

# The Canadian Friend

Volume 110, Number 1

March 2014



*"My life is but a weaving between my Lord and me..."*

Considering Health and Wholeness

# The Canadian Friend

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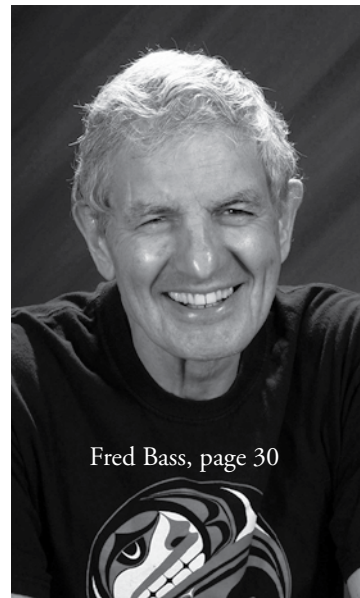
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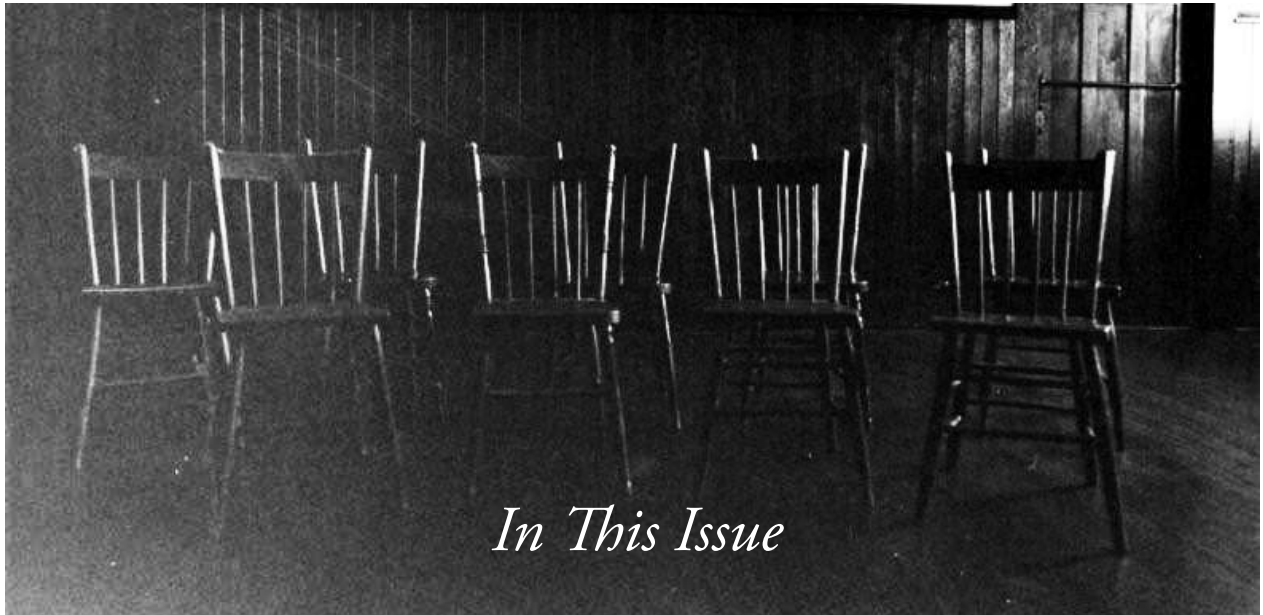
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[\* I was unable to determine the name of the photographer of Ed and Vivian's lovely photo. I trust that the Friend responsible, will be pleased that it graces this cover. Editor.]

# Editorial:

A decade ago, my daughter and I landed in a hostel just east of Thunder Bay; not the one I was headed for, but the one meant for us – rather like ‘life is what happens when we make other plans’. Something about the couple who welcomed us – Willa and Lloyd Jones – made us happy for our “mistake”.

Finding we were from British Columbia, they said, “We taught school in Borneo with a couple of Quakers from BC.” Thus we found we had mutual acquaintances in Hugh and Agnes Herbison of Argenta. Last year, both Willa and Agnes passed on. Both women were dedicated to justice. I am glad, along with many others, to have known them.

Our dear Friend Ed Abbott died in December. He, with his wife Vivian, lived a long life of service. It was on that same summer road trip that I learned about the Abbotts. “If you are Quaker”, my Ontario cousin said, “you have to know Ed and Vivian Abbott”. I learned of the close friendship the Colemans and the Abbotts shared; that her dad was Ed’s best friend since youth. I love serendipity and find it a marvelous thing that Ed’s dear friend Bill Coleman, former Anglican Bishop of the Kootenays, founded the centre at Sorrento that is so loved and claimed by Quakers for Western Half Yearly Meeting.

I am grateful to have experienced Ed’s generosity of humour and spirit, but besides that I also valued Ed’s encouragement and support for my work as editor of *The Canadian Friend*. If Ed approved, one knew one was on the right track.

Remembering those summer treasures, and revelations, makes me want to learn of your serendipitous encounters among Friends, and of Quakers doing service in the world. Please share them with *The Canadian Friend*.



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The poem Ed recited at CYM 2012

My life is but a weaving between my God and me.  
I cannot choose the colors He weaveth steadily.  
Off’ times He weaveth sorrow; And I in foolish pride  
Forget He sees the upper and I the underside.

[Corrie ten Boom]

This issue focuses on various aspects of health and wholeness. As people of Spirit we feel called to be stewards of our environment – of planet Earth, but do we overlook that our bodies are the temple of God and that they need good stewardship? Since I was a kid, I have been conscious of environmental toxins and compromised nutrition. It has never ceased to confuse and amaze me that humans breathe or ingest any number of not so good substances, then wonder at poor health. We would never dream of putting anything but gas or oil into our car. Of course it would be wrecked. Neither does our body fare well when we ingest depleted or poisoned foods. It breaks down, it ails, and when it does we want a fix. Some pray for healing, and many put money into more and more research to find the cure.

An example of this is the huge “raise money for cancer research” campaign, signed onto by the cosmetic industry and other companies – many of which riddle their products with known carcinogens. Then there are ads that lie. Those for artificial “air fresheners” feature happy kids waltzing around the room, although it is a known fact that the toxins in chemical fragrances exacerbate rates of asthma, and other respiratory, or even neurological disorders.

If we eschew the practises of greed that poison the environment and harm the health of workers, then should we not also eschew the products of that greed? Could it be a way in which we are called by the Creator to “...come out from among them and be separate...”?

