I take the bus to St. John to begin a visit to the tiny worship group there.

Oh--the most important part! This week I re-learned to knit, the first time since grade 4, and that awful afghan square which apparently scarred me for life, until now. I produced a useable red knitted square to be incorporated into a blanket for Vivian Zelazny's first apartment on her own. It turns out that knitting is very easy, and very addictive, and it has changed my life.

Journal 22 HAMPTON WORSHIP GROUP Long Reach and St. John NB September 3, 2004

Hampton Worship Group does not meet in Hampton. It used to, when Friends were there who have since moved away or died. When Doris and John Calder were at Pendle Hill these past two years, Hampton Worship group became even more tenuous. One Friend continued busy with focused community work and visiting in prisons, but was not always free to attend Meeting. Others newish to Friends sought out the more established group in Fredericton. That often left Hendrien Kippers, never feeling abandoned by Friends, she says, but in need of spiritual sustenance from a worshipping community.

Hendrien was attending meetings of a group which encourages work in schools with children, about peaceful resolutions to schoolyard conflicts, I think it was, when one of the several Unitarians there invited her to that community; they are organized and offer an interesting range of discussion groups, worship and social action. "At the Unitarians I miss the silence, and at Friends I miss the singing." She also appreciates the Friendly insistence on personal responsibility. At both groups, Hendrien always feels a space to speak one's heart, name a concern, and feel it is received and heard, without people being impelled to "fix" anything. She appreciates the Unitarian custom of beginning each meeting for worship with the opportunity to come forward and light a candle and perhaps speak to a personal concern.

Hendrien has had ten children and has 25 grandchildren and 7 or 8 great-grands. After all that, here she is at 76, vibrant and healthy and active, deeply involved in her various communities.

"Young," I want to say, storing away this delightful visit as one more role model for my own aging self. A few years ago, Hendrien finished off an Honours BA in English Literature, including a thesis with a nuanced discussion of gender roles in Canterbury Tales. She has also authored a complex memoir for her family, and many poems, ongoing. She reads out to me a quotation from her friend and mentor, poet Kay Smith: *The poem begins silently, secretly, a splinter of light in the surrounding dark of mystery. Sometime—when time is right (is ripe)—it may be today, tomorrow or ten years from now, this intimation, this hint, this bright speck of poem somehow contains sufficient strength to rise up into the light of the conscious mind.*

The discovery of Kay Smith's light-filled poetry helps me a lot at this moment of my visit. Friends speak of travelling under the "burden" of a Concern. I have not felt burdened; I've felt directed, upheld, led. I have felt clear. But after the yearly meeting gathering, and as I began this two months on the east coast, the spiritual pool inside me has not felt clear, but disturbed. I've had heavy, busy, burdening dreams of large carnivals or conferences, where I rush around and I am in charge of something but am not prepared. Or vivid, up-close dream encounters with a problematic baby. What is going on? (No need to e-mail and tell me...I'm figuring it out!)

In the external world, all has seemed well. I do feel prepared. Intense, interesting conversations take place, or gentle, risky, sharing ones. I have quiet times at the back of

someone's garden with my journal, or walking with Friends down east coast roads. I feel reasonably useful, doing dishes and such in the homes of welcoming Friends. At moments the conversation stops and one feels a sense of Presence. There are stories of travelling Friends who feel the "burden" lift and turn around and go back home. I began waking in the night, obsessing about matters at home.

For the first few days of the visit with Hampton Worship Group, I stayed with the Calders, relaxing happily into their peace-filled home with its peerless view over the St. John River, catching up with these Friends and also sinking into reading-- pamphlets and books...reading and writing and talking and walking, my favourite things. I heard some good Quaker stories, including this one: Laina Ullman, mother of Chris Ullman whom I stayed with in Mission earlier this year, participated in a peace group at one time organized by Niemuller. All these spellings and facts are unchecked, but the point of the story is this: Laina carried in her purse a letter from the Patriarch of Moscow of the Eastern Orthodox Church to Rome and arranged to deliver it to the Pope. This was the first communication after the war between these two branches of the Catholic church. -Thought you might be interested!

Then I fell ill. Only a head cold, and it's nearly all over, but I hadn't seen it coming and it felt all wrong. If what my soul needed was sleep and soup and care, my soul got what it needed and then some. On Sunday I was still well (that may be what did it, actually, wearing light summer clothes into Meeting that day, to chilly, fogbound St. John), and Meeting felt remarkably centred and deep. Everyone was there and so we were seven.

On Tuesday we foregathered again to share around this matter of creativity in our lives. By then I was still sniffing, but beginning to rally, and had slept nearly the whole day. Mary Lord of American Friends Service Committee had arrived; I was delighted to make Mary's acquaintance, and frustrated that I had to go away and sleep.

I want to mention some of the sharing from this group, because for one thing I learned some things and perhaps you will too.

One Friend had spoken on Sunday of the "fear of resurrection," a phrase I hadn't heard before and which spoke well to some of my own resistances. On Tuesday this same Friend, Jim, a visual artist, brought an early drawing of his own face ..."Who am I? What sort of being? And what am I to do?"

Lauren brought a painting of light and dark: a watcher at a window viewing a candle on the sill and outside the glow of a streetlight, and the dark. Several spoke of love of the dark, of the profound truth of finding the divine in the womb (doesn't always feel that safe) and also in the blaze of enlightenment.

John showed us the blue prayer bowl he'd made at Pendle Hill, with symbols in it that help carry John through. He quoted from John Donne, and later I asked him to give me those words again over the telephone, and so here they are, without line breaks: *Since I am coming to that holy room where, with thy choir of saints, I shall be made thy music; as I come I pause here at the door and tune my instrument, that what I shall be then I think on here before.*



Doris makes networks (as well as wonderful meals and much else), and tends them, networks of people. She has become Keeper of the Vision for a lay order inspired by St. Francis of Assisi, with a way of life that includes care of the earth. I think you could look it up on the internet as The Third Order.

Hendrien read us two of her poems and passed around needlework. Cross-stitching for a runner for a coffee table, which takes on deeper meaning still when we learn the story of the coffee table, of learning those stitches, and the web of relationships that goes back to the little girl living in Holland during the stress of World War Two, and accepting that life as normal. Cross-stitching indeed, one thing stitched to another, crossing over, casting back. A poem Hendrien read had as central image a skein of blue thread.

Nancy said, "This is something different," and passed around a photo of "The Folks"--two life-size people she has made out of cloth. As she told stories of their adventures--making people laugh and sometimes sitting at windows to help people feel more secure, the image came to my mind of the clown figure bobbing outside the door of Dottie and Jack Ross' house in Argenta. I thought I remembered Jack at CYM once, passing out red clown noses in case of sudden need. It turned out that indeed Nancy and Jack have met over clowning, and that laughter for healing is also laughter that can transform society.

I have mused about the creative energy that rises in the silence, if only we can go there in a spirit of expectant trust. I have not considered much the creative force of laughter. Laughter as Way Forward. Laughter as . . . I recall that film back in the sixties, with Jesus as the carnival clown.

Mary Lord is a singer, and Mary sang. First, though, she spoke movingly of 9/11, and of the comfort given to her and to other U.S. Friends that day and the days after, by Friends visiting from other countries where the sense of ordinary safety had already been ripped away. How it is so important to keep centred, keep perspective.

I moved to Hendrien's home in St. John that evening. In her Unitarian newsletter I found news from Peterborough, to my surprise. I knew that the Unitarian community there had just completed a wonderful arrangement with the Jewish community for joint use of the synagogue. Now I read the sad news that the synagogue was badly damaged by the recent flood.

Also in that newsletter was a meditation on the fact that the pictures on our walls go askew because of the rotation of the earth. We humans too, it was suggested, go "askew," just from going our rounds,

Hendrien and I walked to the ocean in intentional silence, and so when we rounded a nearby corner and an awesome seaside vista appeared, I only gasped. Massive tilted rocks, deep blue, braced the cliff where we stood, and in their folds lay great rounded stones like the smooth stones I used to walk on at the beach below Dallas Road in Victoria, except that these were huge. Far below on a sandy stretch a family watched the tide coming in, while a boy sped about on a motorized beach vehicle...is that a dirt bike?...its whine and buzz like a mosquito sound over the whisper of surf. Otherwise, wind, seabirds, silence. We came back in the gathering dark and as people walking dogs passed us, we humans all murmured "hello."

I felt my own tilting stop. That night the dream I remembered was again a field full of folk, having a great time and hey, this time I was *not* in charge. Good. Someone else is, some Spirit of carnival, or maybe The Folks.

I drafted this in the branch library near Hendrien's home. The night before, I had a lovely catch-up conversation with some of the Calder offspring, mainly Gordon but I also met his brother Stephen. I had last seen Gordon some twelve years ago, when he was taking a sea-kayaking course in Victoria. Now the two Calder young men are engaged in renovating a couple of run-down houses they have bought in St. John--work that feels satisfying and good to do on the face of the earth.

I want to include a plug for the work of another Calder kid. Laura Calder has a most engaging and lively cookbook out, a presentation of serious French cooking that you too can do. You can support a Quaker offspring, enrich your cooking skills and do a political act all at the same time, as the book got pulled off the American bookstore shelves with the foolishness about all things French at the time of the Iraq war. When French fries became Liberty chips in the States, Laura's book became toast. It's coming out in paperback too, so you can likely even afford it.

French Food at Home. William Morrow (Harper Collins), 2003. ISBN 0-06-008771-4

Other bibliography this visit:

Two new pamphlets that brought me very exciting new ideas:

Peaceful Prevention of Deadly Conflict: Developing an Alternative to War.

Friends Committee on National Legislation, 245 Second St., NE, Washington, D.C. 2002 800-630-1330 [fcn@fcnl.org](mailto:fcn@fcnl.org) [www.fcnl.org](http://www.fcnl.org) This committee usually is specific to U.S. legislation, but this pamphlet has ideas you can run with anywhere, including here.

Friends Struggles Through the Years, by Ron Mock (Northwest Yearly Meeting). Wider Quaker Fellowship, a program of FWCC Section of the Americas, 1506 Race St., Philadelphia, PA 19102-1498 215-241-7293

[Americas@fwccamericas.org](mailto:Americas@fwccamericas.org) This pamphlet is badly titled. It's actually about pacifism and raises succinct ideas in response to scenarios varying from "what do we do if someone is attacking our loved ones?" to how do we respond to situations such as Rwanda, or today the Sudan. From a discussion of the Good Samaritan: "Or will we pass by into Phariseeism, keeping our skirts clean but leaving people in ditches all over the world?"

Both these short pamphlets challenge us to move into more active approaches to the making of a culture of peace. One refers to a book I haven't seen, but would like to (Would somebody in Peterborough please recommend this title to Dhoog?):

War Prevention Works: 50 Stories of People Resolving Conflict. Oxford OX2 6JE, [U.K.org@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk](mailto:U.K.org@oxfordresearchgroup.org.uk)

Also noted:

Cultures of Peace: The Hidden Side of History, by Elise Boulding

Finite and Infinite Games, by James Carse

There. I'll stop. I found out that the guy who wrote *The Elephant Talks to God* (Dale Estey), the book that made such a delightful discussion group starter for Peterborough Allowed Meeting, has been known to have lunch with the Calders. But then so has the guy who took me out in the boat yesterday.

But I'll write about that next week.

Journal 23 FUNDY FRIENDS WORSHIP GROUP September 12, 2004

I came to St. Andrews because there are Friends here, and their contact person Maria Recchia had asked whether I'd be interested in helping throw mud at her straw bale house. The bus driver called out something about a connection for St. Andrews, and there was a shuttle bus beside the highway and several of us switching over to it and Bay of Fundy. An upright little woman across the aisle proceeded to look me over and try to find out what were my motivations for coming to her town. I asked her how long she has lived in St. Andrews. "Eighty years," she replied, and then, "I've lived here all my life." She was discussing local news with the bus driver and in a few minutes, as we passed a side road, she suggested that he could, if he wanted to, take us on up there to see the straw house. A few kilometers later, I had admitted that I did expect to see the straw house, and she had let me know that it had to be Maria's house, as there were no others around. No, she didn't know Maria herself, but the bus driver did.

After half an hour of shuttling about to hotels and a Marine Biology station, the bus let me off on Water Street, the main drag, and I found myself being warmly greeted by a tall dark-haired woman named Leanne Ward. The heritage stores and tourist crowds let me know that usually people who come to St. Andrews come for other reasons than the Quakers. Still, for me it had already turned out that the Friends were where it was happening, eh. First the straw house and then I discovered that Leanne, who met me, organizes the farmers' market which meets right over there beside the post office, in Market Square. Larry Lack was down the street in a café or something, but he emerged and they drove me to their place. I soon realized that their home had its own significant parameters, indicated by the sign posted on their door: words to the effect of: Use it, Recycle it, Don't buy it in the first place if you can do without it. I looked around at handmade furniture and hangings and the very attractive living quarters of a couple committed to living close to the earth and its needs. I met Della the dog, and Tootsie the cat, and was ushered into a bedroom with woven hangings on the wall and bright red cotton curtains. The hangings were in honour of Leanne's work some years ago with aboriginal women in New Mexico. Great vegetables and a walk in the sunset beside the water (and under a wooden fort from past days) started my visit here. The vegetable theme continued, as I was served wonderful meals of garden veggies, and stood in awe as they transformed into meals I hope to learn to make. I *know* these journals should include recipes. I'm just not quite there yet.

Larry was recently returned from his job of inspecting organic farms. It involves a great deal of travelling, followed up by urgent paperwork, as growers wait to receive what they need for certification. As we chatted over their kitchen table, I realized that he and Leanne are in the midst of a lifetime of committed activism, mainly around the growing of food, but also around other environmental concerns and almost anything that comes up. I had arrived in the aftermath of a protest they and others had mounted against the removal of healthy trees from the Anglican cemetery. The protest ruffled feathers but appears to have also helped heighten consciousness about care of the remaining graveyard trees. Later in the week, when the Friends met again, Larry would be proposing an educational effort around use of Just-Us fair trade coffee. So far everybody I've stayed with in New Brunswick uses Just-Us coffee. It's very good.

Meanwhile, Larry was going out in the boat the next day, after Meeting, to work with David H. Thompson, the Baykeeper guy, who was spending a week here revisiting sites they had checked out last year at this time, to see whether the clean-ups had been done and in general how things are now. Would I like to go with them? Larry asked. I didn't understand yet what it was about, but it sounded like an adventure I'd like to accept. Later on the boat, I asked David what he is looking for, and he said, "Anything."

It turned out that Fundy Baykeeper is an initiative of the Conservation Council of New Brunswick, a citizens' effort to monitor environmental degradation in the Bay of Fundy. In the St. Andrews area, the biggest issue is the garbage left on the beaches by aquaculture companies, and by the business itself, which I am told has in the past been smelly and polluting. All of this is now less of an issue. I still felt sorry for the salmon I saw leaping inside the big circular plastic cages, but the fishy smell near them was not disgusting and I was told has cleaned up a great deal. No one was sure how much they still have to use antibiotics.

On the beaches, however, in secluded coves, I was shocked to see piles of bright blue plastic, discarded giant circular pens, and rolls of netting half-buried in sand and floating free in the water near the shore. The men slowed the boat to neutral and purred closer and closer to the floating debris, while David took photos and Larry made notes.

We also saw two eagles feeding in a herring weir, seals, porpoises, loons, cormorants, and people sunning themselves on the rocks on Deer Island, the largest of the many islands we sailed past. Altogether we travelled about 30 miles on the water and spent 5 hours in these observations. I learned this: if you focus on an issue and pursue it, take notes and then follow up doggedly with the appropriate authorities, and if you keep this up summer and winter, with follow-up and revisiting and commitment (seems to be my favourite word so far in this journal) then you do make a difference. David said that if the matter is small, give it five years; if it's a bit bigger, give it ten. But what we were looking at was only 10 per cent of the mess that had been there only one year ago. The men pointed out one rocky island where plastic had been hauled by the companies and burned: plastic had flowed down like lava. Another rocky headland, now bare except for a little blue plastic at one end, last year had been piled high with garbage. On one hand, I was startled and shocked to see how much stuff people are willing to leave around (and in other places, I heard, people bulldoze developments right down to the waterline, against provincial regulations and without a permit in the first place...and so on...) terrible incursions into the island beauty they live in. On the other hand, because environmental groups are monitoring the situation, they are cleaning up.

We took pictures of sardine boats, because when David was a boy there were 200 of them around here, local boats bringing back local herring catches to the fisheries for packing. Now the boats have to go much farther out, and take a day or so to get back and need refrigeration units on board, so that the sardines I eat are not so fresh, and there are only 20 of those local boats left, and soon there will be none.

Next day, Labour Day, I did get out to the straw bale house, with Leanne. The part I learned to do was stuffing layers of muddy straw into the 'holes' between bales. It was satisfying, figuring that I was blocking the cold and wind from coming through in all the winters ahead for this house. An article had appeared in the local paper the day

before, which is why the local people on the bus knew about it. Maria's house is producing a major raising of public awareness around alternative modes of building and insulation.

The Fundy Friends began with two or three people--Maria Recchia, Julie Kronenberg--both of whom had worshipped with Friends elsewhere--and Gwen Locke, whose membership is with the Anglicans but who has joined the Wider Quaker Fellowship as part of her eclectic but clearly defined spiritual path. Two years ago, Leanne and Larry moved to St. Andrews and the group took on new life. A few others have attended from time to time but have moved on or for other reasons can't always attend. One such person I didn't meet is the mother of three children. One way or another, the group has the seed of a more stable meeting.

They meet in silence, prefaced by a one-page reading from a collection called: Daily Readings from Quaker Writings Ancient & Modern, edited by Linda Hill Renfer. This two-volume (so far) set could be an exciting addition to the Faith & Practice collections we use at present (the blue and the red) and the chapters we are putting together for a Canadian volume.

On Sunday we were seven for Meeting and eight for potluck. Two people just dropped in. We met on the stage at one end of the Anglican Sunday School room, an odd but pleasant place to be, with a kitchen nearby for potluck. I just mean 'odd' because there we were on stage! After potluck, I wondered why I hadn't laid out my Quaker info, but at the time it felt enough just to become acquainted.

After the boat and the straw bale house, I did wonder what next St. Andrews would have to offer! On Monday I moved over to stay with Julie Kronenberg and, after a little checking around with other kind people Maria had lined up to billet me, it was agreed that I would stay with Julie, sleeping in the very nifty space she has set up in the loft of her barn. I was in the hayloft, actually, although it felt like a penthouse. In the main house were four dogs, and so one of our first acts was to get a photo of Julie on the couch with Shandy, Sam, Niki and Chip. This is for my collection of Quaker women on couch with four dogs, a sister series to my collection of Quaker guys in housecoats making waffles. Later I got pictures also of Julie and dogs under red stone cliffs, in and out of the Bay of Fundy. That beach with its walk with dogs, Julie said, was the place where she personally regains her creative and spiritual centre.

Near that beach is an extensive farm, where Julie's horse George boards, in friendly association with a donkey named Belinda. All these creatures I met, and trotted around after Julie along with the dogs as she organized pails with apples and carrots and bran and whatever else kept George and Belinda lined up at the fence.

Julie is an experienced and passionate speech therapist. After many years of work in a hospital in Boston (she first came into Friends there, in the Cambridge Meeting) she enjoys working in this small seaside town. Our conversations ranged wide and deep and I am grateful for the opportunity to meet the Friends in St. Andrews.

Because I stayed in town instead of moving out to a billet in the countryside, I had the opportunity of meeting again with Gwen Locke. Gwen is a visual artist, deeply

immersed in her community and living through the first months alone after the recent death of her husband Lafe, a beloved cartoonist and writer of children's books. I got to know Lafe a bit through his cartoons, and to see some of the varied aspects of Gwen through her paintings. I was able to take a photo of the artist at work on a painting of yellow irises. I was also quizzed quite closely about this travelling I am doing and was invited to join Gwen at the Anglican Bible study on Thursday evening. Which I decided to do. I had my Bible, after all, having brought it along for Yearly Meeting.

First, though, I was marched down the street to the door of the potter Tom Smith. Gwen herself was moving on to other appointments in her busy life. Tom Smith is the father of the Friend I didn't get to meet, the mother of three, and he is a well-known art teacher as well as potter and sculptor and painter. Rumour had it that he is "a Quaker" and I was willing to follow that thread. Which led to a delightful and stimulating hour with this interesting artist. I heard that Tom in the past taught in Friends' World College. I got the sense of a teacher who has no doubt effected much positive change in the lives of his students. I decided to try to voice my queries about creativity, spirituality and effective social change. I really was curious. "Tom," I said, "what do you tell people when they ask you what is going on? What happens when you are doing this?" I was looking behind him to the rows of yellow cube chunks overlaid with the weave of cloth, and luminescent blue raku spheres.

"I make pots," he replied.

We compared notes and names a little longer. I heard more about the ways his work has evolved. I wanted to come back and look some more, but had to move on. By then I had learned that the group was planning another potluck for Friday, and so I invited him. He's an "unbeliever," he explained. From my point of view, he probably doesn't believe in the same things I don't, but here, for me anyway, is the fine line between proselytizing and informing. I did blurt, "I'll bet you're right there when you make your pots." Truly I felt lucky to have seen some of his work, and for the way he sat down and discussed it all with me. I should carry along a tape recorder, but maybe then these conversations wouldn't be quite so neat. What do I know. Anyway, I'm sorry that I didn't make it back there, just to look.

The Anglican Bible Study was a bit of a culture shock for me, but I must say that I liked their format, and some day I'd like to do it again, maybe with a group that reads in subtexts more compatible with my own. But I liked the idea that they decide on a book of the Bible to go through--this time they were starting in on Second Corinthians--and that they pass around the leadership, take turns around the circle reading a bit, and then ask themselves what jumps out at them, what they can relate to from their own lives. The text was at least as obscure as *The Elephant Talks to God*, and it included a few famous bits, notably that the letter killeth while the spirit giveth life. I found out there is an intriguing bit about early Christians vis-à-vis worship of Diana in Acts 19: 23-41. Got a little Diana theme going when I slipped in later in the week to visit their historic Anglican church and found myself sitting just behind where a plaque said Diana and Charles had sat, on their visit a few years ago, in, as Gwen said, "happier days." The rapprochement of the Fundy Friends with the Anglican Sunday School room comes to an end this Sunday, after which the Anglican children will need that space. At our potluck on the Friday night, I felt led to explain how small decisions such as where

and when to meet can be used to practice that other Friends' process, discernment--or Meeting for Worship for Business. I had the nice explanation with me that Peter Harkness wrote a few years ago, and Julie made copies so that they now have it in hand. And Maria has remembered where they've put their copy of Organization & Procedure.

A little group begins to meet and then the question arises where to go next, how to grow a Meeting. This week it has come to me strongly that we have three processes that are precious to us as Friends. One is to meet for worship in silence. One is to practice "discernment" in small matters, so that everyone owns the decisions, and the group becomes accustomed to tempering individual leading with what is best for the group. And the third is worship-sharing. Not all our interchanges will occur within these formal containers, but we grow strong when all three are part of our life together. I made sure I mentioned John Woolman, who continued his individual leading to end slavery through long years when the corporate discernment did not join with him. When it finally did, some Friends reluctantly submitted to the corporate discipline, and freed their slaves. Others turned away with broken hearts, and left the Society of Friends.

About there in our discussion is where Larry put forward the idea that surely the group could approach the big local hotel with the proposal that they change their coffee to Just-Us. I bent to Leanne as the conversation broke into many voices, and explained how, on a leading like this one about the coffee, the group could, if they wished, make a minute. How a minute gives credibility, both in the world outside Friends, where it can be brought as a corporate statement, but mainly among Friends, where it can go forward to the Monthly Meeting and might season and grow.

Larry brought photos to add to my collection, one of the Calders' peaceful house (I guess he has been to lunch there too, along with most of the social justice community of New Brunswick, at one time or another)...and one of Leanne and me in coveralls and rubber boots, ready to go off to work on the straw bale house. When I get my own film developed, I should have one of Leanne standing brightly in the rain at the farmers' market, with a red umbrella, keeping up people's spirits. The Thursday before had been sunny and the market bustled with 25 booths. Even in the cold September rain there were 8 booths when I got there, and tourists in rain gear still wandered by. I bought an Eccles cake and Turkish flatbread, and tsuziki, and organic broccoli.



Journal 24 ATLANTIC Friends and friends: Bedford, Dartmouth, Baie Verte, Scotsburn  
September 24, 2004

I didn't really visit Dartmouth Worship Group, because Dartmouth is part of Halifax Monthly Meeting, and I will visit with Halifax next month. After I left St. Andrews, and with no further Quakers to visit for a few days, I bused off to Sackville and was met by Beth and Helene, small-f friends from many years ago, when Beth came into one of my writing classes in Ottawa. These same good people also offered me accommodation ten years ago, when my one book had just come out and I was touring around doing readings, and financing them with writing workshops. They organized a workshop in Moncton and a reading in the bookstore run by their friends Ed and Elaine. Into this nexus of friendship I landed again last week, only this time in the cottage my friends rent at Baie Verte. Elaine was there too, because she had a booth in an art exhibit in the Nature Centre at the New Brunswick end of the bridge to PEI. All the art in the exhibit was made from recycled materials, and the next day we wandered around, enjoying the creative use of found objects to make great laughing animals and fish plaques and photographs. Elaine's prices were so low that I suddenly made a leap and bought one, a fragment of driftwood with a gold salamander (a child's abandoned toy) and when I looked close, a message: Be Still.

Everybody in New Brunswick knows everybody else: the week before in St. Andrews, as I sat at the table chatting with Leanne, my eye fell on the name of my Moncton friend, there on a list of Larry Lack's Things to Do. It turned out that there aren't two Beth McLaughlin—although likely her friends sometimes think there must be—and that the woman I'd met as a writer is now up to her ears in New Brunswick environmental actions. In my time at Baie Verte, I was given a tour down the beach by a very knowledgeable person, who showed me the storm surge line left by Hurricane Juan, and offered me her knife to help harvest a bagful of field mushrooms. And I heard even more about the work of the Conservation Council and of New Brunswick Environmental Network. They sound a lot like Quakers, right down to a fairly pervasive mystical sense in their encounters with nature.

In return, I responded to probing questions about Friends and what we do and believe. Finally I suggested they could contact the one known Friend in Moncton and start a worship group and nope, they weren't quite there, but the conversation ranged far, wide and deep. Ed and Elaine left, and Beth left too, because on the Wednesday there was to be the release of a report from a group of MLA's, about use of the forests, and she was among those invited to be present. The report hit the news, as it recommended diversification in the forest industry, with a percentage included of trees that could be grown for "value-added" industry, the making of furniture and the like. The percentage was small but the environmentalists were pleased, as it was a big improvement and it appears that some of the arguments they have been making have been heard. Many told me that the Irving family still holds enormous influence in this province, and any changes have to be persuasive to the Irvings as well as to the electorate. The new report is still not law, but it is apparently another big step in a right direction. More environmentalists came to dinner, more tasty garden vegetables got laid out, and once more the conversation ranged wide: we compared notes on ouija board experiences, dysfunctional families, potting (this was a quiet woman named Gita, who puts images of frogs and dragonflies under her glazes) and why everybody there has spiritual

experiences but is never ever going to submit this part of their lives again to any kind of organized religion. My pleas that Friends are unorganized didn't make a dent.

Back in Bedford, near Halifax, Sylvia Mangalam was also having a super-busy week. On Thursday I bade goodbye to beautiful Baie Verte. At the last moment the name of Linda Foy came into the conversation, and I discovered that this Friend lives a five-minute drive away from where I'd been, and that she is leading workshops on faith and the environment! I'd seen Linda and her children at the yearly meeting gathering, but hadn't got into talking about this. I caught the bus from Sackville to Bedford, and Sylvia met me by a clear instance of divine grace, as she had been told to look for me and the bus a full city block away from where she found me.

One of the things I'd discussed with Beth was what sort of living arrangement we hope to get ourselves into for our old age. I want to revert to a communal arrangement-multi-generational, I said, big rambling house with room for private space. So when I walked into the big rambling house Sylvia lives in with her daughter and son-in-law and her grandchildren and many passing guests, I recognized perfection when I saw it. Sylvia has a quite huge urban garden and a magnificent bank of knowledge about food, gardening tips and plants. She is the author of a cookbook that I now own:

Cooking Where Cultures Meet. Sylvia is a Raging Granny, a founder of Food Action Committee (under the Halifax Ecology Action Centre: [www.ecologyaction.ca](http://www.ecologyaction.ca)), a poet, has lived in the Bronx, in Lahore in India with her late husband, J. J. Mangalam, and her cookbook notes that she also carries further "food habits" from her Ukrainian grandmother. Sylvia is a recent past clerk of Halifax Monthly and Meeting.

In the two days we had in Bedford, Sylvia saw to it that I met with the founding members of Dartmouth Worship Group, Corey and Atze Douma, and John and Valerie Osborne. These two couples initiated the group as a way of making sure that they can still attend Meeting when they find it difficult to get across the bridge to Halifax. They do not have potlucks or midweek meetings and so far are united in the determination not to do business. For all that kind of activity, they can still cross the bridge. Atze did say that if I would like to join them for worship on Oct. 24, I am very welcome, and I will do that if I can, and anyway hope to take a picture of Atze with his new, smaller model train setup. Right now he is in the process of dismantling the large one which has engrossed his creative energies for many years.

Sylvia and I attended a rehearsal of the Halifax Raging Grannies, a fun time for me, belting out new songs for the upcoming Car Free Day, and I helped a bit with Sylvia's ongoing harvest of vegetables from her garden. On Saturday just after lunch we headed north and east to Antigonish.

Here I entered the first of several hand built homes I've visited this week. The first was that of Barbara Conway, one of the two main members of Antigonish Worship Group. The group used to be larger, and I wish to pause and tell the story of its beginnings. I heard this story a year ago from Colin Stuart, who is now with Ottawa Meeting, and I checked with Barbara, who said it is true. So here I go, with my usual caveats about possible misinformation and misspelled names:

Colin was teaching at St. FX and yearning for a Friends' group. He and a like-minded acquaintance put an ad in the student paper and probably also the local main paper, saying that at a certain Sunday at 11 a.m., at a place they announced, they invited anyone to join them who was interested in spending an hour in silence. They didn't mention 'Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)' but just the silence. Sixty people came!!!

After the hour of silence, they confessed their hope of beginning a group which would worship in the manner of Friends. I suppose they were open to questions or had some information there for anyone interested. In this way, a number of people discovered they did wish to continue to meet in this way, and the Antigonish Worship Group was formed.

"It will come back," said Barbara. Right now she and Sara av Maat are the seed. Occasionally others meet with them. Barbara's son Chris Griffiths sometimes does. I met Chris, a sailor and carpenter who hand built the four houses I saw on this land. His own features a red metal dragon on the outside wall, and inside I was enchanted to see that the stairs to the upper loft let down with the pull of a rope. When we had arrived, he was working away at the finishing touches on a small house for his son, Gavin, whom we had met on the road as we came in and who had given us a few more needed directions to find the family homestead.

Barbara spins. Something about the concentration involved and the hum of the wheel and the vibration just where it occurs at the spinner's diaphragm pulls peace into the room. I took a photo. I accepted a soft spun and knitted winter cap. We sat for a long time in this tranquil home in silence, and enjoyed our dinner together, served in dishes with dragonflies and frogs in the glaze, made by Barbara's friend Gita. Sylvia and I drove back into the town.

We stayed overnight in a B&B, the kind where you have Breakfast with the other travellers. The couple at the table before us were from Powell River, and in a trice I had put out the name of Friend Alfred Muma and they knew him.

Thus we came along on Sunday morning, with Sara av Maat leading the way, to the handbuilt home of Paige and Charlie Kennedy, near Loganville. Here I have more or less remained for this week, not visiting Antigonish Worship Group but happily taking part in a Meeting for Worship here, after which I did give Sara the copy of *Waging Peace* that is for that group. Others were here for a workshop on creativity, spirituality and effective social change. We were five for Meeting and seven for the workshop. Visual artists except for Susan Sellers, who writes, makes photographs, and coordinates a longterm project with Guatemala people, around weaving but mainly right now around free trade coffee. Their brand is sold through Just Us! of Wolfville and is called "Breaking the Silence" Gourmet Coffee. Later I saw a book about this work, written by Katherine Anderson, called *Weaving Relationships* (Wilfrid Laurier Press). When I asked Susan about the links as she feels it between her creative work as a photographer and her creative work as a social activist, she told about handing her camera over often to children and others who are interested as she takes pictures, and letting them take their own impressions, see through their eyes. She passed around a picture she had

taken where a beige-grey saddle used by the horses who haul the 300-lb. bags of coffee beans happened to have been sitting against a wall beside a bright blue swatch of cloth and a bright blue door. It was very beautiful to look at, even before knowing exactly what it was.

One woman with us weaves baskets from reeds and grasses and roots which she gathers right here in the New Brunswick woods. Another brought watercolour studies, and spoke of the way she as a visual artist mourns when a painting sells, because now it is gone. I've often wondered about that, since poets and fiction writers get to sell and still keep. She is moving into making prints of her paintings so that she can keep the originals... in the attic... for her descendants... so that the record of this journey is still there.

Sylvia sang a chorus of a Raging Granny song, and read one of her poems (more of Sylvia's poetry later.)

Paige's paintings and dolls were all around us. Anything unsold has to live with her and Charlie in their house, because bad things happen to them in the unheated out building. Initially I was a little overwhelmed, not by the dolls, which occupy corners in friendly little crowds and pass comments on the people below, but by the intricate, detailed symbolism of the paintings. Then I began to see illuminated medieval manuscripts, and then sacred windows and ecclesiastical embroideries. I found that I needed to look from a distance, move up close, and then step back again before the human figures and animals and waterfalls took on an overall pattern, with visions of the world as it is, and visions of what could be. Sylvia was much quicker than I was, standing up on the end of the sofa and at perilous places on the stairs to take photos, and murmuring to me right away that Paige is painting "interconnectedness."

Again, as when I visited writer Alison Lohans, I wonder whether there is some way here in this country for Friends to support our artists and writers, with shows, maybe, for the visual artists. Paige has had many shows, but as with most creative people, the marketing part of things is difficult to keep going. Nothing is set up with ease. Friendly visual artists in the States now have a small start at this through the Lemonade Gallery, which I think is at Pendle Hill but moves to FGC too, if I'm right. Anyway, here I am in an art gallery in the middle of the Nova Scotia woods.

Sara av Maat spoke of three strands to her creativity, something like this: 1) conceptual: have a clear idea of what you want to say and find images etc. to say it; 2) discover your art by doing it: follow images that rise, even when you don't know where they may lead; 3) play, with no goal. If Sara and others can weave those three strands within one experience of "art," perhaps our spiritual understandings, also, weave patterns from this same trinity.

We moved on that afternoon into some creative work together. Sylvia chose a rock from the objects from nature I'd brought into the house, and wrote a poem about interconnectedness: "Talismans of the earth's firm skeleton," it began, "Seeming so still/Yet they are mostly space...." And ended with the way even the stone decays and becomes dirt: "Even earth bones erode /And there's soil /Some molecules go free, and feed me." Thus speaks the poet and the passionate advocate of "responsible eating."

After Sunday's workshop was over and further good conversations on Monday, Sylvia left to go home to Bedford near Halifax, and on Tuesday Paige drove me to Caribou Island, where she was harvesting vegetables from a garden beside Charlie's mother's cottage. The summer was over and Charlie had driven his mother back to Montreal. We picked more cherry tomatoes and also red and purple runner beans. Paige picked much else while I browsed among the books in the cottage and took notes. It turned out that Doug Roche, Senator, has produced a new book: *The Human Right to Peace* (Novalis, 2003.) I turned pages madly and made notes.

I'm leaving out probing and useful-to-me conversations with both Paige and Charlie about Quaker structure and process. Both these Friends have given much time and service to the work of Friends, locally and nationally, and I learned much that I hadn't understood about Friends' ways of doing things. I've promised June Etta an article for next month, and think it might be about the ideas we are formulating together about these things. Or not.

Paige and I went on to a women's retreat at Camp Redtail, just over a wooded hill from the Paige and Charlie Kennedy house. It was good for me to relax into this company of twelve women who brought in the equinox by wandering in the woods, gathering leaves, flowers, bark and mushrooms and lichen for a mandala we created on the earth, moving around it, taking in whatever it had to say to us. Later I stood against a tree in an old-growth hemlock grove and experienced that hush I felt on the west coast too among such old trees. The retreat ended in the darkness in the sauna with our own version of a sweat lodge ritual. I sat near the door and survived the 150 degree Fahrenheit heat without heart palpitations or other adverse effects, or after effects either. The toxins have now all run out of my body and I've re-remembered that a spiritual experience does not have to be a thrilling coincidence or out of body.

I haven't said once here that Paige and Charlie came to Canada just ahead of the draft at the time of the Vietnam war. Fresh from university and full of idealism, they set out to build a home and life for themselves here in Pictou County, N.S. Now it is decades later and both their daughters are grown. The wood stove works, and the septic system, and the solar shower at the back of the house (I had one; I washed my hair), and most of the time they are still self-sufficient for vegetables. They worry about the ecological footprint they leave with their two vehicles, necessary because of two unconnecting jobs; Charlie is a "housewright" and Paige works on the staff of a home for mentally challenged adults. This house I'm in as I finish writing this was built by Charlie, and includes round holes cut through walls, to accommodate the get-away desires of their marmalade cat. It has all been an awful lot of work. It is peaceful here. The community beyond hums with courses and events and readings and Culture. Was it always so good? It has grown, says Paige, but the Scots people around here (more of the refugees from the Highland Clearances) always had some of this going, from the start.

I want to end with a quote from Roche's book, and another by Matthew Fox (no relation to George) that Paige read in Meeting, both of which say things I too want to say.

From *The Human Right to Peace*, by Douglas Roche: "War is not in the human genes. We are not predestined to violence. Rather, war comes out of our culture...the way we

are socialized to interact with one another. . . .the culture of war can and must be changed in to a culture of peace. . . .Those who engage in peace work are the true realists of our time, for they understand that new technologies are accelerating the spread of weapons of mass destruction and, with them, the capacity to end life on earth."

Notes from Creativity, by Matthew Fox: Resurrection is the rolling away of these boulder-size obstacles from our hearts and minds in order that the natural process of creativity might emerge....What if creativity were so built into the forces of the universe that we could never join the universe, never connect psyche and cosmos, unless and until we surrendered to creativity in our lives and relationships? Creativity is the longest-standing habit of the Universe. . . The artist is, one might say, asking for it: failure, isolation, poverty. But the alternative is worse than death: boredom, a death of the spirit, soul death, which is a concealment of one's truth, or Hell.

Further quick "bibliographical" notes from this week's visit in the usual book-lined Quaker dwelling:

Here as in other homes, one book to hand is Living Buddha, Living Christ, by Thich Nhat Hanh. Paige showed me wood engravings by Fritz Eichenberg, in the Random House editions of Jane Eyre and Wuthering Heights; I didn't know before that this engraver was a Friend. Many Quakers have felt led at one time or another to write a local history or interview older neighbours or family to catch the old stories before they are gone. In this house it is Stories Around the Branch: a collection of tales from West Branch, Pictou County, N.S., pulled together in 2001 by Charlie Kennedy and Steve Harder, with drawings by Paige Prichard Kennedy. And finally, transcendently, I am reading Carole Langille's poems in her 1997 collection, In Cannon Cave (Brick). Carole is a Halifax Friend. One of the poems I am carrying with me from the Waging Peace collection is by this poet. I bought it because I liked it, and found out only later that there is a chance I might meet her when I get to Halifax next month. Speaking (see notes above) of the connection between psyche and cosmos, this collection does that for me. Oh, here are three lines for you:

*What does God  
want with us anyway, the light like gold  
spilling outside our door, a door surely we are meant to open.*

Journal 25 WOLFVILLE MONTHLY MEETING October 1, 2004

This week, visiting Wolfville Meeting, landscape and histories felt charged with the sacred-- "sacred" being a variant of "secret" which makes for interesting connections for Friends. I am accustomed to saying that for Friends, all things are sacred. An open secret, perhaps?

"Charged" is the word Sophie Berube used, as she drove me to the famous headland which is Blomidon, the red cliff where Glooscap is said to have lived. We picnicked on the red sand at Blomidon's foot and I watched with amazement as the tide came in. Ten-year-old Suyin and three-year-old Shan-li drew lines in the sand a foot or more from the water's edge and, a few waves later, they splashed over that line and the girls had to draw another.

Views from North Mountain and South Mountain--the two lips of the Annapolis valley--are like flying in a low plane over the farm buildings and fields below. This is Micmac territory, and also it is one of the places where Acadian farming families were rounded up and shipped off, and their houses and barns were burned. They had wanted to remain neutral in the conflict between the British and the French, but British could not believe that French-speaking settlers could manage not to take sides. They demanded an oath of allegiance, which included willingness to fight on the side of the British, and the Acadiens refused. (This refusal to take an oath and refusal to fight are notions familiar to Friends.) In their few years of settlement, the Acadian farmers had built dykes, which endure today, to hold back the sea. The flat land and flat marshes stretch out to the flat sea in ever-changing patterns of ebb and flow. "This is a very charged landscape," commented Sophie.

Earlier in the week, Carol Bradley had called this land "mellow." It is worn over by history and, for Canada, that history is old. I wandered in the park behind the downtown business area and read the plaques placed there for visitors like me. Blomidon featured in all of them, and loomed across the water, a very distinctive headland. Carol had explained to me that the fossils in it are millions of years older than the ones on the other side of the Minas Channel; we are looking here at a primordial split in the earth's crust. For Carol this land reminds her of the countryside in England, similarly worn over and changed by the long habitation of human beings. Friends kept pointing out that I was looking at a Micmac gathering place, or an Acadian burial ground or the venue of eerie goings-on or of a restless ghost.

We Friends are a mystical bunch. The Meeting here appears to do an admirable job of respectful support for people's sometimes painful journeys, while finding ways to move toward wholeness and healing. At our sharing on Sunday, two such journeys had been worked out partly through creation of blankets and warm wraps, moving from colours of black and other dark shades into joyous interminglings of warm, bright, light-filled colours. One quilt looks like a stained glass window-- squares and uneven geometric shapes of mottled, light-filled colour, held together by strips of deep purple. The woman who made it saw the purple as Spirit, making the fragments whole. She remarked that she likes to sleep under the blankets and quilts she makes before she gives them away. That loving gesture of giving the blanket away to someone else is often the final part of the making.

I sat up straighter when Marilyn Manzer introduced the idea of creative work we cannot keep at all. When she first heard of sand paintings, she thought it sounded like too much work for something so ephemeral. Then she recognized that she does the same thing herself, with cooking and with music. Sometimes no one else at all hears her music. She improvises but does not write it down. It appears in the world and disappears again--or does it? Later in the week, I got to take part in a Kindermusic class Marilyn teaches, this one for ages 3 and 4. We jumped and clapped and hopped and learned the word "tempo." Words and music went out of there in the developing brains of little kids, and did not really disappear.

Another interesting idea came from Carol Bradley, who loves to reuse and recycle. For our sharing, she brought peach jam and peach crisp, made from little imperfect peaches that grow on a tree near her. Carol enjoys the feeling of making something nourishing and tasty out of that which others might throw away. There is a special edge to this kind of creativity.

Penni Burrell announced that she is not creative, and then produced a white silk scarf with wonderful colours--"I just threw the paint on"--and spoke a little of listening--her work as a counsellor. I felt again the way that listening itself is surely a creative act. Friends' practice of worship-sharing is an exercise in creative listening that can heal conflict and open new creative possibilities.

I am at the end of this visit now as I draft this, and about to go off to the final potluck. A few people are gathering at the home of Peggy and David Hope-Simpson. (Peggy is someone else who says she isn't creative, not counting, among much else, the energy she now pours into plans for a home for seniors.) Today Barbara Aikman took me to visit a stony beach across from Cape Split. Nearly every stone there is a fossil, lovely hidden mineral crystals that form inside the decaying shape of a tree. All through the week I have been presented with this feeling of the sacred/ secret landscape that is just under or within or infused through the apparent landscape we see. These fossils seemed yet one more way of seeing this, prisms of light inside the rough stone. On Ross Creek beach, even my untrained eye could see the change going on, with eroded red soil gouged from the cliffside--some still-living trees barely cling there, as the ground shifts from under their roots--and smooth worn fragments of shale and broken fossilized bits washed up--smashed up, really-- against the base of the wall. Round brown fossil trees dot the sides of the rocks. Closer to the water, the stones are dotted with live periwinkles. Barbara sprang nimbly over the rocks; I scrambled after her. In places there was hardened lava, easier to cross, except where wet moss makes the smooth surface suddenly as treacherous as ice. Metaphors, all of it, for our messy, changing, very beautiful lives, it seems to me, but then I am a poet. We sat on a log and ate lunch, and got back ahead of the incoming tide.

Yesterday, after the metaphoric and real picnic at the base of Blomidon, Sophie drove me to the home of Zoltan and Tessa Dienes, who are poets too. Their daughter Sarah brought tea, and we read poems from their books, pausing to speak of the lives the poems have sprung from. In a long life are losses. There are also accomplishments and joys. Zoltan developed new ways of teaching mathematics. A university professor, his work was and perhaps still is in demand in many countries. For his old age, he has



embarked on a project of rendering the New Testament into classical verse. He hopes it may be of use to students of the Bible. He has completed the gospels, and you can read and make use of the text at [www.zoltandienes.com](http://www.zoltandienes.com)

Tessa has some aches and pains and finds it difficult to sit through Meeting. But I enjoyed dipping into her poetry about trying to keep her own centre as a younger woman, in the midst of her large and lively family. It's a recurring theme in the lives of women, and of men, too, who want to spend time with their families and yet be out in the world, doing, and in solitude, creating. Poet Sophie and I had discussed it already earlier that day, and lived it too in our outing, as two writers who were also enjoying the company of children. Sophie has written two books for children in French, one of which won a prize from the Canadian Authors Association, and also won the Prix France-Acadien for her collection of poetry, *La trombe sacree*. Heart images crowd into my thoughts here: ten-year-old Suyin drew a path of heart-shaped stepping stones in the sand, and her little sister played a game of feeling safe inside the hearts. After my visit, Tessa wrapped up a little felt heart that was precious to her, and sent it to me in a box decorated with butterflies. With it came a new poem:

*Free at Last*

*After all the changes  
and restrictions in  
creating me  
a slight crackling sound  
an uncurling of wings  
I fly  
as a butterfly  
tasting  
the flower of  
Life*

I was picked up from the home of the Dienes senior by their son Bruce. We walked to the drop-off edge of the Gaspereau ravine, and then back for a dinner prepared by Gwen before she had to leave for a meeting of Ministry and Counsel. After dinner, we walked again to the edge of some writing ravines, looking for paths forward and I think finding at least one clue: to embrace the present moment, and to write from there.

Back at the beginning of the week, I had stayed with Carol Bradley, horses Amber and Autumn, and Sheltie dog Rainbow, in Windsor. Carol drew me into long thoughtful conversations which did feel as if they got under the surface of things, punctuated by short sightseeing trips into the surrounding charged landscape. On Monday, with the day to myself, I walked down the hill into the town of Windsor. It was so different, being there when my purpose was NOT to climb another hill near the giant pumpkin farm and attend Canadian Yearly Meeting. Instead, I walked past College Road and the familiar buildings of Kings-Edgehill School, and located the bank and the pharmacy and the tearoom, and read the historical plaques. Windsor is not just the birthplace of hockey—it also had Canada's first agricultural fair. It is the home now of the Mermaid Theatre (giant puppets). Nearby Kentville has the Pumpkin Festival, but Windsor has

the Pumpkin Regatta, where folks hollow out a giant pumpkin and paddle it across the lake. The dinner and dance is Rock Around the Pumpkin. :)

I walked back through fields of Queen Anne's lace, daisies, asters and chicory, picking up stones and flowers and fungi for the next day's workshop on creativity. I spotted an old inn for sale to mention to Peggy Hope-Simpson in case of interest for her project. Peggy said later that this leading she is following has been one of those that you discover by doing it-- as you remain faithful to it, a sense grows of certainty and of direction.

On Tuesday I moved into Wolfville and was billeted under the eaves in the second-floor apartment of Dale Gruchy. Dale is teaching counselling and studying theology. What are Quakers? she wants to know, and I guess this is the personal query I, too, travel with these days. Dale reminded me, with delight, that Friends are not waiting for the second coming--the blessed kingdom has already arrived, an alternative universe here among us, which we are only to step into. "Live adventurously" may not even have to be said once we recognize this alternate reality. Dale left a Pendle Hill pamphlet beside my bed, number 331 by Nancy Bieber: "Communion for a Quaker." I read: "Mystical experiences come when the membranes which keep us from an awareness of things of the spirit grow permeable to us" and "It is important to acknowledge that Quaker meeting for worship can also be an empty form, a mere habit, which can fail to nurture its members and attenders." Bieber identifies three strands of communion: the spiritual gift of a deeply united community; commitment to a life of compassionate service; God as an experienced, conscious reality. "Like the Quakers of a century ago whose conversations flowed into unexpected meeting for worship, we, too, can allow spaces in our lives for the Spirit to flow through."

Following is a little addendum about Atlantic Friends' structures, for those readers who do not break out in a rash at the words "structure" and "business." Feel free to skip it.

In the Atlantic region there are three Monthly Meetings, with proliferating Worship Groups. Enthusiasm is high and numbers few. Friends from "away" often wish that the spring and fall Atlantic gatherings could take a next step into becoming a Half-Yearly Meeting. Many or most Friends here resist this. I expected to hear the usual reservations about "doing business," and I did, but I was stopped by the other two reasons, given firmly: we must not stretch our few Friends further than is right, and: we really do not want to weaken Canadian Yearly Meeting. The argument is that Atlantic Friends now serve on many Yearly Meeting committees, and that if yet another level of "bureaucracy" is introduced, there simply will not be the people to do both. The Atlantic region has about 30 at its gatherings, compared with well over 100 at the spring Western Half-Yearly Meeting. "We don't need another level of business. We do need more people!" Wolfville is leading the way, I think, in coordinated, careful advertising. There are only 4000 people in Wolfville, plus university students for part of the year. "But there are still a LOT of people out there who don't know that Quakers exist." The Meeting is growing, and newcomers say they picked up a pamphlet or checked the website.

The children mostly don't come, put off by not finding other kids their own age. At least that was the strong opinion of one young person I asked about this. She would

come to a one-off event once in a while, provided it was the sort of thing where she could invite another (non-Quaker) friend. Maybe. If there weren't other, more exciting or pressing things to do. In the past, Wolfville offered Seventh Day School--Saturday adventures that attracted some kids. But there's a real limit to adult energy, and that's just a reality.

Because Atlantic Friends are few in number and high in enthusiasm, they have developed two structures which as far as I know are unique to them and not anywhere in Organization and Procedure. Last weekend I got to attend most of the fall Meeting for Common Concerns. Its purpose, as I understand it, is an exchange of information. The clerk is appointed after the group has gathered, and no minutes are taken. Decisions are taken back to the three Monthly Meetings for discernment and action. But of course decisions do get made, if only to take a certain issue back home. Why would making minutes in the manner of Friends introduce another level of "business"? Don't ask, Margaret. But I think it's because somebody would have to go home and type them into their computer, run them off and / or email them out to a list. Early Friends didn't do that, did they? I think they just wrote them into a book and stored it away until the next meeting. But then they did have a record of where they were, with what Light. Still, this Meeting for Common Concerns was harmonious and substantive. Sometimes Friends did read back from their own notes, to be sure they had it right, for taking back to the Monthly Meeting. The clerking was brisk and clear and the energy quite wonderful.

The other thing they've invented out here is an Atlantic Friends Communications Committee. Several Friends see to it that matters that come up which affect all three Meetings will be communicated.

"What about the weaponization of space?"

"That would be handled by the Monthly Meetings."

I think there is no mechanism for a corporate statement from these three Meetings (someone made the point that three letters to the government may well be more effective than ONE letter from a regional gathering)--because that would start being a Half-Yearly Meeting. Something would have to give.

I think I get it.

Journal 26 SACKVILLE WORSHIP GROUP & NEW ENGLAND/ATLANTIC FRIENDS GATHERING  
October 10/04

I learned something this week and for a change I'll keep it short: Be open to spaces in your life for Spirit to come in.

Sackville Worship Group is small but growing, and I happened to be there on their first Sunday at a new public location, a very appropriate space at Mt. A. The members are busy--I will only be able to touch the surface here of telling you their various community involvements. I am so glad that Maida let me know about the wider gathering on that following weekend, so that I was able to be there. I don't know of any other cross-border gathering across the country, but this one has been going on for twenty years, and feels like a good thing indeed, for both sides.

I stayed first with Jane Robertson, who stops at sunrise and sundown, or thereabouts, for half an hour. She lights a few candles, sometimes puts on quiet music, and watches the sky. When I left, Jane slipped a fat candle and a little box of matches into my luggage, to remind me. So now I'm noticing the sun. You know, it does that thing every single day. Sunrise, sunset. I mean, there's no such thing as forgetting to take that time, if you keep one eye on the sun.

"When you attend to the way the dawn comes, you learn how light can coax the dark. The first fingers of light appear on the horizon, and ever so deftly and gradually, they pull the mantle of darkness away from the world. ...It is one of the tragedies of modern culture that we have lost touch with these primal thresholds of nature. ...We are not even aware of our loss; consequently, the pain of our spiritual exile is more intense in being largely unintelligible."

--John O'Donohue, in *Anam Cara: a book of Celtic Wisdom*

Jane is listed in *Travelling Friend*, and a few weeks ago the Tabers came through--Bill Taber and Frances Irene Taber. Both have written *Pendle Hill* pamphlets. Frances had left a copy of *Come Aside and Rest Awhile*, *Pendle Hill* pamphlet #335, and I read it. The author points out that when the young George Fox set out on the wandering that led to his eventual spiritual opening, essentially he went on a retreat. With no cell phone or email or telephone to keep him in touch, "at the command of God,...I left my relations and brake off all familiarity or fellowship with young or old." He travelled for four years, searching out priests and other folk he hoped could give him the wisdom he sought. His regular life he left behind, and stayed in "lonesome places and hollow trees."

Taber writes about being on retreat herself, and being brought into "awareness of God's healing and sustaining presence," and then she asks, "Could it be possible, as many fear, to become stuck and not want to bring that love forward into outward action? The answer I found through study was no. A full-time experience of retreat compels and even propels us into the desire to love, to give, to act from compassion."

As for George, after four years: "Now was I come up in spirit through the flaming sword into the paradise of God. All things were new, and all the creation gave another smell than before, beyond what words can utter." Off he went to preach, compelled and propelled into sharing that good news.

Jane drove me to Moncton one day, graciously saying that she had errands there--among her various commitments, she serves on several circles of support for people coming out of prison, which often takes her to Moncton, but this particular day I think she was mostly giving me time alone with Meike Ruitenberg. What a pleasure to finally get to know Meike a little, after so many Friends had told me I must see her. Family history albums came out, wonderful collections of memories and photographs from a childhood in Indonesia, and her Dutch parents who worked there. In Meike's case this early collection is particularly poignant, because the next part of the family story included terrible times as prisoners of war. Everyone asked me whether Meike told me about that, but in fact we didn't get to it. We were laughing and sharing stories, and I was admiring the silver necklace she made years ago, which won an important prize in Toronto. As Meike went off to change into a shirt that would show it off better in the photograph I wanted to take, she spilled the necklace into my hands: "Here. Love it a little."

Midweek, Jane transferred me and my suitcase to Port Elgin, to the home of Rachael and Bob Morouney. Rachel is a serious potter, right now turning out rows and rows of plates and mugs and vases. She handpaints each one. Bob works all day as a technician at Mount Allison University, but in the evenings he writes poetry, paints, and studies Japanese. I figured out that Bob's normal night's sleep must be about five hours.

When I had asked on Sunday, "What do you make?"--Rachel said, "All that I can." In her home, I watched her move steadily from baking bread to making yogurt, harvesting the onions, walking Lucy the dog, sitting at her wheel dipping in a brush and making flowers and other designs appear by careful magic on the pots. She loaded her kiln, washed and hung out clothes, of course swept the floor, and at mealtimes set out healthy and tasty food (and oatmeal porridge for breakfast made from actual Irish kernels of grain!--I had to mention that). She tended her network of family and friends.

There are spaces, too, in Rachel's day, walking Lucy on wooded trails and at many other moments—but one evening we took time too to sit in the living room and watch the setting sun.

In the fields near their house, I saw where Bob has cut back the young alders and other underbrush that grows over cleared land. You have to maintain those spaces, Rachel showed me, or else they fill.

I also was shown photographs of their house as it began, a rundown small cabin, an amusing picture of its moving down their country road, and then the shots of the foundation-building and framing, so that I got a sense of what it took to make their current roomy home. Now it includes a studio for Hidden Hollow Pottery, a loft area recently vacated by their artist daughter (this is where I slept, near a dressmaker's dummy in a net dress with pottery vertebrae running down her back, and a partly-dismembered pottery skeleton with big bare pottery feet, lying on a real wicker swing. Huge plants with leaves the size of three of my hands loomed across from my bed.) AND a loft studio for Bob's painting and writing and studying.

Spaces.

On Sunday, Pam had told us about her long, strenuous hikes in the Lake Country in England. She had an album of photographs, beautiful moments caught. She said she gets into a "zone"--she becomes in some way at one with the hills and the roads and the sky.

Lesley brought a moving watercolour painting she had made and then reproduced in 2001 as her Christmas card--in a dark time she painted from John 1:5: "The light shines on in the dark and the darkness has never quenched it."

Jane brought "The Journey," a poem by Mary Oliver that she loves, about discovering the importance of living one's own life. Near the end: "The stars began to burn through the sheets of clouds, and there was a new voice, which you slowly recognized as your own."

Maida read three excellent poems of her own making, showed us the work she does on family history, and spoke of her new project on the Quaker Dartmouth whalers. On other days, Maida and I visited the Nappan Project, an inspiring initiative by young environmentalists. On their website-- [www3.ns.sympatico.ca/nappanproject](http://www3.ns.sympatico.ca/nappanproject) --you too can learn what you can do with very little to educate your community about sustainability.

Maida and I also met in the family house in Amherst and spent a stimulating time discussing everything from politics to Maida's Quaker ancestors (their portraits grace the entrance way) to the astonishing research projects she is doing. I say "astonishing" because Maida issues a family newsletter once a month that most of us would be proud to complete once a year. The current one includes a whole piece of family history concerning the Moravians (the Brethren), with photographs, poems and a round-up of family news. Edith Miller is Maida's cousin, and so the news includes the fact that Edith has found a place to send her braids from when she had her first haircut at 12--they have gone now to provide quality wigs for financially disadvantaged Canadian children who have lost their hair--and the further fact that Michael Miller has been awarded a Certificate of Recognition "for modeling restorative justice approaches in the service of justice and peace."

Linda Foy lives not far from Rachel, and she called and we had a little while for me to hear more about the work Linda is doing for an organization called Faith and the Common Good-- <http://www.faith-commongood.net/> Linda is hired right now to go into faith communities in the Atlantic area to facilitate thought and discussion about the connections between our faith and issues about climate change and environmental degradation. Linda and Rachel and I drove to a place where friends had mowed a full labyrinth in the grass overlooking the Northumberland Strait. There we set down our backpacks and walked the labyrinth. It took a long time. Much happens inside, with that kind of extended space of time in which, following the twists and turns, one is brought back again and again to one's intention.

Now I am sitting by a lake on a grey Thanksgiving Sunday morning. It's cool but I can still write without gloves. The trees across the lake and nearby have burst into colours as glorious as Ontario Octobers. My thoughts are with my family, gathering near Renfrew in Ontario, and also with my sister and her husband who are in Victoria. I've come from a boisterous belting out of Thanksgiving hymns, with Michael Miller at the piano. In a

few minutes will be Meeting for Worship. I hadn't realized, until I got here, that half of the 25 or so people here would be New England Friends, some of whom have been attending for many years. The U.S. Friends are feeling battered by recent political events--one said, "I used to be proud of my country"--with a catch in his throat. They have wanted to talk about the peace testimony, about conscientious objection, and options for the young people in their Meetings.

This gathering has one tradition that they love and I loved it too, right away: Meeting for Reading. Friends are invited to bring a reading or a story which has given them inspiration or enjoyment. It is usually by someone else, but can be one's own.

Now I am finishing off this journal at the keyboard of a Halifax Friend, and the New England/Atlantic Friends Gathering is over. The Meeting for Reading turned out to be quite an olio--a most stimulating two-hour session, with a wide range, from a humorous nineteenth-century ballad to a prophetic statement from before WWI, to the effect that violence begets violence and always will. We heard a song from Harry and Marilyn Roper that Harry wrote about their hand built boat, and a story Rufus Jones once wrote about a perpetual motion machine.

For a sharing around creative gifts, I collected a bag of striped rocks, yellow mushroom, grasses and coloured leaves, and with help from an American Friend we gave them to people as "handouts."

This gathering was a very special space for me, both for silent times and for meeting some of those Americans I knew were out there, who are working to bring their country back to values we can remember they once thought they had.

Two teens came and three children, and plans began for a possible proper youth program next year.

Oh yes, and there was a GRAND Thanksgiving dinner, and an outing to Kings Landing, which is a pioneer village. Rachel Morouney was at the craft fair there, selling her classic pots, and we had one last hug good-bye.

Prayer Wheels

By Maida Barton Follini

*The spiders spread their prayer-wheels to the sky,  
Stand in mid-air, supported on the silk threads of their faith.  
Decorate the dawning world with dew-catchers.*

*God's arachnobats  
Ornamenting the earth,  
Display the interweb of life and spirit.*

Journal 27 HALIFAX FRIENDS MEETING and SOUTH SHORE WORSHIP GROUP, NS October 25, 2004

I am visiting Halifax Friends Meeting, and I am coming to the end of the first year of travelling among Friends in Canada. After the gathering at Thanksgiving, with Friends from New England as well as Atlantic Friends, I spent the rest of that week and all of the next week lingering here in this city with its long military history.

This is a story of way not opening and of way opening.

A couple of years ago, a woman in a wheelchair planned a workshop to share her love of writing and reading haiku. However, way does not always open. A hospital visit intervened. In the hospital, the woman continued her planning. When she came out, among people who had signed up for the workshop were several acquaintances who were also in wheelchairs. On the appointed day, all concerned showed up in front of the building they were to use. The sidewalk had been torn up and new concrete poured, with boards laid across it to protect it. There was no way that those in wheelchairs could cross the boards and enter the building.

Some time later, on March 29, 2003, way opened. Claire Henry led her workshop on the writing of haiku. At day's end, everyone put the poems they had written into a common container, without signing their names. At home, Claire typed the haiku into the computer and sent them out. For this last journal before I begin again in 2005, I want to begin by sharing with you these little poems. Take your time over them if you can--each one is a world. On the other side of them, I will set down a bit about way not opening and way wonderfully opening in this extended visit to Halifax. As everywhere, it has been a very rich time.

*Branches weave bare buds  
Intuition falls  
Trickles into growth*

*Snaps of my babies  
Delight me--now two of them  
Are now grandparents*

*In this room with you  
I'm inspired so even I  
Write a small poem*

*Millions share marches  
Peace and justice are our aims  
What else can we do?*

*Raucous cries of crows  
From branches stark against the sky--  
Vultures eye the ground*



*Silent circle strains  
Confinement limits minds so--  
Is this woman's way?*

*Feet on rocks recall  
Air over yellow beaches  
Melon trees grow thick*

*Hummingbirds visit  
And treat each other badly  
Lovely though they are*

*Feel silent wisdom  
Watch the mouth speak unheard words  
Scream rhetorical questions*

*Seven women sit  
Drum beat of a dripping tap  
Marks our search for words*

*Turtle tail wiggles--  
Fantasy revealed includes  
Moments together*

*Closer heart too far  
Smiles dimples eyes alone  
Hold cold breakwater*

*Listening for God  
Attentively expecting The  
words beyond words*

*Grandsons sleep over  
Two precious young heads in bed  
Grandparents treasure*

*Talking--Listening  
Women around a table  
Exploring Haiku*

*Poppies stain peace red  
Euphemisms lie under  
Blades ground into grass*

*Two good grandfathers  
Years past, precious baby boys  
Older, still beloved*

On Thanksgiving Monday, we drove through an "crescendo"--Claire's word--of autumn colour, back from the retreat center near Fredericton to Halifax. Teens Peter Earley and his pal Thomas were in the back seat of the van, I was in the middle seats and Claire and Mel Earley were up front. Packed in around us were guitars, backpacks, my suitcase and a few bags of leftover food from the gathering. In the late afternoon, Mel helped us haul our share of all this into the elevator and down the hall to Claire's apartment in Halifax. We were all tired. Mel left for home, and Claire and I had just started to sort things out when there was a loud explosion, followed by another, and the lights went out.

Apparently a couple of transformers blew out. The power was off for two hours. Of course you don't know as you go through it how long it will go on. We reassured the hyper little cat, Simon, that his person really was back, and ferreted out food for ourselves. First, though, I said, "I have a candle!" and lit the candle that Jane Robertson had given me. For the time of this visit, we remembered often to look out the windows across the city (9 floors up) and watch the changing sky.

I know that when these visits begin on a weekday that they are quiet ones. I relaxed into a very precious visit, making the acquaintance of filmmaker Claire Henry. The name of her production company gives you some idea of Claire's concerns: In Video Veritas. At least one piece Claire produced is available in the CBC archives online. I discovered that she also has a passion for noting the subtle ways things are presented on television. She was very interested in the US presidential debates, and we watched the last one together, with Claire taking notes. I started to learn what to look for. Later she showed me a file from a forum last year on media disinformation, that Claire was involved with as a volunteer. Very good, strong stuff.

Halifax Friends had put out the news that there would be a creative sharing on Wednesday evening and a workshop on Saturday. Friends didn't have much sense of what this was about, as I hadn't been able to be there on Sunday to present their copy of Waging Peace and generally make connections. Nevertheless, a small group did meet on Wednesday, in the home of Marie Welton, and the gift (way opening) in a small group is that we can take time and go deep, and we did. Charles Brown brought in a photograph of out-of-season jackets hanging on hooks by the door, together with an evocative haiku:

*On the first cool day  
Putting on my autumn coat  
Lost in the pockets*

By Saturday, a few more had heard about the visit, and, in all, ten people took part in all or some of the workshop. On the evening before, Jessie Tellez had come by and wafted me over to her busy household for overnight, so that I could be there in the morning to set up the workshop. I met 3 of her 4

children, Christina, Juan and John, and their father, also named Juan. The stories of how these two met, and the amazing work they have done over the years, both here and in Bolivia, began coming. I realized I had stumbled upon another of those life stories that cry out to be recorded somewhere. There is, at least, a film somewhere about Juan's untiring work in community economic development.

Saturday and Sunday nights, I spent in a very nice B&B suite in the Herring Cove home of a couple from the Meeting. I was taken on a walk out onto the point there, took photographs of the stunning scenery, soaked in as much as I could about the maritime lore I was hearing--details I had missed so far in spite of ten years on the western maritime coast. The green buoy shows the left of the channel as you come in; the red shows the right. Each lighthouse has a different light, recognizable, as part of its use for navigation.

Granite looks liquid because it has been under pressure deep under the earth, but it is sedimentary and that is why it is split. These rocks here, cracked sideways, have turned as they were thrust to the surface, onto their side. Probably. It is speculation. We weren't there. Those stumps--and then I began to really see and understand the devastation that was brought last year by Hurricane Juan (no relation).

Sunday was Meeting, and the quiet week was over. Many people were away, but among those present were novelist and activist Donna Smyth, who also had attended the workshop, and Muriel Duckworth and Betty Peterson, both freshly back from summers away. Later in the week, I spent time with both Betty and Muriel. Betty mentions often that she is 87, and we do need to be reminded. Let me pause to say to those of you who may not know that these two women are legendary for their peace activism, in this province and beyond. Betty has also been busy organizing her records for the provincial archives. From her cover letter:

"As I survey with apprehension and disbelief the developing world crises, I feel more than ever that it is important to record the fact that in this naval bastion of Canada, many people, young and old and of different persuasions, have worked faithfully and creatively for peace and social justice in the face of great odds."

On Monday, I met Claire again, collected my suitcase, and we went out with Jessie for coffee and fine conversation. Then Jessie took me back over to Dartmouth and Corrie Douma and further fine conversation and fine lunch. Atze Douma was away, but to my delight he came back before I left, and I was able to get the photograph I coveted, of Atze posing with his new reduced train set-up. The old set-up took up the whole basement. The Dournas are quietly downsizing, a sign of getting older. "It just feels right."

My own life expectancy felt extended, though, the next day, when I visited Betty Pete in her own apartment (plants, colour, artifacts, posters) and fell into animated conversation about Friends and about peace, and kept forgetting about 87. Then I went upstairs in the elevator to Muriel's (plants, colour,

artifacts, posters). "Betty's 9 years younger than I am." "That must make you 96." Wow, I'm a youngster.

A couple of days later, Betty buzzed over the bridge in her Quaker-grey van and took me for a walk through the Public Gardens, and out to Point Pleasant to see both the view and the terrible devastation from Juan. People had been standing around crying, she said. Trees they had known since childhood were uprooted and gone. Out at Herring Cove I had been shown a book of photographs of the aftermath of that hurricane. ROWS of trees lying side by side, their shallow roots exposed. The Public Gardens are beautiful again, even though much more bare. Ducks with iridescent green necks clustered around a young couple in perhaps their twenties, who were feeding them. We laughed as three other ducks came in a running waddle across the park, having heard the news.

First, though, we sat on a bench and talked the changes life brings, way closing, new ways opening. We had attended a noon reception for Naim Ateek, a Christian Palestinian who is the director of Sabeel Ecumenical Theology Centre. The website is [www.sabeel.org](http://www.sabeel.org) and [www.sabeel.ca](http://www.sabeel.ca) "We must resist but we must resist through non-violence. The solution of the conflict must be through international law. Respect faith but do not base a political solution on any given faith." Ateek spoke at length about Christian Zionists, who are fundamentalist Christians who support the occupation of Palestine because they believe that we are in the last days, and that they are doing the work of God to bring about the Second Coming of Christ. According to this very committed and informed speaker, Christian Zionists believe that anyone who is working for peace in the Middle East is working against God. He pleaded with us to recognize this as a Christian problem. The Bible is being used as an instrument of abuse. "What is the message of the Bible?" he asked. For too long, "mainstream" Christians have dismissed the fundamentalist position as simply bad theology, instead of engaging with it to reclaim the biblical message of justice and peace and reconciliation. I sat shuddering, as I do call myself a Christian, and I agree with him. I personally think it is a class problem too--that educated and middle-class Christians dismiss those who believe the literalist interpretation of the Bible as not worthy of intelligent discourse. Anyway, we all have to discern what piece of this or anything else is on our own plate-- is ours. We have to discern it in order to focus our activism and to respond faithfully to our spiritual calling. We have to discern it also as we age, and as our blood pressure goes up or we face the reality in other ways of our human limitations. You would never know now that after the great storm, giant old trees barred the entrance to the beautiful Public Gardens, and thousands stood looking through the broken fence and wept.

Anyway. Out of the park and back into the home of Ruth Main, dream worker, who took me in on Monday and is keeping me until Saturday night, when I will go to South Shore. I am humbled that Whoever is in charge of this travelling arranged for me to my stay in a healing week with a counsellor for dreams. Ruth is astonishingly astute, and disarmingly able to say when she is not sure. In addition to her Jungian-based training, she is a retired United

Church minister. Last night I heard Ruth give a talk on dream work to a group of singles (Starting Again in Life.) I watched in wonder as people spoke up: "I've had this recurring dream...." and Ruth not only did not step away, but stepped forward, clearly eager to meet the person halfway and to share what she has found. Hers is yet another story of way that kept not opening, and then, most marvelously, it did. In her bedroom she has a framed message on the wall:

*God answers prayer; sometimes when hearts are weak,  
He gives the very gifts believers seek  
But often faith must find a deeper rest,  
And trust God's silence when He does not speak.  
For He whose name is Love will send thee best.  
Stars may burn out, nor mountain wall endure  
But God is true, His promises are sure, for those who seek.*

She also placed in my hands *The Story of the Other Wise Man*, a classic little tale by Henry Van Dyke. "The quest was over, and it had failed. But....he had been true to the light that had been given to him. He had looked for more. And if he had not found it, if a failure was all that came out of his life, doubtless that was the best that was possible." And then, of course, there is one further revelation, and his failure is transformed. I hadn't read this story since I was a little girl, and it's a good one, and true too.

All I knew when I arrived in Halifax was that I was staying the first night with Claire Henry, and another Friend, out of town, was willing if needed to offer a bed for all the rest of the week. And I was invited to join Friends for worship on the Sunday. That was enough to go on, and I am so glad that I have had the opportunity to meet through that first quiet week. I had hoped for some days with the South Shore Worship Group, but again way did not open. Friends were welcoming, but personal circumstances and people away and one thing and another just stood in the way. Meanwhile, the visits with Friends in Halifax opened, including a really great celebratory dinner and conversation with Donna Smyth and her professor partner Gillian Thomas. Betty Pete called again and wondered about a bit more time together and then an early supper and she would take me to the bus to Hubbards, where I was to spend Saturday night with South Shore Friends. Well, we ran late. Friends of Betty will appreciate the thought of us careening through the streets of Halifax, with Betty muttering that somehow she was five minutes out in her planning. I ran in to buy the ticket, and Betty rushed off to throw herself in front of the bus. It had pulled out, seconds before.

Way closed for the nice evening with South Shore Friends. Way opened for one more evening with Betty, going through the photos of my journey, with Betty exclaiming over dear Friends she knows, hugging some to her in delight at seeing them again this way, and asking for news, news, news. I slept on the couch in her apartment of colour, artifacts, plants, posters. I woke at 5 a.m., very happy. The lights of Halifax spread out below her windows (which are hung with stained glass beauty and prisms refracting light.) One stray

beam caught a mobile, a fairy woman on a swing, turning beneath white flying geese.

At 71 was asleep again when my alarm clock beeped and Betty turned on the light and we ate a hasty breakfast--but good!--and headed for the home of Margery and Ray Dahn, whose address is variously Lunenburg, Centre, and Blockhouse. Two hours later, just as we believed we would arrive early for Meeting, we found we had taken a wrong turn. A really dear Nova Scotia teen in a convenience store set us right, and we arrived at the right door just in time for the singing. And the silence. And an Advice reminding us to hold one another in the Light and not engage in "prejudicial judgments" of one another's spiritual journeys. And potluck, sharing and fellowship.

Poet Carole Langille was there, and from memory she spoke the powerful poem that is included in *Waging Peace*, "If You Believe." It takes us to the death camps of the Holocaust. It reminds us of where we are, in history, in our denial of history: "It could never happen here." That was prayer, or whatever word you want to call that profound intertwining of the passionate, creative voice, and the gathered silence that followed. Carole also had brought a stick man, driftwood painted to bring out the dancing man in the wood. It made us smile, and I remembered that humour is part of it too--it has to be.

One Friend spoke of way not opening in her life, as illness has stopped her academic career in biology, and of waiting now to see what will open, where she will "fit in." Another spoke of the gift of visiting the elderly, and of one woman who, even as she comes out of anesthetic after yet another operation, likes to catch someone to play a hand of bridge! We heard of land preserved, and of boats beautifully designed. Margery had turned 80 the preceding week, and there had been a birthday party with family and friends. She spoke of the love that she experiences in her personal life and community, and the disjunction between that personal experience and the political events that are unfolding right now. We talked of sending letters right now to our MPs and other politicians both right and left, insisting that Canada not join the anti-ballistic missile treaty until we have had a full public debate.

As we left, Margery and Betty lingered on the front walk, exchanging news of meetings in Halifax, actions on the South Shore--two elderly activists hardly able to tear themselves away because there is so much to know about, so much yet to do. I'm missing another photo-op, I told myself, as I headed back to the grey van.

Right now, as I edit this final draft, I am back at Ruth Main's computer in Dartmouth, about to leave for the bus for Peterborough. I have been saddened this week by news of an untimely death back home, the sister of a friend. Behind the scenes, Friends here have also been distracted and saddened by the final journeys of people in their lives. But love sustains us, too, as we accompany one another through these times. Way sometimes seems to close most bitterly, a personal crucifixion, but then there is the resurrection. That's my metaphor and myth, and I'm sticking to it-- even as I remain truly open

to the different stories of other wise women and wise men. If this journey is a pilgrimage, it is a pilgrimage to visit people, and I feel reassured and strengthened by the Spirit flowing through these lives.

This is the last journal until I set out again in January. In the interim, I will be in touch with the Friends I hope to meet next year.

Selah.

Journal 28 THUNDER BAY WORSHIP GROUP January 15, 2005

In the line-up at the Thunder Bay bus terminal, heading out, a woman asked me where I'm going. She was going to Dryden, which I know is the stop near where Tom Findley lives in the bush. I checked, but she didn't know Tom. "Long white beard?" I prompted. She actually doesn't live in Dryden, she explained but in a fish camp which she and her late husband ran for a long time.

"How long?"

"41 years."

"But how is it you came from Peterborough?" she asked, sorting out our destinations as travellers do. There are two answers I've learned to give, both true. I tried one: "I'm travelling across Canada for two years, researching a book."

"What's it about?"

"It's called Artist/Mystic/Activist." jI just decided the other day to call it that.]

Her eyes glaze over.

I try the second one. "I'm a Quaker and I'm visiting all the Quaker groups in Canada."

She'd like to be travelling, she responds, but postponed it for a medical reason.

"I hope you're all right," I say.

She smiles brightly. "I will be. Just have to get past some chemo. It's the second time around. I'm fine except--"she places her hand on her chest--"I'm short of breath. The lymphoma is pressing on my lungs."

She's across the aisle and up one now, reading her book. Curly white hair, red slacks. Her adopted daughter gave her a DVD player for Christmas, and last night they played songs she likes, and sang along. "We were silly."

Of course I had to blurt out a bit about my brother-in-law with the lung cancer, how he's going to Germany for immunotherapy treatment he can't get here. "But it's not a miracle cure," I tell her.

The countryside outside the bus window is white, black, silver, tints of peach and blue in the sky above the passing panorama of snow laden evergreen trees. It's like miles and miles of Christmas cards laid end to end. Two weather fronts collided over Thunder Bay and dumped 60 cm of snow. I was able to get exercise over the past few days, helping to shovel us out. Now I'm on the snowy road out of Thunder Bay, heading west. The bus left an hour and a half late, but I'm told I'm lucky it's going out at all. It's only 4 p.m.--the time will turn back one hour in a few miles--but it's growing dark. We had a pit stop in Upsala, where they were advertising a bonspiel.



Thunder Bay was the first visit of the second year of travelling among Friends. Last year this time I was tentatively exploring with Yonge St. Meeting the query about creative gifts: "What do you make?" and discovering that the leading around this felt strong, and stronger at every stop.

This time, however, we didn't do that particular thing, although in private conversation it kept coming up. Thunder Bay worship group feels isolated and was interested in thinking about what it means to be associated with the Religious Society of Friends. I'm not sure how it all fits together, but will report as I can about what I understand of the history of this group and its concerns.

Except for one four-month hiatus after the death of Ian Clark, Thunder Bay worship group has continued to meet regularly for many years. It is small but it is deep!

Nancy Clark is still the group's mainstay and at present, as Nancy has mobility challenges, the group meets in her room. In spite of recent physical challenges and loss--car accident, heart attack, stroke-- Nancy remains bright, searching, honest. On Sunday we were six, three of us geologists. After meeting for worship, I passed around some photos, including one of Barbara Aikman from Wolfville Meeting on a beach full of fossils, and the geologists wanted to know exactly where that was. I felt led too to speak of one Friend's practice of watching the sky, and suddenly everyone there wanted to speak of sky. One geologist rises early every day and walks. She spoke of Thunder Bay sunrises, and having a friend who also watches the sky and shares news about clouds. Someone else spoke of Thunder Bay sunsets, and remembered her mother walking up and down their verandah after the family's move there, flapping her apron in the direction of the sunset and saying, "Look at that!"

The Friend I was staying with, Mary Louise Hill, said she was born in the midst of an August meteorite shower (classier, I thought to myself, than my own birth in the middle of a Saskatchewan mud storm!) and: "Sky unites," she mentioned. Her nieces in Ontario phone her to report seeing shooting stars.

This led to a nice moment when I could reach for the Quaker pamphlet of poetry, *Turning Pages/Seeking Sky*, and tell them about collecting for a new collection. There was a murmur at the title, and another when I mentioned that it comes from a poem in it by Alison Lohans of Regina Worship Group. Some knew of Alison from a Prairie listserve, if I have that right. Thunder Bay is in Ontario, but its affiliation is with Prairie Monthly Meeting. I presented their copy of *Waging Peace: Poetry and Political Action*, and Mary Pat MacDonald accepted it to include in their library, which now fills a box.

Geologist Valerie raised some important questions about inclusivity in Friends. We talk diversity but in Canada we are predominantly white, university-educated, middle class. How do we exclude? Because clearly we must. Clearly I must.

A question about membership came up, not for the first time in these travels. Or perhaps it is more about structure, but it affects how we think about membership too. In most groups there are Friends who find some of their spiritual nourishment outside the Meeting, taking spiritual direction from a Roman Catholic source, for instance, or slipping in to mainstream Christian services at Christmas and Easter. Many of us sit

with Buddhists, attend alternate Sundays with Unitarians or Mennonites, or celebrate Jewish customs or Wicca. Most of our groups, by the same token, include people with a primary faith commitment somewhere else, but who find an essential part of their spiritual nourishment in worship with Friends. These interweavings enrich us, and in some cases, such as here in Thunder Bay, nourish the very core of our meeting. The Wider Quaker Fellowship exists in part to offer a way of keeping in touch with Friends without seeking membership. Personally I love our process of clearness for membership, and the deepening commitment that step reflects, but I love, too, the inclusive way we make little difference between members and attenders. In Thunder Bay Worship Group, attenders Mary Pat and Peter MacDonald, whose primary commitment remains to Catholicism, have helped very much to keep the Friends group alive and well in Thunder Bay for this past ten years.

As I travel, I am slowly developing a sense of the new patterns that are emerging in our Meetings and Worship Groups. One question that people raise often circles around how to be truly inclusive for the sharing of spiritual journey and spiritual nurture, and yet not lose our identity as Friends. We know we have to let go in order to find new paths and patterns, but we feel the need also to hold on to some important things. What are the important things??? Clarity will come as groups listen, discern, and find their way.

On Monday in Thunder Bay, I witnessed Peter MacDonald in action in his job as spiritual counselor at a Roman Catholic longterm care facility. He and Mary Pat had just returned from their holidays, and as Peter walked through the corridors, he was besieged by hugs and news and requests to drop by to visit. One shaky, earnest man approached us over lunch to say that his dad had just gone in for chemo and that he, this man, might be hard to get along with for a while, because of his terrible worry about his father. We told him we would hold them both in our prayers. Other touching stories came past us, even during this brief visit. I saw how Peter is loved, and his essential role in this community. From him I heard news of the initiatives in Thunder Bay to create liaisons among the disparate caregiving services. The detox centre, shelters for the homeless, and seniors' facilities and longterm care, among others, need to know about one another's services. I know from experience that in many communities these services struggle along in too much isolation.

That day and the next, I had the privilege of long talks with Mary Pat, also a spiritual director. Her interest is in the way we think about the divine, and the changes this goes through as we grow. There's no one route, you may be glad to know, but we paused a while over the difference we feel between being "responsible to" God, and being "faithful." Mary Pat's thesis topic is "God-Image and Self-Efficacy--" a notion I found worth puzzling over.

Sky. Rocks. Cancer. God-Image. Care. Seeking. Physical loss. Silence. Healing. Inclusivity.

I'm getting down to the nub of this report, still not sure how it fits together. I had barely arrived, met and warmly welcomed by a lithe dark-haired woman driving an environmentally-sensitive SUV (there is such a thing!) when the idea came up of a Canadian Quaker school. Many Louise Hill's son Sam attended such a school in his

early years, in Philadelphia, and sorely missed it when they made the move to Thunder Bay. Mary Louise was a tenured professor in geology at Temple University in those years, until she was hired back to her home country to be Vice Principal at Lakehead University. She loves teaching, and came with the option of returning to the classroom after five years, which she is now doing, revamping her lectures and enjoying relating again to her large classes of students.

We went in to the Lakehead campus just as the snow began to fall, and from the cafeteria window watched it swirl over the beautiful campus below. In summer it is trees and a river and a bridge. Mary Louise introduced me to Mary Bruenig, another Friendly faculty member with a huge interest and expertise in Quaker education. Nothing will happen quickly, but we talked of a Quaker school as a possible exciting project that might serve many of our young people and help them keep a sense of themselves as Friends.

On the bus now, we're past Dryden. Our clocks are turned back an hour. The lady with the lymphoma got off and was met by a worker from her camp, who helped her with her boxes and bags of Christmas gifts. We had an onboard incident concerning violence, when a very young couple got into a fight and he hit her and she cried. The driver pulled over after a while and two police officers came on board and we all waited while it was sorted out. One voice at the back said that she hit him first. In the new Friends' Journal that I read at Mary Louise's, there is an excellent article by a Quaker cop, calling us to practical goals for changing our police. One is to lobby for less carrying of weapons by the police. The reference is American, but Canadian police carry weapons too. It's yet another issue that I'd like to be more clear about, know better where I stand. I appreciated our driver's zero-tolerance approach to onboard violence.

As usual, I'm leaving out a lot. I've left out lunch with Mary Pat at the Hoito, the heritage restaurant of the Finnish community in Thunder Bay; and a celebration of the Ukrainian Christmas, where Mary Louise held several of us enthralled with a clear, engaging scientific explanation of tsunamis, and also where I got to sing Christmas carols, which I'd missed this year. I've even left out the Sleeping Giant, which broods over Thunder Bay like Blomidon does over Wolfville, and permeates the local culture with myth and, for some who climb to the top, with mystical experience.

The day after tomorrow, I'll be in the interior of B.C., where from time to time there is a fledgling worship group in Trail.

#### Bibliography!

Love and Sex in Plain Language. Eric W. Johnson. Bantam Books. I read the whole thing, wondering if it's the right thing to get into the hands of our teens. (Mary Louise says that 10 years old is the right age for getting this information out.) It's beautifully clear and only a few things need updating. I wonder if it is still available, or whether there's a better one now. I also wonder whether there's a Drugs and Drinking in Plain Language, and if not why not?

Naming, and Round Trip Home. Elizabeth Kouhi. Finnish-descent poet who catches so much of this community's culture, including a poem about the Hoito that Mary Pat read

to me at that very restaurant, across our Finnish soup and pirrakkas. Nancy Clark introduced me to this poet's work.

Laure Paquette, friend of a Friend, also on the faculty (political science) of Lakehead, welcomed me with tea and conversation, and I discovered that she writes books with titles such as: Political Strategy, Path to Peace, Prescription for Change, Campaign Strategy --and I think a new one called Creative Strategies. I haven't read any of her work yet, but I intend to; I think some of us may want to know about this woman's work.

Journal 29 ROSSLAND, B.C. January 22, 2005

Visiting isolated Friends of the South Kootenay Worship Group

"Maybe it's an anti-quest," suggests Gillian. "You're not searching for anything, and so you find things."

I like this way of thinking about a listening ministry. Both the committees for clearness for this travelling cautioned me against travelling with a set agenda: "Stay open to the Spirit."

I started right out that way this week, when I met Friend and writer Christine Sutherland in the line-up for the bus in Calgary. I was on my way from Thunder Bay and had been wandering about the terminal for a couple of hours, wondering whether I should phone Calgary Friends and friends, but feeling too tired to make sense. Now we were lining up, and a small, intense woman with a glorious mane of hair was moving about, affixing labels and tags to an unlikely collection of luggage. She smiled, and it turned out that we had met before, at Western Half-Yearly Meeting. By this time I knew that Lynne Phillips was planning a session of the Columbia River Writers to meet with me around Writing and the Inner Journey. I didn't yet know which night it would be, but Christine was interested and I promised to let her know. We could have gone on talking into the night, but it was bedtime on the bus and we slumped over on our respective seats, and fell asleep.

That was a happy start to a week where writing and spiritual journey flowed seamlessly together, and in quiet moments everyone was reading.

"One book you must read," said Lynne just now, saying good-bye to me in the Greyhound terminal in Castlegar--and we both laughed, because I'd said how, everywhere I go, Friends thrust books at me, saying, "You must read...."--this time, it was *The Spiral Staircase*, by Karen Armstrong. The author finds similar energy in poetry and mystical experiences, and quotes from poets as she reports on --what? -- spiritual journey, I guess. I'll look for the book.

Michael and Lynne Phillips have carved out a path for themselves since at least the sixties, when they were living in Berkeley and wanted out. Michael is writing an autobiography and I hope he finishes it. For reasons of breaking out of a career-oriented corporate job, getting away from the war mentality with the Vietnam War still ongoing, and out of the drug culture of Berkeley at that time, Michael and Lynne looked for work in Canada. They weren't Quakers, but an ad from the Argenta Friends' School intrigued them. They were hired to one teaching job, splitting it between them. They turned the known world upside down and travelled to Argenta with Gillian. Their second daughter, Holly, was born during the five years there. Those years were a challenging time of growth, "and growth is painful." I'm quoting Michael. I think that's what he said, reminiscing. Argenta Meeting and its School went through difficult times. But amazing things happened too, as young people were challenged by the real needs of a marginal, self-sustaining (to some extent) community, and both teachers and students learned and grew. Michael enjoyed teaching carpentry

and being in on the start of the press there, first as a learning situation and later as a small business in the community. He wanted to call it Root Cellar Press, but that name stayed with him for his own publications. He enjoys making fine books, sometimes for the Columbia River Writers. Last year he published Jack Ross' eclectic collection, *What Shall I Do?* [still available!!!]

At Argenta, too, Lynne discovered that she enjoyed working with small children, and is good at it (her grandmothering skills as observed by me over the past week, are delightful, and awesome.)

After five years in Argenta, it was time to move on, but they had emerged committed Friends. Lynne enrolled in training in early childhood education, and Michael found various employments until he discovered satisfying life work in adult education.

I came to Trail and Rossland thinking that there was a fledgling worship group underway. From my point of view, it seemed to melt as I approached. It is true that a few people have met from time to time in the manner of Friends, mainly at the initiative of Nola Landucci, who met these folks mostly through her yoga studio. But yoga is Nola's other life, and an important source of spiritual sustenance. Nola left for a three-week Buddhist retreat, and the "group" hadn't enough reality yet to go on without her.

So in one sense I was visiting isolated Friends. Lynne and Michael attend Nelson Worship Group—in the directory it's the South Kootenay Worship Group—when they can, and Lynne is very involved in international Quaker work, with Friends' General Conference. She is co-chairing the plans for the 2006 gathering.

In another sense, I doubt that the Phillips' household ever feels "isolated." As long-term residents, now, of the area, both take a lively interest in local politics and issues. I kept hearing about campaigns to change this or that, letters to editors, pleas to the municipal council. In the last election, the Phillips' lawns posted both a Green Party sign and one for the New Democratic Party, and the winning candidate turned out to be Alliance—pretty far right.

During my week's visit, the household buzzed with guests. For the first two nights, there was no room for me. I was picked up in rosy dawn by Michael at Salmo, treated to a warm family breakfast, and then delivered three blocks down the hill for nap and visit with Joy Hueber, librarian and member of the writing group, who had very kindly agreed to take a stranger in. I'd been two nights on the bus and so collapsed into sleep as soon as I was shown a bed.

Later Joy and I went for a walk 'n talk, and Joy asked hard questions about Spirit and God and all. A seeker. Then she mentioned that she had met with the little group that Nola had gathered. "We could meet here," she said, and on Sunday morning, as she and her family left for skiing, she said, "You'd be welcome to meet here at 7 p.m."

"I'll tell Lynne and Michael," I said.

Both coming and going between the two houses, three blocks apart through snowy streets and lined by twelve-foot drifts, I got lost. I wandered in the cold, a little alarmed that I might freeze to death and never be found, but actually knowing that lovely people were waiting for me and that I could knock on any door to get set right. I did find the Phillips' house on Sunday, and spent a warm day with their family, got back late for supper--but Joy and her family had waited for me--after getting directions from a young guy out shovelling snow.

At about 7 p.m., three of us did meet for worship-- Joy, Lynn, and me. Michael opted for the ministry of children--both grandkids were visiting from Ontario, with their mum; Gillian.

After Meeting, Joy commented on differences between Buddhist meditation and Quaker silent worship. We rustle and move around more, for one thing. Lynne is familiar with both, and explained her sense of the difference. I do listen to all this, but during Meeting for Worship, sometimes I'm watching the boats drift by and other times I hop right on for the ride. A couple of times I've arrived at Meeting already onboard.

On Monday morning, Joy headed out to her job as a librarian, and dropped me and my suitcase at the Phillips' house. A week of extreme weather was beginning, with a huge dump of snow (much snowshovelling) and then rain and ice and unusual warmth. On Thursday the paper headlined the landslide the day before in Vancouver, where a house slid apart and a woman died.

In the Phillips household, we were all taking turns holding the baby, a fourmonth-old charmer called Zachary, and reading to Thea, 3, a wonderfully responsive child.