I am one of those canaries or sensitives mentioned, herein; I find it difficult to walk the fine line of stating my concern and needs without offending. However, as one of our writers says, whether we sense or feel discomfort from environmental pollutants, we are nevertheless affected. I will leave you to read what others have to say on varying aspects of health and well being.

Marjory speaks of letting go of what defines us; next to that, Jennifer Kavanagh’s book delves into the definition of success – that which we think defines us; and *Hurricane*, seems a metaphor for the losses that Marjory describes.

Here’s to finding and maintaining good health and wholeness for ourselves and this planet in this new year.

Your *Canadian Friend* has managed to thrive into old age, albeit with some face changes! The Summer and Fall issues hope to feature your favourite articles and memories of past issues. I expect them.

Blessings, Sherryll Harris

## Letters to the Editor



Dear Sherryll,

I have been finishing off a thorough read of the CYM issue of CF in the last few days, I write to say it was a good issue and that I actually have read almost every article, more than usually. I was feeling quite a sense of achievement, and then TODAY the next issue arrived in my mailbox! You can't win department! I really appreciate all the different points of view you managed to include. We are going to be really suffering from even MORE great staff loss as a YM when your editor time winds up.

I am very grateful that you shared the poem "The Guest House" on the same editorial page. I love the cover photo too. What a striking image.

Thanks for your good work.

Blessings,

Caroline Balderston Parry  
(Ottawa Monthly Meeting)

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Hello, Sherryll,

Happy New Year. I enjoy The Canadian Friend and found the December issue very interesting, particularly Maida Follini's article on Elias Hicks. I am a member of the South Shore Worship Group, Halifax Monthly Meeting.

Best wishes,

Peggie Graham

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Hi, Sherryll,

Reading into the latest Canadian Friend. Very substantial, especially excellent article on Elias Hicks. Very important and freeing comment on Jesus' crucifixion (and the killing of many others over the years) is not the will of god, nor atones for our sins. Timely issue of the journal, as I am plodding my way through Pink Dandelion's *Quakerism*. Informative, but dense.

Sending my thanks and appreciation for ongoing editorial service to Canadian Quakers,

Friend Marjory Reitsma-Street (above)  
(Fern Street Meeting)

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Dear Sherryll,

The last Canadian Friend has so much good stuff in it. Thank you for your efforts. We hold good thoughts for your work. We need you!

Love,

Betty McInnes (left)  
(Fern Street Meeting)

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## *Clerk's Corner*

A week or so after CYM, Sherryll asked me to write something about the Yearly Meeting session for the October issue of the Canadian Friend. "Sorry", I replied, somewhat grumpily. "I'm too busy dealing with the aftermath of Yearly Meeting to write about it." But as well, I needed more time to process the events of the week. What did I want to say to Friends about the Yearly Meeting?

CYM is entering a new phase of life in which the requirements and processes of the secular world are weighing more heavily upon us. We have new policies around safe nurture of children and how we respond to harassment and violence among ourselves. We are increasingly seeking the aid of professionals outside CYM around matters such as human resources, liability, and other legal issues.

When these matters come up in Meeting for Worship for Business, there is nearly always a voice that says: "But wait – this is not how we relate to one another within our spiritual community." Margaret Slavin wrote in the October issue of The Canadian Friend:

"One concern that rose for me was the frequent mention in many contexts of 'safety' and of 'liability'. We are a Society open to radical spiritual adventure and trust in being led, not necessarily into safety. While it is right to do our best to care for one another responsibly in our community, may we keep our grounding in Spirit."

We do not want to relate to one another in a legalistic or adversarial manner. It is not our way. But it is also not our way to disregard legal requirements, unless we are doing so for well-examined reasons of conscience. It is not our way to put those who serve us at risk of lawsuits, unless they have accepted that risk for reasons of conscience. We often assume that Friends' ways are better than legal ways, reacting to the legal requirements as though they were an intrusion. But sometimes we are surprised to find that our procedures have been lacking, and can be improved when we pay attention to secular requirements. We may find that those requirements are consistent with our testimonies, and provide latitude for us to act as we are led.



So, are we becoming a more secular body? Sometimes it feels like it. But let us remember, that except in a few specific situations (such as an allegation of child abuse), we can choose how we deal with problems. We can try to resolve potentially adversarial situations in a non-adversarial manner. We have a rich variety of resources for dealing with conflict within CYM, including those recently developed through our Quaker Education Program. The more familiar we become with those resources, the more comfortable we are with using them, the less likely we are to resort to adversarial methods.

We may at times find ourselves in situations in which the legal advice we receive, aimed at minimizing our liability, conflicts with our testimonies. We may be guided by our principles to make decisions that will incur risks. When we make such decisions, let us do so with full awareness of the liabilities and risks we are taking on. Let us keep our grounding in Spirit.

*Susan Stevenson*  
*Vernon Monthly Meeting*

## Message from the Publications Committee



Celebration is in order. This publication is entering its 110th year! During this year, if you find notes of interest, or favourite and relevant articles from previous issues – particularly very old ones – please send them to the Editor, preferably in digital form.

The Publications and Communications Committee is committed to providing the *Canadian Friend* in print form. However, for financial reasons, we must make changes. Our circulation continues to decrease, and costs continue to rise. While we are enormously appreciative of assistance from the Canadian Heritage Periodicals Fund, our numbers over the past years have fallen below the threshold of eligibility for this government assistance.

Thus, in 2014, we will print four issues of *The Canadian Friend* rather than five. We believe that the May and July issues can be combined without losing substantial content, and that we can provide preparation material for Yearly Meeting with better timing. (Note deadlines for submissions on page 32).

We encourage you to make the best use of your journal, circulate it among attenders, non-Quakers, or give it to the local library. Or, you may prefer to read it on-line, at >quaker.ca<. The journal, looking the same as the one in mailboxes, is found under RESOURCES on the HOME page. It may not be convenient to read in the bathtub, as some of us like to do, but it does offer good large clear print. You can also download it to an e-reader, though it will be very small: something for us to work on next year. If you do move to reading on-line, please advise the CYM Office, at 91A Fourth Ave., Ottawa, ON, K1S 2L1, or >cym-office@quaker.ca< to have your name taken off the address list for future print issues. There is no charge for reading on-line.

The largest number of our Canadian readers receive the journal as a service through their Meetings, but some of you pay annually, and there are others – Libraries, Meetings, Friends outside Canada, who renew regularly on a subscription basis. We are tremendously grateful for your support. We hope to be able to keep the subscription rate at its current level for the next several years, if moving to a quarterly basis is satisfactory. However, we want to give you the options of requesting a one-issue extension to your subscription, or cancellation. Any person or organization wishing to do this, please contact the CYM Office.

*The Canadian Friend* is not alone in needing to make changes. The venerable *Friends Journal* and other Quaker publications are dealing with the reality of a world that is increasingly difficult for print media. The CF has appeared in numerous variations over the years, sometimes looking more like a newsletter, sometimes like a journal, and recently, the quality journal we have been pleased to provide for the past few years. We appreciate the service of all its editors over the years. We celebrate its 110th year, and the work of Sherryll-Jeanne Harris of Victoria, our current Editor.

Contact: >pubcom-clerk@quaker.ca< or, 121 Dill Road Ext., Windsor, Nova Scotia, B0N 2T0, with comments on this or other matters involving publications and communications within Canadian Yearly Meeting,

Carol Bradley, Clerk  
*Annapolis Valley Monthly Meeting*

# A Guided Meditation on What it Might be Like...

Sit back in your chair. Choose a slightly uncomfortable position, just a little. Maybe your foot is twisted, or your back is a bit slumped. Try to keep a little bit of discomfort during this flight of imagination. Close your eyes. Take a few deep breaths.

You are in the emergency shelter after a cold, rainy day. You don't feel safe at the other shelter. There are men there who beat you up last month. You don't want to go to the Salvation Army shelter cuz you had something to drink tonight. You're not drunk, but no drinking's allowed before showing up there.

You were interviewed when you arrived. You have nowhere else to go. You are not under the influence of any substances. You have put your jackknife, lighter, money, and prescription pills into a brown paper bag with your name on it. The volunteer who interviewed you stapled the brown bag, and locked it with the others in a cupboard. You can get it in the morning.

You are in the sleeping room, on a fold-up cot that is not against a wall, not in a corner, not near an exit. You are on a bed in the middle of the room. Another bed is three feet to your left, another is three feet to your right, a third bed is three feet up beyond your head. At your feet is a sort of pass-way for people to move around in the room.

You are lying on your bed. You made it yourself. You asked for a second pillow. This night you were able to get a real wool blanket. Even though the room is warm, and you are still wearing all your clothes and boots, the wool blanket reminds you of better times – when you had a room that you shared with your younger brother, and there was a window that you could look out of.

There aren't any windows to look out of here. The shelter is in a basement and this room is the large play space for the Sunday School. There are two doors at one end of the room. One leads to the kitchen that used to be the janitor's supply cupboard. People get coffee and snacks from this small kitchen. The other door leads down a hallway to the two bathrooms. Toilets only. No showers. There is only one public shower for men in the entire city. You don't know what the women do.

You haven't had a shower for a week. Tonight you tried to wash your hair in the sink but one of the kids hammered on the door, needing to go badly. Your hair still smells of hand soap. There wasn't time to shave.

You've unzipped your coat and let it fall open, your arms are out of the coat. It is under you. You are under the single sheet and wool blanket. One of your arms is through both straps of your backpack. This is your third back pack this winter. The other two were stolen. Or maybe you lost one when you went to that bar last month. You don't remember anymore.

Things have quieted down near the kitchen. You can hear the sound of the TV in the Drop-In room, but it is low. The guy in the bed beside you is wheezing. You look over. It's Jim. You were buddies when you were kids. You close your eyes. Maybe you can sleep. There is a bit of light at the edges of your eyes. The room is darkened down but in a couple of places there are low lights. Safety lights, so that the shelter is never fully dark.

Lying there, you think about taking your boots off. Last time you took your boots off, someone stole one of them. Only one. Some kind of joke. Ha Ha. Lucky the shelter had a spare pair. Probably your feet smell. It's been a few days since you had a clean pair of socks. Same with your underpants. Maybe it's better to leave the boots on. The smell of your own feet will bother you, keep you awake.

You are almost asleep. The soft sounds of shoes swish by. Your eyes fly open. Someone coming for you? Those guys grabbed you last month when you fell asleep behind the bank. You were kind of buzzy. – alert enough that you heard them coming and you curled up fast enough so the kicks hit your arms, not your head. Your arm is still bruised. It's one of the volunteers doing the rounds, making sure nothing is going wrong, and that nobody is sick. The volunteer stops beside wheezing Jim.

"You OK, Jim?"

"Huh? Yeah. Just this cold."

"You want me to bring you a warmer blanket?"

"Nah, I'm fine."

"How about a couple of pillows under your head and back to lift you up a bit. Help you breathe?"

"Yeah, that'd be good."

The volunteer slips away. You hear the keys rattle in the lock to the supply room. A bit of rustling, and the door being locked again. Second-hand clothes, worn out bedding, donated toiletries, and still they gotta keep the room locked. People steal anything, even if it's being given away.



## to Spend a Night in a Homeless Shelter *Laureen van Lierop*

Jim is set up so he can breathe easier. The wheezing softens to a short whistling. The volunteer steps away. "Sleep tight Jim."

"Yeah, t'anks."

Your own breathing deepens. You fall asleep. It seems like only a few minutes later, but really you've been asleep for a couple of hours. You're curled up on the bed, the backpack pulled into your stomach. One of the pillows has slid off the bed. What has woken you? You hear the swish of soft shoes again. Your heart lurches.

You flail and sit up. You see the volunteer at the door looking back. In the poor light you see a young girl, the redhead. The one who set you up with a foot bath last week.

"You OK, Rob?", she whispers.

"Yeah, somethin' woke me up."

"Sorry if it was me. I was doing the rounds."

"Maybe I'll get me a coffee. Got any on?"

"Always, around here."

You get up, decide your coat is safe and take your back pack out to the kitchen area. There are coffee and some left over muffins and sandwiches from earlier. The clock says 3:00 a.m. No one is in the TV room. The second volunteer is in the kitchen making sandwiches for the morning breakfast. The girl gives you a clean cup and you pour a coffee from the thermos. You heap in four tablespoons of sugar.

"Any chance of some oatmeal?", you ask.

"Sure, just let me heat up some water. I've got apple and cinnamon, or maple sugar." "Apple cinnamon. Jim beside me don't sound too good. He got a cold or something?"

"He thinks it's bronchitis. We're going to see if the Mobile Health Outreach can see him this morning."

"That'd be good."

"Yes."

After the coffee and oatmeal, you head to the bathroom and take your time. No line up. No kids banging on the door. You decide against washing your hair again. It might not be dry by the time you have to leave the shelter in the morning.

You take off your boots and socks. You throw your socks into the garbage and wash your feet. There's a big puddle under you. You can't get your feet dry. You try to mop up the water with paper towels but it's not a

good job. You leave the room and find the girl again.

"I wouldn't mind some socks, if you got any." "Sure, Rob. I'll get them for you in a minute." "I'm going back to bed. I'll wait there."