I was reading Holly Phillips' first published book, *In the Palace of Repose*, newly out from Prime Books. (ISBN: 894815580) I was marvelling, in and out of her stories, at the way Holly makes us believe, not in alternate worlds, but in the rich magic, not always benign, that is the "reality" behind the sterile illusion we mistake for all there is. Holly calls herself an atheist, and I always respect people's statements about their own beliefs or lack of same. But I often think that the God people are sure they don't believe in is the same one that I personally don't believe in either. There's always more to it, though, and Holly's stories of speculative fiction open doors, offer seductive glimmers.

About Wednesday, we all came down with the baby's head cold. The bacterial universe also inhabits our own, unseen but with great powers. By the time the Columbia River Writers came in at the door, and Christine all the way from Nelson, I was steadily going through Kleenex and trying to pretend that was normal. Actually it is amazing what adrenaline can do, plus stimulating company, and I'd slept all afternoon. Most of these women had met together for many years, and were open to an evening billed as *Writing and the Inner Journey*. We retold the journey of the soul to the creative place and back, and then shared writing they had brought with them, moments from their own inner

journeying. By the end of it, I felt as if I'd been to Meeting for Worship twice this week.

Slept most of Thursday.

Bartered some writing help for a grand massage Friday.

Long focussed talk with Lynne about FGC. (Friends' General Conference)  
Michael's response to the idea of a Friends' school was: Be careful. Inform ourselves of the pitfalls. Learn from the joys and pains of Argenta Friends' School.

Lynne's was: if we decide to put \$100,000 into nurturing our youth, there are much better ways to spend it!

Okay, Lynne, what is your vision?

Personnel, she says. Youth ministry. FGC is developing a ministry among youth. We imagined someone coming to stay for three months with a Meeting, with the express intention of building a program for youth. "Build it and they will come." But "first there has to be something happening in the Meeting--an initial commitment and interest."

"What about the majority of our groups, which have no children?"

Lynne questioned whether that is really so, and likely she is right. I remember twice on these travels this past year, once in Yarmouth Meeting and again in Halifax, where a Friend counted some 30 children and youth in and around the Meeting, and yet on Sunday there are three, or none. Personally, I am still interested in ollos, the idea of Friends sponsoring family talent nights in our wider communities, with a welcoming approach to young families.

There is no lack of curriculum materials--so much is out there. [You can start with the Children's Lending Library on [quaker.ca](http://quaker.ca)!]

Lynne went on to say that she wishes that Friends in Canadian Yearly Meeting would avail ourselves more often of the resources of FGC. Here we are, floundering along with our little points of Light, and directly to the south of us is an organized, compatible Friends' service, which we belong to, and which (sometimes needing reminding) knows we are here.

I sit listening (as I am supposed to do) and realize that I have very little idea myself of what FGC has to offer. So I ask.

1) The gathering. Surely every Canadian Friend knows that if they die and go to heaven they will find themselves at FGC Gathering. I haven't been there yet, but I've known that for years.



2) Books. a) They put out a catalogue. Our own Quaker Book Service deals in some of the same books, and our Lending Libraries order from the FGC catalogue, but a LOT more books, pamphlets and curricula are available. b) FGC is a publisher.

3) Travelling Ministers. We can apply to be one, or our group can ask to be visited. There's a process, and I think what stops us here is that we don't necessarily know what we want in a visitor. I suppose we could just contact FGC and look into it, find out who's out there, who would like to come and spend a few days with us. To me, doing it, this seems the most useful FGC service, and the one I know least about. Some Travelling Ministers can offer workshops or a talk, if we want to raise our profile with a public event. But aren't all these people and resources American?

Well, mostly, but maybe they need us. And all the programs are open to our participation. You too can take their training as a travelling minister (you may have to spell it with one 'l') and you too can write a pamphlet or book and submit it for publication to FGC.

Okay, Lynne, I'll look into it.

On Friday we started into our lunch, only to be met by wails from Thea. Loud wails. "What is it? What's the matter?" "We didn't have Quaker grace!!!!" So we all held hands again and everybody listened inside. This is the first time I have heard such loud distress over not following Friends' process, but maybe a little more of that would be good for us. :)

Footnote: I have finally seen copies of the Pastoral Care Newsletter. In particular, I read one by David MacKay on supporting Friends who are burdened by debt, and one by Lynne Phillips on "Nurturing the Small Meeting or Worship Group." Both are thoughtful, useful frameworks for approaching difficult issues faced by every group. The format includes an overview, followed by two specific reports from real meetings, followed by an excellent list of other relevant reading. Most of the references are American, but these two are written by Canadians, and they even let David spell 'cheque' with a 'que'! To obtain copies or to subscribe, contact Steve Gulick, at 215-241-7068, or [steveg@pym.org](mailto:steveg@pym.org).

Journal 30 STEVESTON, COQUITLAM, CRANBERRY COMMONS January 30, 2005

Stand by here for a little Christian content and also, related, views on membership. The book that was put into my hands at one stop this week was by a woman from 1685 who is said to have influenced early Friends as much as George Fox. She wasn't a Quaker, which may be why I haven't been aware of her. Her name is given as Madame Guyon, and in 1685 she published "Short and Very Easy Method of Prayer; Which all can practice with the greatest facility, and arrive in a short time, by its means, at a high degree of perfection." The book spread like wildfire and its author was imprisoned as a heretic in the Bastille. Originally written in dense and difficult French (but people still clamoured to read it), the book has been changed into accessible English and is available as: *Experiencing the Depths of Jesus Christ* (Christian Books, Augusta, Maine).

"The first thing you must learn, dear friend, is that 'the kingdom of God is within you.' (Luke 17:21) Never look for the kingdom anywhere but there, within. Once you have realized that the kingdom of God is within you and can be found there, just come to the Lord."

She makes it sound simple, doesn't she? For me the word 'Lord' translates as 'the Spirit' or 'Love.'

We are a simple religion. Much of the conversation this week has circled around how we manage to make Friends' ways more complicated: several Friends pounced on the satirical lyrics I am carrying with me: "Tis a Gift to be Complex."

I visited three worship groups this week, and feel a little overwhelmed about attempting to tell you about it. I'll keep it simple...

I stayed the first night with my nephew Geoff, in Burnaby, who then helped me to find my way to:

Steveston Worship Group: This is a little group of two families and four children, who meet from time to time in the home of Paul Bruhn and Jane Stokes. On Sunday it was just the Bruhn-Stokes family plus Elizabeth Tennant of the other family. Elizabeth's daughter and grandsons couldn't come because they were battling colds. I could sympathize...

Steveston is a fishing village which is part of Richmond (I think I have this right), just back of a dike which keeps back the sea. The houses are below sea-level and the ocean is just over there beyond the dike, on the other side of a narrow marsh, which I found sobering so soon after the Asian tsunami. However, more building is going on. I was taken sightseeing by Ruth (10) and Anya (8), past a cannery that is now a historic site, and into a very pleasant downtown. Back at their home in a housing co-op, we did some creative writing together, and on the next day Paul led us in a bicycle ride along the dike. The girls turned back to rejoin their mum and go back to do schoolwork (they are homeschoolers) but Paul led me around a duck pond where I also saw a blue heron and a couple of partridges,

and out to a place where there is an overview of the airport. It was a longish ride and wonderful to be back on a bike.

We shared about 'what do you make' and also about 'what is the Society of Friends to you,' the latter starting from the photos and other material I am carrying from Friends across the country. (Some of it is getting tattered.) For their creative piece, the girls performed a (hiphop?) dance about Cinderella, to a tune that had a girl's voice longing to be "freed" by her prince, and ends with her decision that she can do it herself.

Their parents and I talked intensely, but with for me at least with increasing clarity, about their sense of exclusion from the life of Friends in this part of the country. A bitter difference with their home Meeting has led them to refuse to be under their "care." The children are beginning to wonder out loud about how it is that Friends believe in peace and yet have such serious quarrels. But the little worship group itself has been able to give some care to a member who was dying, and to keep in touch with some Friends.

I think I'll add a riff at the end of this on membership matters, because I feel that my own mind is changing. The week has been like an intensive seminar, examining the question from several different points of view.

Paul drove me into Vancouver. I had reversed a couple of digits and had the wrong address for Susan Mussel, but luckily she had told me that there are angels over her back door. We drove along a back lane, looking for angels, and found them. Susan was at work but I was able to let myself in, warmly greeted by Rosie the retriever angel, and spent two days just getting better from my cold and working on my journals. On Wed. night I was able to reconnect with a writing friend who is at Green College, UBC, working on a novel. For one evening I felt like a writer again and started itching to write poetry, but then I put my Quaker hat back on again and so far the poems haven't quite happened. The next night, Susan and I were able to talk about many things, including ideas about Religious Education for adults. Most Friends agree that groups need regular opportunities to review Friends' history, the testimonies, and so on, but now I also think we need a regular chance to learn skills at conflict mediation and resolution.

"Like an annual check-up at the dentist," Susan said, and that sounds right. Susan also quoted another member of Vancouver Meeting as follows: "Conflict avoidance produces bad decisions"--another good one to remember. In other adult R.E., the group at Cranberry Commons offers a monthly session on "Light," using a guided meditation drawn from the practice of early Friends. It is not quite the same as the practice that got Madame Guyon thrown into prison, but in both cases the idea is that we can learn a practice, share a discipline, and that this helps both in and out of the Sunday hour of silence. Sitting in silence is a simple idea, but for beginners it may quite rightly feel intimidating, and they may not come back.

Coqui [I]am Worship Group:

And then Earl Morris drove in to pick up me and my suitcase and drive me to his place, where the seminar continued.

This worship group has a clear sense of what it is doing, which is: meet once a month; alternate silent worship with "education;" education sessions are about the writings of George Fox and the teachings of Jesus; once a year or so, offer an outreach session.

For this group, outreach is simple: put up posters etc. advertising an evening on What is Quakerism? Make it very interactive (they had four Friends presenting various aspects of Quakerism, each one followed by generous question periods.)

...Excuse me? Does anybody actually come to something like this? Well, yes. With minimal advertising, 5-6 people came in addition to 5-6 people from the existing group. Out of the evening, one began attending. "This is a smashing success!" I informed Earl. Next time that they do it, they plan the same basic program, only with better advertising and an article ahead of time in the local paper. I realized with some chagrin that I think of outreach as being indirect, showing people what sort of people we are and projects we undertake, rather than the straightforward and simple idea of offering to respond to questions about Quakerism, never mind to stress that our historic roots are Christian.

I was beginning to realize that Earl likes to keep things simple. He has the idea that George Fox wanted to do this, and in fact Jesus before him. We had long conversations about whether there ought to be business meetings at all and, if so, what sort of items are right to bring to them. I recalled Gordon McClure's guidance on this when he was CYM clerk, to the effect that "only religious questions should come to meeting for worship for business." But what are religious matters? I think that Gordon meant matters that begin with "Are we the kind of community that...." "... that has to discern God's will about the colour of the carpet? .... that is willing to take in an AWOL soldier and give him sanctuary? ...that sends money to the food bank?" Always we must go back to our religious roots: that we believe there is that of the divine in each person: keep that steady and see what follows. I still have trouble sorting it out.

But as we pursued these conversations, and in walks under the Coquitlam evergreens and around the Lake Como duck pond (more ducks, no herons or partridges--there's a bear around, but I didn't see it either) -- points about burden and exclusion came across loud and clear. Earl's image is of a large tray being held up by a stalwart group of fine Friends. With the passing of time and with the presentation of one issue after another, each time another piece of baggage is tossed up onto the tray. The people begin to stagger. Some leave because the burden is too great. Those left begin to fall to their knees. The group is in a downward spiral, and new people hesitate to come in and try to help hold up this weight.

One solution is to put down the tray. Have no more meetings for worship for business. Meet in small groups, many many points of Light, and give up the idea of a CYM office or a directory or a book of Organization & Procedure. Make no lists of members. Let the Spirit guide, radically and absolutely.

One solution is to figure out how to take things off the tray and keep them off. Do not assume that any decision is a precedent, but live in the Light and be constantly renewed.

One solution is to put the right stuff on the tray in the first place. Here we got into interesting questions about politics, and the tendency of Friends to take positions on tangled issues, and sometimes to cease to remain open to all sides, all voices, all the possible workings of the Spirit. Instead it looks as if you cannot be a Friend unless you agree with a long list of political views. This excludes and it burdens. I need more Light on this, because it still seems to me that it is powerful and good when Friends come to unity on a position (same-sex marriage, opposing the anti-ballistic missile nonsense...)

On Saturday night, ten people came to the home of Earl and Joan Morris, and we did some creative work together, going into the creative and mystical space. We told that Psyche story again, and this time she was ten years old and wore soccer shoes. People shared deeply around the stones and pinecones and sticks I had found outside under the trees. Susan Mussel wrote a poem, and I can slip it in here, after Membership.

Cranberry Commons Worship Group:

On Sunday, Earl drove me to this worship group, which originally began in a meeting of the Coquitlam group, but now has its separate life and identity. It meets only when there is a fifth Sunday in the month. It is particularly open to children. As people kept arriving, I stopped counting at 37 people, many of them younger Friends, and including about a dozen children. The energy felt centred and expectant. The children were encouraged to go out with an "older" group or to stay for stories with a "younger" group, or to remain quietly in Meeting. I went out with the older children, who willingly shared stories from their week, and then let me lead them in the writing of short poems. We moved between items from the outside world and the response inside our own skin.

Cohan wrote:

*The tsunami hit Sri Lanka  
I heard pens writing on paper  
And letters in the palm of my hand*

Sky brought together these bits: *I  
heard a car driving past  
Disruption in the Ukraine government I  
see a rip in my hand, and lines*

Sean produced a "concrete poem" that needed the poet there to see the way it moved off the page into three dimensions. But the pieces were: *Voices claim war's end. It goes on. War, U. R. slime.*

Rowan drew monsters with wide-open mouths, and got this: *There was a mud slide in North Van. A car moving. Wrinkles.*

And Grace, who is studying to teach children this age, gracefully produced:  
*Particles can exist in two places at once*  
*The Iraqi government is forced into an American election*  
*Vrrooommm! Creak... Thud. Hmm....*  
*Pain and possibilities.*

Some of the adults stayed after potluck to share some of the fragments of their experience as Friends, and to hear some of my stories of meetings and groups across the country.

I am going to have to draw this to an end. I am due to catch a bus to Powell River in just a couple of hours. I'm at the home of my niece, Charlotte, and her partner Chrissie. Last evening their new housemate came upstairs and turned out to be a Young Friend I vaguely remember from CYM gatherings, Amanda Hill. She went through my photos with delight. At the picture of the potluck in Kitchener, she said, "This was my Meeting-- they still have THAT teapot!!!"

About membership: I always understood that the clearness committee for membership was asking two questions: Has the Spirit truly called you into membership, and do you feel clear about this, and that membership is the next step in your spiritual journey? AND: Do you fit with us, with this particular group? Are we called by the Spirit into accepting you as one of our community?

It is the second part of this which is now being questioned in my own mind. Someone called it the "judging" part, and I see that Organization & Procedure does say that the committee is to "judge" whether this person is to become a member. If the person is clear that God has conferred membership in the Spirit, do we take on too much baggage when we undertake to confirm this or disaffirm this?

There is much more to say, but that is the bare bones of it. I'll slip Susan's poem in here and send this off. Susan has recently been accepted into membership in Vancouver Monthly Meeting.

*Babbling Brook of Consciousness*

*(Rock Exercise! Stone of Coquitlam)*

*It is not solid but fluid, flexible, malleable,*  
*It has groves, pock marks from internal scars and sores,*  
*Rough edges which soothe the soul.*  
*It glints ever so slightly, intently, persistently - only for eyes to see*  
*Which are open and closed. Darkness mingles with light, recharging*  
*Feeding off of one another yet distinct,*  
*No grey,*

*No dullness,  
No confusion.*

*Clarity speaks as the clean brook from which I emerged, fast water, negative ions  
With fresh oxygen breathing life into me,  
I emerge not solid, no rock of Gibraltar, but fluid, flowing, bending and breathing  
As the willow bends her branches to drink the water,  
She is nourished in her ability to sway and not break.  
I am a rock which grows and recedes, a granule which has been made up  
Of centuries of particles  
Pieces of knowledge, of spirit so small  
It contains me, I contain it.  
I am centuries from now, everything and nothing of the past and of the future.*

Journal 31, Bed 80 POWELL RIVER, B.C. Visiting isolated Friends Feb. 6, 1es

This has been a week of ferry crossings, two to travel from Vancouver to Powell River (really I got off at Saltery Bay), and one more from Powell River & "The Island." The actual place I now am is Merville, visiting Judy Racher and Harold Macy. But from Tuesday through Saturday last week I drifted within the enchanted household of Jennifer and Alfred Muma and their two children, Joya (16) and Galen (12), with three cats, one dog, umpteen goldfish and a serious number of rocks, sculptures, paintings, and plants. In the seven years the family has lived there, they have transformed their house into a long, rambling, wonderfully pleasing structure, blue with white trim, with skylights and gables and a central tower which is Joya's conservatory and bedroom. When I visited the tower, large plants reached out with leaves the size of four human hands...okay, it was a philodendron, but it was a west coast philodendron! ...and there was a small banana plant with red-spotted leaves, and many others, all curving over rocks the size of, well, small boulders, and hidden behind was a delicate gold-tinted cabinet filled with treasures. Joya showed me porcelain figurines and a variety of music boxes, including one with a solemn gilt lion, turning round and round with a tinkling song.

Music is Joya's main focus. Health problems have forced her to give up singing lessons and set her two years behind in school, but now she is moving forward confidently, with homeschooling and a new focus on playing the cello. She is part of a group that plays medieval and baroque music for the Society for Creative Anachronism.

Galen attends school in grade seven. He has discovered theatre and is learning the role of Benvolio in a production of Romeo and Juliet. He also produced an exquisite postcard for the collection I am making from Quaker children, or in this case, child of a Quaker, as Alfred is the only Quaker in the area and there is no worship group. Galen told me that kids at school tease him about his name, and I was able to tell him that there is another Quaker guy named Galen who is a bit older and seems to have survived.

Their mother Jennifer attended Unity Church when she and Alfred met back in Ontario. Alfred has deep Quaker roots...many Friends know his relatives, including his father, Ken, and his aunt, Dorothy.

Jennifer and Alfred were married in a ceremony that blended elements of Unity and of Friends. Jennifer is a nurse but also does calligraphy, or used to, and she made the scroll for their wedding and among those who were there to witness and sign were many Friends.

One end of this long blue house with its gables and its tower is an artist's studio, crowded with stored paintings, prints and boxed crates holding whole shows. Alfred is an artist who has had many shows and a list of awards. He known best as a watercolourist, but has several differing styles, including linoblock prints and one series of angry political pieces, responding to cutbacks in the B.C. health system. Those cuts had a direct impact on this family, because for nineteen years Alfred had supplemented his artist's earnings with steady work in hospital maintenance and kitchen support staff.



After a rollercoaster of not knowing what was going to happen, finally all the support staff were laid off, the services (long-term care for seniors) were privatized, and he could have had his skilled job back at now-minimum wage. This he has refused to pursue, and is well underway in developing a business in the arts, marketing visual art. Jennifer's job has held, although now the seniors being given care are only those who have disappeared into dementia. Other vulnerable seniors have seen services reduced or withdrawn.

Still, all seemed fine this week inside the enchanted blue house. Galen came home from school and spoke Shakespearean lines as part of his conversation; Joya created beautiful music from her cello; Jennifer came home from work, and gentle guidance appeared with her, around food and schedules and spending time together. I have a photo of Jennifer on the piano, accompanying her daughter. And Alfred created a really nice poster advertising my workshop on Artist/Mystic/Activist, and sent it out through the community. He also phoned a few people who had expressed interest in the Society of Friends. In the end, no one from outside the family came to our Meeting for Worship, but four people from the community turned up on Saturday for the workshop, one of whom lingered afterwards to find out more about Friends. There are two good sources of information, I told her: Alfred, and [quaker.ca](http://quaker.ca).

Back when I left Vancouver, last Monday, my niece's partner, Chrissie Poulos, who is young filmmaker, pressed a DVD into my hand: "You must see this. Give it back to me when I see you again." I really had no idea what it was. It was called *Scared Sacred*, by a filmmaker who rejoices in the name Velcrow Ripper. (Right up there with Ben Pink Dandelion, one Friend noted, as a memorable name.) On my second night at the Mumas, Joya and I decided to give the DVD a try. I am still grateful and touched by having this film come into my hands and to think that I can share it a few times with other Friends. I see now that Chrissie knew that the film is supremely relevant to the questions I am travelling with, about the interconnections of the sacred, our creative gifts, and the state of the world. The filmmaker spent five years of his life in search of stories of hope in the blackest "ground zeros" of the planet: Bosnia, Bhopal, Auschwitz, the wall in Palestine-Israel, the killing fields of the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia. These are dark stories indeed, and yet the film itself is so beautiful and stories so compelling that one comes away with renewed direction and hope. We need to hear these stories. It turns out that this low-budget film is being shown in film festivals around the land, and so perhaps it is one of those films that most of us will have an opportunity to take in.

Images from *Scared Sacred* merge over in my memory now with images from the workshop on Saturday. In particular, I am haunted by the collage that young Galen put together, with not one but two images of a cliff face with people standing precariously at the top, on a ledge that looked ready to break off. Galen chose these as the "tripod" for a giant camera he cut out and balanced on top of the cliff. The camera's eye was trained across an abyss of white space, upon images of dancers and of various forms of music. One twisted Asian house was included, he noted, to indicate that music flows from one house to another, and creates community. The more we looked, the more it appeared that the collage spoke to that sense of risk that performers feel, that edge where fear transforms into beauty and relationship. In the *Scared Sacred* film, this edge is identified as the place of the "sacred." I had felt it myself that very morning, walking out into the room where we were setting up the workshop, and feeling at odds with

myself, depleted, not sure where the energy was going to come from, or for that matter, the people. Then the sun came out, seven people arrived, and everyone took astonishing creative risks. Back in the house proper, Jennifer was giving herself a rare quiet time. In the afternoon, she came in and took a photograph. To my surprise and pleasure, it turned up on my travel letter when Alfred took it off to "endorse" it. His full-colour endorsement includes a copy of the art postcard Galen painted, and the photo of the eight of us sitting around with sun pouring in through the windows.

The workshop really came together, I felt, when everyone trooped upstairs to Alfred's studio. After a bit of a tour (but with intense, interested questions about his work) we were able to unfurl a long ten-foot sketch he had done of the seniors' facility, showing it from simultaneous perspectives, and focussing on a tiny sign on one window, reading "CLOSED." It isn't closed, but the services it once offered are in the artist's view diluted or disappeared. One local artist who participated in our workshop told of the impact this sketch made upon her when she first saw it in a show a few years ago. She wondered out loud what further difference it might have made if it could have been shown again at some of the meetings and discussions, as privatization was decided upon and put in place.

A lot more happened during the few days' visit with this family of "isolated Friends." Much of it was reminiscences, as Alfred and Jennifer traded memories of the Friends they have known over the years. Joya expressed amazement at all the people we knew in common.

On one afternoon, we helped someone move, and it turned out to be the person who was at the wheel of the ferry when I watched it delicately manoeuvre into the dock at Saltery Bay. On Friday evening we went to an art opening where Alfred had a painting, one of his land and seascapes with his almost signature plume of smoke rising from a mill. Several of the Powell River women artists came in feathered masks, and one had all exposed flesh dyed a deep blue.

On Saturday, after the workshop, the Mumas drove me to the ferry. When I had arrived four days before in the dark, and had stood watching the ferry touch into the dock, I was the only walk-off passenger. I had felt on centre stage under the bright lights, as trundled my suitcase up the steel apron; behind me a bus and a transport truck and a whole row of cars had to wait until I was safely up the apron and in behind the sidewalk's barrier. At Powell River, however, I was with a crowd of chattering young people as we walked on board in the stunning "west view" scene of twilight over the sea.

An hour and a bit later, we walked off again in the dark. I had expected to be in Comox, but the announcement was for Little River. I walked off anyway, a woman called out my name, and I was welcomed into the next adventure, with different folks, just a ferry ride from one another, but not yet acquainted.

More to come!

I prefer to avoid theology in these journals, even though the content in the long conversations often touches on "what is happening in the silence?" We are mystics but we are also plain folk--when a Friend makes a theological statement, he or she is likely to gesture toward the garden or a tree.

In the kitchen of Judy Racher and Harold Macy, in Merville in the Comox Valley, a colour picture of the Dalai Lama smiles down from a cupboard door. A copy of the magazine of the conservative Friends of F.U.M. (Friends United Meeting) lies on the table. Bibles in various translations turn up on end tables and such throughout the house. In the bathroom is Calvin and Hobbes, and everything around here stops so we can watch The Simpsons.

Both Harold and youngest son Josh (grade 12) attend the local Mennonite Church. Josh was baptized into it sometime in the past year. He enjoys the Mennonite youth group and tells me "anybody can have an active youth group if they want to put time and energy into it." They have a rock band, a skateboard park, they go bowling and on excursions together. One night of my visit, Josh hustles off to an evening of worship and then a speaker. "What on?" Things like choosing careers, and summer camps, he answers. "How many will be there tonight?" "Not everybody. Only about 40." Josh is a neat guy with a big grin and friendly, respectful conversation. When I understand the size of the Mennonite youth group, and that the local United Church has one three times bigger, I wonder out loud whether maybe nearly ALL of the teens in the Comox Valley belong to a youth group. Josh erupts with laughter. No, no, he says. "But it's true that lots of non-Christian kids come too."

I like Josh a lot but this casual use of "Christian" and "non-Christian" makes my tummy tighten. I'm comfortable, though, with "Quaker" and "non-Quaker." Obviously I'm doing to him what I've complained about others having done to me: I'm assuming that just because a person identifies with the teachings of Jesus, that they believe in a lot of things that I don't, mainly that Jesus is the only way to God. I never do get around to checking this, but I don't hear it either, in our conversations. That night I write in my journal: "I don't know how to relate to this, really. Simply, I guess."

"Where is the Christian left?" asks Harold next day, in some anguish. He hasn't found it among Friends. His meeting that night is with friends he smilingly calls the "Mennonite left." He comes back pleased by the work everyone has taken on. Every year his church puts on a big fair, selling homemade goods. They raise many thousands of dollars for relief of poverty overseas. This year their theme will be "Remember Africa" and Harold expects his plant table along to bring in over \$2000, as it did last year. In a different project, fundraising is underway to restore a well that was destroyed in the Asian tsunami.

I spend some time during this visit looking over Mennonite materials, thinking about whether I'm comfortable with them, and if not why not. I fuss to myself about whether there's too much helping and not enough of going to the roots

[but how do you do that] and assisting empowerment. But a well sounds like empowerment, and one brochure shows a strong inner-city program for older youth to work with homeless people and then reflect upon their experience. It's called by the Marxist word "praxis" (action & reflection & action...). A super little study book called Earth Trek takes the reader and any study group through personal and collective learning experiences around "stewardship" of the planet. Could Friends use this great little book, I wonder to myself, or would we be uncomfortable with the word "stewardship"? I mean, I am; I think I want a word that does not suggest that human beings are in charge at all, except--and perhaps I am quibbling here--in fulfillment of our own unique calling as humans, our part in the ecological web. We're here for a reason within that web, as trees are, but is that reason "stewardship"?

I'm trying to formulate a larger question here, but the exact shape of it eludes me.

On Sunday Harold makes an exception and joins the Friends worship group which is meeting in his and Judy's living room. He thumbs one of his Bibles as we spend that silent hour.

We share together about creativity. Judy plays a CD of a Vancouver choir singing a song with political lines in it ("Just how stupid do you think we are?") and also lines about hope -- in general a lively and beautiful performance. She's in a local choir which is preparing a performance of this same song. Laureena brings a large conte (charcoal) drawing she has made of two people on a street, standing close together to block our way and gazing over their shoulders at us suspiciously. "The Importance of Being Narrow" is the title. We look at it and talk about it for quite a long time. Shirley speaks of knitting, and of looking for the right person to receive a sweater she made that is too big. We munch on muffins made by Meg, who is feeling too weak to come. Harold tells us about a book he has begun to write, combining his practical love for the forest with his journey in the Spirit. Later I look through photos and enthusiastic letters from the latest grade 5 class that Harold took through the woodlot and taught about sustainable use of the forest. "Non-timber forest products" were a buzz-word, such as mushrooms, and island maple syrup. The maple sap was running like crazy while I was there, with the cold nights and bright days, the buckets filling and overflowing.

After Meeting, Shirley Bonney let us know about a fundraising initiative from Canadian Friends Service Committee--something new. You buy a "ticket" to an evening of doing nothing in particular, "guilt-free." You use the ticket yourself, maybe to visit a friend you have wanted to see, maybe to stare into space (watch the sky), or you give it to a friend. Judy took on informing local Friends about this, and coordinating it. "A creative idea," someone said, and I felt that too.

Shirley also brought along the Meeting record book, which Harold started when the group began some years ago. It includes brief reports of meetings held, some bits of memorable ministry, quotes, and photographs. I know we are all encouraged to keep such a historical record of the life of our groups, but this is

the first one I have seen, and what a treasure it is! Shirley is keeping it up now that Harold is mostly with the Mennonites.

I saw less of Judy, who is an R.N. in palliative care, and is working shifts. But we spoke some about pranic healing, and about "energy." Judy's travels in the world led her to an interest in Buddhism and meditation. Is pranic energy related to capital-S Spirit, I wondered out loud, is it the Light Within, is it the Seed, is it the Risen Christ? I feel inside that many Friends in CYM stop at that last one. We might just be in a phase.

On Monday, Alfred Muma came over on the ferry for a couple of errands in Courtenay, and he phoned and came around to bring back the CD of Michael Miller's Peace Cantata, which I had cleverly left behind on the Muma kitchen table. So Alfred and Harold met, two bearded Quaker guys, so I'm hopeful the Powell River Friends might be a bit less isolated.

On Tuesday Judy organized a lunch for a couple of Friends who hadn't made it to Meeting on Sunday because of a fall of treacherous slippery snow. So I met Marian Rowat, who had attended the Victoria School of Writing (my baby) in the past, and Mery Davis, who is writing his memoirs (a long life in social work, much of it in prisons.) We happily talked writing, mostly. Mery and I had both known poet Dorothy Livesay, and traded fond memories. Marian brought her creative offering, a "novelty" bouquet of rosy chrysanthemums that had been given a rabbit face, with a mauve bunny tail stuck onto the back of the vase. Its outrageousness broke us up laughing every time we looked at it.

On Wednesday, Shirley came back and brought with her daughter Meg. We had lunch and a good chat, and I was and am grateful to have had the opportunity to reconnect with Meg, whom I knew well in Victoria. One of my sisters has the same chronic illness as Meg has, and is facing similar serious options. One thing we talked about is living life while we have it, living, Shirley the mother said, "openly." They saw me to the funky little E&N train, and I traveled south to Victoria for a short visit with another sister and her husband who is living bravely with a different illness. It is tenuous, this life.

On Friday the same train and same trainman brought me back to Nanaimo. The train whistled and rumbled and ran late, crossing up our connections with one another, but now I'm ensconced in the B&B suite at Cathy Molnar's, and will be visiting Mid-Island Allowed Meeting for a whole week. Shirley Bonney lent me *The Barn at the End of the World: the Apprenticeship of a Quaker, Buddhist Shepherd*, by Mary Rose O'Reilley. Meg Bonney remembers that she met Mary when Meg was at Pendle Hill. This is a book that Jane Zavitz Bond showed me, and a few other Friends along the way. Now I've read it and recommend it. The publisher is Milkweed Editions ISBN 1-57131-254-4 I'll end with a quote from it, and send this off. I'm typing this journal in an internet café--my first internet café--in Nanaimo just a block from the B&B.

On p. 130, Mary hears a Buddhist teacher say, "Anger makes us less productive," and she comments: "I am more useful in society when I operate out of a friendly

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acceptance of other views, a wariness about the splendor of my own ideas, a clarity about what ought to happen, and a detachment from who should get the credit."

Journal 32 MID-ISLAND ALLOWED MEETING, Nanaimo, B.C. Friday, Feb. 18, 2005

As it turned out, I stayed in Nanaimo for a full week. A full week in more ways than one, as opportunities opened for quiet times for myself, some going inward as I near the end of this first leg of the second year of travelling.

I came up from Victoria (a one-day flying visit to see my sister and her husband) on the E&N train last Friday, and left today on the Greyhound bus. I stayed in the "suite" in Carey House, the B&B run by Cathy Molnar of Mid-Island Allowed Meeting. Usually I am living smack dab in the middle of a family, and so it was a different experience to have my own space and my own little refrigerator and microwave, tucked away from life upstairs. Between events and encounters, I took this time as a spiritual retreat and also a spiritual challenge. At home I am often by myself, but am always busy. Who am I when I'm alone with the Spirit I keep referring to, and my notebook and--oh, thank you!--a radio tuned to the CBC?

On Saturday, Mid-Island Allowed Meeting had a potluck and discussion which was announced by Joy Newall as "How does creativity fit in with our Friends' testimonies?" I'll use that phrasing again. Eleven people came, including one brand new inquirer, who had phoned that very morning to ask about Friends. After introductions and eating, we went into silence and then I told some of the story of the beginnings of this leading, and the process of clearness, and then asked the question, "What do you make?"

For several of those present, making is a big part of their lives. Amber is one of these, and spoke of many creative interests, making all she can. Except: "I don't knit!" The next day at Meeting she brought along a mirror whose frame she has built from papier-mache as a complicated tree, bearing shiny fruit and delicate butterflies.

Her mother, Kay, spoke of organizing, of "making things happen."

Cherry invited me to come to her house later in the week, to see her weaving and her quilts, which I did, and enjoyed speaking with this artist who says she's not sure she is one, "but somehow I keep doing these things." Cherry also said she's not sure that this beautiful work flowing from her hands is a spiritual journey. "But perhaps I'm not aware of it." I backtracked from my nudging questions. There is 'being aware,' and there is just 'being.' I told Cherry about the potter I met on the east coast who, when I asked what goes on inside him as the pots come from his hands, answered me firmly, "I make pots."

I didn't backtrack, however, from a different moment that came during the Saturday sharing, with so many people responding deeply and clearly about their creativity. It came as ministry to say, "If we leave our deepest passions at the Meeting House door, then surely we sever the connection with the... the juiciness of our spirituality. We risk sterility."

Joy had brought a wool lamb, at my request, one of a flock she has knitted over the years for new babies. Joy's creativity has included forty years as a writer, notably for the Mr. Dressup shows, as well as an awesome record as a practical activist for peace. At present she is involved in inter-faith work.

We met at the home of Ruth Chase, and I was intrigued by Ruth's stories of her own response to a number of issues over the years that have engaged her emotions and at times her anger. Ruth's response is first and foremost a creative one, as she plunges into making a quilt square or a knitted thing or a painting. Often she is called into a craft she has not tried before, which can be chancy. But risk is part of it, as we've seen before.

Nancy passed around stunning photographs of flowers from the height of last summer's garden.

Cathy spoke of being "addicted" to travel--I had seen her volumes and volumes of travel photographs. She was just a week or so back from a visit to her daughter in India, and spoke eloquently about the simplicity of the lifestyle there, compared with our own relative luxury.

First-time attendee Shahira spoke of her work as a massage therapist, and the special creative energy of body work.

Bob Newall was the only guy there, but it didn't bother him. He brought along some of his marvellous creations in wood, which I had admired the day before when Bob and Joy had wafted me off to their place for lunch. "I make sawdust," said Bob.

Two Friends, Helen and Janet, were, among other activities, singing in a choir. Their faces lit up as they spoke about this. On Wednesday I spent a few more hours with Janet, including a brisk and needed walk along the sea wall. I am carrying her greetings to Friends in Calgary, where she recently spent a special retreat.

On Monday, I went with Cathy and her partner John to hear their seniors' band, complete with singing dog, which brightens the lives of people in Alzheimers' wards and other seniors' facilities. For Valentine's Day month, they have lined up thirteen gigs! I had a great time singing along to "Sue City Sue" and "Five Foot Two" and hearing Cathy on accordion, John on mouth organ, and a remarkable drummer, the oldest member of the band, who has played professionally in the past and is really fun to watch. In the audience, a woman in a bright red pantsuit kept circling and swooping in on her motorized wheel chair, arriving with a flourish (over and over again) like a superhero. On the back of her chair was a sign: Jesus Loves You, But I'm His Favourite. A tall woman in a silky blouse held my hand and whispered in my ear comments on the action and "I like a woman beside me." It was poignant and wonderful to see blank, ancient faces brighten and then you could see them begin to sing along, remembering the words. We were there on Feb. 14, and an aide brought around heart-shaped cookies with pink sprinkles, and red cinnamon candies. My friend beside me saw to it that I got my share.

Cathy and John also invited me along to a fun evening with Tourism Nanaimo at the Dinghy Dock, "Canada's only floating pub." Deep fried everything and free beer! On the way back I had one of several unexpected, dear encounters, as I recognized a friend from my Victoria writing classes waiting to get on the ferry when we got off. We clasped hands and that was it, passing in the night.



A year ago, Victoria Monthly Meeting began a brave experiment, moving its Meeting for Worship for Business around the island, no longer basing it in Victoria. I was able to sit in on a session and can definitely say this--the sense of ownership and participation by up-Island Friends has skyrocketed. The down side may be that since local leadings are dealt with locally, the agenda tends to be less interesting --a change in record-keeping, announcements, requests to local groups to find names for committees, but not the actual names. Applications for membership and approvals of same were among the most lively items; also memorial minutes were read, celebrating the Spirit at work in the lives of Joan Robinson and of Hubert Mendenhall.

Back at the I3SzB, I divided the five remaining days in Nanaimo into the five sections I was once taught of medieval prayer: Confession (Where Am I, in all ways); Thanks; Praise (Stillness, Opening out); Intercession (Holding in the Light); Petition (Holding my own needs in the Light). The week lit up. Openings appeared in encounters planned and unplanned. Cathy gave me her memoir of her childhood up to age 13 to read, an enchanted childhood in Abernethy, Scotland, brought to an abrupt end by the war. Reading this was a pleasure, and we were able to do a little work on it as well, mainly around where to go from here in terms of finding an audience for her manuscript.

At another moment, there was a strong opening around this matter of membership (which seems to be on the minds of many Friends). I mentioned the idea that Earl Morris had given me, that, in addition to the basic belief in the indwelling Spirit which is the ONLY thing mentioned in Organization and Procedure (well, along with an affirmation that the Christian path is an identifiable, respected spiritual path), we Friends may give new attenders the sense that, before they can think of membership, they have to believe a whole list of political stuff. A Friend responded with a story we may need to hear: this Friend was working for a provincial government (NOT an NDP government!) and knew about Friends and wished to attend, but constraints on joining political groups

kept this person from attending until that job was finished. One could attend an Anglican group or a United Church etc., but Quakers were seen as a wing of the New Democratic Party! Others who heard this remembered moments from several different Meetings where announcements and even vocal ministry made that kind of assumption. Interesting. Anyway, we didn't lose this Friend, but it underlines again for me the importance of being more clear about how to offer our reconciling vision to the world without losing our own openness to many voices and beliefs.

Last night, Thursday, Joy and Bob came for dinner. Cathy put on a spread at the long table in her B&B dining room. Today Joy drove me to the bus terminal. We sat there a few minutes, summing up the week. I said that it felt that "perhaps" some openings among us had been of the Spirit. Suddenly Joy turned into the spiritual elder I have missed. "You can take out 'perhaps,' she instructed me. "We must stop dancing on the edges of our belief."

Journal 33 CALGARY MONTHLY MEETING March 4, 2005

I'm home now in Peterborough in the snow and ice, and will be here for two weeks. The visit to Ottawa, which was to be next week, has been postponed to *next year* in February.

A short time before I arrived in Calgary, the Meeting held a threshing session to address its sense of depleted energy. No one has felt led to take care of the nominating process, for example, and the Clerk also serves, with one other member, on Ministry and Counsel. The report from this threshing session was brought to Meeting for Worship for Business on Wednesday night for approval / action/ attention. Friends took time over a sentence saying that they feel it is right to let go of Meeting work which does not enrich them spiritually.

Sitting there as a visitor, I was struck by a sense of stillness in this group. There were long silences, a willingness to wait, it seemed to me, for Light. I had noticed the same thing at Meeting for Worship on Sunday, at least the part I was present for, before I went out with the children. My, these folks are quiet, I thought. If indeed I had happened upon Friends who were good at expectant listening, I needed it. Something was stirring and slowly breaking apart inside me—nothing dramatic, maybe nothing more than the sense that I have been travelling now for over a year, and shouldn't I be coming up with some summaries now, some major insights?

Among the things hitting me were some that were not Quaker-related, but the sort of things that everybody carries as we move in this world. A woman I know slightly in Victoria is going to court to be tried for the murder of her child; she has decided that the adversary system is irrelevant to her situation, and intends not to defend herself. Two illnesses in my family are on my mind and heart. Then funny and exciting things: I met a Japanese fellow on the bus who decided at age 5 to become a Buddhist monk, and at age 15 to move out from there to explore a larger world. Near us was a needy woman who talked to herself and stretched her feet across the aisle or, in my friend's case, up beside his head. Her foot kept shoving at me just as I would start to fall asleep, and at another moment it landed right in the middle of the journal I was scribbling on my lap. It would have been fun to be a fly or mosquito on the bus window, watching the Buddhist and the Quaker practicing peace. Also I was fussing about what I might find at home after my eight days in Calgary were over, since things were shifting there too. Two years is a long time to be mostly away, although I do realize that many people's jobs take them away for much more time than this small commitment I have made. Nevertheless, I arrived in Calgary feeling in need of spiritual nurture.

Kate Holden met me, and I stayed with Kate all week. Her partner Julie and their daughter Gabriele were in Ontario, visiting grandparents. Kate was missing them and working full time, and still had the sensitivity a few times in the week to give me a needed hug. I stood in their kitchen one of those first mornings, looking at the sky, mottled clouds underlit with pink and peach, feeling emotional and unsure what I believe. A friend this past January suggested that

perhaps in this travelling I am searching for Evidence of God. Well, maybe not that arrogant a search, but a little evidence from time to time doesn't hurt. Or really I mean not evidence as such, but experience. I look for that sense of centredness, of calm direction.

On Sunday I went out with two girls of about ten, and Kitty Dunn came out with us too. I showed the girls the postcards made by other Quaker kids, and they made bright ones to add to the pack, and started a new thing, a request for penpals. "I like gymnastics, skateboarding, pigs, play mobil, and am a vegetarian. If anyone has some of the same interests (preferably gymnastics and being a vegetarian) I would really like a penpal." "I love art and I like camping. I'm looking for a penpal. I would love a new friend." I have the idea that I'll send this development along to June Etta for Canadian Friend, but am not sure yet how to organize these penpal requests. I'll carry the cards with me as promised, but it may be that some other children would like to be in on this too. Something to bring up with Religious Education Committee, I guess.

After Meeting, I was wafted off for coffee and veggie sandwich with artist Francesca Walton and her partner Paul. We were getting acquainted, as Francesca has a large body of work that she both wanted and didn't want to show and talk about. On the one hand, it is her life; on the other hand, how to bring it out into the world? Especially so that it can really be seen, and might make a difference. Again I wonder whether a Friends' network might help. I forgot to even mention Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts to Francesca, and must email her with that information. The conundrum is similar to the writers of Friendly fiction who are unknown to our own community, never mind changing and challenging the whole world.

On Tuesday night I went out of town to Canmore to visit with longtime non-Quaker friends. Ruben Nelson is a futurist. The organization he has dreamed into being is called Alliance for Capitalizing on Change. Ruben and I know one another from our years in the Student Christian Movement at Queen's University. He is my only Conservative friend, and we have enjoyed arguing from time to time now for, gulp, 47 years. His wife Heather, a nurse, then as now, keeps the conversation grounded from time to time with a sigh or caustic comment. Heather looked through the photos from my travelling with apparent interest, asking questions, while Ruben moved little containers of marmalade and jam around on the restaurant table—this was at breakfast next day showing me the organization he is putting together, and how it all works, organically and sweetly. <http://www.capitalizingonchange.org/> We may be getting older, because we agreed more than ever before. As ever, I admire his ability to carry values I mostly agree with right over into the Alberta business community, and, like, to find that of God in the corporations. I don't think Friends are going to invite a Shell Oil executive to lead one of our Special Interest Groups any time soon, but if we are cutting out most of the world from our own conversations, how are we going to build those bridges? Do we want to? If I understood the gist of what my friend the futurist was saying, it was that humankind has reached the end of the possibility of one culture or another taking over. We have two choices now: learn to get along with one another with

"deep respect," or else more war, more killing and no one will be left out. We have to learn peace. It is like seeing the tsunami on the horizon, he said, and governments still thinking that they have lots of time to decide whether or not to set up a system of warning. Later that day I saw the photos that the BC couple took of that very thing: the line of tsunami far off across a placid ocean on a sunny day. People walking casually across the sand, soaking up the sun. Then the wave getting higher, until the last shot was a wall of angry brown water and foam. Their bodies have been found, and also this film. I was really disturbed by this, but also feeling as if in Calgary everything was coming together. I had made some wisecrack about the rightist Alberta mindset, and both Heather and Ruben shook their heads at me: "You don't understand." Alberta isn't set in its ways, they said—its oldest history is 100 years ago. Albertans are wide open to everything, and my friends find it an exciting place to live.

Thoughtfully, I went back to Kate's, viewed the pictures of the tsunami, and met for a couple of hours with a new attender who had made an appointment to discuss Quakerism, and incidentally the meaning of life. "It will come clear," I heard myself saying, giving her a confident hug. What made me so certain? It came again later in the week, again speaking with a younger Friend. "It will come clear." As if, after all, I am sure that there is a Spirit working in things, some sense to it all.

Kitty Dunn had taken on the job of ferrying me about, and on Thursday came to take us both over to Francesca's for a day of viewing her work—and even then we didn't begin to see it all. On the way, I told Kitty about Ruben's work, and she gave me several key words so that I could check into related work that interests her: Conversation Cafes, Living Room Collaboratory, The Evolutionary Salon, Co-intelligence, and the names Jean Robertson, Tom Atlee, and Jim Rough. Since I'm home now at my own computer, I just did some surfing and came up with the following intriguing sites:

<http://www.conversationcafe.org/>  
<http://www.livingroomcontext.org/index.cgi/Activity>  
<http://openspacecanada.org/osharrison.htm>

The more I read here, the more I see the principles of what Friends call worship-sharing or Claremont Dialogue, being carried boldly into communities and into attempts at true democracy.