You head back to bed. Your coat is still there. It looks undisturbed. You check your pockets. Your cigarette is still there. Jim's breathing is softer now. You lie down, your bare feet in your boots and fall asleep before the girl comes back with clean socks.

You wake up again. It's still dark in the room. That means it isn't 7 yet. The two volunteers are leaning over Jim.

"Jim, Jim?", the girl shakes the bed. The older volunteer, a man, shakes Jim. Jim doesn't respond.

"Call an ambulance", the older man says to the girl. The girl hurries to the office and unlocks it. She steps into the room, closing the door behind her.

"What's wrong?" You ask the older man. "He's not breathing well. You gonna do CPR?", you ask. "He's still breathing. I will if I have to. Hopefully the ambulance gets here fast."

You sit up in your bed, swing your legs over to look at Jim. He seems peaceful, just kind of barely there. You hear the ambulance's siren. The girl comes out of the office and locks it behind her. She goes to the exit door. She heads out, probably to show the paramedics where to come. The older volunteer has taken Jim's hand and waits beside the bed.

The paramedics come in, trying to be quiet. They have their kits with them, no stretcher. They lean over Jim, trying to get him to say something. Their voices get louder when they don't get a response. The man on the other side of you sits up and looks over. One of the paramedics straps an oxygen mask on Jim. You watch. You clutch your backpack into your stomach. You need to pee, but staying with Jim is important. The older man lets go of Jim's hand.

Jim stops breathing. The paramedics do what it takes to get him to breath again. He don't. The paramedics look at each other.

"Let's move him. Get him to emerg." The one paramedic stands up and leaves to get the stretcher. The girl goes with him to hold the door open. The paramedics move efficiently, without panic or any rushing. The noise of the stretcher coming in through the basement door wakes up a few of the others. The

paramedics lift Jim onto the stretcher. His hand falls over the edge. The girl starts to cry. The older man puts Jim's hand onto the stretcher. He pats Jim's shoulder. "See ya Jim", you whisper.

Jim is gone. The rest of the room is waking up. It's earlier than usual. Before 7. The morning shift of volunteers hasn't arrived yet. The two volunteers decide to turn the lights on since everyone is awake. The older man goes to the supply room and comes back with some frozen Chelsea buns. You hear the microwave being turned on.

You get up to use the bathroom. The room is buzzing with anxious chatter. There's are lineups for the coffee and the bathroom. You choose the bathroom lineup. There's a girl there crying. She's got her arms around her boyfriend.

"It could've been you, Tom. It could've been me. We gotta get out of here."

"Shut up, will'ya? I need something. I can't take this anymore. We'll go smoke in a minute."

"Jim, he was a boxer, ya know," you say. "When he was young. Like you fellas there. He could box good. I used to watch him in the ring. When we was kids, too."

"Yeah, old man. He ain't boxing now, is he?"

"Nope."

The girl is quiet for a few minutes. She starts up again. "It could've been you, Tom, don't you know? You had a cold last week."

"It's gonna be you, next if you don't shut the fuck up."

The girl cries more but shuts up. The smell of warm Chelsea buns comes through the smell of dirty feet and bad breath. The coffee smells good too. After you leave the bathroom, you head for the food. And that cigarette.

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Breathe for a few minutes. Let your neck unclench, let your back or feet shift into a more comfortable position. Open your eyes slowly. Give your neck a stretch. Look around you. Look down at your feet. You've just walked a mile in someone else's shoes.

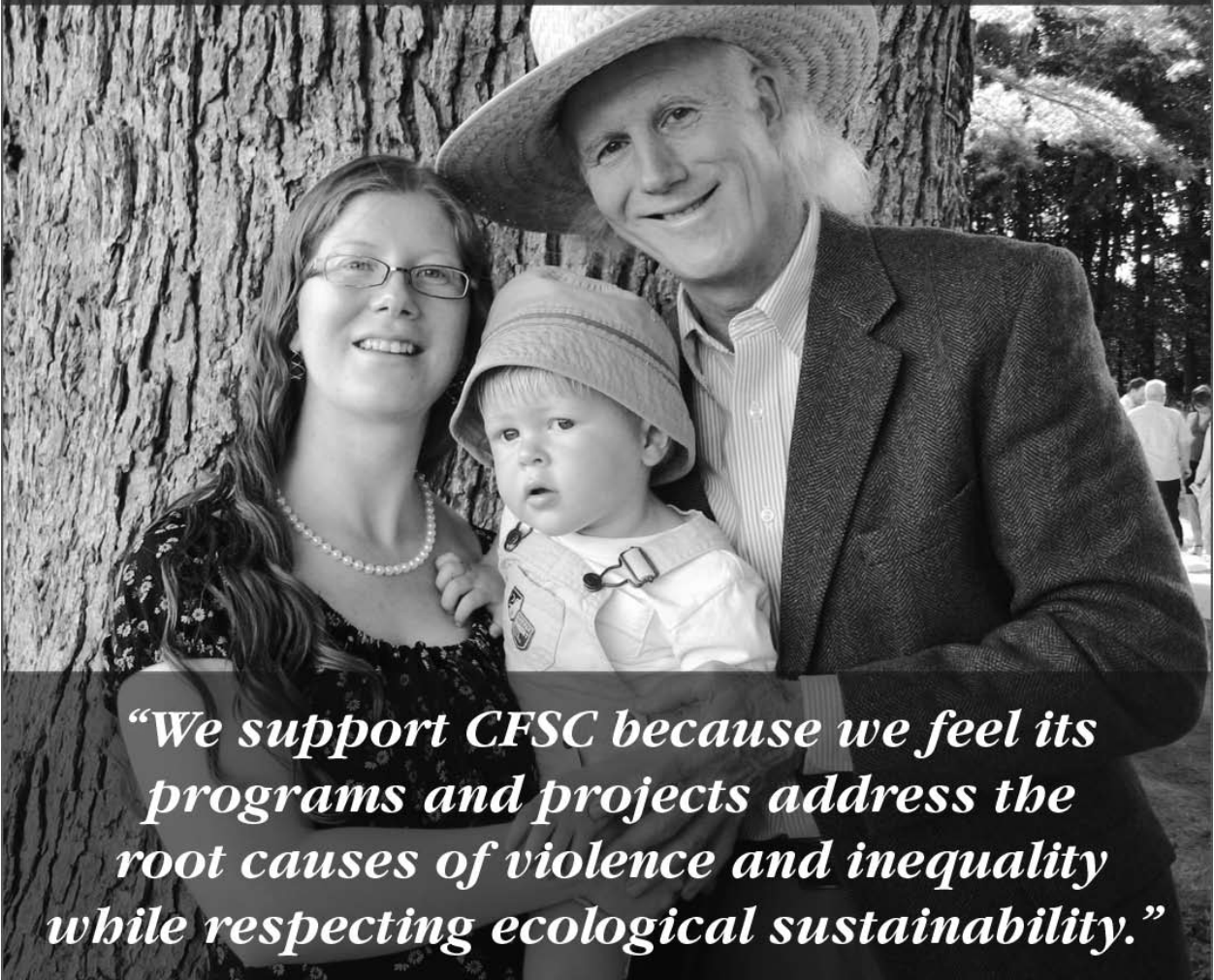
*Laureen van Lierop*  
*Halifax Monthly Meeting*



Respect the wide diversity among us in our lives and relationships. Refrain from making prejudiced judgments about the life journeys of others. Do you foster the spirit of mutual understanding and forgiveness which our discipleship asks of us? Remember that each one of us is unique, precious, a child of God.

Advice # 22  
Advices and Queries  
Religious Society of Friends

# Letting our lives speak...



*“We support CFSC because we feel its programs and projects address the root causes of violence and inequality while respecting ecological sustainability.”*

Tony, Rachel and Elliot (Kitchener Area Monthly Meeting) represent three generations from a Quaker family that generously supports CFSC's witness at home and abroad with financial gifts and through service.

Join the McQuails and become a monthly donor, or make an annual gift, to help realize CFSC's vision of a world in which peace and justice prevail. Visit <http://quakerservice.ca/what-you-can-do/donate/> or contact us at 416-920-5213 or [cfsc@quakerservice.ca](mailto:cfsc@quakerservice.ca)



**Canadian Friends Service Committee  
(Quakers)**

A Committee of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in Canada

# “I am not cancer...”

Marjory Reitsma-Street

How can I possibly feel whole with a progressive blood cancer inexorably taking up permanent residence in my body, robbing me of stamina and concentration? What Quaker experiences encourage me to feel whole, despite the losses that have been imposed on my life and that of my family, since I was first diagnosed in 2004? I had chronic lymphocytic cancer (CLL) at the age of 52.

For months, I told no-one but my husband. The silence helped us digest the situation, and just get on with life. There is no known cure for this slow-growing cancer. Life expectancy is a dozen years. Most of the time, there is minimal pain and disfigurement. There are various chemotherapy regimes that reduce the cancerous cells. If the number of lymphocytes does not grow too quickly, it is just as likely one dies *with* this cancer, rather than of it. I wanted to continue working as a professor of social policy and did not want to think about having cancer, or being known as a cancer patient. So I kept quiet, passing myself off as being well.

I did change, however, what I did with my time. Less work. More play. With the encouragement of my husband, Harry Street, and a rearrangement of our family finances, I reduced time spent in housework, activism and academe. I spent more time sitting, visiting, and participating in Quaker worship. I joined a book club and resumed Tai Chi classes. My sense of wholeness, and what constitutes a full life, shifted gradually to one of balance. I was led to ponder Number 28 of the Advices & Queries:

**“Discern the right time to undertake or relinquish responsibilities without undue pride or guilt. Attend to what love requires of you which may not be great busyness.”**

The time came when I had to disclose my health condition and its implications to close colleagues; I needed to cut my university work to four days a week, and stop direct community activism. Finally my husband told my family. I was sad, but comforted by Ministry in Meeting one day when query no. 28 was read. It was time to relinquish busyness.

In 2007, earlier than expected, as the lymphocytes were doubling, I had to undergo surgery and chemotherapy. Adrenaline and support of family, friends and Quaker worship helped me rally, as did the

desire to return to my university job. I wanted to finish a research book on women’s provisioning labours, and to continue teaching. I served on the Nominations Committee of our Monthly Meeting, and continued playing for monthly Singing for Worship. For several years I worked almost full-time, as my husband and others took over more of the household, family, and community obligations. But the number of cancer cells started to increase again in the spring of 2009. My stamina plummeted. With the relapse, I felt very different. Now I truly knew that chronic leukemia was to be part of my life – all the time. The specialist ordered me to take medical leave. A few months later, I resigned from Quaker committees.

Simplicity was the testimony that spoke to me then, urging me to imagine another way of understanding wholeness. In Query 41, I read: “A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength.” I didn’t feel the strength, nor did I feel that I had freely chosen simplicity. Yet, I hoped that simplifying and letting go of superfluities would help me see more clearly the new priorities of my life, and attend to them. I cut ties to my academic and social justice responsibilities. I also had to let go of the symbols and possessions, the hopes, identity and status of an activist professor and prolific writer. My husband and nephew helped me bag thousands of papers for recycling: articles, journal notes, and data for papers and books that would not be written. With reluctant determination and the help of a doctoral student and friend, I gave away hundreds of academic books from my home and university offices. At times, I felt hopeful. Could the promise of “fresh opportunities” arise? (Query no. 28).

The following year we had to let go of even more. Working as landlords in our own home was easy to let go. Much more difficult was giving up having friends over for dinner, going out of town, and travelling farther afield. My husband and I agreed it was time to say goodbye to our RV. Selling our home was next. We divested ourselves of many of our household goods and gave our cat to old friends. In the summer of 2012 we moved into an apartment. To our pleasant surprise it was liberating and satisfying to see furniture, paintings, workshop and garden tools, and kitchen goods distributed to younger people setting up households and little businesses.

I was stuck, however, about the future of a refurbished 1913 Steinway piano – a gift from my husband upon moving to Victoria in 1997. Since age ten, I have played piano regularly. Earlier, when an elder Friend discovered that I loved the piano, she suggested I play songs before worship if I were so led. I was still new to Quakers, delighting in the spacious quiet waiting in worship, yet also wishing for a little music. Monthly Singing for Worship began in 2000. Music, and the annual Christmas singing and a Spring Song time, became joyous, spiritual activities at the Victoria Meeting House. Other musicians and participants joined in over the years, but my capacity for playing was evaporating.

In the winter of 2012, I had been reading Patricia Loring's book on spirituality in corporate affairs, and reflecting on my favourite Advice and Query No. 1 about the "promptings of love and truth" as "leadings of God". Loring writes that love flows more freely when Friends are open to both giving and receiving. I had participated in small and large Quaker Meetings and was struck by the wise strength and loving concern that came out of Quaker ways of making decisions. Having been accepted into membership, I wondered if I were ready to take a step deeper into what being a Quaker meant, and ask for a Clearness Committee. Its work was conducted by email as I did not have the stamina for group meetings. A remarkable two weeks ensued, with quiet, intense waiting. There was a sense of being held gently in the Light, with music and prayer, while we engaged in several rounds of thoughtful email exchanges.