"As a tool for collective intelligence, wisdom councils are most powerful when they are done periodically (e.g., for a week or two every year, each time with a different membership) as a function of ongoing community dialogue. Each wisdom council generates a quantum leap in shared insight which, when fed back into the community dialogue, raises the quality of subsequent collective reflection. Then, after a period of broad dialogue in which everyone's understanding matures further, another random handful of people are selected to do another wisdom council, thus generating another boost for the community wisdom, and so on. Thus, when established as a

political/governmental institution, Wisdom Councils are chartered to be held at regular intervals." From Tom Atlee's website,  
<http://www.corriminit.com/planningmodels/pmodels/planningmodels-110.html>

"One important thing I learned in the process was that *the objections we have to each others' ideas can be framed as concerns* -- to be acknowledged, understood, and placed in public view for all to consider. We can each learn to do this on our own, and I'm personally trying to do it more, myself. (e.g., "I am concerned that the World Trade Organization makes it harder for societies and communities to care for their own well-being and the well-being of their world.") We *can* monitor our own communication in this way. But, even more importantly, *facilitators* can help groups translate group conflicts into concerns. In Jim's workshop I experienced a novice facilitator instantly plucking up my objection at the first signs of argument, saying "So what is your concern here? Give it to *me*. Let's get it written up here.... Good. So, tell me what you think should be done, instead. Let's get that written up here, too.... So, now, who else has an idea for a solution to this...." With Jim's aptly named dynamic facilitation the facilitator keeps the group moving ahead with their creative imaginings of how they might approach (or even reframe) the situation they're working on -- until the most remarkable solutions begin to crop up and everyone in the group starts exclaiming, "Wow! Look at what we're coming up with!!!"  
<http://www.co-intelligence.org/P-wisdoincouncil.html>

Late that Thursday afternoon, Francesca looked me in the eye and said something like: "There must be a way to bring this out into the world in a way that will make a difference." And I said, "I don't know the way." And Francesca closed the book of photographs she had been showing me, this time intricate, time-consuming, beautiful and symbolic designs in beadwork, and said, "I thought you would know."

We remained friends, though.

Friday I spent the morning in Heidi Dick's class of pre-schoolers, watching boys and one girl find their way into cooperative play in the sandbox, and spending longer with a three-year-old who kept burying an action figure in playdough and spearing it with scissors and a blunt knife. "Will he be okay?" I asked. "NO!!" quoth he, stabbing and stabbing. I made playdough snakes and he chopped them into tiny pieces. Little girls were meanwhile organizing a game around us where I was the grandma and they were baking playdough cakes for my birthday. My young friend announced that his current lump of dough was now a house for skeletons. Then the skeletons began coming through the roof and then they morphed into birthday cake candles and the girls bore it off and put it into the play oven. Heidi called us for story time. We cleaned up, and then I got down with the other kids on the floor at Heidi's feet, and my young friend marched over and sat on my lap.

Heidi has been doing this work for 16 years here, and earlier was trained at a Friends' school in the States which was organized after World War II as a concrete action to help put an end to war.

In the afternoon I visited the other end of the life cycle, a dear poet friend from Victoria who is now in a Calgary seniors' facility and about to celebrate her 92<sup>n</sup><sup>d</sup> birthday. She did attend Meeting a few times in Victoria, but it didn't really stick. Her daughter made a teaparty for us, complete with a genuine silver teapot with a long curving spout.

In the evening the retreat began. Twenty people had signed up. We did Artist/ Mystic/ Activist—the storytelling, the writing and collage and the role-plays. We also had time for walks in the forest and worship-sharing and worship and conversations and a fast fun game of Dutch Blitz, a Mennonite card game. "It's a tradition," said Ebony, and it must be, because she's really, really good at it. I met Dana Bush, botanist, and saw some of her exquisite watercolours. Her book is *The Compact Guide to Wildflowers of the Rockies (Lone Pine)* ISBN 091943357-X, and Friends tell me the text is as lucid and vivid as the drawings. Through a volunteer environment group, Dana and other scientists train layfolk to recognize endangered plants. The laws in place in Alberta, she explained, are mainly intended to protect "the critters." She and her volunteer colleagues are raising awareness about plants. Bugs, too. She showed us a small copy of a large painting she has done of an insect, a lace bug I think it was. It looked like a fantasy creature, very beautiful and very frightening. In reality it is a tiny spider, out of sight normally, on the underside of leaves.

Dana raised the question of how we can justify using more of the planet's limited resources in the creation of non-essential things. She could see the use of knitted things and quilts, but questioned the frame, glass and matting it takes to preserve and hang one of her paintings.

Kitty said it was important to agonize over these questions, but not to assume it was right or wrong.

From down on the floor, where I was making a series of interconnected rings with three colours of playdough, I asked whether work like that lace bug is really "non-essential." And what is "essential"?

I also couldn't resist telling again about the Corder Catchpool quote in the blue Faith & Practice. It is the only piece in there that made me burst out laughing, back when I was a new Friend, and it made me think I might be getting into the right group. I won't quote it again, because it's in the journal from the visit to Saanich Peninsula Meeting, but it's about the impossibility of ever really knowing whether or not one is doing the will of God.

Francesca's life journey bead necklace was out on the table, with its red blood line flowing through and around eddies and obstacles. In worship on the Sunday, we heard of a river, that strong image of the life journey. I kept being distracted by the other image of the tsunami, and the fact that there on the

Alberta prairie we were on an ancient flood plain. I mean, buildings in the Kiwanis camp where we were are raised high in case of a "thousand-year flood." I am not going to make my decisions, however, out of fear.

Although Calgary's energies are in some ways at low ebb, in all I met nearly thirty members and attenders of this Meeting. People are busy, with little energy for maintaining the Meeting. For Meeting for Worship for Business we were only six. But two applications for membership are at hand, and there is that core of reassuring stillness, of willingness to wait on Spirit. I never know for sure what to make of my own responses, either dry times or full flood. On the first evening of the retreat, I felt an almost overwhelming intensity or presence in that room. That feeling carried with me through the weekend and onto the midnight bus on Sunday night. Fifty-six hours later, drowsing, I was actually surprised to discover familiar streets outside the bus window, and to find I was home.

#### Journal 34 SIMCOE-MUSKOKA MEETING and GREY BRUCE WORSHIP GROUP March 30/05

I returned to Simcoe-Muskoka for a few days, partly because last year's visit was a short one, and partly to take photos to help make up for the ones I lost last year. But mostly just to dip back in and see some Friends there before I went on to Grey Bruce for the Easter weekend.

In Simcoe-Muskoka, I stayed in the Meeting House, with resident Friends Allan and Jean. I saw the legendary drawing on the rafters in the attic of a man in a Quaker hat, the "sign" Friends found there as they were deciding to turn the old brick building into a Meeting House. The drawing is much larger than I had imagined, and much more definite. I can't really imagine what else it could be, other than a Quaker. The Meeting House is a delightful place to stay, with wood floors like butter under one's feet, and interesting notices posted, and for this visit the opportunity to get to know the two Friends who live there. Most other Friends were elsewhere, travelling or visiting for the holiday weekend, but Dorothy Burwell and Margaret Clare Ford were there, and took over care of the visit. I enjoyed the opportunity to finally have long conversations with Dorothy, and to continue Margaret's and my now decades-long dialogue, which we always just seem to pick up about where it left off. I always remember how I first met Margaret, at a Yearly Meeting gathering, where the late Pat Miles told me there was someone I just had to meet, that we had things in common. Thank you, Pat, wherever you are, for that introduction!

The visits with both Ottawa Meeting and Killaloe Worship Group have been postponed to February of next year (so there *is* going to *be* a next year!) and I made good use of the extra week and a half at home to catch my breath, see my daughter and other family, sing with the Grannies, attend the multi-faith potluck, rent out an apartment that was coming open, and arrange for a house manager to take over from my son, who is pursuing a new career in travel that has him right now in Fiji. And to wake up in my own bed and see the familiar angel poster, and the vigil poster, and my cat curled up beside me.

There was a last-minute flurry when the furnace stopped and the service man came and fixed it in nothing flat, and then there I was on the bus again. In the terminal in Toronto I ran into a friend from Peterborough who had missed a bus, and we took an hour to catch up. Then on my way to Orillia, a short doze and there we were, with Margaret Ford meeting me, in her grey cape and long grey "travelling skirt," and in the car, driving, was Dorothy, valiantly changing gears with both hands while explaining in her crisp nurse's clear prose that the medication she has to be on now steadily weakens the muscles. We wafted off to a restaurant and talked of many things. Dorothy startled me by asking both of us what we would say to George Bush if he asked us about how to keep out 'terrorists.' I managed to ask whether she thinks anyone benefits by making us all afraid of one another. We were immediately treated to a diagnosis of the current U.S. administration as paranoid. Dorothy's expertise is in psychiatric illness, and she knows the benefit of approaching paranoia by saying, "I look friendly, don't I?"

Thus began a couple of days of stimulating exchanges, keeping me on my toes and making me thoughtful at the same time. Dorothy had taken charge of my meals and



drove over to the Meeting House to join me on Thursday for lunch and for dinner. Margaret then joined us, bringing grandchildren Tasman and Philip, and Allan and Jean there too, in a sharing from spiritual journeys and substantive conversation about the Society of Friends. Philip is twelve, and had questions about the peace testimony and about why there is disease. I felt lucky that the First Day School has recently begun a forum for discussions, for Philip and any other children who prefer this to the other exciting option, the making of quilts. I should mention that twelve children are enjoying this very active program. I saw the quilts, and took photos of them, even though not able to meet the other children who are making them. Some quilts include drawings made with a fabric pen, and all reflect personal choices of colour and theme. One girl has included squares from a favourite dress she has outgrown. Both boys and girls are enjoying this project, which started from a story about the Underground Railroad, when escaping slaves could read messages in quilts that Quaker women hung over the porch railing, directing them north. Freedom quilts, they were called. Anyway, at Philip's request, there is now an option for discussing big questions, and Allan will pick up on the ones that we couldn't go on with much last Thursday night. I appreciated Grandma Margaret's first responses, though: about the peace testimony that there are no easy answers, and as for the presence in our lives of death and disease, well, the human condition is a mix of joy and of sorrow. The other Margaret, me, floundered a bit, saying, "These are very big questions. If we start into this, we won't do the sharing we were going to do." Everyone had chosen some items I have brought from my journey, and I wanted to hear what they had and why they had chosen it.

So we did that, but I still felt uncomfortable, and the next morning sat up in bed in the big, sunny guest room of the Meeting House, looking out over the fields around Orillia and writing notes about things I rather wished I had said, to questions raised by Philip and also by Dorothy, and also by Allan Millard. I felt as if we had just started to talk.

To my relief, we had an opportunity the last night to go on with it, when the Fords invited us all to dinner at their house, along with the children and their parents Sophie and another Alan. We talked about hope, and about whether children in particular require it, or whether they just take it in at their pores by having a clear role in the family and knowing they are needed. Some of us would have liked it if everyone around the table could have relaxed and agreed that we can tell children and ourselves that the intricacy of the universe must presuppose a Creator. However, not all were in unity, and some weren't Quakers either, and so the arguments pushed further and faster than usually happens in Friends. I ended up feeling really satisfied that we had all aired our views and had an opportunity to open things up and maybe shift, if it was time to. Dorothy remarked that she felt we had had a chance to "grow."

We had also had a chance to celebrate a small victory, as there is a serious environmental issue in Orillia about building a recreation centre on top of industrial land where there is evidence of some noxious chemicals that will come back to haunt the children and others who will use the centre. The coalition opposing the local city council on this includes both Allan Millard and Derek Ford, and that very day there had been letters from the Ministry of Natural Resources saying that the testing must be done correctly, and raising the same concerns as the coalition, using some of their own words. We raised a glass of whatever to the happy and healthful outcome of this difficult campaign.

On Saturday, Margaret and Derek Ford drove me the two hours to the farm home of Melody and Martin Donald. It was a bright day, and I rediscovered the charm of the countryside here as it falls in "steps" from the Niagara Escarpment. The Donald farmhouse is one of those beautiful square brick houses, with the lane (muddy right now with snowmelt) leading to a large, well-kept barn. I owned a barn once, with others, and know a bit about the upkeep required to keep them safe and maintained. Martin and Melody told me it is a "bank barn," an expression I hadn't heard but the structure is familiar. The lane leads up a slope to the main barn door, but on the other side one can enter through doors in the foundation, and under there are the mangers and stalls for the animals. We went out on Easter morning and I took photographs of the lambs and horses and peahens and chickens, of 11-year-old Ewan feeding the chickens, and 15-year-old Gabe giving scoops of feed to the sheep, including a hungry ram. Later I was shown the horse-drawn vehicle Martin has made, with tall red wheels, and took photos I hope will turn out of Melody and Martin up there on the upholstered seat. They both teach school for a living, and enjoy it too, but Martin's yen is to build these vehicles: "I don't know whether I am obsessed by the past or by the future." They have bought land near Owen Sound and the next dream is to build a straw bale house there and leave an even smaller ecological footprint. Melody and I talked about leadings, about how to tell.

Fifteen people met for worship in the Donald living room on Easter Sunday, including three boys. In the sharing afterwards, Melody said that she is not sure she makes anything, meaning, apparently, that she is not sure about her focus. In fact she is one of these people who spins and knits her own wool, cooks with ease and care (I stood by astonished as she kept up a flow of conversation while making quiches to serve three different dietary needs) and pours creativity also into making her household and into her teaching. I really enjoyed seeing the way she and Martin work together on the considerable tasks involved in running a small working farm while also teaching full time. I tried it once myself and never got past feeling a burden of anxiety. The farm and lambs and children reminded me strongly of the Little-Leering household in Wooler Meeting which I visited a year ago, with a similar lifestyle grounded in the needs of animals and growing children, and a similar realism about what can be accomplished by two adults who have fulltime jobs elsewhere.

Waking up in the bedroom of that farmhouse, in the room that is really their daughter Madrigal's, who is off at college learning the making of jewellery, I sat up and wrote about the view across the fields, snowy but striated by black earth emerging and brown sedge. Happy dog Buster trotted across the yard, and in the distance a black pick-up truck moved across the landscape. The horses stood hopefully at the fence. From there I couldn't see the old red sleigh which is pulled up on the grass near the house, quietly and artistically falling apart, revealing its curved bones. Martin teaches art and I think everyone in the family has done some drawing and painting. Gabe is also a long-distance bicycling enthusiast, and we had conversations about his possibly peddling to Quaker gatherings--we'll see! Anyway, I got a photo of Gabe doing wheelies on his bike.

The sharing after Meeting was about "what do you make?" and elicited some new and unexpected responses, along with touching statements about the spiritual significance of gardening, and about the creative experience of deep listening.

The Grey Bruce worship group is another rural group that is very far-flung. They usually meet now in Owen Sound, but no one in the Meeting actually lives in Owen Sound. "It is the hole in the middle," said one Friend. They drive for an hour or more from outlying villages and farmhouses. They meet twice a month and they meet in the afternoon. All these decisions about where and when to meet are still under discernment, with most of the people I spoke with feeling a need for more and better opportunities to build community. Some Friends are involved in Alternatives to Violence work, and one, Steve Houlgrave, is a lay chaplain in the prison system. Jerrine Verkaik and her husband Ed (Arjen) are committed to work with weather systems and in general the ecology. They are semi-famous as a couple who chase storms and have what is probably the most spectacular collection of photographs of tornadoes and other storms in the world. They are the authors of a definitive work on tornadoes, *Under the Whirlwind* (Whirlwind Books) ISBN 0-9681537-4-7. Several other Friends in this group are able to integrate much of their creative and spiritual energies with their paid work, through teaching or social work or other forms of community service. One young man said that he builds bridges, meaning bridges between a person and the next step they are longing to take. One man told a koan-like tale of walking in the forest and seeing a skunk run by, a skunk in motion. He is an observer, he observed. A woman social worker said, "My heart is wallpapered with people."

The area we were in was once the site of many Friends' Meetings. The foundations of Meeting Houses are sometimes known, including one at the edge of the Tank Range which blocks access to the nearby hills. "The sites of the St. Vincent Meeting have undergone major changes in this century. In 1942 the Department of National Defence took over 16,6000 acres of land in the northern part of St. Vincent Township for a Tank range, which serves today as a Militia Training and Support Centre." --Gerald White, *Journal, Canadian Friends Historical Association #49*, Summer '99. This particular history is just there: the burgeoning of Friends and then the closing down of the Meetings, and then the taking over of those sites by this military range. There was some talk about possibly putting a heritage plaque at the site of the Meeting House that is just outside the tank range. "Perhaps we should reclaim the sites!" But at least perhaps there will be a picnic, and some further efforts at community building, in a group that wants to meet but is finding distance to be a hindrance. In small groups during the following week, we talked about entering into Friends' process of discernment in order to sense leadings for their next steps.

We also talked about the idea of a Canadian Friends' school, and I was excited by a suggestion from Sandy Houlgrave that perhaps we could use the internet to support homeschooling programs by Quaker kids. We also heard a story of Inuit teens who are living with families in southern Ontario while they attend high school, and we wondered about that, too, as a possible Friends' project that might be coordinated with internet support. Anyway, a "blue skies" session that produced a few sparks and good ideas.

Jerrine Verkaik had left a pamphlet behind by mistake at the Donalds' farmhouse, *This is Who I Am: Listening with Older Friends*, Vol. 9 of *Eldership & Oversight Handbooks*. Quaker Books 2003. Friends House, Euston Rd., London NW1 2BJ I read it and brought it back with me when Melody drove me to the Verkais' on Easter Monday. I have been enjoying conversations with terrine, and also a stream of Friendly visitors, first Melody and son Ewan who brought me here, then today Steve and Sandy Houlgrave, returning the DVD of *Scared Sacred* which they viewed at home, and this afternoon Sheila Davenport, who came for lunch and also to see the remarkable quilt Jerrine has, made by her great-grandmother.

terrine is reading and thinking about this topic of spirituality and ageing, and adding that concern to her lifetime of environmental awareness (and much else, but she is trying to pare it down!) She and Ed have built a large house which they intend as a place for respite and sojourning. When they are not off chasing storms, they actively hope that Friends and others will use the space (which can sleep 16 people) for personal and group retreats. It's on top of a hill, and the view is wonderful, even now in the March sere. I'm sleeping in a little bright yellow room tucked in under one end of the deck, and each morning I sleep a little longer.

Tomorrow terrine will drive me first to Guelph, to meet her grandson, and then to Burlington, to begin the visit to Hamilton Monthly Meeting. We will start with a retreat, but I personally have already begun.

## Journal 35 HAMILTON MONTHLY MEETING April 12, 2005

The visit to Hamilton Meeting began with a retreat, and perhaps because of that went deep, with substantive conversations, and the opportunity to see some people several times, and to revisit some questions, too, from a number of different angles. I stayed the first few days with Mona Callin, and mid-week moved over to the home of Dick and Betty Preston. The retreat was visited by a late-spring blizzard, and so I now have photos of Friends playing volleyball in the snow. By the end of the week, I was hiking with Dick and Betty in the Royal Botanical Gardens, and have photos of magical moments with chickadees landing in both my hands (the secret is birdseed; how could I have lived this long without knowing that chickadees will do this?) Questions are life's punctuation, one Hamilton Friend remarked--not a bad idea for Friends, who prefer Queries to a Creed.

Queries and questions we have had this week, and I want to list some of them. Most of these were raised at the retreat, pursued further over tea at the home of Bev and Robbie Shepherd, given another aspect when Friends gathered one evening at the Prestons to view "Scared Sacred," and again over potluck and at Meeting for Worship for Business. Not to mention ad hoc lovely conversations in between.

This particular journal is taking a different shape, as I feel like listing the questions that I can remember, and then just finishing with a few quotations from various sources.

### Questions:

- If we acknowledge and encourage everyone's deep passions, won't Meeting just end up with 40 passions?
- How can we open our Meetings to people's deep leadings/ passions/ Concerns, and also keep on being a loving community?
- How can we keep one person's strong passion(s) from taking over the whole Meeting, when others do not necessarily (yet) share this passion/ leading/ Concern? And, the corollary of that one:
- How can we bring a deep concern to the Meeting, keeping right ordering, yet also responding faithfully to the insistent nudge of the Spirit?
- How do we discern whether a nudge is a leading?

"Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life." (Query #1)

This isn't the first time that these questions have been asked. For many Meetings across the country, these questions reflect their concerns. From the little red book of Advices and Questions I also note these: "How can we make the meeting a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and strangers are welcome?" (from #18)

- "As we wait patiently for divine guidance our experience is that the right way will open and we shall be led into unity." (from #14)

There is an assumption behind these queries and advices that spiritual nurture and social action are part of one and the same process. We can accept and affirm diverse

individual journeys and, at least with patient waiting we will be led as a community into unity.

More questions:

- Is there interest in Friends in science? In approaching spiritual matters through science? People seem to think that because this is important to me that I must be some kind of technocrat.
- How is it that we look for "way to open" and yet we also admire folks who "persevere and overcome obstacles?" Are we meant to wait or to push?
- How can the Spirit flow in and crack us open and make new things happen, if we leave large chunks of ourselves at the Meeting House door?

Quote from pamphlet for the Bridge House Program in Hamilton ("Promoting Restorative Justice"): "The Bridge treats each person with respect and dignity, accepting them where they are on their journey to wholeness... .."and enable[si] them to become contributing members of society."

Posted on the back of Mona Callin's desk:

"The silence of a religious and spiritual worship is... a fervent praying to, or praising the Invisible Omnipresent God, in his Light and Love; his Light gives wisdom and knowledge, and his Love gives power and strength to run the ways of his commandments with delight." --John Bellers

At the retreat, Friends brought in objects of nature, shaking off the snow and placing them on the coffee table. Pine cones, the delicate spray left in winter by wild carrot, which I think is the same thing as Queen Anne's Lace, grasses, stones, and one clump of burrs. I suggested that Friends spend about half an hour with one of these objects, and then mix and mingle as they wished in the hour before lunch. Instead, to my slight dismay, a hubbub of voices rose as Friends went for tea and a cookie. I sat in a corner with the clump of burrs, wondering how this was going to work out. I was writing a piece about Friends as a clump of burrs--how prickly we can be, and yet how somehow the prickles unite us too, and then the Seed! Ah, the burr seeds spilled everywhere, full of their own life and intention, and without much attention to whether the clump of burrs was pulling together or falling apart. I became aware of a deep silence in the room. I looked over my shoulder and Friends were all still there, gazing at the twig or stone in their hand, sipping tea. They took a long, long time, these Hamilton Friends, much longer than I had expected they might. Later, when we shared from the day's work, one man remarked, "I was amazed at how much I saw in that little thing," and a woman who recently lost her sight said of the spray of Queen Anne's lace, "If this can survive the long cold winter, so can I."

I am going to have to get off this library computer, and perhaps I can bring this to an end. It was a good week.

At one point, Harriet Woodside asked for a list of Quaker artists, and we began compiling one. Alfred Muma in Powell River emailed me about his retrospective show: 30 Years of PAINT (yes, that lower-case 't' is intended to be there) and I told him about Harriet's request. Alfred got back to me at once, wanting to get going on helping with such a list. He'd like to expand it to other forms of art as well. Others also are speaking

of developing some form of Canadian branch of Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts, and perhaps this could be a first step.

Other quotes:

"To forget the self is to become 10,000 things"

About forgiveness: "We have to let go of the right to a more perfect past." "Take away the occasion for prisons."

A recent publication: A Community of Friends: the Quakers at Borden, by Elizabeth Ward, Hagios Press, \$14.95 pb, 98 pp, ISBN 0-973556-70-6

Journal 36 TORONTO MONTHLY MEETING April 22, 2005

I visited Toronto Monthly Meeting last week. This journal is posted late because I went on immediately to St. Laurence Regional Gathering outside Ottawa (which happens to include my own Meeting) and then home and to picking up the threads from having been three weeks away.

I've often visited Toronto Meetinghouse, and stayed there in their third-floor bedrooms. This time I wanted to visit the Meeting itself. Now I'm not certain that there is a difference. When you go into the stately, quiet rooms of the Meetinghouse, there is a feeling of peace and of friendliness. Usually someone you know comes around a corner, often someone from another part of the country. But Friends from Toronto hang out there too, either in volunteer service to various committees, or else in the paid positions that maintain the place. Canadian Friends Service Committee has an office just inside the door, and from the Refugee office one hears voices speaking Spanish. The large, quiet library is filled with books on Quakerism and spiritual journey. In the kitchen Christine Chattin is perched on a stool, checking out details about food supplies. Teresa, who is Spanish-speaking, greets me because we have met before, and gets on with her competent cleaning and maintenance that she is there for. Orion is making tea. Keith Maddock is in the office, noting things to do with guests, and Judith rushes about, smiling and taking care of all kinds of things. At one moment of fatigue --oh, it was Saturday evening, when I trailed after Harvey Braun as he went over to the Meetinghouse to make the simple soup for after Meeting the next day--I lay down on the couch in the reception room and closed my eyes, and Judith came by and dimmed the lights. Nice moment.

So... lots going on at the Meetinghouse, some of it pertaining directly to the Meeting, but perhaps, as I say, this activity *is* much of the heart of the Meeting. People do actually meet there, and caring conversations take place, often by seeming happenstance, as people drop by to take care of something else. Toronto is the epicentre in most ways of Canadian Yearly Meeting. Sit on that couch long enough and everybody comes through, along with much of the rest of the world too. Committee meetings are often held there. People like me stay there when in town on other business as well as that of Friends. A Couples weekend was going on, with Tony and Fran McQuail--or at least I saw Tony in the kitchen, and I suppose Fran was there too. Friendly couples from various different Ontario Meetings drifted by.

Outside the Meetinghouse, it felt difficult to find the Meeting. I may be wrong about this, but it feels as if in the great metropolitan centre Friends mostly meet by appointment, because an event has been announced.

The Meeting room itself is beloved to many of us, curving as it does in face of a wall of window that looks out into a garden. That room can also serve a little too easily as a sort of amphitheatre, and it is hard to rise in the grip of vocal ministry without feeling a sense of performance. I have heard touching and deep ministry there, and so I know that Friends get past the size of the space and into a sense of



mutual connection. But some suggested to me that it works best when Friends get to know and trust one another elsewhere, outside of Meeting for Worship, away from the gathering of people which always includes visitors such as I have been and was last week. I remember in Victoria how our numbers swelled every summer with visitors, but in winter we were back to being just ourselves. In Toronto there are always visitors.

In conversations in and out of the Meetinghouse, I became aware last week that the three strands of Quakerism which joined, really so recently in 1954, are easier to discern in Toronto Meeting than elsewhere. I recall now that people have repeatedly told me about Toronto Friend Alma Starr, who was still living at the point when I came into Friends 22 years ago, and who wore the bonnet and used "thee" and "thou." What this history can produce in a modern-day Meeting is a situation where an issue such as same-sex marriage or... well... there must be another one... can go on and on in the pockets of Friends who live in various parts of the metropolitan area and may not meet one another in the ways and circumstances that happen in smaller Meetings.

One gift in this may be a greater clarity about our process *after* we have collectively come to unity, *after* a minute has been written and approved. Even after the first same-sex union has been taken joyfully under the Meeting's care, the conversation very much continues, and this feels right. What *is* Unity anyway.... To what extent is it an experience of divinity, maybe spelled with a capital 'U'? Do we truly believe that underlying the ephemera of human existence lies a bedrock of Truth, and that in the silence (and over time) we can come to it, with a sense of clear direction, that this is the will of God, or at least feels Spirit-led? We believe in continuing revelation. Does it continue right away, though, or is there a hiatus? Can we revisit that Light before we have, as the courts say, new evidence?

Conversations about unity are not unique to Toronto Friends. They were part of the questions we discussed in Hamilton the week before last, although there the particular issue of same-sex marriage did seem fully come to unity. I heard a minute approved without a murmur, to the effect that when a couple approaches the Meeting for clearness for marriage, the request will be treated with respect, and the process will be the same for same-gender and opposite-gender couples. "What's not to approve?" asked one Hamilton Friend. "Respect?"

When a Meeting struggles with lack of unity, at times deep ministry comes out of it. Harvey Braun let me see a meditation he has written, and I am hoping he will send it along to Canadian Friend. In his final paragraph he states: "When we have worshipped well in Business Meeting, we really feel a mysterious transcending of differences. We have been able to listen deeply, question conventional authority, have become counter-cultural. We have felt called to move from outwardly believing 'sacred and secular creeds' to inwardly knowing the divine, the ground of our being, our ultimate concern. We have become less absorbed with our intellectual positions, have let go of some hurts and fears. And we have become mindful of how important it is to do our spiritual-listening homework before and after Meeting for Worship for Business. Perhaps it is only

then that we can confidently 'own' a recorded minute and truly know there is but one Light and one Truth."

Like most Friends most of the time, I personally know that in my conviction about the rightness of same-sex marriage, it is possible that I may be mistaken. In particular, I may have mistaken a true spiritual opening for a (simple) matter of civil rights.

Harvey is also the Toronto Friend who put that possibility before me. He wants to know why it is that Friends are involved at all in "the legalization of relationships." I am thinking about it. We don't feel the need to have a legal say about adoptions, for instance. Somewhere in the past, though, we did feel it was important to be able to sign the legal papers for a marriage. I personally see nothing *wrong* with this, but is there anything compellingly *right*?

Harvey points out that we could be celebrating a lot more than we do, if we opened our celebrations to, for instance, long-term spiritual friendships. Casting back to Hamilton again, I note that they had a lovely party (I hear) a few months ago, to celebrate Hannah Newcombe's long years (ongoing) of working for peace. I can unite, for sure, with the idea of more Quaker parties, celebrations of the grace of the Spirit in the lives of those still living and not only the dead.

The reason I'm quoting Harvey so much is because Toronto Monthly Meeting billeted me with him and his son, and our conversation was fairly non-stop there for five days. We were not in Unity about every last thing, but we had Respect, and that stirred up Thoughts.

In the more formal events planned by the Meeting, I attended the first bit of Meeting for Worship, and left with a large group of children, parents and other adults. We sat in a circle, introduced ourselves, and children chose among interviewing Lyn Adamson (released Friend in peace witness) or Rosemary Meir (Meeting Co-Clerk), or making postcards with me for taking to other Quaker kids across the land. An enthusiastic sub-group then dug into the art supplies and drew colourful and inspiring images of a peaceful globe, a peace sign, ranges of mountains and sky, and messages: "With no love, peace will not prosper. With no peace, love will not prosper. The two are interconnected. Just like I am with YOU!" from Stephen, 12. On the backs of the cards they introduced themselves: "I live in Toronto. I like to Irish Dance. P.S. Oh yah, I love to be happy!" "I am going to moove when I moove I am going to get two other pets a bird and a dog." "I am 7 I like to draw!" "I live in Toronto. My house is in a Greek community." "I love qintag [?], soccer, and all kinds of sports. My favourite food is butter chicken. (an Indian food.)"

After the simple soup (proceeds to a project in Jamaica) about fifteen Friends gathered to share around "What do you make?" The Irish dancers danced. Dutch Jon Karsemeyer confessed an emotional response to bagpipes and shared a poem called "Searing Heaven." I was going to put it in here, but I just remembered that Jon told me he wants to send a revised version, and so I'll wait.

On Monday I went for tea with Isabel and Frank Showier. "How are you?" I stupidly asked Isabel as I arrived. "I'm as you see. There are still two things I can do voluntarily: speak and swallow." She chooses to keep doing both. I nearly forgot Isabel's diminishment shortly after that, as she excitedly showed me the novella she is completing, saying that the members of her care committee have been invaluable in urging her on and giving practical assistance. She tried to retrieve a copy of a recent poem, "Refugee Lament," for my collection, but her computer wouldn't cooperate. She said it was on Hamilton Meeting website, and sure enough it is:

Lament of a Refugee: A Poem by Isabel Showier

I am eighty years old.  
I used to be a Canadian.  
I belonged to a country where human life and  
human dignity were respected.  
We did not send people to be tortured or killed in  
a far country.  
We do now.

I used to be a Canadian.  
I lived in a country of clear lakes and streams, Of  
fresh, clean air,  
Of waving fields, of healthful grain.  
Now our waters are dirtied, our air is polluted. And  
they won't tell us what they do to our grain!

I used to be a Canadian.  
I lived in a country that promoted peace.  
We sent our people all over the world.  
To help people live in peace. Not any more!  
Now our neighbour says, "I think I'll do a little bombing."  
And we say, "Me too! Me too!"  
"I want to play with the big boys!  
I want the big boys' toys!"

I used to be a Canadian!  
What am I now?  
My country has disappeared from beneath my feet. I am  
a refugee from the "war on terrorism."

This poem has legs; it has already been read on the CBC and published several places, including here. Over tea, I brought out the file of poems gathered so far, towards a possible new anthology of poems from Canadian Friends. On top was a Raging Granny song by Catherine Verrall of Regina Allowed Meeting, to the tune of "Somewhere Over the Rainbow." Isabel gestured for me to flip it down the table to Frank for a rendition. I sat back and enjoyed the moment as Frank sang, in a firm clear baritone:

## Rainbow Song

In our land there's a rainbow  
 People all  
 Colours lighter and darker Gay,  
 Straight, short and tall Muslim,  
 Jew and Christian Buddhist,  
 Christian, Baha'i First Peoples  
 and Newcomers Rainbows in our  
 sky.

It matters not how families form For  
 love is love and that's the norm Faith's  
 leading  
 It matters not what words we say  
 Creator, Allah, God  
 Life's Spirit heading

In our land there's a rainbow  
 No room for strife  
 Each one respected and valued  
 Each a Gift of Life

After our tea, I made my way by subway to the Meetinghouse and connected with Jane Orion Smith, who had been working through most of the weekend in the CFSC office, opening time for a trip to visit her partner, Janet. Orion and I go back some, as we met quite a few years ago in Victoria Meeting. We went out for dinner and enjoyed catching up. That very morning the interchurch group, KAIROS, on which Orion is a Quaker representative, had issued a multi-faith statement across the country, getting the word out that not all members of all faith communities refuse to marry same-sex couples. The statement is at [www.religious-coalition.org](http://www.religious-coalition.org) where there is also a petition to sign and other information.

Two quiet days followed, with good conversations with Harvey, and a walk to the local library to get down my email and post the Hamilton journal. On Wednesday evening, it was back to the throbbing hub of Toronto Meetinghouse for mid-week worship, potluck and a sharing session around "What are Friends?" with photos and material from my travels. We were 13 or so around that oval dining table, and the stories told came from South Africa and Uganda and Thailand as well as Toronto and Owen Sound. As the stories unfolded, it seemed to me that we held there, a moment, in microcosm, the living entity which is the Society of Friends. Joys and sorrows, risk and reconciliation, spiritual openings and laughter, frustration, hope, prayer.

Thursday I was driven in one of those little Smart Cars by long-legged Jon Karsemeyer through the late afternoon traffic to the door of Kathleen Hertzberg. There I was at last in Pickering, Ontario, in the house designed by Lionel Sharp, a

Friend whom I'd met last year in Fergus. Jon stayed for tea and then sped back to attend Spiritual Companions, a worship-sharing initiative I am hoping to take back to my own Meeting.

David MacKay came to dinner and we compared notes a little from his own travelling among Friends. I also met Mary Anne, whose daughter Megan I'd met in the postcard group, and Ellen, committed Friend whose husband is an Anglican bishop. Our very lively conversation included some interdenominational news bits, talk about the welcoming of children, decision-making in Friends, and prickly matters of Unity, Quaker Faith, and Meeting. Kathleen sat at the head of the table and kept stirring it all up, speaking her truth.

Later she and I spent too short a time over her enormous project, translating her late husband Fritz' diaries from his war years as a prisoner of war under the Nazis.

From Kathleen's I travelled to Ottawa and the gathering. This journal is long enough and so I will just say that it was moving to be with f/Friends I have known a long time, including from Ottawa Meeting, where I came into this Society when we all were younger.

And the question of what it means to come to unity did come up again, so I guess it's big.

*"Prayer may be lived out in our longings. Patrica McKernon, who has shared her music at Friends General Conference Gatherings, writes in one of her songs, 'Your longing is your surest love of me.' Bill Taber, a teacher from Ohio Yearly Meeting, says that yearning (what we today might call longing for wholeness) was the underpinning of early Quaker seeking."*

--from "Quaker Spiritual Disciplines for Hard Times," Patricia McBee, Friends Journal, August 2003.

Journal 37 THOUSAND ISLANDS MONTHLY MEETING, Kingston, Ontario May 6, 2005

I started this in the Ottawa bus terminal, on my birthday, travelling from Kingston to Fredericton, and finished it at the computer terminal in the basement of Fredericton Friends:

When I applied for membership 22 years ago, I wrote "I think I am still carrying a short sword." I was referring to the story of George Fox's reply to William Penn, about Penn's sword: "Wear it as long as thou canst." I was also admitting that I might hit back if I felt attacked, physically or otherwise, and also the primal human reaction: if you attack my loved ones, I may have to kill you.

I was accepted into membership, and soon after, a Friend brought me a book from the Meeting library, a collection of real-life stories about times when non-violent responses really did defuse dangerous situations. Instead of one person killed or a massacre, no one died. I learned a calculation I had not thought about before: if every human life is sacred, the fewer who die violently, the better, even if one of the dead is me. But really I came to a deep commitment not to kill, ever, because this commitment releases a broad range of creative responses that I would likely never think of if I were carrying a gun.

But the fact is that, like most, but not all, Quakers, I have never carried a gun. I wouldn't know how to "use" one. Yet when a fight broke out at the corner of our street when I was home recently, with one fellow posturing at another with a tire iron, I dialed 911. Without an instant's hesitation I called in the guys and women who carry guns. My thought was that they could help see to it that no one got hurt. And there is no authority that I could have called who could have arrived and taken care of it and who are not armed with guns.

"A religion unwilling to take risks shuts out what is creative. Preoccupation with moral integrity is likely to assume that life can be tidied up: that is its goal. In fact, it is because life is essentially untidy that it can be creative."--Kenneth Barnes, 1983

My week with Thousand Islands Monthly Meetings in Kingston reminded me that life is not tidy, and I feel challenged in my understanding of moral integrity. I got to know a man who, in 16 years as a career soldier, has never had to kill. His duties have included work which is so parallel to the work that Friends support in developing countries and would be proud to support here in this country, that I am newly conscious of that tiny wedge of difference: he carries a gun. Much more tested in this than I have ever been, he has not killed. But he is willing to kill, within parameters, if it is necessary, if it is reasonable within the careful loyalties and commitments of his training.

"Do you firmly believe that Canada requires an armed military?" "Yes, without any question."

But the work he speaks of doing in the military is about keeping the telephones going in Winnipeg during that flood, and of the ice storm black-out, and of re-establishing communications in Rwanda after the civil war massacre, and then helping to move refugees

back to their homes. He tells of delivering a truckload of toys to orphans in Rwanda. "The countryside was still very dangerous. I would not have wanted to be doing that job without a gun."

I learn that there are UN Military Observers who do important work in negotiations and peacemaking, and who do *not* carry guns. Wish I had some of *them* to call in to handle Peterborough street fights.

And then I find out that two of the Friends in Kingston work as prison guards. One invites me over for an evening's conversation. She worked with Mother Teresa in India, who said, "Work with the poorest of the poor. Go home to your own country and look around you. You will find them." The work, she explains, is satisfying. She feels she is making a difference to the lives of inmates through a simple showing of respect.

What are the compromises? I ask. Well, at times you have to carry a gun. You have to swear an oath to use it, if necessary. You have to co-operate with a system that takes people who have had the hardest lives, thrusts them close together in small cells and expects the experience to rehabilitate them. This is the price of admission to work with the poorest of the poor. I count it off in my mind: testimony of integrity (affirm, do not swear, and at all times speak the truth), testimony of peace (there is that of the divine in each human being, and to kill is a sacrilege that contravenes that divinity.) But, like the soldier, she has not killed, and neither has her husband who also does this work. Like soldiers, their own lives are often at risk. Their sense of calling to this work feels strong, and courageous. Are Friends never to participate, then, in the police I sometimes have called, in flood and fire cleanups, in work inside the prison systems? Chaplains can work inside with fewer compromises. But also the role, and the calling, is different.

I think about the Quaker government of Pennsylvania who decided that Friends could no longer govern because a state requires an army. I think about Friends and others who hid Jews and others from the Nazis, and where necessary lied about it to the authorities. I remember the story written by a young Friend in Lucknow Worship Group, based on facts from family history. A woman hides her husband when she knows that soldiers are coming to recruit him for the German army. Her children help her dig a hole under the house, and by mistake they leave a pile of dirt in full sight outside the front door. But apparently the soldiers do not notice this evidence of recent digging. The wife finds a way to almost tell the truth:

*'He's not here now,' Mrs. Duimering said calmly. Emily swallowed. The soldiers frowned. 'Would you like some tea?' Mrs. Duimering quickly asked. 'Fine,' the soldiers muttered. She got the tea ready. She set it on the table. Under the floor, Mr. Duimering heard the teapot clunk on the table. He held his breath. It seemed that the soldiers did too.*

In this story, the Nazi soldiers seem to know that Mr. Duimering is somewhere around. As they leave, they say, "You can keep your husband."

These subtleties came home to me forcibly this week as I was billeted on the military base (thus doubling the Quaker presence on the base) with a Friend and her soldier partner. And their five-month-old son, who lit up my week with his smiles. A child led me down to the

marina and around to two playgrounds with climbing sets, swings, and monkey bars. I visited the on-site convenience centre and got used to lots of pleasant young mothers with toddlers, and guys in camouflage outfits. I didn't see any guns. I looked at the photographs from the tour in Rwanda, and drew in my breath at misty views of African hills and plains. I was surprised at how much common ground we shared, and at the new distinctness with which I saw that one refusal most of us make, to be willing if necessary to kill.

For the first time, I heard the story of Friends who became members in the past while still in the military. "Wear it as long as thou canst," I murmured, and the elderly Friend telling me the story from her own life nodded: "We heard a lot of that."

Kate Johnson, who works in the prisons as a volunteer and is studying to be a prison chaplain, told me that there is a retired colonel in one of her classes. "Most soldiers do not go into war as pacifists," he told her, "but many emerge as pacifists after a war." Including some of our Quaker community, who have been tested and have discovered for themselves that for them killing is impossible, and wrong.

....So what else happened in Kingston, besides poking and probing at the outer extremities of the peace testimony, and the testimony of integrity? Lots and lots of that other thing we're good at, the loving community.

On Sunday, the children again made postcards, and I have to say that this is taking off, each postcard a little gem. I want to invite the children--and now teens are taking an interest as well--who didn't get a chance to make one to do so, and to ask people in your Meeting how to get them to me. If you want to ask for a penpal, put that in the message on the back. One idea is that First Day Schools in different groups could send postcards to the children of another group that has a similar range of ages, and exchange info. This could be done through the group's contact person, and that way we avoid concerns about names and addresses that could potentially be misused. In Fredericton, Lucy discovered a postcard from another Lucy, and shared interests in gymnastics and Playmobil. At Thousand Islands Meeting, Yates, who is 3, marked bright colours on a scrap of card and instructed the helping adult to write: "I like to paint. I like to play with toys."

Then we had finger food and then everyone shared around what they make. Later in the week we had two other gatherings, one with midweek worship and one evening an intense discussion. In between were opportunities for a few one-on-ones. Mathematics education came up in discussion with Kate Mackrell, and I mentioned I had had tea with Zoltan Dienes (father of Bruce) who was world-renowned for his work in the teaching of mathematics. Kate affirmed to me that Zoltan is deeply respected for his work, and told me about a conference in Wolfville where he spoke, and she couldn't get in because the auditorium was full. Kate also plugged in her laptop and showed me fractals, and talked with me about their beauty, and what is going on with this connection between aesthetics and mathematics.

On the last day, my birthday, Kate Johnson and partner took me out for a celebratory lunch, and on our way back to the car, a figure was spotted down the street: white beard, red shirt, yellow pendant. That would be Bert Horwood, current Clerk. Bert was coming from the weekly peace vigil. We hugged and when Bert heard it was my birthday, he put an arm around my shoulders and began a story: "On May 6, 1932, Mrs. [Something] Horwood gave



birth in [a certain place] to a baby boy, and named him Bert." We all took a moment and then realized that it was Bert's birthday too! He has seven years on me. I must say that this coincidence made my day, and helped hold off the little tsunami of loneliness, traveling through the night in a direction away from my family, although towards some Friends I really did want to see.

It turns out that Macmillan of Canada published a book of haiku by Bert in 1973, called *Trees*. Following are some quite lovely and moving arctic haiku by this poet, which have not until now been published, and which seem to me to be a fitting summary or something of the happy and the challenging experiences of this past week:

*NANO OK RIVER HAIKU*

*Chilling north wind blows  
crystal song on rocky  
ridge horned lark  
whistles too.*

*Chalky white clam shell  
high and dry on tundra  
slope was this a sea bed?*

*Lemming jaw sticks out  
hair and ribs in owl  
pellets fertile green  
cone.*

*Drab barren tundra  
dotted with blowing  
flowers sky-lined muskox,  
Life.*

*The cold wind blows strong  
sweeps my flapping page  
away firm on rocks, lichen*

*Heavy pack hangs  
down I bow beneath  
hard edges grazing  
muskox watch.*

*Groaning long  
portage sweating I  
see at my feet  
camomile daisies*

*The heavy burden  
bends me low to better  
see the cheerful daisy*

*question mark bird  
flutters, flaps and sadly  
cries who ate plover eggs?*

*Raw northern gale blows  
flying tern drifts, floats and  
dives I shiver and shake.*

Journal 38 FREDERICTON WORSHIP GROUP May 17, 2005

Last week I returned to Fredericton, and for the third time curled up in the spare bed in the home of Vince Zelazny and Martha McClure. The first time was in 1994, when they took me in after the yearly meeting gathering. My book of stories had just come out and I had a few days to put in between readings and workshops. Martha and their two little girls, Vivian and Sandy, and I sat on the grass in a downtown park and enjoyed the antics of the Calathumpians, a theatre troupe presenting history in broad farce.

Next time was last summer, when we were all relaxing after the intensity of Yearly Meeting. Vivian was now the coordinator of the Calathumpians and an experienced actor in that group and others, and getting ready to leave home. During that week, she pressed me into knitting a square for the afghan she was making for her bed in her first apartment on her own. I was terrified, having had an unfortunate knitting experience in grade 4, but with lots of McClure and Zelazny encouragement, I finished it. It was more like a rectangle than a square, but everybody told me it was beautiful.

This visit, Vivian was ensconced in her apartment downtown, with roommate Chloe, daughter of the Kennedys, Friends from Nova Scotia, and was coming home only for visits. Sandy was now the center of the drama, at that very moment choosing among universities and scholarships, and opting for the music program at the University of Prince Edward Island. I watched from the sidelines in awe as Sandy registered on line, the paperwork went into the mail, and she flitted about in her schedule of school, piano practice and lessons, work at an inn (as a server, I think) and as a clown, making balloon animals.

The visit began at a choral music concert, with both Sandy and Vivian glamorous in long gowns, and singing in an ensemble called VocalEase. A very pleasant evening of music it was, too, and included a piece called "Flight of Birds" composed by Friend Michael Miller. At intermission, Michael and Edith came over to chat, and Chloe was there too so I met her nice boyfriend, and it all felt like a lovely Quaker beginning to the week.

It went on much like that, with real but pleasant experiences. There was a sense of discipline behind the easy laidback flow of the complicated schedules of the Zelazny and Miller households and of the Fredericton Worship Group.

The sun came out warmly and a big laundry went out on the long clothesline, including my small much-worn wardrobe, and I had the pleasure of standing on the porch and reeling it all in, while Martha was off doing an afternoon of supply teaching. I vaguely recall Martha's worrying, eleven years ago, about what she could do with her biology degree. Now she has a comfortable, flexible pattern of tutoring and supply teaching in math and sciences, along with contract work in the field in biology. While I was there this time, a six-month contract came in for work on aphids.

Vince is a forester, winner of a prestigious prize from the forestry association last year for his work in the preserving of crown land from development. I had heard a story

about this work from the Fundy Baykeeper last year, and Vince filled me in on the details. The screensaver photo on their computer is a rock wall with very beautiful pale green lichen, and beside it a small bush with yellow flowers like buttercups. This photo comes from the set taken one day last year which Vince spent out of his office, checking out a report from the Baykeeper, a semi-volunteer who works with the Conservation Council of New Brunswick. A biologist and Vince spent part of a day tramping around on the crown land in question, with a wild shoreline of layered rocks and tufts of plants. Sure enough, over a steep ridge and near the water, there was an anticosti aster, not only endangered but *scarce*. It is a white, daisy-like flower with a long stem, rising from between the shoreline rocks. It would have been gone, perhaps forever, if the development had followed the pattern of one nearby, where concrete foundations rear at the very edge of the water, with nothing at all left of the shore. Balconies and decks jut out above, for people to enjoy the view. That's progress, but not for the anticosti aster. I know that workers in the environmental field become discouraged at the destruction of so much that is irreplaceable. But I am still delighted to know that we have made laws anywhere at all that will let that fragile windblown thread of a stem stand in the way of the blade of bulldozers.

I saw other ravages, this time more pure nature, as Fredericton had had a flood the preceding week, and Vivian and Martha and I picked our way along a walking trail that had washed out in places to the underlying railroad bed, and in some places had even undercut those old beams and ties, where the water had rushed through.

Another concert was planned for the following weekend, just after I would be gone, and in the evenings Vince put on CDs of some of the swelling choral pieces he would be singing with the community choir he also right now helps as coordinator. Another concert the same night, which included two sons--Andrew and Nate-- of Michael and Edith Miller, was making both groups nervous about ticket sales and attendance. Music was just a background reality to much of the conversation and running around during the week I was there. "Hear that?" said Vince, beating the rhythm with his hand. "It's a 7- beat bar." In spite of my colossal ignorance about music, I could hear it, and could enjoy the effect.

On Sunday we met for Meeting for Worship in a Friendly home. One out-of-towner arrived a tad early and was greeted by the 5-year-old son of the house. "My mom is in bed and my dad is nekkit," he announced. Knowing she must have the right house, she came on in. (Dad was in the shower.) By the time I got there, everybody was up and dressed and I commandeered the breakfast table and put out my photos and other papers from my travels, as well as the postcards that children have been making. We were experimenting with their very first intergenerational meeting. I think people were generally happy with the way it unfolded. On the coffee table in the centre of the circle we laid out cardboard (recycled) and coloured pencils. One we settled, Martha introduced me a little as a traveling Friend, and we invited everyone to rise again right then and to choose something from the big table that spoke to their own spiritual journey, or just drew them. I mentioned the postcards and invited the children to make ones themselves during Meeting, whenever they wanted to do that. Martha and I both mentioned to all that we would be listening to one another, and also to the Spirit within, and that the children would work quietly, still listening. Some people had also brought items they had made. So there was then a

subdued milling-about as everyone went into the dining room and found their item from the table. I smiled to myself to see how many adults glom onto the children's bright postcards.

Then we settled again, and went into fifteen minutes of expectant silence. People then shared from what they had brought or what they had chosen. Trees were a recurring theme, maybe not surprising in forested New Brunswick. The children spoke first, showing us things they had made (I remember Isaac's glass thingamajig, studded at the edges with bright blue glued-on buttons and beads.) Then they happily and quietly got to work on making their own postcards. As we went around the circle, one man said that he would not speak, and then said yes, he would. That very morning he had seen two barred owls. Or were they ruffed grouse. In my imagination I saw two large brown birds, and the surprise and pleasure of seeing them up close. That was all he said, but I'm glad I heard it. Next day I would see two brown mourning doves, also up close, hopping about on the porch rail near the clothesline.

As for one of the children, Phoebe likes pigs. Her postcard shows PINK and PIGS and happy-faced porcine smiles. The items she brought that she had made were a mother pig and a row of babies, all realistic and well-done, made of pink play-dough.

Michael Miller brought music he is composing in response to a poem by Isaac Newton. The poem compares Newton's knowledge of the world to a few attractive pebbles on a beach, while all before it lies the ocean of unknowing. When the sheet music came around to Elizabeth Rossinger, she read Newton's poem to us again, and it took on deeper meaning.

One Fredericton man chose a Toronto child's image of jagged mountains, and said something like: "This reminds me of my spiritual journey, which has had jagged ups and downs." For another man, a Calgary child's careful drawing of a balance beam and a balanced gymnast reminded him of his own spiritual need for "balance."

One of the girls had brought a long coloured rope she had crocheted, and after Meeting we had a demonstration of its use, in a choreography of skipping and cartwheels. The man who had spoken of balance turned a perfect cartwheel, and his dad, grandpa to the girl, jumped in and did a clown act, tangling himself in the rope. Friends speak of and act out playfulness, Spirit discovered in spontaneity, in laughter.

There is a tiny midweek meeting here too, at St. Thomas University, where busy profs and others can drop in at lunchtime. The presence of Martha and me swelled the numbers to eight, with some arriving and leaving, and including two more children.

Oh, and the night before that, at the senior Millers' home, Friends gathered over pizza and then we retold the story of the journey of the soul (this time Psyche shot off from home in a canoe during a Fredericton flood, and capsized at a speed bump.) Then Friends chose from the shells and coral from the McClure-Zelazny collection, and various fungi, cones and grasses I'd found among trees in the Baptist graveyard, when I'd got lost there briefly the day before. Several people wrote poems, and I hope to get my hands on the ones I didn't actually bear away. Irmgard wrote a good one and is going to email it to me. Her sharing on Sunday had also been almost a poem,

about coming from Germany and finding the New Brunswick forest at first frightening, but later feeling her own growing into her new country, and the putting down of roots. According to Irmgard, a tree which is battered by storms responds by putting down deeper roots.

Oh, and I visited the completed afghan, over at Vivian and Chloe's apartment. My long red rectangle is crocheted into one corner and is folded over at one end, making a handy (?) little pocket.

In other knitting news, I completed my first further knitting project, a scarf with pompoms. I kept laughing to myself over the pleasure it gave me to finally complete it and throw the thing around my neck. Next project is a headband, to be knit from a skein of wool Melody Donald gave me in Grey Bruce, Ontario, spun from the wool of their own sheep.

At the Fredericton Farmers' Market, just before I left, I got to meet Heather again whom I'd met in Meeting and over coffee with Martha later in the week. Heather, like Martha, tutors in math (and so again I sat in on lively conversation about math education), and she also parents some of those creative children and also markets bead jewelry that she makes. I chose a necklace for my daughter, and also bought sesame chips at another booth from the daughter of Joan, whom I'd met among Friends during the week. Then I met Joan herself one more time, coming in to the market, and it felt like the concert back at the beginning of the week, with Quaker notes beating contrapuntal (?) time. I had one more interesting exchange with Vivian around her journey into Roman Catholicism (about symbols, about the need for Quaker education, about entering a rich historical tradition, about perhaps acting out more intentionally the playful sidetracks and enigmas of the human soul.)

A lovely thing happened. My request for a companion to accompany me to the next stop was responded to by Edith Miller, who rode in the bus with me to PEI. We were already on the bus and starting our 4-hour chat when Martha came onboard for a last goodbye hug.

I'll see many of these people again next weekend, at Atlantic Friends' Gathering, so that made this sprouting of Friendships seem a tad easier to leave behind, as we headed for the bridge to P.E.I.

Journal 39 PRINCE EDWARD ISLAND WORSHIP GROUP; ATLANTIC FRIENDS GATHERING /  
FRIENDS WORLD COMMITTEE for CONSULTATION May 25, 2005

This heading is why Friends indulge in acronyms: PEI WG; AFG/FWCC

In the first posting of these journals, I mixed up Phoebe and Ella. When I saw them both again at the AFG gathering, I became clear that it is Ella who likes pigs, and that Phoebe runs more to penguins. At the gathering, these girls and other children and teens produced a song, to the tune of "Twinkle, Twinkle, Little Star," which was about the skeleton we had in the basement, name of Adam Clay, and also their happiness at sleep deprivation when they attended the Pre-Dawn Light ceremony offered by Gkisedtanamoogk, which began at 3:30 a.m. The song went: "It was early, but THAT'S OKAY!" It also mentioned that "we gave thanks." I personally was very pleased that the song turned out so well, and now feel calm and competent about doing this same risky songwriting thing with children in Lillooet this summer. In other new openings, I have learned to purl and just now I learned that the notes on drumming musical notation refer to different drums. Makes sense, to hit a bass drum to sound a bass note, but I just hadn't thought about it before. I am in Newfoundland now, visiting a drummer and his mum, but had better back up and take up my tale with the bus crossing the long bridge into Prince Edward Island, and getting off in Borden with Edith Miller and seeing Daphne Davey's black Cherokee come zooming up the highway to collect us.

Living on PEI seems to involve a lot of careening across miles of red potato fields, but everyone seems to take it for granted. The underlying myth is that the island is so small that nowhere can be far away. So everybody just goes there. I was on the island for only six days, and so perhaps it was only the people I met who zoom around the countryside. For one thing, in the major capital city of Charlottetown, which is about half the size of my home town of Peterborough, which in Ontario is a small place, there is no public transportation. When I was determined to get up to the university from downtown, I walked thirty blocks. It was pleasant, though, with lots of friendly people en route. I stopped halfway and consumed a milkshake, bought a new top at a thrift store (\$3) and laughed with some students who were doing giddy improv on the sidewalk, I suppose because exams were over, or convocation. That day I got in a grand swim at the University of PEI pool and then spent a very pleasant evening listening to stringed music from the students of John and Jenet Clement. I was following a Quaker string myself, as John is one of the mainstays of the tiny PEI worship group. He was resplendent that evening in a white tux jacket and fancy shirt, and my only regret is that I forgot to take my camera out once the performances were over and get a photo.

I have others, though, of our evening at the home of Maud and Richard, Maud being another regular attender and also gourmet cook, writer, teacher, private scholar, feisty Dutch contrarian, poet and seeker. Not an inclusive list. Following the Quaker thread / string of the interests of my host, Meredith, and her friend Maud, I was included in a gourmet dinner club (where I found myself in deep conversation with my table mates about Friends: "Do you believe in the Second Coming?" a woman asked in an understanding voice, trying to place us); the AGM of Theatre PEI, with play readings; tea with their writing group; and a quietly exciting evening with a group of

women making art--I learned about values (colour values), and I made a collage. Possibly all this raised the profile of Friends among these fine people I met, or possibly I just had a wonderful time.

We also had three scheduled Quaker events: dinner together the first night, where I met Maud and re-met Lobie Daughton, whom I had known slightly twenty years ago in Ottawa Meeting (one of Lobie's poems is in the last Quaker pamphlet of poetry, and he is still writing poems); another dinner with this time a little workshop attached, on Tuesday, and on Sunday a sharing after Meeting for Worship at the Clements' house, around "What do you make?" To this last, Doug Dahn brought (among other interests) a photograph of a bee counter he has invented, and Maud Anschutz brought a poem:

*Matthew 20: 1-16*

*The poor always stand in line  
for soup, for bread,  
for work, for a chance  
to be picked first.  
They know better, however  
than to expect anything.  
That's why I was glad  
to be asked to work  
at the eleventh hour ...*

*That's why I cried  
when I received a full day's wage  
at the end of the day.*

Maud also asked for an explanation of what we mean by "testimonies." Those with Quaker experience explained that, well, we don't have a creed, but experience has provided some common discoveries which we witness to. At the time, I could remember only Peace, Simplicity and Integrity. I believe it was Daphne who reminded us of Unity with Creation. (At the gathering this past weekend, someone mentioned the mnemonic "SPICE"--Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community and Equality. However, on the handy list I picked up from Jo Vellacott at Thousand Islands Meeting, the list is: integrity, peace, simplicity, equality, social justice, unity with creation. In that schema, all 6 testimonies DERIVE from Community, which derives from Light, and they MANIFEST in prayer, personal observance, public testimony, and corporate action.) Anyway, in PEI I read out to Friends the bit at the beginning of Advices and Queries, from the elders at Balby, 1656: "Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided; and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life."

Maud asked, "Do they really mean it??"

Daphne brought poems about unity with horses, about the creatures we live with and among, and the spiritual gifts they bring. Edith and I had already remarked, in Daphne's house, that the best window looks out at the farmyard, and constitutes a



frame for scenes of her old horse and his companion, a black pony. The next best window frames the birdfeeder, the birds, and the squirrels. From our point of view, these windows also framed Daphne herself, outside caring for her animals and for the birds.

John brought a book he has written and which has been distributed through the school board, for parents of students of stringed instruments: "With Strings Attached." He spoke of the joy of seeing young people grow and blossom as they discover that they can create this music.

On Tuesday night we got together again, this time without Doug and with Meredith and Richard. Maud cooked, and after dinner I laid an evergreen bough and shells and stones in the middle of the table beside the teapot, and the little group proceeded into an unusually elegant telling of the story of Psyche's wanderings, followed by meditative writing and sharing what we wrote. Afterwards, with Daphne off to take care of her animals and John to prepare for the festival, Richard asked me one of those hard questions. So, he said, you've led us through a process and I've stirred up some thoughts and written them down--they are thoughts that I have had before--why are you doing this? What is the next step? I may never see you again, so tell me: what is this about?

Sheesh, and I thought it was bedtime.

Sometimes I feel less led than at others, and I'm not sure that my stumbling reply was Spirit-led. But I knew what to say about the thoughts that Richard had written down. He had described the dependable surprise of springtime growth, always coming back after the ravages of winter. As far as I know, I told him, that is one of the most profound spiritual truths around. Hang onto it; you'll need it.

After the one night at Daphne's in the countryside, and after Edith was wafted off to catch her bus (connecting with husband Michael in Moncton, as he emerged from a weekend in the prison, facilitating a session of Alternatives to Violence), Meredith had taken this stranger, me, into her home for five days, sight unseen. "Did you do what you wanted to do?" she asked me as she drove me to the bus terminal very early on Friday morning. I thought I had, following Quaker threads. I missed some folk, I realize now, who do sometimes attend--and also a mysterious member who no longer comes--but I met some amazing people who hang out in that little provincial capital amid the fine red blowing dust. "I respect all religions," explained the owner of a gallery, whom I'd met at the gourmet club, "but I am of no religion myself." As I hadn't mentioned anything other than the Quaker connection, probably even that much set off her internal alarms. She is surrounded by beautiful objects she has chosen, and I have no trouble seeing that as enough. The letter can kill, but the spirit gives life. We met by chance later on the street and she called out to me, "Goodbye, Margaret. Have a good life!"

It was foggy that morning I left, and the bus goes first on an hour-long run to Summerside. I dozed, but kept opening my eyes to make sure I didn't miss the bridge. I saw only white fog and, faintly, more potato fields. Then I opened them again and saw a sign for Amherst, and realized I'd slept soundly all the way back over the long bridge.

The weekend gathering was at Villa Madonna outside St. John--one of those Roman Catholic retreat centres which grace so many of our cities now that they no longer function well as convents. I slept in a former nun's cell, with the crucifix over the bed and the little sink and the Jerusalem Bible.

As this was one of the most transformative weekend gatherings I've fallen into, I'd like to do it justice and am not sure that I can. Is there any way we can bottle the opening panel discussion and send it out to Meetings across the land? The theme was "From Global Crisis to Global Community." The resource people were: Katie Aven, barely 30, leading us into and through a truly disturbing Bible study; Alleson Kase, new interim coordinator of the CFSC International Development Committee, whose voice will now be heard in the land; the powerfully-named Mary Lord, who led us in singing chants from Taize and from Beverley Shepherd, and who brought us news from American Friends Service Committee; Jack Patterson from the Quaker U.N. office, who reminded us of the very important work of "quiet diplomacy," and also got us to get our bodies up out of our chairs while shouting "Stand up! Hold fast! M0000ve forward!" Amid much mooing and laughing, some sense of an old-fashioned revival meeting bubbled up, and we did need it, unflinching as these folk were about the Crisis. As was Gkisedtanamoogk, "Wabanaki cultural practitioner and bridge builder between our two cultures," as the program described him. Gkisedtanamoogk (not hard to say if you sound it) is cheerful, intelligent, clear and unabashed about the fact that he and other aboriginals are living the crisis and do not need to discuss whether or not there is one. The challenge for the resource people and for the participants was not to evade the issues and not to drown in depression. Perhaps the skeleton in the basement helped. They were real bones, human remains, hung there for study and for respect. Can't play pranks with real bones, the person who brought them pointed out.

But I can't share this weekend with you, because you weren't there. I will tell you some things I am taking away from it:

- 1) About the horrifying use being made of biblical passages in today's world: in dialogue about this, remember the principles of conflict resolution: listen well; affirm emotion; affirm common ground; affirm overtures of reconciliation. Do not imagine that explaining and arguing will help much at all. "Never allow fear to be the law between us." Seek community. Hold fast. Move forward.
- 2) Human solidarity is a deep spiritual truth. Hold fast to human solidarity. Insist on it. Don't be shy about it. It is a value. It is a truth. Find your own words but grab hold of it.
- 3) Make spaces, "which are the only place where change will happen." What is a space? It is prayer. Meditation. Long walks. Quiet diplomacy (creating spaces where people of opposing views can listen to one another with respect). It is poetry and music and sitting in silence and a child taking you by the hand and leading you down the stairs to look at a skeleton. It is dream. Following a leading, not knowing where it may go. It is a moment, suspended, on the back of a horse. The main thing I understand about this is that it feels like a waste of time and a non sequitur and that there must be more important things to do than to hold open a space. But that is the clue, so do it.

4) Give thanks.

5) If we want our Quaker presence in the world through such agencies as AFSC--I know that CFSC is not exactly analogous, but perhaps in this respect it is--to reflect the diversity of our larger society, then our Meetings must become more diverse. (We are not in unity about this.)

6) Columbus in the name of Christ slaughtered, for example, indigenous people on Espanola, so that their numbers fell from 3 million to 250,000. "If we were walking like Christ, the native people would have no problem."

7) This week it was the testimony of equality that got stirred up for me. "In nature there is no equality." In Wabanaki culture, men and women are seen as having very different natures and roles. The only connection I can make with this from my culture is a memory of one of the Haight cousins--I think it was Deborah--in Ottawa Meeting a long time ago, expressing distress over the testimony of equality. We never said that people are equal, she said--clearly they are not. What we testified to was the discernment of gifts. Each person is gifted, and it is the task of the spiritual community to discern and celebrate and help release those gifts.

8) Oh, and finally: the reason that the opening panel knocked my socks off was that they had been invited to speak from their personal journeys as a lead-in to their current work with Friends. If you want one thing that will unglaze our eyes and hearts when we confront the crisis we are in, start with why people are throwing their lives into this work, now, at this time.

Exciting pamphlet for Friends who are involved with the restructuring of our society:  
Fellowships, Conferences, and Associations: The limits of the liberal Quaker reinvention of  
Meeting polity, by Elizabeth Cazden, Beacon Hill Friends Quaker Issues, 6 Chestnut St., Boston  
MA 02108 [www.bhfh.org](http://www.bhfh.org)

Part Two of Daphne Davey's poem "Red Admiral:"

*II*

*There was a moment, a stride,  
When Time stood suspended  
Enough to sweep a glance 'neath white-gloved hands  
Down the swelling arch of your swanning neck  
Russet red, the colour of this Island soil  
Bedecked with neat, regimented braids.  
You knew the occasion and when you rose to it  
I sat so still, breath suspended  
Lest I break the spell  
As you flowed beneath me, dancing, glorious  
Saying, "This is what it is to be God's creature.  
I am here to serve, but I bow to none.  
We will dance together, you and I,  
But know it is my gift to you, not your right of me."*

*Pride melted at the piercing of that ray  
And after, I fought with the groom, that you not be  
    led away, discarded  
As though, if I kept you with me  
I might command that moment to linger  
And bathe again in its divinity.*

Journal 40 ST. JOHN'S WORSHIP GROUP, Newfoundland June 3/05

It was my second visit to Newfoundland, the first having been 42 years ago, when I was newly married, starting a new life and months of teaching at the high school in Clarenville. The school was new, too, a "big" new regional secondary school, drawing all of 200 teens from the surrounding coves and towns, and employing ten teachers. This story crossed with the Quaker one for me as I took the ferry from North Sydney to Port-aux-Basques, and then watched miles and miles of stunted evergreens flow past, with breathtaking upheavals of bare rock, and sudden "ponds." It's not like B.C. or even like the rest of the Maritimes. It's like Newfoundland, and I hear it's like Scotland too, and broke off from there some while back.

The people are like Newfoundland too. As soon as I got onto the ferry I was surrounded by the soft friendly accent and "my dear" and "my love." "Is it a gender thing?" I asked later of Kate Morrison, who attends the St. John's worship group and has a sharp ear for inequities. Being a former practicing lawyer now spending one's days in a wheelchair can do this.

Emphatically yes, said Kate. It is women who are "my dear" and "my love"--men are "buddy." Kate is frustrated by the slow pace of social reform, but appreciative of her home help and the municipal transportation.

Kate came to Friends first and to Unitarians second, a question you ask in St. John's, where the Friends meet as a sort of sub-group of the Unitarian Universalists (UU's), meeting every few Saturdays for worship in the manner of Friends. Quite a few Friends across Canada worship with Unitarians when the Friends don't meet, but the links are strongest in St. John's. "We're findable," points out Nathalie Brunet, who is just finishing her term as president of the local Unitarian Fellowship, and also recently became a Friend, with her membership in Wolfville Monthly Meeting. Unitarians who also like to worship in silence hear about this worship group mostly through word of mouth, I think, and other seekers can find it through [quaker.ca](http://quaker.ca).

But there is only so much energy, and so to connect with one another outside of silent worship, most Friends look to the Fellowship. Like our Quaker groups, Unitarian groups wax and wane. They too have an anonymous donor, and at one point could afford a minister, but they're back to volunteer leadership. They are usually about 25 people, although swelled to about 35 the Sunday I was there. They have a social time after the service, and other opportunities for discussions and community-building. At present they don't have a children's program, but it may happen again. On the weekend I was there, both groups organized extra program and had extra attendance.

The Friends met Saturday evening at Kate's, starting with a potluck, then worship and then a spontaneous deep discussion around the peace testimony. David Artiss came, a longtime Friend (membership now with Halifax Monthly Meeting) who served as a Conscientious Objector in the Friends' Ambulance Unit in France during WW II. David attends a Presbyterian church on Sundays with his wife, Grace. The couple included me on Friday in their Presbyterian Bible study which included a video presentation by an engaging British minister named Nicky Gumbel. He said some good things about "the secret of being content" (Philippians 4: 10-21 if you're interested: it's the opposite of

consumerism.) The story of the dying and rising god is central to my own spirituality, along with most of the really radical and useful teachings attributed to Jesus. A foreground assumption to Gumbel's sermon (an extension of the "Alpha" series that is very popular with mainstream churches right now) is that the death of Jesus was a particularly potent gift for which I ought to be grateful. This is where they leave me. But they were friendly people who appeared respectful of different paths and did not insist on Gumbel's. They were doing the important thing, being a supportive community to one another, sharing the journey.

Nathalie Brunet took me in for the whole long visit (8 days), and we talked and talked until we actually began to run out of things to say. Nathalie and her son, Bernard (14), are involved with the martial art of Tae Kwon Do, and I went along one night as a curious observer. I saw a vigorous physical workout that made my own flab ("it's all those potlucks") ache to get back to my own routines. The workout then escalated into one-on-one exercises in kicking and slapping and grappling that was exciting to watch, and more than a bit disturbing. Was this okay? Was this Quakerly? I began to have similar questions to those stirred up by the conversations in Kingston.

The Tae Kwon Do students used thick pads and helmets, in addition to their strict discipline, to be sure no one got hurt. The group ranged from a seven-year-old to folks in their sixties. There was a supportive feeling in the room (along with a rising smell of sweat) as people worked together. The instructor, a sinewy older woman, moved through them, showing, encouraging, and barking instructions. They'd go at it and then she'd call out a word and they'd stop, smile, bow. The idea is to respect one's adversary, a nice Quaker value, except we don't usually train ourselves to beat them about the head and aim a really swift kick at the groin.

A martial art is a weapon of sorts, a weapon one hopes not to use, which is what a soldier could say about his gun. But somehow to me one's own body feels different. The fact that I might know how to disable you and perhaps how to kill you, and I choose not to use that knowledge, seems more in line with other internal disciplines with which I am more familiar. I may know how to devastate you with an unfeeling comment, but I choose not to do that, too. A martial discipline is a weapon that doesn't invite violence, and cannot be used against oneself.

This became one of the things Nathalie and I talked about into the night. What do you do with the part of yourself that is prepared to use violence? The usual Quaker response is to look for alternatives to violence --conflict resolution, diplomacy, ways to stay respectful and de-fuse. I like the idea of channelling it, too--transmuting all that energy into creative solutions to poverty, illiteracy, disease. But what about going right into the heart of one's darkness, getting familiar with it and exploring it, at the same moment teaching it and you clear parameters, how to turn it on and turn it off again, return to the smile and the bow? Control. You could let it out any time because you know you have it on a leash, under control. I really got scared watching these people "attack" one another. I'm not sure I want to know this about myself. But I don't believe in conflict avoidance either, in tamping it down. Is that what I do?

Those conversations fed into the conversation after Meeting about peace. Try as I might to keep us all focused on what to do *before* war breaks out--all the range of things we

*don't* do to root out the seed of war before it has a chance to sprout—the conversations keep coming back to the ultimate question: "What to do if push comes to shove?" What do we commit to do? If we knew what we know now about the death camps in WW II, would we sign up? There's a thing under consideration now by Canada, called Responsibility to Protect. It grows out of Rwanda, Yugoslavia, and more recently Darfur. When a country's internal controls have broken down, and people are massacring one another before your eyes, do you have any other option *then* other than to interpose your own unarmed body? Is that what I want us to train soldiers to do?

I have a feeling that these issues won't go away this coming week, as I head into the United States.

I hiked a bit in the stunning landscape of Torbay, where Nathalie lives, and on Signal Hill in St. John's. I drove Nathalie's car around while she was at work teaching science to junior high kids, and delighted in the winding, hilly streets and funky houses and shops. I discovered that the public library closes on Mondays. I went to lunch with Kate Morrison and on another day with Liz Ohle, who is the third actual member in this group, with her membership in a U.S. Meeting. Liz and I compared travel stories, as Liz and her former partner travelled around the world not long ago, staying in some places for months, and the stories she has brought back seem worth bringing out to the world. We discussed travel books, and what needs to be said.

On Sunday I attended my first Unitarian service. Nathalie as president spoke first, with a clear, articulate and moving statement about what this group is, its parameters and aims. I wondered whether it would help our Meetings if we could find a time for a similar recapitulation of our vision for ourselves. The group used a sound system, which let everybody hear, including some who are hard of hearing.

When my part came, I perched up at the front where Nathalie had been, asked "What do you make?" and told them a little about my journey—both the current travels and the inner journey as writer, Quaker, activist. I told them that the Saskatoon Friends worship in the Unitarian Fellowship Hall on Saturdays and have a permanent sign outside announcing that fact. I was wired for sound but then a talking stick went around in the form of a handheld microphone. People said the most amazing things—as usual, but every time it is different. I knew a few of them already from the Friends' worship the night before. One woman passed around a dream-catcher she had made, with eagle feathers on it. Two people led us in a brand new song. Two young girls passed around "fairies" they had made out of paper, with faces from photographs of themselves. An older woman spoke about doing less and enjoying it more, and feeling that she is more effective in the world when she is doing work she loves, rather than operating out of duty. A man is making video documentaries of various faith groups in St. John's.

In their announcements period, I told them about the DVD I still have with me, *Scared Sacred*, and six of us gathered that afternoon at Kate's, to watch it.

A family invited me for dinner (it was cod, and delicious) and a very pleasant evening of lively conversation. Their daughter, who has attended one or two Quaker youth events in Hamilton, made a postcard to add to the collection.

I telephoned Caroline Balderson Parry in Ottawa about some ideas, and we further discussed the Unitarian-Quaker connection. Caroline too has a foot in each of the two communities.

I read a Tom Harpur column that had come out the week before, praising Unitarians, and found there that our Peterborough Friend and UU person, Susannah Cole, had facilitated a discussion at the UU annual gathering on this difficult interface between our privileged world and "development" projects. Susannah attended a work camp with Uganda Friends this past summer. Liz Ohle and I had discussed this too--how can we keep from cringing back when desperate people (especially desperate people whom we have come to trust and care about) keep asking for money? It's not just a third world issue, and it's something we need help with, speaking only for myself.

So--another very rich week, crossed with my own old story from 42 years ago. On the side of a bus I saw a surname I recognized from days past. As the DRL bus passed again above Clarendville, I again craned to recognize anything at all that was the same. This time I thought I saw the school, but I still couldn't relate it to anything else. Life passes fast.

During the week, I half-read two novels--a recent one in French by Nathalie's father, Jacques Brunet: *Messe grise, ou La fesse cachee du Bon Dieu*--and a book intended for teens, by Kevin Major, *Blood Red Ochre*. Nathalie's son Bernard had had to read it for school. It was about the Beothuks.

Early on in the visit, Nathalie had taken me to see Flatrock, the Torbay promontory that that rears against the sky and gave me the same shivers as Blornidon in Wolfville and the Sleeping Giant in Thunder Bay. Forgetting for a moment that the aboriginal people of Newfoundland were completely exterminated, I asked about the aboriginal myths that must surely have grown from this rock face. But those stories are gone.

The story of the white people who arrived and who clung to these rocks remains, however, etched in faces and voices, in jokes on the bus, and in dignity. Life has been hard here, and people reach out and help out and call strangers "my dear."

On my way to Bar Harbor, Maine, the bus stopped in Halifax for three hours. I phoned Claire Henry and got to her place in time for a picnic on the floor of her apartment, provided by Margot Overington. The two were a little giggly from working at a skit to celebrate 40 years for Halifax Friends Meeting.

Conversations keep starting up about what is Spirit, who are we listening for in the silence? On the bumpy bus again, I scribbled in my journal: "Am thinking about Spirit as the dance of the universe, us part of it. Then what was that sense of leading? Perhaps it was a brain glitch. And here I am, and that is the dance."

June 7:

Addendum to Journal 40

The writer in me is having qualms about having mentioned two recently-published novels without saying anything more than that they were "half-read."



Now Dale Gruchy emails me to observe that in her Newfoundland experience, "buddy" is gender-neutral.

So am taking this opportunity to add that observation, and to make the following addendum:

The reason that the novel by Jacques Brunet was half-read was my wobbly hold on French. I did read all of it, though, almost without putting it down, and understood most of it, enough to follow the intense story line with great interest, and to appreciate the book's unusual and effective structure, part theatre, part poem, part internal monologue and prayer.

As for Kevin Major's book, *Blood Red Ochre*, the son of the house had issues with the convention the author used, where a Boethuk teen turns up in a contemporary high school class, full of her identity and with an understandably wary attitude. Is she a ghost, returned to teach current kids something about the past? I wanted to read to the end, to find out whether her presence was somehow accounted for. I was interested in that one, too, but ran out of time to finish it and so left it half-read.

There. I feel better. Have a good day.

Journal 41 ACADIA FRIENDS, Bar Harbor, Maine June 11, 2005

*Liberal Friends seem to take more pride in the breadth of their seeking than in the depth of their finding of the truth. Truth is not served by being captured in particular creeds, nor is it served by the collection and amalgamation of beliefs in good causes.*

*„unless we are fully cognizant of the threat that creeds and ideologies pose for us, we are in as much danger of falling under their influence as the rest of the world. We could lose our prophetic voice and become merely part of the babble.*

*... Quaker membership will never be an easy matter for Friends. We have no product for believers to buy. We want them to do something on their own, not follow us.*

Pendle Hill pamphlet 377 "Creed and Quakers: What's Belief Got To Do With It?" By Robert Griswold.

*"We want them to do something on their own."* Everywhere I went among Acadia Friends, I saw bright yellow copies of this Pendle Hill pamphlet. They are reading it, discussing it, passing it along to one another with the recommendation to read it.

One of the somethings we do, at our best, is to live as if community is possible and indeed already manifest. Community is a testimony, an experience Friends have discovered over and over again as we live in the Light. Our understanding of community has expanded to embrace the natural world as well as our best relationships with one another. At that gathering on the long May weekend, someone said that the most profound spiritual insight of the past century has been that of community. I understand this as a signpost: 'This Way God.' Okay..."spirit." This way things crack open, transform, take on new life and--what I want to see--direction.

The decision to visit a group of American Friends who are not part of Canadian Yearly Meeting (two other American groups *are*, but not this one) was in itself an expression of community, on many levels. I was invited to come last fall, when Friends from Maine and from Vermont crossed the border to attend the Atlantic Friends Gathering at the Canadian Thanksgiving. I was there, and at one moment, Diane Phipps of Acadia Friends said, "Come and visit us." We held it in the Light. It was going to cost a little more, not covered in the grant I have from the trustees, and getting there is not easy when you are not travelling by car. Eventually, way opened. The final lovely bit was when Ottawa Friends, who have had a decades-long cross-border Friendship with St. Lawrence Allowed Meeting in Potsdam, NY, approved a budget item to support this visit by a Canadian travelling Friend to Bar Harbor, Maine.

So there I was on the Cat, a Bay Ferry catamaran, moving fast over the sea from Yarmouth NS to Bar Harbor ME. I had filled out my customs declaration, admitting that I was bringing in a small jar of P.E.I. honey. The shadowy hills of this bit of America came up on the near horizon. I had to consciously put aside a spike of terror: here I go, into the belly of the beast. Stop it, Margaret. You are okay in Canada, and Canada helped bomb Aghanistan. The time for demonization is over. I entered the customs lineup, showed the guy my shiny new passport and told him I was visiting friends. The honey was all right. I was not turned back for being a Raging Granny.

Then there the f/Friends were, bearing flowers! "This is for your faith that we would meet you," said Diane.

It had been Convocation at the College of the Atlantic that day, and they were just back from it, having gone to cheer on several students who had been living at their house. They'd already eaten at the college, but in their big rambling house I met Gwenn, one of the graduates, who had prepared dinner for me from their garden, tasty healthy food which I consumed out on their back deck, overlooking the garden, which I saw was planted mostly in circles.

"What did you graduate in?" I asked Gwenn.

"Human ecology."

"It's the only degree they grant," explained Robert. Oh.

I discovered I had landed in an intentional community of 25 years' duration. The College is about five years older than the Downeast Friends Community. Robert Phipps is a visual artist, but back then had decided he needed a more dependable source of income. He came to Bar Harbor to be a baker in a community of bakers. Learn a useful skill; find out about community. The bakery lasted quite a while, but was a difficult road. In the end, it was laid down, and I don't know whether that is when the restaurant tenant on the ground floor began, but apparently that relationship is also now of long standing. The community, with all its life lessons and surprises, continued and expanded. The connection with the College of the Atlantic was intentional and has been rewarding. Robert comments that Americans easily understand the value of individuality, but that it took and takes more effort to appreciate the value of "individuation within community." Robert's art grew too, it is apparent to me, looking at the paintings that are on the walls.

-- Here is a quote from "Prescription for Community," by Patch Adams, M.D., an article which Robert and Diane have made part of the package they give to potential members of this community: "For tens of millions of years we primates have lived in tribes. I'm sure we came together because of mutual interdependence in child rearing, food gathering, and security. The fun experiences as a collective came as a powerful side effect. I believe this is so much a part of our primate past that the drive to huddle together has become part of our genetic coding. I think all this is why an intimate health professional like myself finds loneliness to be one of the most devastating illnesses in our culture. Only friendship can cure loneliness.... Ultimately everything is better with a circle of friends .... Without this circle of safety it is extremely difficult to erase the security fears that coat each of our lives, in our economics, health, and relationships. Seeking to resolve these fears as individuals can result in increasing competitiveness and isolation, major stumbling blocks to establishing community. Yet it is in community that we find the basic emotional security we seek." And: "By sharing costs and possessions we have been able to do big things for pennies."

A recent member of this community is Jiang Ping Zwang, a Chinese medical doctor who is doing research at the Jackson Laboratories in Bar Harbor. His specialty is with the middle ear, but he has a broad knowledge of both Western and Chinese medicine. We all had intense discussions about what we mean by "spirit," and the Chinese experience of "chi." Jiang Ping told us about pre-Communist-era folk ceremonies that showed honour to the ancestors. There was and still often is a strong sense that those who are dead remain among us, offering guidance if we will hear.

This week, somewhere about the time I found myself in a bug screen shirt, out past Bluehill, planting tomatoes, it was my mother who felt so close I had to move over for her. What do I know? It felt as if Dorothy approved. So did the garden devas, whom I couldn't feel, but who had opinions. The land is the next evolution of this community, which is longing for a rural location. Some of the graduates hope to continue with it in this new phase, as it leaves the city. I stood on the sunlit site that will become Robert's studio, and on the sunlit site of the house, which will be off the grid. Diane sells real estate, and fends off her colleagues' understandable bemusement that she would build a house that is not wired for electricity. Diane keeps on collecting kitchen and garden tools that will run without power.

On Sunday we went to Meeting, which is at, gulp, 9 a.m., and was well-attended. A crowd of children went off, and the adults entered what felt like a deeply gathered meeting. One person spoke with concern of "seeds of war" being planted about China. Another brought into the Meeting his sense of foreboding, and mentioned the vision of George Fox of the ocean of darkness, which was eventually overcome by the ocean of light.

The children came back in, sat on the floor, and were led by Gray Cox on guitar in a lively, slightly ribald song. We moved from seriousness to delighted laughter and singing along, as that rooster kept striding into the yard, and catching whatever—a hen, a cow, the gas tank, a gum tree—a "little off guard" -- after which the hen lays eggs, the cow gives eggnog, the gas tank offers Eggson gasoline, and the gum tree drops Chiclets. Spontaneity, laughter and sex made their happy way into the meeting circle.

On Wednesday night, fifteen of us met again in the community house to share our experiences around creative energies, spiritual journey, and passions for social justice and change.

Matt, a student at College of the Atlantic, spoke about listening. He is convinced, from his experience playing his songs in public, that listening is a creative force that actually changes (deepens, gives more nuance to) the music. He hears his music change and becomes aware that someone is listening. He notices this all the time in conversations, too. When he listens, people feel it, and there is a connection.

Lottie scratched her cane on the rug for a long time, and I had just enough sense not to intervene and check whether she wished to speak. I knew she is a longtime Friend and I thought, this person is comfortable with silence. "My creativity..." began Lottie at last, and a story came out, one of those moments when I wonder whether it is all right not to be taping all this (but it is). Women meeting to make quilts. There was a war on. A request came in to make quilts for soldiers who are not going to get well. We put all we

could into them, said Lottie--we were trying to make up a bit for what had been taken away. Then came a request to make burying dresses for babies who died at the hospital. The women sewed and sewed. Lottie came to feel she must burst out, do something wild. She threw together colours and sewed them, just anything she liked, without a plan. She sent it to the county fair and the thing she had just thrown together won first place.

One wall in that room is taken up by one of Robert Phipps' paintings, done in panels, of the same gigantic rock face which he has painted repeatedly and in all four seasons. "Autumn" has sold, but "Spring" graced this wall, above the table spread out with my photos and papers. In the fifth panel, a couple of seabirds flashed past, low on the cliff. In "Winter," in the dining room, on the ice before the cliff in the second panel, a bear shuffles along, black against the white snow.

Diane took me to see a couple who are friends of hers. There is a whole immense story here, about two women at two different times, one in the Seattle area and one in Kelowna, B.C., both experiencing a call so clear it came as a voice. Both setting out for Maine on the strength of that call. And both finding exactly what had been foretold. The Irish side of me hears stories like this with a whole heart. The British side listens

clogged up by a grain of salt. It's not that I'm resisting, I explained to Diane. I just can't say something if I am not feeling it. We were talking then about reiki, and the way my hands don't get hot when many others' do. But here I am in Bar Harbor on a leading, and there I was, sitting at the table of these two artist friends of Diane, Ed Bagley and Daphne Daunt, and Daphne's daughter Laurel, who is a ship's captain and almost never able to visit, but who was there. In two minutes we were awash in coincidences. The couple were just back from Peterborough, where I live when I'm home. They'd been visiting Daphne's stepmother, Frances Daunt, after whom the Daunt Healing Centre on King St. is named, where I have often visited. Laurel was on her way to Victoria. I said I'll be there next month to teach at the Victoria School of Writing. Laurel had considered attending! More to the point, Laurel has often attended Meeting at Fern Street when she has been there. We walked out past Ed's sculptures, me with my mind in a daze. My goodness. Back there under the Mt. Desert Island trees, behind the black bicycles Ed has lined up to make an elegant fence, are people who have been in all these other spaces where I have been too. Is this normal? I took comfort from those coincidences, even if Diane and I do disagree about the importance of the movie *What the Bleep do We Know?*

On the last night of my visit with Acadia Friends, I was able to sit in on a meeting of their committee for Peace and Social Justice. I saw Gray Cox in action again, and heard more about the July experiment here, where about a dozen Friends, two of them from Canada, are going to spend the whole month in discernment about Economics and Ecology. A big part of the experiment is to use Friends' methods of discernment around this mostly science-based research. If you want to discuss attending for all or part of July, Gray's email is [gray@coa.edu](mailto:gray@coa.edu)

This experiment is an initiative of the Friends Institute for the Future, the Quaker "think tank" that some of us heard about at yearly meeting when Keith Helmuth gave the midweek lecture last year, the one called "Arrowhead to Hand Axe: in search of ecological guidance" (Canadian Quaker Pamphlet Series No. 60, available through Argenta

Friends Press [afp@look.ca](mailto:afp@look.ca)). See also Gray's article in Friends Journal, May 2005: "Meeting God Halfway: One Way to Engage in a Quaker Witness on Economic Justice and Ecological Concern."

As I got ready to leave, Diane tucked the copy of the article on community into my papers, and also the minute that Acadia Friends approved in January of 1998, on Living in Unity with Nature. It's long and practical, but here are a couple of bits: "Living in unity with nature means living simply and lovingly with the blessed earth community in light of continuing revelation. In witness of that revelation, we will do all we can to be worthy of the life spirit wherever and in whatever form we find it expressed. ... Living in unity with nature is a challenge that invites us to become responsible members of the larger natural community which embraces and supports human society."

I missed an opportunity to go trolling for phyto-plankton. But I did find out that I would have come along on the activities of an environment-awareness program for youth as they monitored the local shores red tide. I was told later that the ocean can literally turn Homer's "wine-dark" as the phyla-plankton swarm in. Shellfish accumulate great quantities of these plant-related plankton (as distinguished from zoe-plankton, if I have this right--and I may not have--which are very tiny animals). Such shellfish must not be eaten by humans, who will suffer illness, paralysis, or death. It happens on the west coast from time to time too. Anyway, a red tide was advancing up the east coast and Gwenn was on her way out to toll, and I could have gone, but I was still eating breakfast and my hair wasn't combed and I was just not ready to answer the call. I gather that "toll" means to scoop up water samples.

Other stuff I wrote down this week in America:

Diane and Robert are very much into organic food and alternative healing, mostly through nutrition. The basic book that they take seriously has to do with balancing one's body's alkalines and acids:

The pH Miracle: Balance Your Diet, Reclaim Your Health. By Robert O. Young, Ph.D., and Shelley Redford Young. Warner Books, 2002.

This concern connects at the personal level with deep concern about the severe lack of balance which has resulted in environmental degradation and climate change. Everyone here talks about the weather, and suggests it is changing alarmingly and too fast. "It has only just now stopped raining," they said. A day later, we were into hot August weather, with no transition. They are eyeing the hurricane forecasts, and predictions for next winter. It's not a surprise to find that Acadia Friends have produced that minute about Unity with Creation, and that they are involved with the Institute for the Future.

Robert was also reading George Lakoff, his ground-breaking articles about re-framing political discourse so as not to feed in to a view of society that requires a patriarchal hierarchy; instead to frame issues from an expectation of nurturance and inclusivity. For example, Lakoff urges people not to speak of "tax relief" because it assumes that tax is a burden from which we need relief, instead of being our way of equitably funding the social supports we want to have in place. Sorry, I forget the replacement expression.

But I guess it is to talk of the positive social values of care for children, universal education, affordable housing, public transportation, accessible healthcare.

From Creed and Quakers: what's belief got to do with it?--

*Whenever in our Quaker meetings for business we come to the point when great differences threaten to separate us, we can be sure that a creed is being held close to someone's bosom (maybe to many bosoms).*

My next stop was Potsdam, NY, to visit St. Lawrence Allowed Meeting. In one of those normal coincidences, Richard Lunt of Potsdam turned out to have a summer place near Bar Harbor. Richard arrived just in time to paint the bottom of his boat and then drive me back 500 miles in time for Sunday worship at 5 p.m. June 12. When we walked into Meeting, there were five Friends from Ottawa, including the members of my committee of clearness for membership from 22 years ago. I worried that they'd come to do a recall, but I think it was just their normal twice-yearly cross-border building of community.

Journal 42 ST. LAWRENCE ALLOWED MEETING, Potsdam, NY June 21/05

... nice moment when Lora Lunt and I surfed to the quaker.ca site and thence to Canadian Friends Service Committee, and in short order found the document they keep updated, about what to say to a U.S. soldier who asks about fleeing north to Canada. We discovered two versions--the one for most of Canadian Yearly Meeting groups, and another tailored for the U.S. Friends who are under our care. A good moment of inclusivity, as we printed it off in Potsdam, N.Y., where the group has for decades been under the care of Ottawa Monthly Meeting.

Potsdam is a village, only about 10,000 souls, if I have this right, when the students aren't there. Clarkson University and also one of the 60-odd campuses of SUNY (State University of New York) are both located there. Lora teaches French and Arabic on the SUNY campus, and is much involved in student exchanges and the welcoming of foreign students. She is well-placed, at this time in world events, to work at expanding the courses the university offers in Middle Eastern Studies. The interest is there, she reports, and clearly she loves her job.