Way opened in my heart, and my husband and I were able to discuss our feelings on letting go of gifts that we had given each other. As we prepared to live in a smaller space, I found I could let go of the piano. I was led to ask the Property Committee if they would accept the piano as a contribution to the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations of Fern Street Meeting House. My piano was invited to "become an Upright Friend".

Now I am in the next stage of my life – with radically simpler obligations. The cancer cells continue to increase, slowly. I face more chemotherapy in a year or two. Having relinquished great busyness, I question if this is the time for new responsibilities or if it is my path to be still? Those living with disabilities and chronic illness know it is hard work to be ill, with few benefits. It takes discipline to focus on exercise, rest, health work, and quiet times. Often I find my

mind churning, craving absorption, ranting at a sense of being on the sidelines, becalmed, and mourning the loss of stimulation and activity for me and my family. I worry how I will be if pain visits or when stamina decreases even more. I question whether to push myself, break out, or burn up, doing or giving something beyond what feels to me like a 'little life'.

What is wholeness now? What Quaker teachings will open up new thoughts and hopes? Is it for me to look for 'that of god' in cancer, or forgive it, or adopt it? I do not feel so. I just live with it. I sometimes look into the medical research literature, hoping to find a new chemo cocktail or other treatment that could give me more energy and new adventures while subduing the chronic leukemia into complete remission. I tire of bereavements, am weary of holding myself ready for more losses, am challenged to live fully in this new body of mine.

Yet, every day I feel that life is a stupendous gift, that it is Holy. We are but specks, yet part of a huge mysterious universe that has neither beginning nor end. There is an awareness, that diminished though I may feel, I am still alive, often brimming with gratefulness for life, for laughter and surprises, the loving presence of my husband, the ongoing friendship with family, friends, and Friends, and sufficient money to pay the bills.

At the close of writing this essay, I was stunned and amazed by how deeply I felt that the inner Light – The Light – is not diminished by what happens to my body. The ineffable Mystery is just that: ineffable and boundless. It does not need me to do, or even *be* anything except alive, for now. No matter what happens to my body or mind, this mysterious Light continues burning brightly. This is comforting and wondrous. Comforting too are the words of John Oxenham that my husband gave me:

**'Mid all the traffic of the ways  
Turmoils without, within.  
Make in my heart a quiet place,  
And come and dwell therein.**

*Marjory Reitsma-Street  
Vancouver Island Monthly Meeting*

[Marjory thanks Stephanie Deakin for her Quaker and professional help during the difficult transition times, and Catherine Novak for her encouragement to write this essay.]



## Book Review: *Jerry Peterson*

*The Failure of Success* by Jennifer Kavanagh, O-Books, 2012.



Probably few Quakers would be surprised by the idea that western society is immersed in a culture of success and celebrity. In this book, Jennifer Kavanagh takes a deep look at the meaning and implications of success in our culture – what it is, how it is measured, and the meaning of failure. She explains how success is generally understood today as the achievement of

something attempted, or the attainment of a desired object, with particular reference to the attainment of wealth or position.

Kavanagh examines several issues and problems that arise when we identify ourselves too closely with our own successes and failures, or with the successes and failures of others. Success and failure do not exist in their own rights, but only in relation to one another and to some kind of measure or expectation of ourselves or others. The emotional, spiritual, and material costs of our culture of success and its frightening shadow, failure, are high.

The author explains that the achievement of success is measured either against a standard or against the achievement of others. Certainly, healthy competition improves performance. However, competition can also narrow a person's view down to a singular focus on defeating others. Differentiating between these two goals – producing quality work and defeating others – can sometimes be difficult, but Kavanagh shows the importance of maintaining this distinction.

In a very real sense, success is not what it seems to be, and neither is failure. We often consider an individual who claims success, as having achieved some final result or having reached a state of completion. The truth is that much innovation and many creative ideas are embedded within processes. Often, a person who is celebrated as a great success is in reality just another link in an ongoing chain.

Failure is not what it seems to be either. One great insight of the spiritual life is that failure can help us reconsider our projects and direction and make

necessary adjustments – if we receive our human experience of brokenness (failure) constructively. At a spiritual level, failure, dark times, and trauma can challenge us in significant ways and open us to change – not just change in our outward actions, but in our very selves.

I think that Friends will find this book of interest. With the continuing increase in income inequality in our world and with our culture's increasing emphasis on a "winner take all" mentality, this little book provides some much needed perspective.

*The Failure of Success* is available in paperback and electronic formats. Learn more about Jennifer Kavanagh at >[www.jenniferkavanagh.co.uk](http://www.jenniferkavanagh.co.uk)<.

*Jerry Peterson*

*Mountain View Friends Meeting in Denver, CO.*

[Reprinted with permission from *The Western Friend*]

## Hurricane Aftermath

Brokenness

The spirit set free  
from the vessel,  
shards unrecognizable, unimportant.

The state of listening  
without searching.

The absence of earthly foundation.  
Sorrow unadulterated with self.

Walls down,  
pure soul unassailable.  
Responsive to tremors of Spirit,  
unlike anything temporal,  
and the only reality.

Without hope  
or its necessity,  
existing only in the now.  
Buoyed up by gentleness,  
warmth, caring;  
beyond hurt  
if these are lacking.

Adrift  
Invisible  
Unstanced

*Nancy Comeaux  
Baton Rouge (Louisiana) Meeting*

[With permission from *The Carillon* and author, Nancy.]

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*Awake and Aware: Reflections on Friends and Civil Disobedience* by Kenneth C. Hone. Canadian Quaker Pamphlet 70. Argenta Friends Press 2011. This essay was inspired by police reactions to peaceful demonstrations in Toronto in 2010 at the time of the G8/G20 Conference. Violence and civil disobedience are defined and examples are discussed. (17 pp. \$6.00).

*Balancing* by Helen Stevenson. Argenta Friends School, 1980. Back in print in this well-illustrated booklet are descriptions of forty single, double and multiple formations. (89 pp. \$15.00).

*Beyond the Growth Dilemma: Toward an Ecologically Integrated Economy*, edited by Ed Dreby and Judy Lumb. Quaker Institute for the Future. Pamphlet 6, 2012. "Globally we are using approximately one and a half times Earth's biocapacity to renew resources and absorb pollution." The need to reform our monetary, financial and economic systems is explained and workable solutions are proposed. (101 pp. \$10.00).

*But Who Do You Say That I Am? Quakers and Christ Today*, by Douglas Gwyn. The Kindlers, Booklet 7. 2013. After an overview of various perspectives on Christ among Foundationist, Conservative, Ecumenical, Interfaith, Universalist Non-Theist Quakers, twelve of the Kindlers team express their personal views. (56 pp. \$7.50).