Dick Lunt is retired from the same campus, with a scholarly background in folklore. It turns out that folklore embraces a variety of the "vernacular," including barns and lobster boats, house architecture and linguistic localisms, in addition to myth, tall tales, and the spinning of yarns. As Dick drove me the 500 miles from the land of his birth in Maine and the land of his profession and his family in New York state, he kept the conversation lively by pointing out the history and associations with the buildings and landscape we passed. I began to spot the connected barns: settlers moved their barns, outhouses and homes closer together and joined them. You can't usually walk from one to another inside, but there was a feeling that things looked better that way.

At one point Dick pointed to a shingled house and said that it was the last one I'd see on this trip. Then when I did see one, he explained that he meant of the old ones--that one was new! When we rolled into his driveway in Potsdam, there was another shingled dwelling, as he has made his house look a lot as if it were in Maine, blue-shingled and "weathered" with silvery streaks.

The dog is Henry, also silvery. Very friendly and calm, like his owners. The bird, a cockatiel, is Peaches, friendly mostly to Lora, who goes about her work at home with a bird often perched on her hair or pecking a grain on Lora's shoulder.

The view out my bedroom window reminded me of American villages I've seen in movies, with white clapboard houses and expanses of green lawn. Downtown, the official buildings are red brick or yellow sandstone. Strung between the columns in front of the Municipal Building is a bed sheet stitched with an American flag, and a hand-lettered welcome to a returning soldier.

In the first couple of days, I spent time on the SUNY campus, some of it in long talks with a sometime attender who spends the first part of her week in the



United States and the last part in Ottawa, Canada. She and I discovered a shared concern that it does not help right now in Canada to demonize the United States. It blinds us to our own demons, for one thing, and it cuts off our support for the only people who might turn things around, the majority of Americans who do not support many of the decisions of the current administration.

Also at the SUNY campus I sat in on conversations with people who arrange student exchanges and facilitate "dual degrees"-- arranging for students to take some credits in the U.S. and some in another country's university. The job is more difficult now, I was told, because of the falling off in numbers of foreign students who want to study in the U.S. Still, it is reassuring to see good people working at these exchanges, one of the important ways that young people can get to know and value other cultures.

Midweek, I sat for quite a while one nice day on a bench by the Raquette River and let the sparkles and placid stretches percolate into my thoughts and feelings. I was nervous and pleased to be almost back home again, if only for two weeks. I wanted to see my cat.

The Friends ended up having a whole week of fellowship, with one session building on another. First on Sunday we met for worship, and enjoyed the visit over potluck of five Ottawa Friends. Then on Monday we met to write our own queries, an unexpectedly worshipful session and something I would like to try again with other Friends. Since I still have the Scared Sacred film with me, we met again on Wednesday to view that, and then on Thursday to share around creativity, showing what we make and stirring up some creative connections. In all of this, I felt touched and challenged by people's spiritual depth and centredness. The times are affecting American Friends, it is clear. Wherever they go from here, St. Lawrence Allowed Meeting can have confidence in their strength together as, in the best sense, a Meeting.

They were welcoming babies in Potsdam, with all the joy and responsibility that babies elicit in their communities. Lora read a brand new poem to a baby who is not yet born. I'm not including any of it because the baby and its mother are not supposed to see it until after Baby is safely arrived. At this same gathering, we listened to a lively, danceable cut from a new CD by musician Dan Caldwell, who expects to be a proud father by about the time you read this. The CD is "In Lieu of Cigars." Mom-to-be Kate patted her belly as her main creative passion at this time, but also brought along with a warm quilt she made with help from some of those present.

Bill Mueller brought a poem reflecting on the theme of responsibility, written recently as he travelled by train to his granddaughter's sixth birthday party. Responsibility, his poem reminds us, is the ability to respond. His poem ends by saying that he undertakes this journey "to expand my soul/ that is squished down/ with the habit of avoidance,/ looking forward, for once in my life,/ to a little responding." Bill's soul looked to be responding fine, I may add, when Friends ended the evening with the presentation to him of a chocolate birthday cake, complete with candles.

Neal Burdick, clerk of St. Lawrence Allowed Meeting, looked forward too, in reverent response to the planet we find ourselves on. One repeating stanza reads:

*The mountains will be there still  
Long after you and I are gone.  
Do not try to understand.*

Among other things passed around that last evening were a handmade arrow that was in part a reminder to listen to the inner voice, colourful cloth bags into which one Friend sorts the facets of her life, and a clear glass ball which almost blew itself into being, as the air blown in cooled and extruded the molten glass. I saw it as a metaphor for the way change can come into being almost easily, almost without effort, if we can just find the... at the time I fumbled for the right word, but perhaps it is inspiration.

On the way out of Potsdam on the overnight bus, a group of Amish people were at the front, including two very cute babies in stiff black bonnets. One man got into a conversation with the driver, who had strong opinions, backed up by the information he'd gleaned from his news media. They're moving soldiers into northern New York state, he stated, because the army is worried about China. "I knew the Chinese were coming when I saw all those Chinese restaurants." He repeated this, and I couldn't tell whether it was intended as a little joke. "You know, north of us is Canada, and on the other side of Canada is Russia, and on the other side of Russia's China. China's got over-population and they need land. They won't grab it from Russia, because they know the Russians don't have the scruples like we do--they'd make hamburger out of them, ha ha! And China's got the rockets, and they can deliver them over here. That's why they're moving the soldiers up here--in case the Chinese attack."

Well, I said to myself, this is different from the Quakerly conversations I've been having these past two weeks.

The driver sighed. "It seems as if there is always some country or other, y'know, trying to take over. Now it's North Korea. I think the economy's too dependent, you know. We got to put the pressure on North Korea. We liberated South Korea. I was there. The South Koreans live just like us now. They've got freedom. They drive cars, just like us."

The Amish man kept plying him with questions. I couldn't figure out whether he was just drawing the driver out or whether he really was eager to hear opinions about the state of the world. I don't know much about how isolated the lives of the Amish may be.

Anyway, just as I thought I had this driver taped, the next thing I heard went like this: "I used to fish all around here, you know. All these streams and lakes were clean. But then they told us about the mercury poisoning, and the dioxins. They said it was safe to have one fish meal in a week, but I thought, why take a

chance, you know. It didn't sound safe. So I stopped eating them. I went on fishing, only I'd throw them back in. Then one time I said to myself, why am I making the fish suffer? Because that was all I was doing, making the fish suffer. They tell me fish don't suffer--they don't have nerve endings around their mouth. But I don't know. What can you believe these days? So I stopped."

At customs, I was the only white person in the line-up at customs. Only one traveller was held back for a few minutes, a guy who couldn't locate his bus ticket and had to search for it inside his suitcase. Then we were all waved back onto the bus.

As I write this, I am now back in my own country, with renewed clarity that the challenge of being a Canadian is as great and serious right now as that of being an American. We have a role to play, I am saying to myself, and people in many countries are counting on us to play it right. On the other hand:

*The mountains will be there still  
Long after you and I are gone.  
Do not try to understand.*

Journal 43 WINDSOR ON June 26/05

I'm home in Peterborough for a few days right now, and have put today's date on this journal, but this story is from last week. I spent June 18-22 in Windsor, Ontario, in a special visit with a niece and with the one remaining Friend in Windsor Worship Group, Blodwen Reitz.

I am a fiction writer, not a journalist. Getting facts straight in these journals is sometimes a struggle, while characters and stories entrance me and lead me on.

So when Punim (names in this account are accurate only within the uncertain parameters of my memory) leaned into my ear and said, "You could write a book about Blodwen," I said yes, someone could. Purim and I were sitting on a couch in Blodwen's office of Ready-Set-Go!-- Community Action Plan for Children, me knitting, and Punim wearing a red cotton sari and going through bills.

I hadn't expected to sit in on a writing project, but there was a grant proposal to finish, and so I listened with delight as Emily, who was very very good and was there on some sort of short-term grant, helped Blodwen hammer out the words. They were working from a document written earlier and broken off because the writer had ended up in full rant. "Let me look at that place where I was so mad." "I've never seen you so mad." They picked out points, checked their plans against the guidelines, and all went smoothly. I don't know whom it was going to, but funding bodies listed on their brochure are the Public Health Agency of Canada and the Ontario Trillium Foundation. I think the municipality is in on it too.

A program for toddlers was being linked with another one for women's literacy. "Look at it this way," Blodwen had explained to me the day before, after we had silent Meeting in her living room. "Suppose you have a lump in your breast. You don't speak English, but your child does, and is your interpreter. The roles are reversed. It is your eight-year-old child who gives you the news."

Another important bit made clear that in no way were they applying for a program for recreation. Although some of the activities may appear to be games, they wrote, all have an educational purpose. A point which, later on that day, I observed for myself.

First, though, was the office visit, and one of many incidents throughout the day that showed me how it goes when a person in need is treated with respect. A young woman came in with her caseworker. The young woman seemed too young to have had a baby, but it turned out it was her third. She was eligible for vouchers for a layette and some other items she needed: a crib, a car seat. But she had not brought in the right documents. There are many ways to deliver the news that, having made all the arrangements to arrive in this office, you must now go home again and get the right papers and come back. Blodwen cut to the chase: "Is it a girl or a boy?" "A girl." "Ah, you're so clever. Any idiot can make a boy, I made them myself, but it takes talent to make a girl!" The young mother smiled. Blodwen explained about the needed I.D. "You know all those papers they send you at the end of the month? They're just trying to kill trees, aren't

they, one a minute? Anyway, that's what we need. Bring that in." She bustled into another room and came out with a new pink baby bonnet. "There. That's for coming in. Now come back with those papers and we can....."

We headed for the daycare program, which occupies a space in a low-income housing project. On the way in through a courtyard, four men sat at a door with six-packs on the ground about them and glasses in their hands. They called out friendly greetings. I returned the calls, and then noticed that Blodwen didn't, quite, which seemed unlike her. It turned out that these guys were scaring off some adults who had registered children at the daycare. "Especially the Chinese grandparents," said Blodwen. The police were aware of the situation, but it was troubling to the women in charge of the program, Nasheem and Shan. Trained childcare workers, they need the parents and children to feel safe.

However, quite a few children were indeed there, having their snack (Cheesies--I kept sneaking one more). They were very cute. I started taking photos, much to their excitement. I'm looking forward particularly to seeing the pic of two little Moslem sisters in identical dresses, with their mom. We delivered some plastic chairs that Blodwen had found for a dollar each somewhere. The parents and grandparents took the children home, and there was a further little ad hoc meeting about how to handle the unwelcome welcoming committee.

It was noon. We hurried off to the school-readiness program (stopping for a drive-through lunch) which is held in an inner-city school.

Diversity we had galore, in both programs, the children and also their instructors. At the school-readiness program, I just sat and knit and observed, enjoying the ethnic diversity, from Libby with her mop of curly red hair, to Jacob, African-Canadian, with his sunny, loving ways. Some four-year-olds are already really mature human beings.

If this were the book about Blodwen, it might need to get into what it was like to grow up white in South Africa under apartheid, and the whole story of the decision to leave one's country behind on an issue of conscience. Her son Simon found his way to a Friends' school, and Blodwen looked into it and eventually became a Friend herself. Her marriage ended fifteen years ago, and both grown sons live in Windsor near her or with her.

In the past, there has been a worship group, but people have moved away, so that right now Blodwen is the only Quaker in Windsor. She often attends Meeting in Ann Arbor--another cross-border Friendship.

Three years ago, she says, she was a "bureaucrat." She was in charge of a large chunk of the library system and was paid a good salary. One day at her desk she saw an ad for a coordinator for Ready-Set-Go! -- a program run by a partnership of core city parents and community agencies. The program directly addressed issues of poverty, illiteracy, and school readiness among inner city core residents, many of whom are recent immigrants. I've heard a story like this before, I told

her. Its how Albert Schweitzer got involved with Africa. He was a medical doctor, at his desk, and a news item caught his eye...

Anyway, here she is now, obviously loving her work, using all her "bureaucratic" skills and also relishing the persona as "Quaker grandmother." At the school-readiness program, she and a helper who wears the Moslem headscarf and long dress, Selina, call children over to them to check whether they can tell them their names. The children come willingly, enjoying the attention. One catapults into the coordinator's arms, confident of a hug.

I look at the forms she and Selina are preparing, meticulous monitoring on so many points. Does the child understand about putting things away? Does the child clean up and put away without being told? Maybe I should enter this program myself!

"I need a Meeting to back me up," says Blodwen as she drives me back to Tecumseh, where my niece and her husband live (and their friendly dog.) I'm full of ideas and suggestions about things people could do to revive a Meeting there. But clearly Blodwen herself has no time left to do any of that. All her energy and time now goes into following this leading which has pulled her life, at age 66 now, into highly satisfying work. The Spirit is going to have to take care of growing back a Meeting in Windsor.

In November of this year, she plans to take a whole month off to go back to South Africa by herself, leaving her work and her sons behind and just taking time to think about the next bit, the road ahead. That would go into the book, too, but then you would turn the page and there would be more.

I could get very enthusiastic about the idea of a summer workcamp in Windsor next summer for some of our teens....

Friendly quotation by Tom Cullinan, embroidered and framed on the wall at the home of Blodwen Reitz:

*If we idolize wealth, then we create poverty.*

*If we idolize success, then we create the inadequate.*

*If we idolize power, then we create powerlessness.*

Journal 44 PRAIRIE MONTHLY MEETING July 12, 2005

Prairie Monthly Meeting is one of the floating Meetings in Canada, and likely the first. For about fifteen years now, the tiny pockets of prairie Friends have found some continuity and companionship through meetings for worship for business which have met in various places -- in Saskatoon, at Wynyard where Bill Curry and Dale Dewar and Lenore Price live, and in Regina and Winnipeg. They are ready now to explore the possibility of meeting sometimes at their most far-flung points, Thunder Bay and Whitehorse. The distances are immense, and the network of communication has often felt tenuous in the extreme. Yet it feels as if a turning point has been reached, and that I lucked into being there to see it turn. It will surprise Canadian Yearly Meeting if we begin to feel our energy coming from the prairies instead of the traditional centres, and we're not quite there yet, but exciting changes are happening. Saskatoon Worship Group now often numbers more than 20 when they meet, as they do, on a Saturday, and Winnipeg has grown to (at times) more than 40, with many children. One of the items of business this past weekend was a request from Winnipeg Worship Group, after an exemplary process of taking time to discern the next steps, to become Winnipeg Allowed Meeting. This request was approved.

Also approved with pleasure were four new memberships, a process to begin a Ministry and Council, and several next steps in regard to handling finances, and for responding to requests for membership and for marriage. As the business meeting approached noon, Saskatchewan time, we became very aware that in Thunder Bay the marriage of Mary Louise Hill and Andrew Cheatle was taking place, with joyful support from the Thunder Bay Worship Group. We held this union in the Light, even though technically Prairie MM was unable (yet) to take the marriage under its care. The whole question of what we mean by taking a marriage under care was raised again, and perhaps Prairie MM will help the rest of us become more clear. I have mentioned before that it seems that one of the best things we Friends can do to nurture long-term relationships in our communities is to make available the kind of couples enrichment sessions that are offered by Tony and Fran McQuail. Perhaps soon such sessions may be offered also by Dale Dewar and Bill Curry. At present Dale and Bill are developing a discussion presentation for younger Friends, not yet married, but who may be thinking about it.

I had climbed back onto the bus with some reluctance this time. I find myself wanting to fast-forward to mid-November, but without missing any of the rich experiences ahead! I am very happy to be visiting in Wynyard, and will now head happily again toward the week in Victoria as a writing teacher, and visits to Lillooet and Prince George, followed by CYM gathering in Alberta. For the rest of the summer, I will fly back to Ontario to be at the wedding of my youngest sister, move house (sigh) (really just to the other side of my existing house), and then fly back in September to see Bowen Island Friends, Duncan Worship Group, Fern

Street Meeting (formerly Victoria Monthly Meeting), and a few more groups in the BC interior. At Thanksgiving, for a few days I will be between Fraser Valley Friends and Nelson Friends, and may not have a place to go. So if someone near there wants help with writing or maybe harvesting at that time, please contact me. Then will come the adventure up the Alaskan Highway to Whitehorse, then back down again to Saskatoon, and home. There I intend to stay, except for the postponed visits to Ottawa and to Killaloe, which are scheduled for February next year.

Near Dymont, Ontario, at two o'clock in the morning, the bus slowed for a figure beside the road, holding a flashlight and wearing a long white beard. I was a bit thrilled to finally see for myself the legendary figure of Tom Findley, flagging down a bus. I was also really perturbed, because the bus was full and the driver had told me that he couldn't take on anybody else if we were full. They took on Tom, though, and the spare bus driver sat in the door well until they got to a stop where they could call taxis to take the overflow. For the last day of my travelling, I enjoyed a long conversation with Tom, and hardly noticed the time until we pulled up in the early evening at a gas station in Wynyard. We were met by Bill Curry, looking newly shaven in a close hair-and-beard cut for summer, and by Lenore, glamorous in a long gown and wide-brimmed straw hat and two canes, who had walked over from her house to greet us. That was Friday night.

Now it is Tuesday and here I am, all alone in the Curry-Dewar house, after a very full weekend. Bill and Dale left this morning for the Sunshine Coast to be present at the marriage of Calgary's Sarah Dick. Canadian Friends are a sort of a family, but, my, we are spread out! I love it here, an enchanted corner of the Saskatchewan prairie in the Touchwood hills, in an octagonal house with, spread out below the windows, a small natural lake. On the weekend a flock of pelicans came through and rested there. Last night, Dale called us outside to see an awe-inspiring sweep of Northern Lights, pulsating white overhead and flowing down the sky to the far horizon. And of course we have been out standing silently in the prairie, with wraparound sunset. And wraparound mosquitoes, but that night it wasn't too bad.

This house sits on land that belongs to the New Roots Community Land Trust. There are two other houses nearby on this land, a nice one that may be for sale, and one that needs work, but has a new roof and is rumoured to have been the oldest house in Wynyard. I think the idea, twenty-five years ago, was to combine love for the earth with a nature conservancy and/or land trust--I don't yet understand if there is a difference between these two -- and an intentional community. The people here own their houses, but not the land under them, which is rented from the land trust. Maybe one sign that I am nearing the end of my journey is the pull I feel to stay right here and inhabit one of those houses! Or maybe it's because I was born out here in Saskatchewan, because I have always felt some of



that pull. But I felt like staying in Windsor, too, and it was hard to leave Peterborough. There really are challenging and beautiful places to live and things to do, for those so led.

On Sunday evening, after all Friends had gone except Lenore, who lives half an hour away in the town, we set out across prairie roads to Naicam, where Dancing Sky Theatre was on tour with "All My Relations," a play to celebrate Saskatchewan's centennial year. Ntara Curry is in it, and will be, all summer, as they take the play to many small places. Its theme is respect for the land, and the way both the original native people and the more recent immigrants live in close connection in Saskatchewan with the changing seasons. The performance we saw was in a hockey rink, a major community centre in this small town, and the performance drew a large audience. The echo in the arena meant we missed some of the poetry, but we caught much of it too, and the dancing of the seasons was exhilarating to watch. At the end, the white people, seen here as Ukrainians, and the aboriginal people prepare harvest feasts. Ntara gets to deliver the line, "Can we eat together?" She gave it a poignancy and depth that made it a real question. Can we? The tables were lifted into the centre of the stage and baskets of food were exchanged as "all my relations" joined in their celebration of the fruits of the land.

Next day I had the opportunity to speak with a trapper who lives near here and who admires his neighbours on the Daystar First Nation reserve for their trapping skills, yet also speaks bitterly about their rights to their land. It wasn't fun talking with him, but I thought I saw how ambivalent he feels as he attempts to keep his prejudices going in the face of facts. My own facts didn't impress him much, I must say. His basic view was that the land is there for our use, especially white people's use, since we are the ones who had the wit to discover electricity and a few other things that he felt the native people had been slow about. Any species that can't be harvested for money is likely a species we can do without, he felt, although he seemed to make an exception when I asked him about grizzly bears. But "we don't need it," he kept saying, about species, travel, and any other adventure or culture outside of his experience. As Dale pointed out afterwards, "need" can be an ethical starting place too. Enough for our need but not for our greed. Anyway, that conversation let me see that the play is speaking directly to an ongoing process, a long unfinished journey towards mutual learning and respect.

Which I guess we need to learn first in our own communities, and in particular in the annual gathering of Canadian Yearly Meeting. I have seen a minute from Yonge St. Meeting, raising questions about our endorsement of the Earth Charter. I hear also, but have not yet seen the minute, that Wolfville Meeting is asking us to revisit the process for the writing of protocols for responding to incidents that may arise of sexual harassment. With all else there is to do in these difficult times, I feel saddened that we have to go through further exercises ourselves in conflict resolution and rebuilding trust and the making of peace. I hope

that by the time we get to Canmore in August that these minutes and concerns will feel like opportunities, and that we will find our way to the kind of loving care for one another that I experienced this weekend in Prairie Monthly Meeting.

Journal 45 LILLOOET PREPARATIVE MEETING August 10, 2005 *Home (Lillooet*

*1990)*

*Sam Mitchell said  
they called it "Hanging Waters"  
this place that I call home.*

*I can't pronounce the words  
he used to couch the name,  
but waters hang there, just  
the same,*

*as if no time had passed at  
all since tools were struck  
and nets were cast*

*by people  
who regard  
the Earth  
as blessed.*

If that looks familiar, you may have read it before, when this poem by Sarah Chandler was included in the pamphlet of poetry published by Canadian Friends in 1994. Last week I lived in that place of hanging waters, with Sarah and Trevor Chandler, and the white noise day and night from water falling down the mountain towards the green Fraser River in the valley below. This is Dickey Creek, and it supplies water to the homes near its base, and also to the town of Lillooet. Water is a constant reality here, and issue, as a town worker comes out to climb up the uncertain path to the stream's head, where what Sarah refers to as "our medieval flume" diverts some of the flow to their own use, and where stones and silt keep plugging up the source, and have to be shoveled out.

Fire is a reality too. Smoke blew across the landscape a couple of days while I was there, burning in my throat, and I heard much conversation from everyone about where it was (Spence's Bridge, I think they said) and that it wasn't serious. Last year at this time, the house I stayed in was under an evacuation alert, and Trevor was watching burning logs roll down the mountain towards his home. Sarah was in Montreal at that time, helping facilitate an annual month-long conference on human rights. I met her there when I was roped in by the Raging Grannies to facilitate some political songwriting. I remember now that Sarah told me that their house back in Lillooet was under alert from the forest fires raging in BC. This

past week I was at that site, and the water we drank had to be boiled because of contamination from that fire.

But also from the logging which is going on in the burned-off zone, and that is more controversial. The idea is to go in quickly after a fire and retrieve the lumber which is still untouched, even though its outsides may be charred. The problem is that such contracts allow for a much cheaper price for the wood, and do not prevent the taking of other surviving trees which could have renewed the forest. There are other issues as well, and again they are very real and daily, and not some vague environmental issue that affects other people far away. It was right up there on the mountain, visible from the deck where we ate our (fresh from the garden) meals.

Water, trees, fire, climate change, fish, wildlife, indigenous people, the legacy of the gold rush days here -- these form the warp and woof of the days, not the periphery. Sarah can pronounce the words now that she couldn't eleven years ago when she wrote her poem. She coaches me in the pronunciation of the characteristic clicking sound that is expressed in the written form of the St'at'imc community as an apostrophe. (There is also an acute accent over the "a" that I can't reproduce in simple text.) For the apostrophe, you make a "t' sound while blowing air out of both sides of your mouth. Magalie, the WWOOFER (Willing Worker On Organic Farms) from France who arrived a few days into my visit here, is better at some of the sounds than I am, because they are much like the French "r"--which I also always had trouble learning to do. But Sarah can do it. Whole sentences come from her in the Strat'imcets language, along with place names and passionate statements about such matters as attracting tourists to Lillooet by celebrating the gold rush. "Thirty thousand, mostly men, arriving where indigenous people had lived for 10,000 years, unmolested. What's to celebrate? It was destruction. Fifty percent of the population of present-day Lillooet is still indigenous. The gold rush is an occasion for grieving perhaps, for reparation...."

But slowly it is changing. We met a man who is working on a rock mosaic for the town, inspired by the rock mosaic which is on the reserve.

And the Xwistenmec have begun offering visits to some of their land and celebrations, to outsiders who can approach with respect. At one point, Sarah explains to me, indigenous people everywhere began closing off some of their wide-open invitations to the white society to come and see how they live. There had been too much abuse of their traditions, too many white people taking some of what they experienced and changing it too much as they offered it, sometimes for money, cut off from its roots in their culture. One such issue that is affecting Friends is a controversy over the offering of a sweat lodge at Friends General Conference, an experience which has been profound for many Friends, but which felt offensive to the indigenous nation whose territory we were on at the last FGC.

Let's get to a few stories, from this rich and crowded week.

On the day of my arrival, Sarah took me on an orientation hike down to the river and past a boulder cast up by old upheavals, and I climbed it and got into the hole in its top, a circular pot created in the past by stones swirling inside the larger stone. Sarah photographed this little adventure, and also guided me in placing my feet as I came down, or else I'd still be there.

Graeme Hope came from Kamloops to join us in a weekend retreat, and the four of us enjoyed the gifts of small gatherings. Much time was spent out on the deck, as Sarah said, "noshing" — lunch extending into afternoon and almost catching up to supper. In between was hiking down into the orchard and up the creek and gathering vegetables for dinner from the garden, and quiet times. We reflected together upon our spiritual journeys in a worship-sharing circle, and we worshipped in silence on Sunday morning.

The group in Lillooet has shrunk at the moment mostly to Trevor and Sarah, with some attendance by a few others who do not live close in. The Chandlers have become in effect isolated Friends, and they miss the sustenance of the larger Friends community. The worship group in Kamloops is in a similar situation. One Friend spoke of finding "spiritual companions," and this became a recurring theme in the week, the idea of finding a group of people now, where we are, to go the journey with us, whether or not our Meeting is in a position to meet our needs. By acting to meet our own spiritual needs, we may also be doing the most Spirit-led action towards eventually renewing or growing our own Quaker groups.

Graeme left on the Monday and Trevor had already left, returning on Tuesday with their grandson, 14-year-old Mischa, who is en route from Toronto to Halifax, via summer with his grandparents. Mischa was a treat to have with us, and I will see a little more of him at Yearly Meeting gathering.

Only at the last moment did I get back to the orchard to see Trevor and WWOOFER Magalie harvesting red apples. But I slept in the house which is also Trevor's office, and I saw the many geological maps there and the aerial surveys. When I had first arrived, Trevor had been up in a helicopter himself, taking photos and beginning a survey commissioned by the province, this one concerning arable land. He showed me the device with two eye-holes which can turn two flat survey maps into a 3-D landscape of steep hills and deep valleys. Slowly I understood that his concern for the environment around him has led to many long struggles as well as to contracts and other environmental work. We talked of logging practices, of natural cycles and of climate warming and climate change, of water and of fire.

On Wednesday Sarah took me into downtown Lillooet for two workshops sponsored by the Lillooet Library, the Religious Society of Friends, and by Lillooet Learns. The first was a children's reading program where I tried to make a connection between poetry and songs. Magic ensued when a local man who makes wooden marimbas (a form of xylophone) came and gently introduced the children to making their own music. I regretted, really, coming back in with my perhaps obsessive need for WORDS, but we read poems, some funny and some wistful, and then wrote a song of our own, using the tune to Frere Jacques. It turned out to be about one's cat, and had a catnip verse, a verse about affectionate cuddling, one about trying to hug the cat and being scratched, and a final, unexpectedly sad verse about the cat who got sick and died under the bed. "I love my cat," we sang, at the beginning and at the end, and the event is going to be written up on the Lillooet Library website, for all the world to see.

The group I worked with numbered seven. Usually there are more than twenty more children from the Friendship Centre, but I saw those kids only in passing, as they quietly lined up with their adults for a tour of the police station, and later returned at noon for a picnic lunch on the grounds outside the rec centre and library. We regretted the cultural divide, but I have to admit that I was relieved not to have to pursue the writing of songs across cultures and across 30 kids. It would have gone fine! But this was much easier, and I'm sure the police station was really interesting too.

On Wednesday afternoon, we offered a second poetry-writing session for adults, and on Friday, an all-day session of Artist/Mystic/Activist. At both sessions some adults came from the indigenous people of Lillooet. All concerned produced risky, touching stories and poems and stories, and all I had to do was to receive them with awe and pleasure.

Wildlife kept happening. I saw my first black bear, swimming across the river near where we had gone for a walk, away from us, fortunately, and then eating berries from bushes directly across from us. We could hear the branches snapping. I saw mountain goats high on the rocks, impossible to imagine how they managed to be there at all, and then they moved -straight up the rock face. Two ospreys flew low across the cliff, changing it to look for all the world like the large paintings by Robert Phipps on the walls where I stayed in Bar Harbor, Maine. On another day, a deer leapt across the road so close that it was only because of Sarah's swift reaction that we didn't slam into it. On the last day we saw a slanted shadow ahead on the road and little dark dots flowing around it: a mother grouse with a dozen chicks. Rather too many wasps, rather too close up, shared our meal times on the deck. A very cute packrat viewed us with curiosity from a live trap, and another thumped in the ceiling of the old house where Trevor grew up, where he now has his office, and where I slept. I hadn't known that packrats thump, and that they are more like squirrels and not really rats. Xing the cat carried in one dead baby bird, one fledgling (who flew away), and one very live garter snake. Trevor said the fledgling was an LBJ: Little Brown Jobbie.

The fishing season opened, and Sarah drove me to overlook the fishing rocks, traditional places where indigenous families set up their drying racks and their nets to fish. This is also the very dangerous place in the Fraser River where anything coming along is sucked under and spit out quite far downstream. A man was fishing in this strip, sitting on the rock ledge at the shore. Sometimes people tie themselves to something in case of catching a fish and falling in, but this man seemed to be just sitting there, taking his chances, working his net.

On Saturday, Sarah drove me to Cache Creek -- it had finally dawned on me that Lillooet has NO bus and NO train service -- to connect with the bus. On the way, we stopped at the reconstructed Shuswap Village run by the Stuctwesemc Band at Hat Creek. I was particularly interested in the little hut made of cattail bulrushes, leaning together. You could see daylight between the cattails, which meant that a breeze could come through. However, if a rain starts, the cattails swell up and the hut becomes waterproof. Neat. I also liked the underground house. It had queen-size sleeping shelves all the way around and I bet it is as warm in winter as it was blessedly cool on that hot day.

Sarah was to give a workshop on human rights at the FGC just past, but not enough people showed up. I hope she can find Friends who will put their heads into this workshop, and find out the riches she has to show us. For instance, did you know that the U.S. Declaration of Independence, after all that about life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, lists the things that George III was doing to them that a leader must not do to another country? Their indictment of George III and their reasons for breaking off from England sound like the same list of upsetting actions that have many Americans unhappy with the present George.

Even more important is the vision of "human rights" as a kind of universal philosophy which we can use to help us grasp issues that might otherwise remain confusingly complicated. An example is the way the rights of the child can guide our response to the reality of child soldiers. In the study package Sarah has prepared I found this quote from Kristi Rudelius-Palmer: "Reclaiming our human rights enables us to share a common vision, speak the same language, and practice responsible actions toward one another."

Also in the package, and poignant in this context of human rights, is this statement from Ursula Franklin, from 1979: "I have never lost the enjoyment of sitting in silence at the beginning of meeting, knowing that everything can happen, knowing the joy of utmost surprise; feeling that nothing is preordained, nothing is set, all is open. The light can come from all sides."

I dived into some of the resources that Sarah had brought back from FGC, and can really recommend the following package, as fun and useful and provocative: Inreach-Outreach Packet for Small Meetings. Available from Advancement Outreach Committee, Friends General Conference . 1216 Arch St., 2B, Philadelphia PA [19107.friends@fgcquaker.org](mailto:19107.friends@fgcquaker.org) [www.fgcquaker.org](http://www.fgcquaker.org)

Light is becoming another theme as I move on into the days in Prince George. On the bus I read an article that Graeme had passed on to me from Joy Conrad-Rice, as of possible interest to me, and it *was*. I will finish with a quote I found there, from somewhere in the writings of Rufus Jones:

"There is a type of organic mysticism which is much more common than highly conscious mysticism." Speaking of his own experience of this, he wrote: "Suddenly I felt the walls between the visible and the invisible grow thin and the eternal seemed to break through into the world where I was. I saw no flood of light; I heard no voice, but I felt as though I were face to face with a higher order of reality than that of the trees or mountains..... A sense of mission broke in on me and I felt I was being called to a well-defined task of life to which I then and there dedicated myself..... I was brought to a new level of life and have never quite lost the transforming effect of the experience."



Journal 46 PRINCE GEORGE ALLOWED MEETING & CANADIAN  
YEARLY MEETING Tuesday, August 23, 2005

This journey has brought me a sharp exercise in trusting Spirit to lead. At the moment, way is not opening well for the seven visits remaining in the west. I, and perhaps God too, really want/ wants to complete this project of visiting everyone, or almost everyone, and to do it this year. At the wedding of my sister on Saturday, the groom's mother showed me an exquisite Navaho-type rug she has made from, gasp, \$500 worth of short pieces of wool. I have been told that the Navahos always include a flaw in their work, in acknowledgement that only God is perfect. (Here I get a flash of Betty McInnes of Victoria exclaiming, "So you're not perfect!!!" and the relief I have felt at various times at this reminder that perfection is not expected.) Anyway, my sister's new mother-in-law had not, as far as she knew, included a flaw, and the rug really was beautiful. Right now I sense that stumbling into what seems a flaw can also indicate that a journey is truly under the hand of the Spirit, and not mine to plan out, even if I do hope to write a book about it, and thought that the visits could all be concluded within a span of two years, 2004-5. Which may still happen, with the exception of the two, Ottawa and Killaloe, which have been rescheduled to February, 2006. By then I would like to be well into the writing and reflections which will come from this.

So it is to be seen. Perhaps from a viewpoint wider and farther than mine, it is already seen, imagined, visioned. The Creation Story book which the children of Yarmouth Meeting made a few years back has God "imagining" the world into being. I like that, and I like the idea that we imagine alongside, and that there is something true in the notion of co-creation. One Friend took me aside and told me firmly that God does not imagine; God just is, I think was his belief. God is not the sort of entity that has imaginations that can go one way or maybe another. I may have that Friend's objections wrong, but as I write this I note how firmly my own belief system feels that God's work is indeed the kind of process that can go one way or maybe another. Not without direction. I think of it as the growth of a seed sprouting into a tree which emerges and finds itself on the side of a windy cliff. It will grow. The shape may not be the same as the shape which comes from an identical seed in the middle of a forest. But it will, in its own terms, be perfect.

Beginning in Lillooet, a theme had started up about the dark night of the soul, about losing one's sense of numinosity, of one's connection with the hills and mists and wildlife, and with one another. I felt like that on the bus, leaving Lillooet. I had had a rich time, and the days of workshops had left me satisfied, but also feeling empty, or maybe emptied. I rooted around in my backpack, not able to settle and write or watch the wooded hills and sandy cliffs outside the bus windows. I found an article that Graeme had brought, sent by Joy Conrad-Rice, who thought I might be interested. This is the same article that I quoted from in the last journal, Rufus Jones on Light. I was to give it back to Joy at Yearly Meeting, so thought maybe this was a moment to read it. "Kundalini Energy as Manifested Through Quakers Past and Present, presented at the Institute for Consciousness Research, Markdale, Ontario, July 31-Aug. 1, 2004." This time last year. By Jean Roberts. I started into it, and suddenly I was reading

with one of those upswells of interest, the feeling that "this is exactly what I need." Basically it was a reminder of the mystical experiences which brought so many of us to Friends in the first place, and which are affirmed (but perhaps not enough) by the hour of silence on a Sunday morning.

To my surprise, I found a passage that said that the mystical strand of Quakerism became intentionally muted in the 1950's: "...the importance of science and technology were ...being emphasized in the society at large, and Quakers were not immune to these influences from the culture around them." Some of the mystical writings of Rufus Jones were not reprinted.

I came to several quotations from recent Friends, recounting experiences of quaking or coincidence that have stopped them in their tracks and suggested to them that there is something more going on than is accounted for by ordinary expectations. There on the bus I stopped in my tracks myself as I came to the name of one of the contributors, "Quaker mystic and healer" Elaine Emily. My goodness! That was the name of the first-timer I had been assigned to at Yearly Meeting as a "buddy"! Okay, I thought, and felt more on track.

This was a short bus trip, just half a day from Cache Creek to Prince George. was met at the bus terminal by both Susan and David Stevenson, with David's big bear-hug and Susan's warmth. I had imagined Prince George as a small place, impossibly northern and isolated. Instead, of course, it's a well-established city, rough and ready at times which gives it a character of its own, but with its own beauty and with now a university. Since I was staying with the Stevensons, and son Peter was still at home, I was dropped right in to the city's thriving cultural scene.

I had missed the performance of a musical event organized by Peter, called "Pushing the Edge." The local arts magazine presented it this way, in an article by a local writer named Nicole Gagnon: "Stevenson, 19, sees strong parallels between Quaker worship and Jazz improvisation....The performance given by The Northern BC Free Jazz Ensemble on June 1st will mirror this Quaker style of worship. The program begins with a period of silence. As the music progresses, each of the eight musicians will have moments in which they take the lead as they are moved to do so, and moments in which they do not play at all. Solos will be offset by interludes of silence." Peter had pre-written a few musical themes, to form a base for the improvised melodies. A tape of this performance was played in the Stevensons' kitchen while Susan and I cut up apples for applesauce. The music was unexpectedly listenable, and I discovered that when my uninformed attention did wander, that I became alert again and my hearing sharpened each time the group fell into silence. A CD of this performance is now available, and was being sold at the craft fair at CYM. Also the arts article says that some of Peter's compositions can be found online at [www.newmusiccanada.ca](http://www.newmusiccanada.ca) by entering his name in the search bar.

That very first night, when I got off the bus, David and Susan whisked me off to the home of Magee Spicer and Richard Thompson, parents of Peter's special friend Jesse, and an ongoing party. Richard is a storyteller and author of many

books for children, some with illustrations by Magee. One series was inspired by Jesse when she was a child. So this was a very creative household I was brought into, with Peter on the piano and children's book illustrations on the walls. Friend Lesley Cerny, who lives in Smithers, was there too, returning from a painting retreat with her car full of fresh wet canvases. Also there was a fellow with a guitar, singing songs that had me mesmerized. It turned out his name is Raghu Lokanathan, and I've just found out from Susan that he has a website: [hap:/ /www.raghumusic.com/index.htm](http://www.raghumusic.com/index.htm) He has one CD, with another out soon. Catch, if you can, his song "Caledonia," a funny and tender song about the big brawling city of Prince George. He's great!

The Thompsons and Lesley were there the next morning for meeting for worship, and for the sharing afterwards about what we make with our creative passions. Magee the artist said that her prime creation is dirt for her beloved garden. Richard told about his journey into writing and telling stories for children, and raised provocative questions about the economics of being paid for such creations. It seemed to me that his questions were more radical, really, than the question of money for creative work. Doesn't it have to do with the spirit within any deeply-inspired work we may feel called to do? This is a bit like the old Quaker mistrust of paying for "hireling clergy." In some cultures people pay a teacher or a healer, as well as artists, in barter or in freewill donations rather than a salary. Does it make a difference? The Thompsons are also experimenting with living lightly on the earth, with much walking and bicycling and commitment to not using motorized vehicles.

Which brings me to the grand bicycle tour that Peter and Jess did this summer, visiting Young Friends in B.C. and Alberta, stirring up interest in attending Yearly Meeting, and in general in the future of Friends. For more of the story and the map, click on [http:/ /www.drawandtell.com/jtrip/jptripnain.html](http://www.drawandtell.com/jtrip/jptripnain.html) For a really cool photo of the scene from the Chandlers' deck in Lillooet — prayer flags, and a train crossing mid-cliff -- go to [http:/ /www.drawandtell.com/jtrip/jpc02.html](http://www.drawandtell.com/jtrip/jpc02.html)

A neighbour down the street from the Stevensons has young children, and Peter has been tutoring the boy in piano. Susan hoped that I might meet their mother. The little girl in particular is at an age where she needs an eye kept on her when she's outside playing, and so, when we set out for a short walk down the street, we did meet mother Marcie, right away. Susan had already lent out some books to help respond to the children's curious, insistent questions about God and the general meaning of life. We had a good conversation, standing there on the street keeping an eye on the little one. Would it be all right to come to Meeting? Marcie wondered. So that looks likely to happen.

Grace Wolf and Andrew Gage turned up later, taking the long way from Vancouver to Yearly Meeting. The next day they took me to Barkerville, one of the sites of the gold rush, and we became absorbed in the history of the Chinese settlement of that place. We forgot all about the main reason people go to Barkerville, which is the opportunity to do a little pseudo placer mining for gold ourselves. Instead we followed the vivacious, very knowledgeable guide through

the Chinese end of the long Barkerville street, and followed up with lunch at the Chinese restaurant there, leaving time for only a short visit to the rest of the town. We did go upstairs in the hotel, where I learned that social historians now pay attention to songs and poetry if they want to recover the less-solemn details of past daily life. We also stuck our heads in at the little Anglican church, where tourists were singing hymns, and spoke briefly with the schoolmarm in the school, who was getting ready to teach the public "the basics."

I was fatigued from this satisfying outing, but when Grace and Andrew suggested a tour of the campus of the University of Northern B.C., and Susan said she'd show us where she works, I knew I had to go along. I was really glad I did. We saw the beautiful architecture of this new campus, but also Susan took us into the dungeons to show us petri dish upon petri dish, and container upon container, of lichens, mosses and (I think) liverworts. Susan explained the importance of weighing lichen, and the difficulties, since it absorbs moisture so readily. It was exciting standing in that humid little room, understanding something of the work she is doing. Later, on our way to Yearly Meeting on the bus, Susan would help me to understand a little better the forest patterns I would be looking at. One part of tracking forest change is to track alterations in the life of the lichens, especially at the margins of logged areas.

Grace and Andrew left, and we got into serious packing for Yearly Meeting ourselves. David had already left. His contribution at the Sunday sharing had been his pride and enthusiasm in setting up and helping to maintain the Yearly Meeting food co-op. Feeding one hundred people has become a much more serious enterprise than the old co-ops of perhaps forty people. Foodsafe has become a watch word, and the need for proper permanent equipment has become essential. David had made a wide photograph that opened out into his vision of the co-op as it would be set up, with pristine sinks and stoves set against a preternaturally green lawn. The reality was going to prove much more challenging, but his vision did come through.

A series of further coincidences continued to suggest to me that something was going on, all right, on this part of the journey that led to Prince George and then to Yearly Meeting. I try to keep one mystical foot on the ground, but I do think of coincidences as perhaps blazes on trees, not necessarily meaningful in themselves, but indicating that I'm on the path. One that was particularly startling occurred when Peter brought out a psaltery, a precious handmade instrument of ancient design that is mentioned in the bible. A label inside it made me suddenly realize that it had been built by Robert Spears, who is the brother of my longtime friend, writer and artist Heather Spears. I said this, and Jesse nodded and said that Heather had come to Prince George several years ago, and Jesse had taken her course on the drawing of the human head.

This trip by bus was the first manifestation of a pattern I had originally hoped might have cross-stitched this journey all across the land. I had hoped that groups would send a companion with me on the bus to the next stop, someone who could attend meeting there and then come back. This has happened a couple of times by car, but this time Susan and Peter and Jesse and I all travelled

together to Edmonton by bus, where we were met by a badly frazzled David, and taken out to Camrose. There we did attend various meetings for worship together, and a week later, on the Thursday of Yearly Meeting, some of us had to pull ourselves out of the gathering and we left together. It was a big transition for the Stevenson family, as Peter left to attend Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana, and Susan went with him just for a couple of days, to attend a parents' thing, while David and Jesse went back to the gathering, and home. I missed out on giving Jesse a special goodbye hug, but was very aware of the parting of lovers. Unless Jesse overcomes the family concerns about air travel and goes to Earlham for a visit, she and Peter are saying goodbye until Christmas.

David had commented that he had missed the whole of Yearly Meeting. His intention and commitment had been to set up the equipment for the food co-op, but the hugeness of the feeding operation kept him right there nearly all of the time. The site was windy, and the first two tarps he set up as a roof over the outside tables were torn away by the wind and literally torn. In the end he waited for Steve Abbott to arrive, with an engineer's eye and knowhow, and sure enough, soon after Steve got there, the third tarp system went up, and this time it stayed in place. But meanwhile, David was solving one challenge after another, at first with relish, but then someone stole the license plate from his trailer and suddenly he couldn't go into Edmonton himself and haul back the extra tables and the refrigerators and food, but had to wait for a new license plate to be couriered in, which also took a day longer than expected. The drainage for the grey water turned out to be under a solid manhole cover, which couldn't be removed for fear that little children might fall in. Step by step, David pulled this thing together, but by the time we were underway, people were speaking in awed tones about the fact that his usual wide smile and bear hug had faded, for the first time in corporate memory. I don't know what the evaluation was at the end of the week, or whether we're going to do it all again next year, but I can say this for sure: the food was incredibly good. Janet Ross also spent 14 hour days there for the first few days, and then cut back to twelve, coordinating the menus, and the good food just kept coming.

One morning, rain drizzling and the air so cold you could see your breath, I took the first spoonful of my scrambled eggs and onions, and exclaimed out loud how wonderful hot food really does taste when you're outside in the cold and wet. "Ah," said Lynne Phillips, "you've found the pony!" It seems there was a guy who kept digging and digging at a huge pile of horse manure. "Why are you doing that?" asked the seeker after wisdom who happened upon him. "Because," he answered, "if there's this much shit, there must be a pony!"

Yearly Meeting for me was incredibly intense but also satisfying. Along with Leigh Turina of Toronto and Margot Overington of Halifax, I worked in the mornings with the 10 to 12 year olds. It was fun, and I hope somebody took lots of pictures of their historical skit at Family Night. I thought of everyone there on Friday night, celebrating 50 years of Canadian Yearly Meeting, but by then I was back in Ontario, writing the words I had to say the next day at my sister's wedding.

I wasn't in on the issue about the Earth Charter, and so can't speak about that. I did have a rich, too-short session with Elaine Emily. And the CnR group (Consultation and Renewal Working Group) and I had dinner together two nights, and their comments and queries helped me begin to sum up whatever it is I am learning from these visits to our groups. I was able to attend some of the sessions, both formal and informal, around the policies and protocols we are struggling to write to respond to any incident of sexual harassment. On that matter, it felt as if mighty shifts were occurring. I felt that happen inside myself. I cannot go into it all here, and the issues have not gone away, but I feel humbled and heartened by the sense of Spirit creating new openings among us, opportunities to remember that we are one family across our deep divisions. To speak one's own truth, in love.

The poem Susan Stevenson brought to our sharing in Prince George:

#### WHERE I STEP

##### I

Barreling down the mountain slope  
 Forcing through tangles of brush  
 Trying only not to trip  
 Not to fall between logs  
 Not to be skewered by branch stubs,  
 By some fluke or watchful goddess  
 My boot arrested in mid-air  
 Above a day-old fawn  
 Still except for quivering nostrils,  
 Curled as though still enclosed by womb.  
 I crush creatures with each step  
 But this big-headed baby is spared  
 And I remember the intimacy of life beneath my feet.

##### II

This log passes over boulders, torrents, and devil's club.  
 I am no squirrel  
 Scampering runways, hurtling branch to branch,  
 Yet in my slow progress I  
 Avoid the hidden branch stub,  
 Regain balance when bark separates from wood,  
 Grasp branches that do not break.  
 Dare I ask why so blessed?  
 Or will that question break the spell,  
 My next step landing on a hidden faultline,  
 My new consciousness plunging into rock and water?  
 How then to give thanks for blessedness?

Journal 47 FALL WESTERN HALF-YEARLY MEETING & SASKATOON ALLOWED MEETING  
Tuesday, October 18, 2005

In the early morning of October 5, I hitched a ride with my young tenant who was on his way to work, and fetched up at the Greyhound terminal in downtown Peterborough in time to pick up a free Globe & Mail and tie a blue tag to my suitcase reading 'Saskatchewan.' The buses were crowded because of the Thanksgiving weekend, but my seatmates were pleasant all the way. An extra bus was put on and so I did not see Tom Findley this time, flagging down the bus beside the highway, but in Winnipeg there he was in the line-up for Saskatoon. I began to focus in on the fact that other Friends were travelling long distances to wind up at our same destination: a Mennonite retreat centre called Shekinah. In the last hours of the two days and two nights on the bus, I sneezed, then sneezed again and abruptly my throat grew scratchy and sore. I realized with dismay that I had caught a bug. After that, it was just a waiting game to get to Saskatoon and to extricate myself from the bus. At 5 am Friday we were there, and my tall blonde sister was up and dressed and waiting for me. Tom went off to phone Jay Cowsill, who had said he too would be up already, marking papers, and would come and get Tom, and I was whisked to my sister's house for a welcome breakfast, bath and several hours' sleep. By this time I felt so rotten that I considered not going to the weekend at all, but by the time I woke, I knew I could do it, and I wanted to. In the afternoon, Laurel Beyer arrived with Torn in the car and a pile of bedding for me, and I loaded in the suitcase and we headed for the beautiful Shekinah hills.

There is a lot of love floating around in the western half-yearly gatherings. I remembered the fall one as very small, mainly the Curry and Dewar family and maybe some McGruthers and Stevensons, cramped into overheated cabins and a rustic lodge. I did remember that Tom Findley always picks high bush cranberries and boils them down into syrup for pancakes, and that they smell as they cook like dirty socks. I was unprepared for the spacious lodge which was built there about six years ago, out of wood recycled from a prairie grain elevator. The whole set-up was welcoming and wonderful, and I fell asleep in the comfortable bedroom and woke up to find I had slept through most of the program. I think it may have been a flu bug, because of the fever and the way my energy disappeared. Whatever, by Sunday morning I knew I'd survive, and in between I managed to see -- and I hope not contaminate -- some of the 50-60 people, including many children, who drove in some cases for three days to get to this gathering.

At first the high bush cranberries seemed scarce, and then the children discovered shelves piled with them, in a rundown shanty the Mennonites have left on the grounds, for the very purpose of being discovered. Squirrels had picked the berries and stored them for the winter on these shelves. We marveled, and carefully left those berries for the squirrels. Other bushes were discovered that the squirrels had missed, so the syrup did get made, did smell like dirty socks -- and tasted yummy. I slept through the special interest groups, and so I did not hear Dale Dewar speaking of possibly

returning to Iraq in the Care to Care project, or Amy Jean Singleton-Polster reporting about the international Young Friends gathering, or Barbara Bazett explaining about the school being built in a community in, I think, Ghana. I am fuzzy about all of it, and I apologize. I did begin to discuss poverty issues with Stacy, who had piled five of her six children into a car and driven all the way from Prince George. I was well enough and centred enough to attend a gathered meeting for worship on Sunday morning. Maria Hopkins lent me use of her Tiger Balm and made me a cup of healing tea. Each day I could feel my illness receding and my energy seeping back.

A woman named Marie Grehan had been billeted into my room, and put up graciously with my coughing and snorting in the nights. She is working with aboriginal communities in food production and sales, and David Stevenson became excited about Marie's projects and decided to find out more about them. She invited him to come to her house after the gathering, where she lives down the river from where we were, and then she invited me to come too. Susan Stevenson had arranged a ride with Friends to Edmonton and thence home to Prince George again by bus, freeing David to pursue this strong--though, as he noted, unseasoned -- leading.

By this time I knew that I had an invitation to stay with Frank Klaassen and Sharon Wright and their family in Saskatoon, but there seemed no hurry, and so I set off on the adventure, following David's leading and Marie's SUV. It became a magical mystery tour. We pulled up hopefully at an old railway station at Rosthern which has been renovated into a substantial theatre space and restaurant and a place for sale of some crafts. Because of the Thanksgiving holiday, it was closed, and so lunch did not happen. We snacked on whatever we had in the two vans -- not much, as it turned out -- and stopped next at the home of Metis writer Maria Campbell, who was not at home. We made use of her nicely-equipped outhouse, admired her backyard sculptures and structures, and took off again across the river valley countryside.

Marie parked outside the gates at Batoche and we walked in, although it too was officially closed for the holiday, and walked among the gravestones and thought about what happens when a moment of historical injustice becomes commemorated into the Parks system. Marie led us next down a side road and into the yard of a family she knows, who invited us to join them for Thanksgiving dinner! They really did have enough, and I got over my embarrassment at barging in on these strangers, and enjoyed their wonderful meal, their children, their other guests, and their views. Paul is an organic gardener and Burgit works in pottery, making, among much else, medieval-looking drinking horns, and little round pendants inscribed with ancient symbols of happiness (a spiral, a dancing elf). I bought a couple of the pendants, and forgot and left my wallet on their kitchen counter.

I helped with the driving for the last bit, and when I went to make sure I had my driver's license, discovered the wallet was gone, and figured out where it had to be. Finally we drove into Marie's yard. The phone was ringing, a message from Burgit about the lost wallet. David and Marie began discussions about land use and land claims, blueberry jam and rosehip jelly, sustainable economies and



Traditional Knowledge. I listened as well as I could. A row of ducks on Marie's window ledge was made out of small rocks but looked ready to fly. I struggled to understand the life of this woman Marie, living on the prairie in a small house, running some sort of business involving wild berries, and about to take off to Ottawa to manage a political campaign for an aboriginal candidate for the NDP.

Next day, David and I retraced our steps, picking up the wallet; stopping at Rosthern for lunch, then backtracking to Shekinah to pick up some kitchen pots that Dale and Bill had left behind, where I picked a few rosehips to remind myself of this place. Then it was on to Saskatoon, and the very welcoming house and Klaassen-Wright family. David stayed a night there, visited the food production plant next day, and headed back to Prince George. Meanwhile, I settled in, finding my own centre in a household crisscrossed all day by the varied needs of three children for school, music lessons and fencing lessons, birthday parties and the urgent need to get to Value Village to pick out a costume for Hallowe'en, and of the parents, who teach and who both are medievalists. The screen saver on the computer is a silver Celtic dragon. To my enormous bemusement, Frank's area of academic study is medieval magic, and Sharon's is medieval women's wrath. We fell into intricate conversations, profoundly enjoyable. I got to sit one evening with Ahren (7) over his homework, and to watch "odd" TV early on Sunday morning with Isaac (11)-- "odd" seemed to refer to the sexist underpinnings of frothy shows aimed at young teens. Jessica, 13, was writing fiction, mostly for school. We all knocked along together, eating together, exchanging smiles, building bits of trust. I had met the young people twice before, and now we were establishing a little more experience together. I have the idea that I'll see them again, perhaps when they visit friends who live near Peterborough.

I went out for tea with Jane Dimnik, who teaches conflict resolution in the schools full time, often meeting with seven different classes in a day, children whom she has not seen before and whom she engages through puppets. It seems to me that it is exhausting work, although clearly to Jane very satisfying too.

Twice people told me that they liked having an "elder" to talk with. As I have now signed up to be an elder in a leadership workshop in Duncan, I feel eldership settling around my neck a little. I think it is okay, although perhaps the moment I think so, it won't be. ".... Walk humbly with your God." I hang tightly onto that.

The Saskatoon group meets on Saturdays, at present in the Unitarian Fellowship hall. The Unitarians are moving and have invited the Quakers to come with them to their new location. The Quakers are thinking about it and will discern around this at their next Meeting for Worship for Business. I asked whether anyone enjoys the Saturday time as freeing them to attend the Unitarian group on Sunday. Perhaps one or two, but the main shift is the other way--people of various denominations coming to sit in with the Friends on a Saturday, which leaves them free to attend their other group on Sunday.

The call had gone out to bring something you have made, and a couple of remarkable poems came in the hands of remarkable Friends. Another Friend spoke of her garden, and brought a heritage tomato she had grown: "I did not make this!" and said she makes "pockets of biodiversity." We heard of the detailed discipline implied in the making of a print, and admired the resulting work of art. One participant said clearly that, in the very act of focusing on a scene or person or whatever as one's subject, for a film or photograph, drawing or poem, we are automatically stating that the subject is *meaningful*. As soon as we begin to create, we are delving into meaning.

I liked this, and we saw a further example of it when a Friend spoke thoughtfully of the way the subject of her thesis recapitulated her own life journey, her spiritual story. Another Friend spoke of the joys of teaching first year English, and the opportunities it affords to encourage students to imagine different ways of being together, different meanings perhaps, different structures with different outcomes.

Later at the Klaassen-Wright home, Frank presented me with his well-thoughtout theory that in Friends our structure is in fact our process. We think of ourselves as unorganized, but we are very conservative, as a group, around our processes: meeting for worship in expectant silence, making our business decisions together in an opening to spiritual discernment, and sharing our thoughts in the worship-sharing structure which that afternoon held in such tenderness those poems, print, photographs, thoughts, pages from a dissertation, and one small orange-red tomato.

I'm back at my sister and her husband's now, relaxing into a few days with family. My niece and her baby girl and growing boy are close by too. On Friday I hop back on the bus, this time for Nelson, B.C.

Journal 48 NELSON WORSHIP GROUP, B.C. October 26, 2005

In *Friends for Four Hundred Years*, by Brinton, there is an image of a river flowing between high banks, contrasted with a river that spreads out onto a plain, or even alters course. I don't have the book to hand, but a Friend here in Nelson referred to that image, and suggested that the river is our spiritual unity, and the high containing banks are the silence. Quakers are a wordy lot, but we know that words have their limits. In silence we can become aware of truths too deep for words. I fished out my little red book of *Advices and Queries* (\$2, I think, from our Quaker Book Service in Ottawa Meeting) and read aloud again that lovely passage from the elders at Balby, 1656:

*Dearly beloved Friends, these things we do not lay upon you as a rule or form to walk by, but that all, with the measure of light which is pure and holy, may be guided; and so in the light walking and abiding, these may be fulfilled in the Spirit, not from the letter, for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.*

Most of us learned in school about the Nile and the Yang-Tse rivers, which by overflowing their banks spread rich silt on the surrounding plains, nourishing new growth. I don't remember how the ancient Egyptians dealt with the insecurity, and the devastation of human communities, that must have accompanied this annual dump of fertile mud, but I do recall something about modern-day efforts to channel and contain the mighty Yang-Tse. Friends often speak of process, of "right ordering," and of the dance of freedom versus discipline which we have developed over the years to contain and channel -- and receive -- the mighty intrusions of Spirit. One Friend I spoke with here said she feels we have stopped it dead, and in her experience it has moved on to other communities, not ours, other ways of being together in this world. Other Friends have found a "home" in our Meetings, a safe place for the sharing of journeys we cannot fully understand, for tears, for laughter, for me a contained wildness that I love.

We refer to our booklet of *Organization and Procedure* (\$5 from QBS), our ongoing accumulation of wisdom about how to proceed, as "the Discipline." But isn't the ultimate discipline from inside, where we hold open that space, listening, then sharing and checking with our group of fellow spiritual travellers, then attempting faithfulness in living out what comes?

It is because of this radical openness that we require those high river banks. Yet nobody wants to mistake the riverbanks for the river.

Nelson is built on high banks scored by ancient glaciers, rising from Kootenay Lake and Kootenay River. I am here in fall, and until today the weather has been glorious. I've been out shuffling in yellow and red leaves, and picking up objects for "hand-outs" for our sharing last night. A pear. A walnut. A pine cone. Brilliant red leaves from the Japanese maple, indented at the veins as if stamped from an artist's press. Broad smooth waxy yellow leaves, or maybe they're some

kind of heavy petal. A fragment of bark. A sprig of clover, which wilted the moment it was plucked from its source.

One Friend fingered the bark and noticed this: on the outside it is stretched and broken from its necessary growth; on the inside, where the sap rises, it stays absolutely smooth and straight.

On Sunday, invited to bring something they have made, one Friend brought the unexpected gift to the group of a carefully-finished beautiful wooden cross. We passed it from hand to hand. The path of Spirit can lead into an experience of crucifixion — that is the old and true story. The rising again into wholeness and healing is part of this true story, too. We fingered the pattern of dark indentations on this cross. After Meeting, Friends placed it gently on the shelf of Quaker things that they have there in the room they rent in the Anglican church hall.

A Friend who works as a practical nurse said that he "makes people comfortable," and spoke of how each gesture in this work can respect a person's dignity.

Another Friend spoke of chocolate chip cookies, made with wholesome ingredients, and a regular part of the community-building she is involved in, as a counselor, especially to parenting groups, and as a human being.

I liked the story, too, from a new and younger attender, of learning to make crocheted circles and how they have evolved into hats, and the way she is beginning to make a connection between these whimsical creations and a growing concern about Haiti -- maybe she can sell the hats to raise some money for. . . what?? It was lovely to dip into a journey uncompleted, hear its ripples.

From close up, where I was billeted, I watched the quiet, focused passion and commitment which the teachers in this household bring to their students. Years ago, Liz Tanner started an alternative classroom which welcomes a range of ages, likes having siblings, and offers an environment of respect and care of one another as they learn together. Liz had been the principal of an alternative school in the past, and had taught sex education at the Argenta school (one of her first steps into Friends). However, the challenge when you're outside the system is always the tendency or the necessity of including only those kids whose parents can afford it. When she was offered an opportunity to bring her classroom under the school board, she took it.

Consequently, on the Saturday I arrived, three of the usual six at Meeting, including Liz, were out on strike. They had been out for two weeks, feelings were running very high, and the vote was to be Sunday. More riverbanks, more rivers. What boundaries of funding and class size will give serious, loving parameters to society's commitment to the education of its children? Where is "right ordering"? At our sharing on Sunday, one teacher brought a sign from the picket line: Talking Works/Dictating Hurts: and a photograph of this Friend's stake in the future, his grandchildren.

We Friends have decided time and again not to turn from the world, but to engage with it. It's tiring. Every day brings its challenges, and often we have to face these decisions alone. On the second day back at work, kindergarten teachers were presented with a pile of unsolicited picture books, a gift from the province -- and an expense that can gall, given that teachers achieved no real improvement in pay or class size — with instructions to send the books home with each child. Printed inside was a little ad saying that the book indicates the commitment of the province to the education of its children. Do you send them home or do you commit some form of civil disobedience or...

The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life. As I see it now, there are three major 'containers' for the spiritual life that flows in us and among us. There is the hour of silent worship; there is worship-sharing, each voice separated by deep banks of silent listening; there is discernment together about way forward, about action. Some questions arose in Nelson about right ordering in Meeting for Worship for Business (our formal mode of discernment), and so I spent some time re-reading that section of O&P. This may not be what they need, but I smiled as I noted this bit to myself:

*It should also be remembered by all Friends at times when unity is not present that the concept of the Meeting being united in spirit does not mean that the members must all necessarily conform to one particular opinion, no matter how compelling such a view may appear to some. Indeed, the imposition of conformity becomes a censorship which is quite contrary to the teaching of Friends; the Society, itself, is a testament by those who have cherished the right to dissent from majority opinion.*

I wonder whose voice that is, who first put together those words. The first printing of our O&P was only 1969.

Also of use this week was a quotation from Gandhi, made into a powerful print in the past by Pauline Hughes. I can see this print as a river of words that are held in check by the slant of Gandhi's walking stick, grasped in his hand as, bent, bespectacled, barefoot, he trudges on:

*Non-violent resistance is an all-sided sword: it blesses him who uses it and him against whom it is used.*

*Friendly Footnote:* For those of you who read Macleans, the Larry Last on p. 54 of the Oct. 24 issue, in the article about the campaign to stop Tim Horton's coffee cups from filling every ditch and curbside in the country, is the same Larry Last who attends the worship group in St. Andrews, New Brunswick, or did last year, when he and another activist conservationist took me out on the Bay of Fundy with them, checking for environmental destruction. But I remember now walking on the beach in the sunset with Larry, his partner Leanne, and their big dog, and Larry grumpily picking up coffee cups. According to the article, he has 500 now, and St. Andrews is not a big place.

I stood on a ridge above Nelson in the dark before the dawn, and looked at the stars bright above me, and city lights spread out below. On the steep slope up from where I stood shone the light from the sheep pen, where Liz Amaral was feeding the two sheep. I made my way up the path so that I could meet the sheep before I left. Duly introduced, I made my way down again, this time with the help of Liz and her flashlight. A few minutes later, we were in their van, ready to leave for Victoria. Liz pulled over to the side of the road and said aloud a simple prayer for safety on the journey. Then we were off.

Prayer became one of the themes of our day-long conversation, and came up again several times in the encounters in Victoria. One at tender told me that she first came to Meeting because she wanted to know about prayer. A friend had a serious illness, and she really, really wanted this person to live. But what is prayer? Does it imply a theistic God who can reach into our lives and effect outcomes if he or she wants to, and who refrains from doing that in too many ugly corners of the world? A God who pulls back from stopping the murder of little children, or from doing miracles of healing except sometimes, if prayed to by the right people in the right way? How to pray without implying beliefs we really don't subscribe to? For me, the first question if I want to pray out loud is: how do I address God without a whole lot of disclaimers first about what I do and don't believe? So I stay silent, and would not have prayed that simple little prayer that began our day that Thursday, even though I liked it, and liked beginning our journey with that overt gesture of faith.

We did arrive safely, and I was deposited in one piece at the gate of the apartment building where my sister and her husband live. They were out dancing, but I picked up the key from a neighbour, and wheeled my suitcase into their familiar apartment. I sat there silently until they came back, tired from our long conversation that day, but glad of it, and glad to be once more in Victoria.

I lived here for ten years, and left five years ago. A lot of my heart is still in this city, and with this Meeting. After two days of rest and family connections with my sister, she drove me over to the home of Kornelia Meszaros, whom I know from Ottawa days and who had offered me a billet for the week.

I am tired again, as I write this, because every contact in Victoria brings back so many memories and so much history. When I went into the copy place to fax some information to Duncan Friends, I was greeted by name! Last evening at the home of Arnold and Margaret Ranneris, I sat between Fran Grady, who took me in as a boarder and housemate at the end of my marriage eight years ago, and Dana Lynn Seaborn, who now is the Director of Cultural Planning for the Metis Community Services in Victoria, but then was the penniless piano tuner who lived in Fran's basement suite! Dana Lynn is also the friend who gave me the Psyche story which I have used so many times in these visits and in my writing classes.

The shape of the week was this: Meeting on Sunday, where I spoke in the announcements time and presented their copy of the poetry book, *Waging Peace*; a sharing on Wednesday evening around "What do you make?"; and on Friday evening a sharing and discussion about travelling in the ministry. On each of these days, I had the privilege of searching conversations with folks in and out of the Meeting.

On Saturday, I had a swim and lunch with Arnold at the Y. Afterwards I came upon a group of homeless people being evicted by the police from a park. I stood with some other sympathizers watching for a while. Arnold came by in his car and rolled down the window and suggested with a mischievous smile that I might want to "do a George Fox." I found I was not so led, and after one well-dressed nice-looking man had been led in handcuffs to the police car and a tent had been hauled off to orchestrated cries of "Thief! Thief!" I walked on. I wondered whether Janine Bandcroft who sometimes attends Fern St. and puts out *Street Newz* was among those in the park, but I don't know her well enough to identify her. Later I bought my copy of *Street Newz* on the street, catching up on the serial adventures of the fictional characters invented by the Meeting's Robert Smith-Jones.

On Monday was tea and a walk with Fran Grady. Among much else, we talked about prayer. Tuesday was lunch with Marlene Jones (I was driving a car that Kornelia lent me and went the wrong way, but I was only about an hour late for lunch, and Marlene was admirably unruffled) where we talked, among much else, about leadings. Muriel Sibley picked me up from there and took me to her studio, where I admired her latest pottery and where she has a little apartment familiar to me and made me supper. Much of this week was doing things again, such as sitting in front of the woodstove in Muriel's apartment, that I thought I would never be able to do again.

Wednesday was another swim and lunch with Arnold, and a visit to the remarkable room in the Y basement where Arnold proudly showed me the archives. He and another person with a similar passion have pulled together a coherent record out of boxes of unorganized clippings and papers. Dinner was with the Resident Friends, Sherryll and Gerald Harris, and their daughter Holly. Gerald performed for me a remarkable children's poem he has written, and now I dearly would love to see it find its way into print. Holly showed me a DVD of Baha'i students dancing to a song with a social message. She left me thoughtful about whether this was too structured for Quaker young people to relate to at all, or whether we are letting them down by not offering some of these ideas. The kids on the DVD looked as if they were having fun. As Holly pointed out, it was one way that boys can feel fine about dancing, and that some of them are very good at it. Wednesday evening was the sharing around our creative passions and its connection or lack of same to our spirituality. Precious things were shared, and Celia Cheatley drove me back out to Kornelia's.

Thursday was lunch with filmmaker Heather MacAndrew, where we talked, among much else, about prayer. In the afternoon, I ran into Tobias Tomlinson on his way to the store he has opened along with several other artists, glassblowers and ceramicists. I turned around and followed him in, and took a photo of him with his sculpted pots. Tobias promised to email me a practical list he has prepared about how a Meeting can respond when a Friend dies. He'll do this after the Christmas season is over, as right now he and all other potters are running full tilt to produce enough for the Christmas sales. On I went to the copy shop where they still know me, and then to a precious tea-and-catch-up with Friend and poet Dee Hornosty. Then back to Kornelia's for one of her beautifully-presented Hungarian meals. Kornelia had found out my blood type and determined that, whatever I thought, I am a meat eater, and I must say that the Hungarian pasta with ham in it was delicious and made me happy. I explained that I never did stop liking meat, only eating it. We discussed, among much else, the pros and cons of vegetarianism.

Friday was my day off, at least until the evening, and my sister invited me and three other writers to come for lunch, including one who was actually married under the care of the Meeting, but doesn't attend because she is not a pure pacifist. "There is nothing in Membership that says you have to be," I noted, and she knew that, and we talked a bit about the Saanich Meeting, which is closer to where she lives, and about whether the writer's discipline is really analogous to opening a space in Meeting for Worship, or whether the need to pound something out onto the screen is a different kind of discipline. (I think it's the same thing, myself.)

Bob McInnes came over and picked me up and there I was, once more sitting at Bob and Betty's kitchen table, looking out at the familiar view over the Gorge. I picked up more material on death and dying, which my home Meeting had asked me to, and I found out that Ottawa MM also has a very useful packet of info on this subject.

We drove to Arnold and Margaret's and among other things, we talked about various people who have travelled in the ministry. I read a bit from Helen Stevenson's letter to me about the travelling she and John did thirty years ago, stopping from three days to three weeks, as led and as invited. Elizabeth Azmier-Stewart recalled that her parents had done quite a bit of this, perhaps mainly in Ontario but also in B.C. Arnold spoke of his travels on the Island under a Concern for education in Friends' history and ways. Connie Mungall brought a map showing the Meetings, Worship Groups and Isolated Friends she visited over one year in the eighties. I was impressed to realize that Connie visited 46 meetings, and walked in all 135 miles, as she walked in to each place, usually accompanied by other Friends, under a Concern around peace. We remembered as well that Gale Wills travelled extensively under a Concern that we not lose track of our Friends' way of doing business. I think others were mentioned, and I know there are still others whom we didn't recall. I cherish Dana Lynn's remark as she contemplated the map of my own journeys: "You've been like a sort of synapse, connecting people."



One Friend asked whether on my journeys people have "opened up" about their theological beliefs. I spoke of my long visits, and said maybe not on Monday Tuesday Wednesday, but by Thursday yes. In my search for examples, I found myself once more mentioning deep discussions about what is prayer.

Today, Saturday, I spent the morning with a dear writing Friend, where we visited art galleries while discussing the meaning of the painting and the universe, and then went for lunch to discuss her play that is about death and dying, and also and mainly about friendship. She left me and my suitcase at Connie's door, and once more I was in a very familiar place. This week is the anniversary of the death of Connie's son Alex, and the one-year anniversary of the death of Christopher Cheatley.

Several Friends wanted to talk about the very difficult past five or six years of Fern Street Meeting, beginning with a painful administrative tangle and ending with Christopher's death last year. I remember a very active and loving Meeting fifteen years ago, with a First Day School and sometimes three worship-sharing choices every week, and about forty people there on a Sunday morning. This past Sunday there were 23, but nearly everyone I spoke with said that it feels as if the Meeting, after a very hard time, is coming back.

Bibliography this week:

Marcus J. Borg. Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time. [I know I'm reading backwards, first The Pagan Christ, then Spong's New Christianity for a New World, and now finally getting to Marcus J. Borg. But it seems to be working for me!]

Brave Souls: Writers and Artists Wrestle with God, Love, Death, and the Things that Matter. Douglas Todd. Stoddart, 1996.

Journal 50 DUNCAN WORSHIP GROUP November 15, 2005

*Mystical experience is the mirror image of negative paranoia. It sees "the universe is a conspiracy organized for my benefit."* --Andrew Weil, M.D.

That must be the universe that is conspiring to force me, ready or not, into summing up things I have learned from nearly two years of visiting.

One does not spend four days in the home of Gale Wills and Sabra Peil without a first-class intellectual workout. It was stimulating and challenging, and every time Gale let up, there was Sabra with Matthew Fox's *Original Blessing*, heavily highlighted by its former reader, Sabra, or with creative-supply stuff. I had to find or make a gift (that had to cost no money) to bring to the Inclusive Leadership Adventure at the end of the week and I decided I needed wool. Sabra opened a cupboard and there were bags of wool and of wool ends, and cartons of coloured paper and sparkly stuff.

On Monday (I'll get back to Sunday later) several people from the Meeting arrived to "play." First, though, they wanted to discuss creativity. I passed out the page of quotations from the Fellowship of Quakers in the Arts, indicating an evolution in Friends, moving from a distrust of creativity as distracting us from God, through to clarity that "the artist and the Quaker are on the same internal journey." (Janet Mustin)

The chapters in *Original Blessing* begin with clusters of quotations, and I read out one from Dag Hammarskjöld: "Do you create or do you destroy?" We tossed this around, and later, when we all trooped down to the greenhouse to "play," Lorna painted a quite beautiful piece, moving from the yellow of creativity in one corner through to the murky browns of destruction in the other. In between was interesting turbulence and gradations. E. Daisy Anderson is the leader or mentor in this group, although this time she and Lana went to work on a presentation star for a Meeting member who deserved it. At one point, they were observed doing waves with their bodies, apparently intent on dislodging new ideas. It seemed to work... I made a pompom. Sabra quietly painted on coloured tissue with water, shoving the goop around on a canvas to produce a bright, textured dream landscape. We played for over an hour, and then cleaned up and went in and had lunch. I heartily recommend this activity for Meetings that feel a little stifled. We could put it into the Discipline.

At other moments, in discussion with Gale and with Sabra mostly listening (but she did!!) it became clear that the experience of corporate discernment is a place where some Friends connect most deeply with a sense of Spirit, of Presence. Take away Meetings for Worship for Business from such a Friend, and you take away too much. There is something "real" in such moments, affirmed another longtime Friend later — something reassuring, even if not always comfortable. This is in challenging contrast to the Friends who have *lost* the sense of Spirit in such moments, and want to *avoid* business meetings. I have not yet met a Friend who wants to avoid the experience of corporate discernment, though, but many who feel that their group does not do that when they do business; even if they do sit

formally and read back minutes, there is still often the sense that space was not made for opening to Spirit. And some groups, of course, make their decisions literally in the parking lot, which leaves out those of us on bicycles. :)

Gale challenged me to say what for me identifies the Society of Friends in Canada. I gave the potted list I've developed in conversations as I've travelled:

1) One "belief" only, and even this is acknowledged not as head stuff but as experience, as relationship: there is something of the divine in every person. We experience this; we acknowledge it to one another.

2) Four "containers" for the rush of Spirit among us (maybe I mean channels, or maybe ways of containing US so that we can stay open to this):

- i) meeting for worship in expectant silence;
- ii) corporate spiritual discernment in decision-making (including annual discernment around State of the Society);
- c) worship-sharing;
- d) testifying to the truth as we have experienced and discerned it. [Gale added this fourth one, and it is the vessel or source of our understanding of the Meeting's action in the outer world: around peace, for example, or the environment, or poverty.]

3) Our particular history: a Friends group will offer opportunities for repeating the Christian story and the story of Friends. "Our mythologies," said Sabra. "Faith and Practice," reminded Gale.

4) I want to add, but am not sure there is unity on this one: practical skills in conflict resolution: a Friends' group will check from time to time to give members the opportunity to learn and practice practical peacemaking.

"All that's not simple," said Gale. "No, but it's not hard either," I said.

Which seemed to sum up much of what we were talking about.

On Sunday there were twelve of us at Meeting. Gale and/ or Sabra had made soup, and most stayed for it, and shared a little from their lives before we went home. I began to learn about the most recent innovation in Duncan Worship Group: three Friends have been named as Pastoral Care Committee, to keep tabs on people's lives and in particular to respond to the inevitable hard times. Previously the representative to Ministry and Counsel (of the parent Meeting, Victoria MM) was the only such Friend named, although both this Friend and the whole group has a long precious history of caring for one another. But with three Friends named who can meet easily when needed, there is a firmer sense of being aware of people's journeys. It is also giving an opportunity for some Friends with this kind of training to continue to offer their wisdom and skills. People seemed comfortable with the new arrangement. One thing that was being gently upheld was a seeming division in the group between those who wanted a meditation group and those who want a Friends' group. Already it seemed that

this division, which had been upsetting at first, was not as deep or divisive as many had feared.

Books and pamphlets and articles and quotes that interwove with the creative moments and the ongoing discussion:

Original Blessing: a Primer in Creation Spirituality Presented in Four Paths, twenty-Six Themes, and Two Questions. Matthew Fox. Bear & Co., Santa Fe, NM, 1983, ISBN 0-939680-07-6

*The truly wise person  
kneels at the feet of all  
creatures and is not afraid to  
endure the mockery of others.*  
--Mechfild of Magdeburg

*"...religion with original sin as its starting point and religion built  
exclusively around sin and redemption does not teach trust....It  
teaches... fear .it teaches distrust." p.82, Orig. Blessing*

The Meeting Experience: Practicing Quakerism in Community. Marty Walton. Canadian Quaker Pamphlet Series Number 45, 1997.

From FGConnections, newsletter of FGC, Spring, 2005:

*...we have settled for a watered-down Quakerism that cannot satisfy the deepest human hunger." --Michael Gibson: "Blessed are the Hungry: FGC Friends Today."*

*"For the last decade, I've done ground-breaking work publicizing nonviolence online. I've been profiled in the New York Times and invited on national talk shows, but the clerk of the peace committee in my achingly-small monthly meeting always forgets that I have 'some website' and I've never been asked to speak to Friends about my work. I wouldn't mind being overlooked if I saw others my age being recognized, but most of the amazing ministries I've known have been just as invisible." --Martin Kelley, "The Witness of Our Lost Twenty-Somethings"*

*"Can we learn to say again that God's Kingdom is within and among us -- and anyone can see it if they just watch us a bit?" --Marty Grundy*

On Thursday the intense lovely discussion, creative play moments and reading culminated in my lying in a hot tub under a cool rain, followed by zipping up the suitcase and preparing to leave for the Inclusive Leadership Adventure.

John Scull picked up me and the suitcase and drove us to the Inclusive Leadership Adventure: Journey into the Heart of the Earth Charter. John is an environmentalist and this version of his wife Linda Hill's adventures was his idea. The Adventures offer an experience in diversity, but this one explores that experience in terms of this document.

John brought at least two rich experiences to me during this visit: a tour of

Providence House Farm, which is where the Friends meet on Sundays, and which also turns out to be, during the week, one of the best places in the country for responding to people who are dealing with disabilities, mental or physical. We wandered through the gardens, now mostly put away for the winter, and the horse stables, woodworking workshop, small motors workshop, and so on.

The drive on Thursday gave me a chance to ask John more about land trusts and nature conservancies, and I now have a less hazy idea of this exciting stuff that has been going on, and which has involved John's passions for many years.

As soon as we pulled up at the Cowichan Community Centre, a curly-headed teen materialized beside the car and insisted on carrying the suitcase and helping to orient me to the registration desk. I felt shy, entering a room of strangers, many of them very young. Wasn't I supposed to be a wise elder? I expected I had to be terribly responsible, and I had almost no idea what, in this context anyway, that meant. At the desk a young guy said to me, "You can stop worrying about *anything*, starting now!" Wow, that was the first time in about 60 years that my job was to stop worrying. I did my best. :)

I stayed through until Saturday just before noon, when I was picked up by Daisy and driven in nice time to the bus terminal. In between there, I got to really connect across lines of age, colour, gender, and disability in ways that I now realize were new. In particular, when I got on the bus to the ferry, suddenly I noticed that the brown-skinned youngsters who surely before had not been invisible to me were now REALLY visible. They reminded me of people I knew, and could be open with. The question I asked the week before, as I viewed that DVD of the Baha'i kids dancing, now seems to me to be answered. Teens -- and adults!!! -- *can* be offered an inclusive program that sets up an experience that teaches, both in content and in experience, such values as: Respect for the Community of Life; Ecological Integrity; Social and Economic Justice; Democracy, Nonviolence and Peace.

"I'm having to *think* about this," noted Sam, who is in grade nine and inhabits a tall wheelchair with a plastic table in front of her which was very useful as a base for the project she and I were working on together. We were searching for images which would represent the value of "respect and care for the community of life." We settled on a central blue recycling box, flanked by a person kneeling to plant a seedling. We glued on a real sprig from the outside world as the seedling. Above that, we pasted on an image of a spider's web (it was a whiskey ad, but we cut that part off) and on it pasted a photo of a boy who had lost a leg in a landmine, and a young black teen girl from North America who was waiting for her school bus. We tried to make it look as if they were hanging out together. Then we wrote "EQUALITY" across the young people (Sam raised questions about what equality means, in a world where she cannot walk, but can operate the lever of her speedy motorized chair), and then PEACE, RESPECT and BALANCE.

At another point, Nancy from the Cowichan band and I worked step by step through an exercise together. We were to identify our concerns (what bugs us

most in this world) and then our passions. Could we bring them together? was the challenge. Much in this weekend was framed as a Challenge, including how long you might be able to sit in silence in the woods, listening. Give it at least ten minutes, our leader suggested, and taught us a simple breathing exercise to give us something to do in the first few moments. I remembered the Friends who have noted that when newcomers arrive at our meetings, we tend to throw them in at the deep end of an hour of silence, without much in the way of tools to navigate. Nancy is in Middle School, where they don't yet have chapters of Youth for Diversity, but some of the older kids, including Rachel from Duncan Worship Group, are active in this movement, and it sounded right on to me.

Anyway, I have never before been in an ambiance where people I met at meals or in these exercises opened up so disarmingly about their experiences of racism or their time on the streets or whatever. I was touched and also I was moved along. I am very grateful for this experience, and am not at the end of what I learned, including the inspiration of seeing the result of Linda Hill's faithfulness in following a true leading.

A poem by E. Daisy Anderson:

#### WALKING

*Walking breathing listening.*  
*Walking seeing smelling.*  
*Walking.*

*Walking breathing listening.*  
*Walking mulling puzzling.*  
*Walking.*

*Walking breathing listening.*  
*Walking loving sharing.*  
*Walking.*

*Walking breathing listening.*  
*Walking.*

Journal 51 BOWEN ISLAND WORSHIP GROUP November 18, 2005

The visit to Bowen Island Worship Group nearly foundered several times because of the need to change dates at my end or theirs. At one point last year, Sheila Keir invited me to come along, but she was the only one there! Rather than visit an isolated Friend right then, I waited, and then almost didn't get there at all.

So it was a good moment, coming off the ferry after dark and finding Sheila there waiting, with her car. I had turned my ankle rather dramatically at the bus terminal in Duncan earlier that day, and the suitcase seemed even more than usual in very heavy mode. Once I take the bag of Quaker books and papers out, it becomes reasonable again. Anyway, Sheila hefted it and carried it all the way up the long set of steps leading to her house, perched, like many others on Bowen, high above the road and looking into the tops of tall trees. Throughout the visit, I kept reflecting on the fact that really these islands are the top of jagged mountains that have their feet in the ocean bed.

A long line of people in need of a haven have found it in Sheila's house, and in particular in the cosy room she led me to. In the nearby living room, a lovely fire was going under the care of Sheila's friend Richard, who also did me the favour of wrapping my painful ankle in a tensor bandage after affixing a "stinky patch" from a Chinatown medicine place. It smelled of eucalyptus and other stuff, and it helped right away. By next morning, I knew I hadn't done serious damage and would be able to haul the suitcase back off the island in a few days, which I did.

In the recent past, the Bowen Island Worship Group met in the peaceful, simply-furnished chapel at Rivendell, a retreat centre on the island. The Friends advertised in the local paper and in general did the right basic things to let it be known that they were there. A few times, a visitor joined them, but the only people so far who have stuck, and who continue to think of themselves as part of the group, are people who have already encountered Friends and already desired a Friends group as their spiritual community. At present, with one couple living elsewhere for several months and with Doug Rogers not well, the group has shrunk to Bev and Doug and Richard, and Sheila. They meet, when they do meet, in Bev and Doug's home. It's a natural moment in the life of a group, a moment of drift and uncertainty, even as the care for one another continues.

Sheila finds some spiritual nourishment in a local Buddhist group: "The Buddhists seem *enthusiastic* about their group, and what they stand for. We seem less certain. What I do hear often from people is: 'Aren't Quakers some kind of Christians?' " We talked about both parts of that — about where our identity and enthusiasm may lie, and also about whether the tide of revulsion against Christianity may be turning, as the mainstream churches have become more inclusive. There is nothing *wrong* with having some form of Christian connection, any more than some form of Buddhist or Jewish or Hindu or Wiccan connection, to name a few. But people who hear about Christianity through TV

evangelists learn that this is the only faith that claims an exclusive path to the divine. All the rest recognize that there are many paths, even when they may believe that theirs is the most recent and best update. The fact that there has been a strand of Christianity from the start that saw things differently is still not well known.

Richard found Friends when he lived in South Africa and was about to be drafted into the military, with much mandate around enforcing apartheid. Friends helped him establish his status as a conscientious objector, and he remains very grateful for this. I wondered whether the issue of U.S. war resisters was calling to him, but it seems that poverty issues interest him more. An architect, he works in the city of Vancouver checking building permits, and thinks about affordable housing and about the homelessness so evident in a big city.

I had a personal encounter with these overwhelming issues on the day I spent in Vancouver after Bowen and before taking the train to Mission City, where I am now. A woman accosted me outside the bank. I was in one of those moments of shock when you realize that your bank account is not as healthy as you had hoped, and my request at an ATM had been turned down. This woman didn't know I wasn't coming out with money in my pockets. She was quite a bit younger than me, bent, with marks on her face, some teeth missing. I said that I couldn't help. "Why, Ma'am?" she insisted, holding eye contact even though she was bent. "WHY can't you help me?" I know it is a practiced solicitation that she does many times to many people every day, but that doesn't negate her need. I said respectfully, "Because I do help where I choose, and because I too do not have much money." I headed on to the Safeway to buy myself a little container of chicken salad for my lunch. I thought of finding a bun or something to bring back to her, but I didn't and she was gone when I came back. And of course my answer seemed absurd even to me. The real answer was that the loonie I might have fished out was not going to help her larger problems, and right then I was not certain that *anything* could. It was a disturbing encounter. In the big city, the desperation is much more in one's face than it is in Peterborough, where people just sit quietly beside buildings and put out a cup.

On Sunday on Bowen Island, five people and seven chins met for worship in the home of Bev and Doug Rogers, with its stunning view over the strait, and ongoing "stories" as tug boats go out to meet an ocean liner, and sail boats and ferries move across the panorama below. Chins are dogs, little Chinese lapdogs, these ones all black and white except for one mama who was beige and white. Very small, very cute, and all of them settled down for the hour of silence. There was vocal ministry about gifts, how many do come, even in a difficult day, and that the question is what we do with them.

From Bev I learned to write more -- Bev writes every morning from 5:30 until time for breakfast, and is completing a book of family history. Most of her time is spent on taking care of Doug, but the dogs add bounce and humour to their days. In spite of being much slowed down at this time, Bev is still



very involved in her community. From Sheila I learned to read more — books were piled everywhere at her house, and she punctuated our long conversations with, "You really would like to read this!!" and running to pull out another book.

After Meeting, we talked about the travels rather than about our creative projects, and I passed around photographs that Bev said was like meeting again with old friends. I heard more stories about the intertwining of Quaker lives, and glimpsed again one dynamic which holds us together, which is this intense bonded friendship we develop in our little groups, over the years, and to which we return when we are able to attend gatherings. And I did take a photo of Woman on Couch With Seven Dogs, to add to the series which began with Elizabeth Rolston in Belleville (Wooler Meeting) with four dogs, then Julie Kronenberg in St. Andrew's, N.B. with her four dogs, then John Clement on P.E.I with 3 of his 4 dogs — one ran out of the picture. So Bev now holds the title to most dogs, and I doubt it will be broken.

I was taken twice to Rivendell, which is the peaceful and beautiful retreat centre that was used some months back by Young Friends. Several people who had both vision and financial wealth brought it into being a few years ago. Although there are suggested rental prices, there is also a generous sliding scale, since one of their tenets is to keep the place accessible. Bev showed me "the cottage," which is intended for people who have, for instance, a writing project. One could scarcely *not* write there, with that view and the fireplace and all. Friend George Lakey stayed there recently, I was told by several people. I also re-met the MacIvities (may not have that spelled correctly) who used to be in charge of Sorrento but now take care of Rivendell.

Some of the challenges of maintaining a worship group on Bowen struck me as similar to the situation in Argenta: the larger community is already very friendly and very attuned to spiritual and creative paths. Unlike Argenta, the fact that most residents on Bowen have a lot of disposable income mutes the social action concerns. There are no homeless sitting by buildings in downtown Bowen Island, and the one or two "lost souls" who wander there are known to everyone and in their own way are part of the community. But there is a heartwarming looking out for one another in the changes of lives, and while I was there people were getting ready to attend a fundraiser to assist costs for a little boy who has been burned, and also there were two events upcoming to raise money for Empty Bowls, a project to address world hunger. As in Argenta, somehow in a community like this it follows that very few folk wake up on a Sunday morning and think about going to Quaker Meeting.

Why cling, then, to this path? I asked myself. Yet it is mine.

Something happened while I was on Bowen that had nothing to do with the visit to the little group. Terrible news came from Peterborough that a man who was on parole from the prison system and whom some members of my family had supported and trusted, had broken out and committed a terrifying crime,

abducting and raping two women. He did not kill them, and he turned himself in. The betrayal and violence has created seismic shocks in my home community and in my family and in me, since I often met this guy and detected nothing of this. Sheila was very helpful as we spoke about this, drawing on her wide and integrated background in Jungian psychology, Christian theology, women's spirituality and I suppose the Buddhism. What I basically heard was the reaffirmation of journey. I get tired of my use of that word, but it is central to everything I can hang onto.

Books you too might like to read:

*Dance of the Dissident Daughter: A Woman's Journey from Christian Tradition to the Sacred Feminine.* Sue Monk Kidd. Harper San Francisco, 1996. [P.S. Her husband was able to make the journey too.]

*In Praise of Slow: How a Worldwide Movement is Challenging the Cult of Speed.* Carl Honore. Vintage Canada, 2004.

*Year of Grace.* Margaret Hope Bacon. Quaker Press of FGC, Philadelphia, PA, 2002.

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Creativity: Where the Divine and the Human Meet. Matthew Fox. Tarcher/ Putnam/ Penguin, 2002.

The Soul Tells a Story: Engaging Creativity with Spirituality in the Writing Life. Vinita Hampton Wright. Inter Varsity Press, Downers Grove, Ill, [2005. www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com)

I spotted those two books on the shelf in Meredith Egan's CFSC office as I arrived, and put them beside my bed with the intention of scanning through them during my visit. In the end, scanning is all I got to do, because the time filled. On the last afternoon in Mission, with much cooperation from all concerned, I managed to take a photograph of Woman on Couch with Four Kids, a Dog, a Cat and a Bird. This may be the trump photo in this series of Person on Couch with surprising number of dependents. (Although during my present overnight in Prince George, on the way to Whitehorse, there is still the possibility of driving out to the Stirling residence and perhaps taking a photo of Stacy on Couch with 5 of their six children plus any other pets and dependents who may be in residence. I may just rest, though, and relish the thought of this rather than the reality.)

The travelling is drawing to a close, and my thoughts are very much on going home, even as I look forward to the last grand adventure, busing up the Alaskan Highway and visiting Sue Starr and the newest worship group in Yearly Meeting, in Whitehorse. I have just come from Mission and the visit with the worship group there, one of several under the care of Vancouver Monthly Meeting.

The Mission group meets on the first Sunday of most months, and is usually three people unless the Egan-Pimblett young people attend, which can swell it to 7. This past Sunday they met specially for my visit, and brought things they had made. We used the format which worked well in Fredericton, and which felt right again here, with a shortened time of silent worship first, and then a gentle move into worship-fellowship. I had put out the photos and papers from the travels, and people chose an item from that collection before we began, as well as bringing something they had made. Brigid, who is eleven, brought a poem she had written the night before:

*The First Light of Day*

*The first light of day*

*The calls of wild birds*

*Ring out*

*The air grows warm*

*With the light of day*

*Butterflies swarm the sky*

*With their beauty*

*The light brings morning and life.*

Her mother Meredith let us see and peek into a manuscript she is working on, a work of fiction arising from her years in restorative justice. It was bound in a cloth cover she had made, with a labyrinth design of beads. Men in the prisons where she was visiting at that time helped her "couch" the beads. As this was not something she could bring into the prison, she had had to describe her challenges and then go back and implement their advice. Some of the lines of the labyrinth wandered a little, which I felt added to its beauty.