*How Does Societal Transformation Happen? Values Development, Collective Wisdom, and Decision Making for the Common Good*, by Leonard Joy. Quaker Institute for the Future Pamphlet 4. 2011. Changes in society depend first on the development of a higher order of values by individuals. The time-tried practices of a Quaker business meeting could be effectively used in secular institutions for the common good. (85 pp. \$10.00).

*Jail Fire*, by Julie C. Robinson. Buschek Books, Ottawa. 2013. The work of Elizabeth Fry in London's Newgate Prison during the early years of the 19th century was the inspiration for these poems, which poignantly express her encounters with the women prisoners. Based on careful research. (61 pp. \$17.95).

*This I Warn You In Love: Witness of Some Early Quaker Women*, by Catie Gill and Elaine Hobby. The Kindlers, Booklet 6. 2013. After first describing the calamitous social scene that followed England's civil war, the authors include passages from the writings of eleven 17th century Quaker women. An enclosed CD permits listeners to hear their stories spoken by a modern interpreter. (44 pp. \$7.50).

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# Mental Health in Our Meetings

Isobel Lane

For me, the most vital Quaker testimony is the one to equality. If we truly believe that we are each created equal, unique, precious, and a child of God, how can we treat any human being as not worthy of the same consideration and respect as anyone else? When mental health issues create discomfort, usually due to fear arising from ignorance, living this testimony can become difficult.

Experience has shown me that ignorance creates fear, and fear is very powerful. The best way that I have found to overcome this is to be as open as I dare in telling others of my realities, so they know why I sometimes behave as I do and, while maybe not liking it, can see that I have not ceased to be human. I also need to feel safe with them. So it is a slow process. As Bob Johnson says in his book *Emotional Health*: “Truth and trust are rarely dramatic, but you cannot be emotionally fit without them.” We have a testimony to truth. If we cannot be truthful among ourselves, how can we follow that testimony in the wider world?

My own story may illustrate some of the difficulties that Meetings have when faced with mental health issues. The last few years have been very difficult for me. I was very ill and spent some months in the hospital. Friends from my Meeting visited me from time to time to have Meeting for Worship with me. That was immensely valuable. After discharge I was still very fragile and fighting a hard battle within myself. I found that my ministry sometimes disturbed others. I was aware of this and felt alien. The Meeting elders responded by producing a leaflet about ministry. This was done sensitively and with truth. I think that helped all of us. I have, also, had to use the Meeting to root myself to stop me leaving and harming myself. I found it impossible to speak about this at the time but, later, did so when the power of that feeling had dropped to a manageable level. I was very frightened of revealing my thoughts. I felt they were unacceptable and simply far too much for others to deal or be with. I was also worried that actions that I would find inappropriate might be taken, when what I needed most was human warmth and acceptance of my struggle at the level it was to me.

The lack of awareness of the realities of mental illness and, indeed, the fact that it is illness was vividly illustrated in a Meeting for Healing. At these we speak

the names of the people who we feel need to be held in the Light. My name was not spoken. I was deeply upset. I felt that my illness was considered as not needing healing and as well how little mental illness is considered, let alone understood. More recently, I said that I was struggling badly and I did get a response that helped me. A Friend gave me a very warm hug and others spoke to me, including someone who had not previously spoken of her depression; so, in Meeting, at least, things are slowly changing.

I have heard of one case where a Friend who was in hospital heard nothing at all from his Meeting. Why not? If he had a ‘physical’ illness would he have been neglected? Were the Friends in his Meeting afraid? Couldn’t they see his need? Or did they simply not care enough? When researching the difficulties that Friends with mental illness have, I was told about a situation where a Meeting for Clearness was held to discern what to do about a Friend with extreme anxiety. Apparently it was decided to ‘leave it to the professionals’. I hope that her Meeting offered her warmth and simple acceptance as another human being.

Another Friend said that he has difficulty with the idea that people who have mental health problems that make silent worship difficult should consider if a Quaker Meeting is the place for them. Surely, the consideration should be the other way around. How can the Meeting be more comfortable with that Friend? As another Friend said: “Thinking about this in relation to the testimony to equality, it doesn’t seem right to treat these people’s needs as any less than the rest of the Meeting.”

Last year a wonderful person, Wanda, from my meeting died. At her Memorial Meeting, a friend of hers said that she had rung Wanda when she was mentally distressed. Wanda had tried to help by offering ideas of things to do about it. The friend found that this simply didn’t work, so she said to Wanda: “Why can’t you just be with me in my pain?” Wanda paused, then simply said: “Thank you.” That was a wonderful gift.

Quakers have a long history of involvement with mental illness. The Retreat in York was founded in 1796 to be a place where Quakers could recover from mental illness in an environment that was both familiar and sympathetic to their needs. [In the USA, the first

private psychiatric hospital was founded by Friends in 1813; ed.] Other things have been happening more recently: Young Friends expressed a concern some fifteen years ago and the third London Quaker Dialogue was on the topic of 'Spirituality, Creativity, and Mental Illness.' The Friends Fellowship on Healing addressed it in October, 2010. The Quaker Youthwork Conference in 2010 held an event on the subject of Young People and Mental health, and Quaker Life held a special interest group at the [British] Yearly Meeting Gathering in Canterbury, 2011 on 'mental health in our Meetings'. This was later followed by a day-long workshop in York. Woodbrooke offers support to elders and overseers through the 'Mental Health in our Meeting' courses. A mental health Cluster (MHC) on the Quaker Life Network has now been formed to carry forward the work within Friends generally. Its members are Stephan Ball, Isobel Lane, Jane Muers and Peter Allen-Williams.

In order to carry the work forward the MHC needs to gather material from Friends with experience of mental health issues in their Meetings, from those with mental illness and others, whatever their interests. We aim to show how Friends do, and can –as sufferers, carers, healers, and fellow human beings–help all in the Meeting to be safe, equal, at peace, and to build trust; and as a consequence, reach deeper levels of awareness and fellowship –Friendship, allowing all to partake fully in the care of the Meeting, feel connected and safe, enabling hope to grow.

**"If no one is honest and visible, then nobody can move forward at all." Stephen Amos**

*Isobel Lane*

*Streatham-and-Brixton Meeting.*

[Reprinted with permission from *the Friend*]

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## This I Can Now Affirm

This I can now affirm  
As I walk through the house of my life  
In the middle years.