Caroline Armistead brought a collage of images and words from a community play she had organized, one of several that involved children and which were performed in several venues in Mission, including schools and in this case the Fringe Festival. As Caroline is now back teaching full time, her dramatic energy goes into lesson plans for Special Needs kids instead of theatre, but she paints for herself, and brought a "self-portrait" which danced with energy. When I visited Caroline next day at her house, she showed me a book which looks very interesting, an approach to working with colour that has parallels with my own approach to getting words out on the page. That book title is: *Life, Paint and Passion: Reclaiming the magic of spontaneous expression*. Michele Casson and Stewart Cubley. Tarcher /Putnam / Penguin NY 1995.

From Nat, 17, we heard sober thoughts about the creativity that goes into entering step by step into one's future. I had thought we might hear some lines from "The Miser," a school play under rehearsal in which Nat has the lead, but instead he passed around a play he wrote last year to dramatize his concerns about big corporations and a system based on greed.

Chris Ullmann brought photos of her passion, her garden, with, a story of a rhododendron that would not bloom, and how quiet nurture over four years suddenly resulted in a riot of colour. She was both resisting and suggesting that her own situation reflects such a process, as years of interest in China, and a current extremely challenging attempt to learn to speak and write Chinese, has resulted in a possible invitation to return to China in some teaching capacity. Maybe yes, maybe no, but when I visited her, I noticed the Chinese figures in her house, sitting in niches here and there, not new, part of the long time of nurture in Chris' own life.

Two people created their offerings that very morning. Jonah, 14, baked delicious scones, and brought one to the worship-sharing on a plate, in a simple gesture of "presentation" that I enjoyed. Grace, 11, used scissors and coloured paper to create an evocative picture with layers -- in the foreground a black crow flying, in two dimensions of distance, a tower and far hills. Translucent paper allowed light to shine through, like sky. I had seen Grace in the kitchen after breakfast, snipping away, but was surprised to see the result, all neatly finished and, again, presented.

Stories, I just now realize, were the theme of this visit, as each of these sharings had larger stories attached, stories which again lead to interconnected further tales. Meredith will facilitate a workshop at Friends General Conference next year, on the healing experience of "catching" our own stories.

When I visited Chris Ullmann in her home, again I heard stories. When Chris was in school in Hitler's Germany, the history in their textbook was Fascist. Three times in the year, the children were to stand beside their desk and state what they had learned from this book. Chris was twelve. She stood and said, "I have not learned this." The teacher looked perturbed and reminded her that she had another chance coming up to make this right. Chris notes that it was at this time that her ability for critical analysis began, as she sat listening to the teacher and in her own mind began picking apart the strands of "fact" and comparing it with "truth." (Interestingly, in this same week, someone else mentioned a similar experience when she had to listen as a young teen to sermons from a priest. I too recall sitting listening to the minister and finding that I had become critical of what I heard.) The second time of reporting came, and again young Christiane stood and said, "I did not learn this." The teacher reminded her that he would have to fail her if she did not give a better report at the third time. But at the third time she said again, "I did not learn this." A parent-teacher conference ensued! What the child did not understand was that her defiance could draw unwelcome government attention not only to herself, and to her family (her Jewish father -really Lutheran, but Hitler did not make this distinction -- had left the country, with the help of Friends) but also to her school and to this teacher. Her mother and the teacher decided that it was better not to make a great fuss. Chris was given a failing mark in history, and at home her mother handed a great tome of world history, a book which belonged to her absent father. Chris read through it with enormous interest and, in spite of her mark at school, she learned her history.

When I told this story back at Meredith's, there was great interest from the girls and Meredith told me another lovely story from Betty Polster's childhood. Somebody could be drawing these stories together. Any takers?

I had a story of my own that was causing me quite a lot of agitation, and it was this story from last week at home, where a man with a prison record but who had seemed returned into our community, broke down somehow and committed a further serious crime. I need to know how to think about this, and I could not have been at a better place to help me along. Meredith's years of work in restorative justice have not brought her into any rigid theory about how and why people do these violent acts, but neither have they destroyed her belief that as a community we have to find a way to face these situations and own them.

I was interested to understand that the Quaker Committee on Jails and Justice (they hope to change their name to drop the reference to jails, and to highlight "justice") has shifted its emphasis from prison abolition to prevention of punishment. One of our pioneers in this work, the late Ruth Morris, has a pamphlet titled "What About the Dangerous Few?" As I understand the thrust of this work, it is that the truly dangerous people who are also in trouble with the law are indeed few. Most of the people whom we incarcerate could be reintegrated into our communities if we did not have such a strong revulsion against facing our own shadows, a revulsion which causes us to divide society into lawbreakers on one side and on the other side, us. However, even for the

dangerous few, prisons do not have to look like the prisons we now have. Punishment is not a useful response.

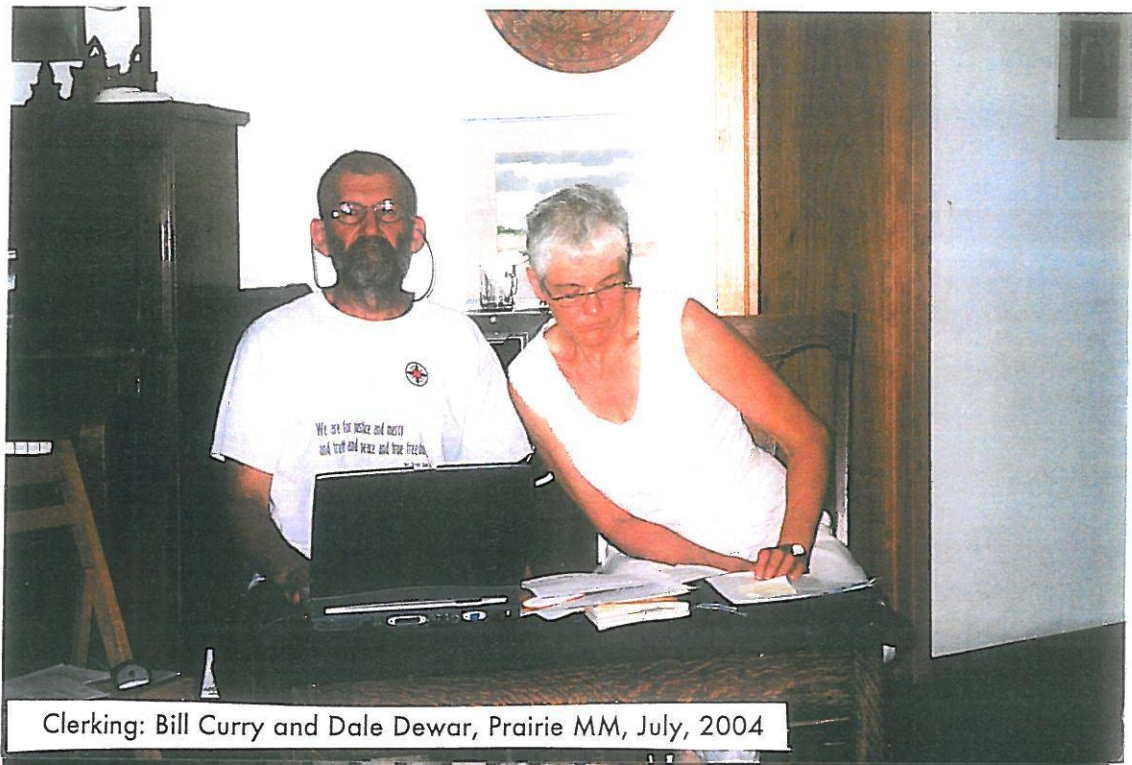
Anyway, in conversation with Meredith, I remembered again the distinction between breaking the law, which we all do at some time with varying degrees of seriousness, and doing harm. Most of us also try not to harm people, and all of us fail at this from time to time. When there is harm, there is a tear in the social fabric, and the question is how it can be mended. When there is great harm, as in rape and murder, there is a great challenge in this mending. But even behind prison bars, these people who have harmed are still among us. Eventually nearly all will be released and will attempt to find a place again closer in to us. We are safer if we recognize this. The only real security we have is in loving communities and in a sense of the Divine. Meredith quoted statistics to me about the impressive success rate experienced when Circles of Support are offered for prisoners returning to their communities. I needed to hear news of something that does work.

There is no television set in this household I was staying in. Children sat in the living room doing homework, practiced violins or for Jonah a cello. Nat went off to his play rehearsals. We did some yard work, attended a concert, and the rest of the time, we played games. Never a dull or bored moment. Jonah read out questions from a game called Cranium, something like Trivial Pursuit. It went on and on, but it was hard to stop, because the questions were continually intriguing. Then there was a game like Charades, where both Brigid and Grace acted out "states" or "expressions" drawn from another box in the same game. Then there was a fun evening spent playing Apples to Apples: the game of Hilarious Comparisons. I didn't know such games existed. This one is by Out of the Box Publishing Inc. The email address is [info@otb-games.com](mailto:info@otb-games.com)

After four days of being drawn in again and again by the screensaver on the CFSC computer.. Thoughtful, searching queries kept appearing, accompanied by hauntingly lovely landscapes and faces. I finally asked Meredith where she had found it. Meredith explained that the photos were taken by Marc Forget during his travels for Alternatives to Violence Project, and that this screensaver is available from Quaker Committee on Jails and Justice for only \$10. I bought one, perhaps for a Christmas present, perhaps for myself.

Marc Forget himself arrived, to work with Meredith on a workshop on restorative justice. We all hugged good bye, Jonah made supper and then he and Grace walked with me to the bus stop a few short stops away. After they left and as I stood shivering in the cold wind at the stop, a man in an open shirt and wearing a black cowboy hat started talking with me. He was from Fort St. John, and said that he could hardly wait to get back there. Too many people down here, he said. I smiled. Mission is such a small place that I had met the only non-Quaker I know there, a client whose book is about to come out, once on purpose for lunch and then by accident at the concert and then again at the craft fair! But to this guy, 5000 people was just the right number, and the cold wind was "sun-tanning weather." The bus came, and we headed north.

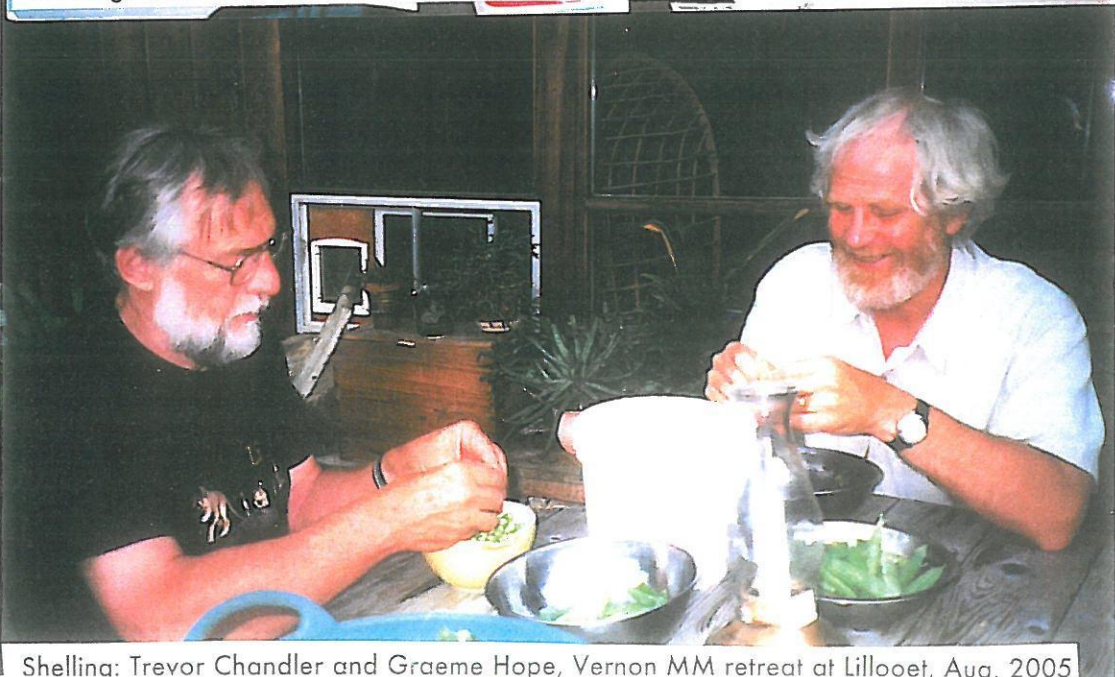




Clerking: Bill Curry and Dale Dewar, Prairie MM, July, 2004



Clerking: Gale Wills and Keith MacGowan, Victoria MM, meeting in Nanaimo, B.C., Feb./05



Shellina: Trevor Chandler and Graeme Hope, Vernon MM retreat at Lillooet, Aug. 2005





Bev Rogers with 7 Chins (1 ran out of the picture), Bowen Is. WG, B.C. Nov./05

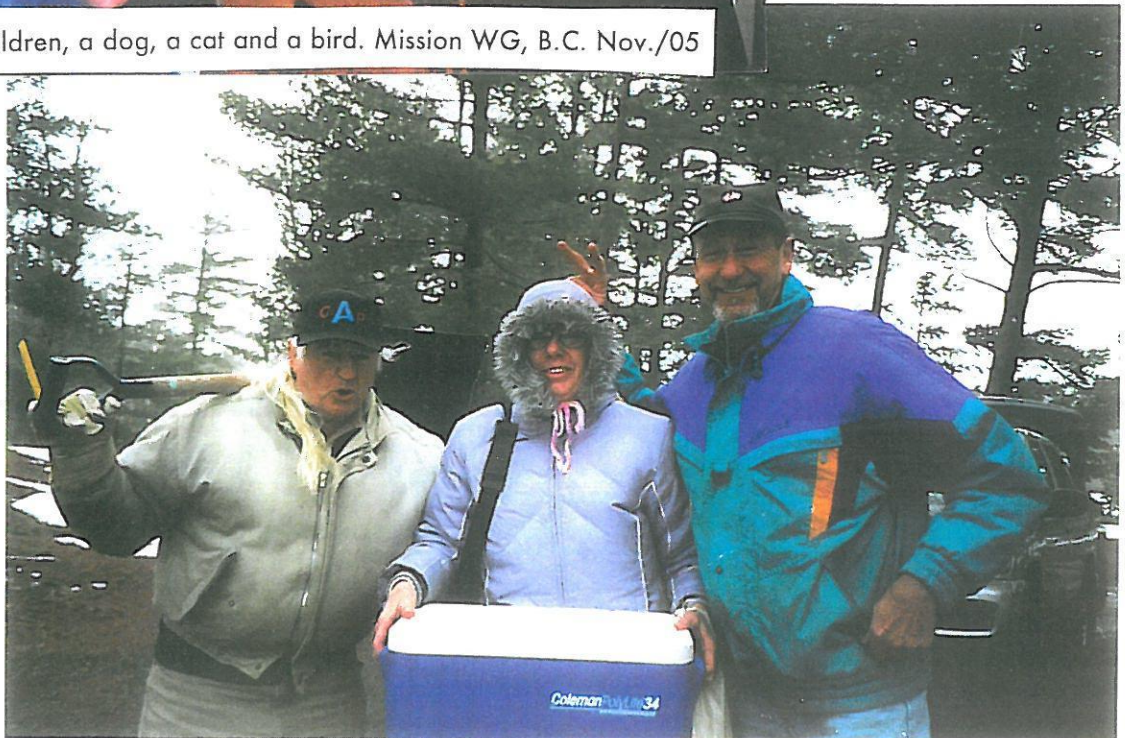
# WINNERS

of the most-dependants-  
on-a-couch award!



Meredith Egan with 4 children, a dog, a cat and a bird. Mission WG, B.C. Nov./05

Members of CYM's  
newest worship group  
arrive for Meeting:  
Land O'Lakes WG,  
near Sharbot Lake, ON.  
Jerry Ackerman,  
Sylvia Powers,  
Bill Powers.  
February, 2006





Journal 53 WHITEHORSE WORSHIP GROUP December 7, 2005

...really it was Dec. 2 when I wrote this in the Calgary air terminal, during a six-hour wait between flights. Once the redeye flight to Toronto took off at 1, a.m., an unnervingly short time later we were landing in Toronto. I had turned my watch forward through the time zones and slept only about half an hour because, I guess, I was excited. Back in Calgary, however, here is what I scribbled down:

I'm drafting this at the Calgary air terminal, in front of a three-storey-high Christmas tree decorated with little lights, silver stars and blue balls. It's too early to check in for my flight to Toronto. I'm nibbling away at the excess goodies handed out on Air North from the Yukon. After two years of crisscrossing Canada by bus, I'm flying home. It's time to pick up the threads of my life.

Words really do fail me to express the gratitude and awe I feel at the gift of these 59 visits so far — still two to go next year with Friends.

The new worship group at Whitehorse was the last stop this year, and at the moment feels like the journey's end.

On the battered map of Canada I've carried with me, with red dots indicating the scattered groups of Friends, Whitehorse is the anomaly, high up there in the Yukon. Ride near the front of the bus, someone advised me, and from the Alaskan Highway you will see a lot of wildlife. At this time of year, much of the trip is in the dark, and although I did watch the road as it opened before us in the headlights, all I saw between Prince George and Whitehorse was one bull moose that stood in the road and then galloped across and up a hill. Later I heard the bus driver telling another driver that actually there had been three moose, the bull in pursuit of two females.

I had got off the bus at Prince George to sleep in the spare bed at Susan and David Stevenson's one night before resuming the trip. I slept a lot more than that, collapsing into sleep for hours and hours the day I arrived, even though it had been only one overnight coming from Mission, B.C. There was still time, though, for more long conversations, mainly about boundaries in a Friends' Meeting for Worship, and how far can we stray from stillness and silence before we no longer have a Friends' Meeting, but something else.

David Stevenson took me to the bus terminal a little before midnight, and away the bus went in the dark and next day through daylight that came and went faster than any other day in my (southern Ontario) life. The road twisted and turned until, thrown back and forth in my seat, I wished I'd taken a gravol pill. Finally after Dawson Creek it straightened out. When I could see, stunning scenery opened around us, wide valleys with dark blue hills. We pulled up at log buildings with a flag or three out front on a pole, looking like stereotypes of northern outposts. I had to pinch myself to remember that they *are* northern outposts, not just pretending. At Toad River we stopped at a place that had

hundreds of baseball caps nailed to the ceiling and down the walls. Apparently one guy started it, and it caught on.

After miles and miles of forest, suddenly city lights appeared, spread out, and at 4:30 a.m., right on schedule, we pulled up in the terminal at Whitehorse. I'd expected snow and had my boots on, but the sidewalks were bare and it wasn't even very cold. Later I heard that in Ontario, it was colder and there was much more snow than on the streets of Whitehorse. I retrieved my suitcase and looked around. There in the 4:30 a.m. dark was Sue Starr coming to greet me. Sue is ordinarily "car free," but had rented a car for my visit. She whisked me and my suitcase back to her apartment, where once again I slept away most of a day.

Whitehorse Worship Group meets on the second Sunday of the month and this wasn't it, so Sue and I met in silence ourselves at her place. On the second Sunday, Sue faithfully sits in a room in the United Church, which donated use of the space for the first year, under a dramatic mobile of peace cranes. Out of twelve second Sundays, she has been there by herself only twice. Not bad, for the first year of being the seed of a new worship group. It will be easier, though, when there is at least one other steady person, to share the responsibility for being there.

Several times we drove to the spiffy recreational complex, once to watch Gracie, Sue's 7-year-old granddaughter, skate, and twice more to go swimming ourselves. Grade broke out with chicken pox the day after the skating, but was well enough later in the week to come over to her grandmother's, where we made cards together. The cupboards and drawers of Sue's place are replete with exciting creative stuff. I learned about embossing. Sue showed me a beautiful card-in-process which included some fine paper that she had from June Etta Chenard, artist and editor of *Canadian Friend*, who had ridden the bus from Edmonton to Whitehorse with Sue this past August after Yearly Meeting. Gracie made an elegant card to add to the children's collection I am gathering, with dancers and "My name is Grace I dance with my mom she is a dance teacher." Inside she embossed an orange sun and a silver moon, on either side of dancers. We took a photo and Gracie struck a dance pose, and you can't see the chicken pox at all.

June Etta and I are not the only Friends who have made our way north to this our newest worship group. Gale Wills and Sabra Peil visited, and also Fran and Tony McQuail, who were WWOOFing their way through the north.

Sue arranged two sessions for the exploration of spirituality, creativity, and connections with social justice and change. On Tuesday two women who have attended worship came for supper. I am once more carrying a demo copy of *Scared Sacred*, and one of these women had met its producer and told us about his idea of "spiritual activism." We shared stories about transformations in our own lives.

By this time, I had looked through some of the workbooks Sue and a colleague have developed to deliver workshops on "Care-full Communication." The

Yukon government contracts with them to support this teaching of practical skills in conflict resolution. One thing they practise is how to transform angry and dismissive statements into an honest exchange of statements about needs. One of their resources is this: *Nonviolent Communication: a Language of Life*. Marshall B. Rosenberg. 2003. ISBN 1-892005-03-4 I went through this material thinking of Friends and muttering, "We need this!" Sue was ahead of me, already planning to offer a Special Interest Group on this at next year's CYM.

On Thursday we had a second session, with two more women, this time people who have not attended Meeting but who responded to an ad Sue put into the paper for a free public workshop, and to "bring something you've made." This time we spent half an hour or so playing with paper and colours and cutting things out of magazines, using some of Sue's creative materials. We were making an object or image to represent our own spiritual journeys. It was an intimate, truly playful and revealing experience.

And felt like a satisfying end to the current travels.

Earlier in the week, Sue had led me into the Yukon Art Gallery, where we discovered a section of paintings by Nicole Bauberger, whom I know a bit because Nicole attended Meeting a few times in Peterborough. These were powerful, confident paintings of the Yukon landscape, the low light and shrouded hills and sunlit peaks. I knew that Nicole had gone north and fallen in love with the light or something, and was still there. I didn't realize that she has now been in Whitehorse for most of three years and is painting and repainting the same mountain! She had a new show opening on Friday (still today as I draft this) but too late for me to see it. We phoned her, and to our delight she came over for tea. I sat back and watched the amazing connections these two people made through their involvement in the local art scene. Sue's art connection is largely through her daughter Andrea, who runs a dance studio.

Everywhere we went in Whitehorse, without exception, Sue was exchanging greetings with people she knows. Much of the population works for the government. People choose to be there and enjoy their choice. It is the land of the midnight sun, and when I was there was edging toward the longest night. It is the Yukon, land of Robert Service. Lake Labarge is just outside of town. The art scene thrives here, and there is enough disposable income that when people like an artist's work, they might be both willing and able to buy it. I don't know what I expected, but Whitehorse was an amazing end of the trail.

And today I saw a sundog.

And last night Sue completed the beautiful card she was making and turned it into the Whitehorse Worship Group endorsement for my travel letter.

And two nights ago we lit a candle and had silence as we held in our thoughts the four members of the Christian Peacemakers Team, together with another westerner, who have disappeared in Iraq.

Journal 54 KILLALOE WORSHIP GROUP February 12, 2006

I began this journal in Renfrew, Ontario, at the home of my brother and his wife. Outside, snow was falling in heavy wet flakes, a steady pouring down between the window and the dull dark green of the pines. Close up, one bough sparkled with silver droplets and a fine white coating on its long needles. It was Friday, February 3. Later that afternoon my brother drove me to the home of Eric and Fran Schiller in Ottawa, and Eric drove Colin Stuart and me to Temple Pastures, site of the annual retreat of Ottawa Monthly Meeting.

Thinking back a further week to January 27, the Friday I left home again, I take up the story of this journey from — where else? — the bus terminal in Peterborough. My house was in reasonable order, my cat in the caring hands of a new boarder, a Trent student newly arrived from Guyana. All was basically well. Two final visits beckoned: Killaloe Worship Group, and Ottawa Monthly Meeting. As it turned out, a new worship group had popped up four months ago near Sharbot Lake, and I would be whisked off to visit there as well. That Friday, however, I was heading for a retreat at the Marguerite Centre in Pembroke. Skye faris had invited me, and would get on the bus in Killaloe. We knew one another from years ago in Ottawa Meeting, where I first came into Friends.

Three hours later, skye's familiar figure came on board, and we had a little giggle at our adventure. One more hour and we were there. Skye worked with this spirituality centre in the past, and we were warmly welcomed by Sister Berenice, a spiritual director there, and by Paul Schwartzentruber, who coordinates their programs. As in many towns and villages across our country, the nuns who once lived in these Roman Catholic convents have diminished in numbers and have transformed their space into spiritual centres intended to serve the whole community. I was encouraged and impressed by the range of workshops and services.

After getting a bite to eat and settling into our rooms, we joined 18 other participants for an evening and a day of "visioning the second half of my life." I guess I could live to 132, but more likely I was looking at the last quarter of my own time on this planet, and welcome it was, too, as I neared the final visits of this journey, and the beginning of everything that comes after. We revisited the main ideas of Carl Jung about the soul journey. From this and from the discussions, I took some good notes. One was to think of our "handicaps" as "handy caps" to our various energies, signals of our true boundaries. We were presented with a number of poems, several of which spoke to me. This one is by, I think, Rumi:

*After all these years  
the earth never says to the sun  
you owe me.  
Look what happens with a love like that—  
it lights up the whole sky.*

I was already aware of the poems of William Stafford, and in "A Ritual to Read to Each Other" found this:

*...it is important  
that awake people be awake,  
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;  
the signals we give--yes or no, or maybe—  
should be clear: the  
darkness around us is deep.*

I hadn't realized before that being clear about what I *can't* do may actually hold off the ocean of darkness.

Our Friend skye lives in the countryside without a vehicle, relying on a network of friends who cherish her and who enjoy sharing their time with her as they pop in to Killaloe for groceries, or come via Pembroke from a workshop on therapeutic touch in Golden Lake, to pick us up from behind the Marguerite Centre and waft us to skye's straw bale house. The first of these friends turned up for us on Saturday evening. Another came by to drive us to Meeting in the morning, and a third brought us home. A vanload of laughing women arrived in the evening to take us to a moon circle, and on Wednesday came the neighbour who had a few things to pick up in Killaloe, and who drove us in to catch our bus. By then I was on my way back to Pembroke, to be picked up by my brother, and skye was heading for Ottawa, for a conference on sustainable communities. She would be reporting back to at least two community groups. A lot is going on in that quiet countryside, and skye is deeply involved in much of it.

On Sunday morning, the usual Friendly magic happened. Half a dozen people stamped the snow off their boots at the home of Jackie Goodheart, and found it normal to sit in silence for an hour. All were women except for Blair, whom I also knew from early days, and who is a doctor who has recently brought into being a community health centre, a longtime dream. These are very busy people, and they seldom stay for potluck, but that day most of them did. The conversation was lively with stories and remembrances, as we discovered connections, Quakerly and otherwise. That was it, basically. I scooped up the photos and flotsam I'd spread out on tables, felt the mutual regret that we couldn't talk longer, and back we went through the snow to skye's place again, with the thick straw bale walls and the soaring roof, solar panels, and banks of sunny windows. A whole day passed before it dawned on me that we were entirely off the grid. The electric lights and the telephone answering machine were powered directly from the sun.

In this whole visit, I had the strong sense that whatever wisdom I have acquired in my life was not much needed here, and that instead I was in the position of learner. I was being shown alternative ways to live, not as dreams but as day-to-day realities. The van of laughing young women, for example, deciding to come out on a snowy, blowy night over country roads to pick us up and land us at a farm kitchen lit by candlelight and rich with the aroma of cooking vegetables. "We thought you weren't coming!" Delight. Acceptance of this stranger, me,

blown in out of the storm as skye's friend the traveling Quaker. Old faces and young, fresh faces, all gentled by the candlelight, sitting on fleeces and cushions on the floor, around a circle of cloth. These women gather like this every new moon, and at the full moon, men come too. They know their ritual. Sage was lit in a dish and passed around the circle, each of us wafting it over ourselves in a cleansing motion I have learned before from aboriginal teachers. Then "toning," which was new to me, but easy and okay, which was the holding of long notes, each person changing it as led, until collectively we felt it come to an end. Then, what I call worship-sharing and what they call a listening circle. The ground rules were reviewed exactly as they are at Friends' gatherings. A stone was passed around as a "talking stone." Each person spoke from her heart, from her real life, from her inner journey. After we had gone around once, we went around again. Speaking from the silence. Then it turned out that one young woman had brought delicious food, the kind of thing that everyone dips into, and we all happily sat around further and ate together. Then out again into the blowy night, and the laughing conversation all the way home.

I am telling Friends about this partly because it brought back to me a moment in Argenta when we were discerning together what is the way forward for that Meeting. Dottie Ross suddenly remarked that many people in Argenta think of their lives in terms of spiritual journey, even though few identify as Quakers. Dottie finds some of her own spiritual nurture in a group around women's spirituality. What if, she said, -- and we were just brainstorming here, just sharing thoughts that came -- what if there could be some way to invite people to share journeys, *without* making it "sponsored by the Religious Society of Friends" -- a genuine sharing from different life experiences and from different faith journeys too? And I know that for an instant, I felt an opening. The next instant, I felt frightened. It had to do with this: how then do we keep and maintain our own identity? Others felt the same fear, and the moment passed. It was more a puzzlement than a great fear, because clearly we are open to many faces of the divine. But our history and tradition is specific to ourselves. And personally I treasure the Christian roots and the 400-year history of the Friends. Here on the floor of a country kitchen near Killaloe, I glimpsed that moment again. Sunday worship and potluck had been precious. People in midlife and older, sharing reminiscences and the draw to silence. But this thing in the evening crossed generations and crossed several other barriers too, lifted the membrane between daily living and the mystery. The evening session felt like a continuation and deepening of the morning time.

This sense went on, as I lived at skye's and read some of the magazines and affirmations she lives among, and met a few more of her friends. She showed me the draft of a summary she has been making of a book which is important to her: *The Isaiah Effect: Decoding the Lost Science of Prayer and Prophecy*, by Gregg Brader (Three Rivers Press, NY, 2000). How strange, I thought, to be feeling strong connections between this "new age" thinking and the christocentric eschatology that I encountered back in Vancouver in 2004, in Lloyd Lee Wilson's *Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order*. There is a major shift between the earnest Quaker desire to work our way into a better world, and the mystical Quaker vision that the Blessed Community is already here, and we have only to

begin to live in it. "Live as if," I suggested to skye, who said no, for her "as if" feels too tenuous; rather live in the moment, mindfully, now. I copied the following quotations from her summary of the Gregg book:

"To change the nature of our experience, we need only choose another course." "We attract future outcomes, already established, into the focus of the present."

"The membrane between future possibilities may be so thin that we fail to recognize when we have crossed into a new outcome."

We talked about time, about how it isn't the way it feels as we experience it, how astronauts come back from space a few seconds older or younger than if they had stayed here. It is not a new thought on the face of the earth that past and future possibilities keep on existing somewhere quite concrete, at least for a while. We didn't get into talking about ghosts, but we could have.

Earlier I copied down a more contentious saying which was posted in the kitchen of the straw bale house. I copied it because it seemed to agree with the learnings I had received at the weekend retreat, around boundaries and *"the signals we give -yes or no, or maybe — should be clear."* I asked skye the source of this one, and she said she had it from a workshop by Toby Kelly in Calgary:

"Every issue that arises in relationship is a reflection of an inner calling to connect more deeply with our own soul. Living congruently with our soul's purpose dissolves outer conflicts."

Oh. Okay.

I took lots of photographs of the deep windows and of the solar panels on the outside of the house. I trailed around as the builders, skye's friends and neighbours Frank and Cheryl, gave a tour of the straw bale house to a young man who was thinking of building one. I peered into the central space where big batteries and monitors and tanks store and supply energy to the house. I put up the curtains when the day outside got cold and took them down when the sun poured in. One morning I joined skye in her Buddhist chanting, and in general attempted to fit my chattering self into the long spaces of silence that shape this Friend's days. I carried in a little wood, peed in a former yogurt container during the night and made visits to the cosy wooden outhouse during the day. I looked around outside at the sculpted snow and the blue blue sky, and I noticed how busy people still were out here in the silent countryside. Then on Wednesday we hopped back on the bus for our different destinations. Now I am home in Peterborough again, to stay this time, and reflecting on the past week spent among Ottawa Friends. First, though, I'll post this, just a slight sketch from the richness of living and learning in the countryside near Killaloe.

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February 15, 2006

"Canadian Yearly Meeting Organization Sz Procedure," it says, printed in gold on the navy blue vinyl cover. It's the loose-leaf version, with pages I have fastened in that were sent out after Yearly Meeting over the years, when Friends came to unity about changes in "the discipline." On the back of the title page: "To Margaret Dymont [which is who I was then] Accepted into membership of Ottawa Monthly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends, 3<sup>rd</sup> May 1984." It is signed "Barry H. Thomas, Clerk." More than two years of travelling among Friends ended last week where it began, with the Meeting where I first came into Friends. It is twenty-three years since I first slipped into the meeting room and sat in a corner chair and looked around with tears in my eyes at these odd people who sat in silence and expected God to break through. A year or so later, I applied for membership.

Last week turned out to be an immensely satisfying end to my travels, here where it all began. Most of the people I met with I already knew, from our yearly meeting gathering or else from back then, when we were all 23 years younger. I had lunch with Janet Martin, widow of Philip Martin, and recognized Philip's bilingual notice on her door: BELL - SONNETTE, with an arrow in case you missed it. Janet can't see well enough to read, but her days appear serene and full. Peter Harkness came with me, and since Peter had been on the committee of clearness for membership that met with me, our conversation turned at one point to that. Janet told a story I heard first a long time ago, about her own application back in Britain, and the way she was made to wait, during which her committee talked with her and took her around to Quaker things — a gathering, a meeting for worship for business (non-members were not allowed to attend business meetings, except by special permission) — until, quite a few months later, they decided she knew what she was getting into, and proceeded with a recommendation. This was approved, and Janet was accepted into membership.

I reminded Peter of his own remark at the closing of our meeting for clearness, when he said that it looked as if this could be the next step in my spiritual journey, and that perhaps at some other time I might feel led somewhere else! After my first pang of "don't they want me??!!" I came to cherish very much this open-ended affirmation of the mysterious and necessary work of a spiritual force in this universe, not all accounted for by the particular life of the Religious Society of Friends. So far I haven't felt led to move on. ..

Temple Pastures is a great place for a retreat, and one they hadn't found yet or which may not have been built yet when I was a member in Ottawa. It has a kitchen where we can prepare our own food, and comfortable beds and meeting spaces. I felt a sense of coming home among these Friends almost as strong as the one that overtook me that first Sunday that I settled in the corner chair and looked around. Indeed, among those present were Bill and Sylvia Powers, who were important among the factors that converged to first push me through the door. Sylvia and I had known one another from the Student Christian Movement at Queen's, and she used to often tell me that Friends were much like the SCM



I should come and check them out. This young couple is now retired and on the cusp of moving out to the Sharbot Lake area, where Sylvia grew up and where they have long owned the farmhouse where she was born (I think) or at least lived as a child. I have good memories of rustic New Year retreats out there in years past. Later on, they began taking in foster children, in addition to their own growing daughters, and the end-of-the-year retreats were replaced by family times.

Ottawa Monthly Meeting holds their annual retreat in February, and invited me to facilitate this one, with the Artist/Mystic/Activist experiences and some context from the travels. I laid out the photos, children's postcards and the papers from various groups on tables. People browsed there and brought into the circle some item or items which spoke to their own personal journey. The fact that I know a little about some of these journeys made this sharing particularly moving to me. Faced with the request to speak of their "spiritual journey," Friends do know what to say, but the resulting reflections vary greatly.

That evening included stories about the raising of children and grandchildren; potent images such as sunrise or of light breaking through dark clouds, or an enigmatic black stone with gold flecks; overviews of a life where the sense of Spirit has been sometimes intense and at others distant. Some Friends glommed onto written articles and pamphlets which I have with me because they also are important to Friends in other parts of the country: "Quaker Spiritual Disciplines For Hard Times," "A Visit to Israel by a Quaker Jew Born in Palestine," "Raising Quaker Children in the Modern World," "Dear God, Why Anger?" As always, someone chose to bring a card a child had made: this time it was Grade's from Whitehorse, with cutout people holding hands, and a sense of the Spirit as joy. More sober thoughts arose around material from American Friends Service Committee, about dead soldiers and dead civilians in Iraq, and the whole business of how we feel about the military. One Friend pointed passionately to our need for myths: the story of a young man tortured to death on a cross is far more powerful than a philosophy or theology phrased in abstract language. Another Friend, like me, was discovering openings right at that very moment around this Ottawa community of Friends, and around leaving it and having faith that there will be spiritual nurture and life elsewhere. And Sylvia has discovered that she grew up among the descendants of Quakers in that Sharbot Lake countryside (the "Land O' Lakes"). Her passion for genealogy (which I have always found particularly quixotic and admirable, since Sylvia was born a Smith, and there are a *lot* of Smiths) has led her to this living connection with her neighbours — that their grandparents knew the experience of expectant silence. Although Sylvia wonders whether they really did, or whether it was after the Methodist revival, and perhaps the Quakers spent their Sunday mornings belting out hymns and vocal prayers. Four months ago, a new worship group started up in that area, and Sylvia now dreams of furthering her genealogical discoveries with a local reunion of descendants of Friends. No mistaking the passion, and on the surface, what a distance from the equally passionate plea for myth, or for discipline, or for the celebration of the spirit in the unfolding lives of children.

One Friend spoke movingly from a saying of George Fox that had found its way onto the table:

*Do not look at the temptations, confusions, corruptions, but at the light which discovers them, that makes them manifest....For looking at the light which discovers them, you will see over them....and you will find grace and strength: and there is the first step of peace.*

When we had gone around the circle, I tried, haltingly, I felt, to say something about my wonder as I listened to all this evidence of the varied gifts and leadings that make up the facets of community. I was thinking about American Friend Chuck Fager's exhortation to affirm the nudges of the Spirit among us and to "strategize" around our vision of the Blessed Community, and then to get going, and to know it will take 100 years. At the same time, to understand it is already here now. I do see Friends who apparently live from that inner certainty, that the vision is among us, just not yet universally perceived. There is no point in asking such a Friend whether they think that their pacifism or their whatever is going to work; they just keep on assuming that their time is spent the only way it can be. I am thinking of our late Friend Edith Adamson and her unswerving commitment to Conscience Canada and to trying to make it possible for Canadians to withhold the portion of our income tax that goes to support the military. And of our ongoing Friend Murray Thomson and his lifetime of commitment to ending the presence of nuclear weapons on this earth.

In the morning, after a super breakfast — the Friends who coordinated the cooking really knew what they were doing — we shared stories about where these creative passions have taken us. Cheryl Neill from Montreal was there, complete with guitar case crowded with messages, including one that came into later worship-sharing: "Begin Within." Cheryl performed a polished and powerful spoken-word piece that led us into a recognition of our own voyeuristic complicity around images of violence.

Earlier, I had had a moment of anxiety. I wanted a tableful of objects of nature as a beginning point for meditative writing, but outside our meeting space was a world of rather deep snow. However, when I headed out down the road, of course I found and collected beautiful dead weeds that were displaying their stark and graceful lines against the snow. For the rest, I took only what had already torn off or blown off and lay along the lane and the road, and brought back a branch of evergreen, a strip of torn bark, and an almost transparent maple key. Friends buzzed with conversation, then found quiet corners to be alone with the object and their own souls.

Later we did some creative work around seeing the world empathetically through someone else's eyes. No one has yet responded to my invitation to solve this challenge through dance, but some day someone will. People produced stunning collages, moving writing, and, inside, insights, some of which we shared. In the evening, I attempted to lead us all in satirical songwriting, but with Caroline Parry gone (trying in vain to make it through a snowstorm for a Consultation & Renewal discussion at Lucknow Worship Group) and with fatigue setting in, we got the vowels rhyming but gave up on the consonants:

*Percy Schmeiser had a farm  
Each year he saved his seeds  
Monsanto came and changed the rules  
Invaded Percy's fields!*

*With a terminator seed here  
And a terminator seed there...*

We had intended to find a way to rhyme *terminate* and *germinate*, but the creative juices were fading into wanting to sit around the fireplace and talk before it was time for bed. Most people then sat up fairly late in long slow discussion, much of it about the young people in our Meetings and how and why to keep them among us and respond to their spiritual needs.

Worship-sharing on Sunday morning was followed by Meeting for Worship, with fewer Friends at each session, as people left to take up their lives again. Sylvia and Bill had gone back into Ottawa the night before, but Bill came back out to take me with them to the Land O' Lakes worship group, meeting in the afternoon at the home of Gerry and Ellie Ackerman at Parham. We stayed there overnight, plied by Ellie's remarkably fine meals. Gerry had run as an Action Canada candidate in the recent election, and Sylvia had acted as his official agent. They filled out some forms and, signed them, and then also endorsed my travel letter, so that now I have collected the only father and son contribution to that letter — Gerry's son Joe endorsed it in 2004 when I visited Winnipeg.

Gerry gave me another copy (had one from him last year and gave it to somebody who was interested) of *Addicted to War: Why the U.S. Can't Kick Militarism*. A new shipment of these comic-book-format books had just arrived. He also gave me a couple of issues of *Global Outlook*, which has stories from the conspiracy theorists about 9/11. The first thing they point out is that the official government story is also a conspiracy theory, the one that is supposed to have been led by bin Laden. They are piling up disturbing suggestions that another conspiracy is more likely, with the government directly involved. I read some of this and it *is* disturbing. I'm not sure, whatever happened, that it makes any difference to the way I spend my time. It's right to keep informed, but I still think that the job of Canadians is to pay attention to our own erosions of freedom, and not to obsess too much about our neighbours'.

In addition to political conversation at the Ackerman's, I heard several rousing stories. One was the tale of their inaugural Meeting four months ago when, partway through the silence, there was an almighty crash. They broke Meeting and discovered a white spruce, often seen as a symbol of peace, lying across their doorstep. It had missed crushing their vehicles by such a narrow margin that the whole thing felt like a statement. Indeed, Ellie heard words arrive with the crash, perhaps from the trees, saying that they will do everything they have to in order to stop the destruction of the earth. This reminds me of some of the thinking coming from the *Isaiah Effect* book I saw in Killaloe, to the effect that human behaviour affects the turbulence of the planet, and not just vice-versa. I don't

know. I'm aware of the argument from quantum physics, where micro realities are seen as also manifesting in the macro world we see and touch and live in. I'm not convinced that micro physics can be transferred to macro physics. I'm not *not* convinced either, and I have spoken with too many other people who have heard trees speak to dismiss outright the idea that communication may be going on. The white spruce landed, that is all I know, and a vocal ministry was heard and, when they all went back into the broken silence, faithfully conveyed, and the Land O' Lakes Worship Group had begun.

The other rousing story that held me spellbound was the detailed account of Bill Powers' trips first to Indonesia immediately after the tsunami, and then to the New Orleans area immediately after Katrina. Understated courage, clarity in following openings, no sensationalizing, but common compassion and a sense of humour ... It wasn't so much a heroic tale, although Bill and the firefighter who invited him to go with him certainly did put themselves in the way of danger; rather it had seemed a good idea to go and help, and they just did.

We headed back to Ottawa, going roundabout via Kingston, where foster daughter Laura lives. We were hauling a trailer load of furniture from the Powers' house, which could now be of use in this other household. I saw Sylvia and Bill in grandparent mode (not for the first time, as they often bring grandchildren to CYM) as they reconnected with baby Amber. We unloaded the furniture.

I landed next with Sue Hill, and a couple of days later with John and Carol Dixon. We had a session at the Meeting House about travelling in the ministry, and another at the Dixons about creativity. Quite a few Friends also came along to dinner at a restaurant before the Wednesday session. It's called Jericho's now but it's the same manager and the same restaurant where we used to go for Meeting for Eating.

Sue Hill was full of beautifully-told stories about her life, about a recent trip to England, and about her favourite thing, doing research, this time in a newspaper library. She was following up on reports from the archives about "match fixing," which is what can happen when too much money rides on the outcome of a game in sports. It seemed pretty esoteric to me, until, on our way over to the Meetinghouse on Wednesday, I saw hockey betting had hit our own headlines. Sigh.

I found it reassuring to spend a few days in a larger Meeting with a long history of forming care committees around Certain people at certain times. I was able to accompany one set to a concert and two other sets to tea and talk and a time of silent worship. All I want for my old age and/or future bad patches is for Peterborough Allowed Meeting to grow big enough and young enough that there will go on being people to do that for me.

The time has come to sort out the flotsam of all kinds from this more than two years of travelling. Carol Dixon had noticed this and had offered to help me think about it, and in particular to begin planning a display for this year's CYM.

My approach so far has been eclectic collecting, and Carol's nurse-trained approach helped me start to think about how to present it all in a way that makes some sense. I finally saw the beautiful map of Friends in Canada that Steve Fick produced some years ago, and am counting now on the idea that he will be able to create a new, updated version this year, and I will be able to use it in the display.

The week ended with dipping back into the Ottawa literary community, which for me crossed at times with the people I was meeting among the Friends. Indeed, the first time that I went through the meetinghouse door was not to attend Meeting for Worship; it was to attend a poetry reading. So last Saturday night I stood on a cold city corner with poet Sue McMaster and other poets, at the site of what used to be the home of poet Archibald Lampman, and listened to readings from his poems. After which Sue and I talked into the night, I added one more bed to my bed count, and at noon took the bus home. I slept all the way. My son Ted met me and took a photo, to complement the one taken on January 10, 2004, by a Friend from my committee of care, Anne Trudell. "Bookends," as Carol Dixon had suggested — the travelling Friend setting out, and the travelling Friend coming home at the end.

Soon I would like to meet with the committee of care who have been holding this journey in the Light, and in some sense give back to the Spirit the "burden" that was laid on us now more than two years ago. Really it arrived in the fall of 2002. The leading I heard or rather felt was to visit all the groups in CYM, and to be there for Meeting for Worship. I look back now and see that arrangements I fretted over at the time really came together marvellously to keep this travelling on track. I missed two groups, but visited 62, and also attended seven gatherings. And I thank Ottawa MM for adding five beds to the bed count. In answer to those who have been asking, the bed count (these are different beds, not counting my own bed again when I went back home, and not counting getting off the bus at Prince George and sleeping again in that same bed) comes out at 141.