I never went through a door  
And found what I had expected.  
The room was always lighter  
Than had appeared from the corridor,  
The furniture more simple,  
More carefully brought together  
For my entire need,  
Than I had ever imagined.  
There was often some special delight  
Waiting for me to receive it,  
Like a dear animal returned,  
Or flowers that suddenly spoke  
In a language I understood.

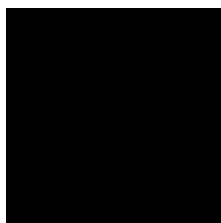
I seldom went into a room  
But there was a gathered company  
Who paused to greet my entrance,  
Whose hands as they moved touched mine  
In delicate reassurance;  
Across whose faces fell  
The shadows from future suns,

Or whose eyes burned dark and kind  
Like the ancient teddy-bear  
I took to bed as a child.

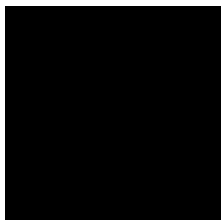
And in the abandoned room  
Where no man's footstep sounded,  
Where there was no bed made,  
Nor table set with food,  
When the door was closed behind me  
Even the dust of the floor  
Silently blessed my feet,  
Even the dying light  
Gently caressed my brow,  
While a thin flute played in my head  
A song I had loved before birth.

Faithfully this has recurred.  
Why should I then suppose  
It will one day be otherwise?

*Winifred Rawlins, Quaker (1907-1997),*  
Poem from collection: *Fire Within*



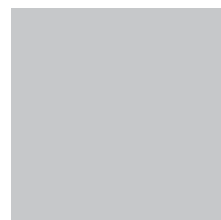
**We**



**are**



**all**



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# Thoughts

Brent Bowyer

In the past few weeks, this winter I've been noticing the cedars, elms, and other trees bowed over almost to the ground after the heavy snows we've had, and the ice storm of a few weeks ago. Some break off and are destroyed. Some of them will rebound by summer, but some never do. They will be permanently deformed. Some have a heavy branch fall on them but continue to grow, sometimes in an "S" shape, as they reach toward the sky. Some of the white pines that have a diseased leader will have another branch take over as a new leader.

When we were at the old St. Williams Nursery at Walsingham, Ontario, last fall with our son, Christopher, we saw a 3 ½ to 4 foot diameter slab of an old tree from Simcoe, mounted on a block under a little roof. It was from a big oak that had lived to be almost 400 years old. It started growing in the early 1600s, around the time Samuel de Champlain came to Port Royale and began the Order of Good Cheer. There were scars within the slab, clues to the hardships the tree had faced: fire; "shake" (separation along the growth rings caused by windstorms); splits from lightning strikes; limbs breaking off and the bark then healing over the injury. You wouldn't always have seen any of these things from the outside, but there were the clues within. When you cut your own firewood, you pay attention to trees and the wood within them.

Someone had written a story from the oak tree's point of view telling some of the changes it had seen in its long lifetime: the native sweetgrass ceremony under its branches; the coming of the first pioneers to southern Ontario when its life had been spared; a sawmill fire that had burned down most of the village of Simcoe in the late 1800s; and climate change in more recent years.

In some ways, people are like those trees. We experience a lot of hardships in life. Sometimes there are scars where the wounds heal over. Sometimes the events can be too much to take and we break under the stress. You can't always tell, from talking to someone for a while, what s/he's gone through.

As a wood turner, I know that the most prized pieces of wood for turning on the lathe are the burls, and scarred or injured pieces of wood – the castoffs most woodworkers don't want. I don't believe, as some do, that all hardships in life are sent to us for a purpose, that "all things work together for good, for those who

love God", as the plaque on my parents' wall said. The reality seems more like: bad things *do happen* to good people, and vice versa. But it is probably true, nonetheless, that the person who really understands hardship is the person who has experienced it firsthand – the wounded healer.

I'm trying to cut people some slack more often when they occasionally say or do things that are out of character, insulting or hurtful. I know that sometimes I've said things, myself, that I wished I could take back almost right away. I didn't always think deeply about what I said or did. It was sometimes just an impulsive thought. It was not my final position or thought on something at all. So when others do that once in a while, I try to give them the benefit of the doubt, and let it go. I hope they'll do the same for me. (It may become a different thing if there is a long-term pattern of such behavior, though.)

It makes me think of how we get through things, of resilience. Maybe a big part of it is having a caring community, f/Friends who will see you through the tough times, who are there for you for the long haul, who try to see that of God in you, even when it isn't always obvious at first glance, or all the time.

*Brent Bowyer, Lucknow Worship Group  
Kitchener Monthly Meeting*

[These were thoughts that came during Meeting for Worship on January 26, 2014]



# Report: A Pilgrimage – an Experiment with Light

Tim Bartoo

“...then, oh, then, I heard a voice which said, ‘There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition’, and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy. Then the Lord let me see why there was none upon the earth that could speak to my condition, namely, that I might give Him all the glory... And this I knew experimentally.”

British Friend and theologian, Rex Ambler, made in the 1990s what he calls “a thrilling discovery”. For some years he had been immersed in the writings of the early Quakers, asking some basic questions. Fox and the early Friends, he said, “...talked of ‘the Light’ within them that showed them the way; ‘the truth’ that set them free; ‘the life’ which sprang up within them and between them; ‘the power’ which enabled them to do the seemingly impossible. What were they talking about? What meaning did these simple but elusive words have for them?”

Fox’s writings, in language from 350 years ago, can be difficult to understand. Rex’s *Truth of the Heart*, an anthology of George Fox’s writings, opens a pathway. Passages from Fox are compared with a modern English translation, making it much easier for us to make sense of his words.

Still, questions remain unanswered. What explains the almost explosive growth the early Friends experienced in the mid-seventeenth century? How was it that so many people, when they joined with Friends, so rapidly experienced such spiritual depth that their lives were so radically transformed? Specifically, how did the early Friends pass on the essence of what they had discovered to those just coming into the nascent Society of Friends? Why are there no explicit “how to” instructions in the early writings?

They rarely missed an opportunity to testify against the “empty form” they perceived in traditional religion. We can understand how they would naturally have avoided any attempt to codify the methods (if indeed they had methods) that they used in teaching their practices. Subject to harsh societal criticism from the beginning, and then harsher persecutions still, they were forced to be guarded in all their public communications.

Thus it is quite remarkable that Rex Ambler discovered, implicit within the writings of early Friends, a detailed guide for a definitively Quaker style of meditation. In a 1653 tract, Fox wrote, “...

for the first step to peace is to stand still in the Light (which discovers things contrary to it) for power and strength to stand against that nature which the Light discovers”.

Careful study slowly brought into focus the six essential steps of what is, perhaps, the method used by the early Friends. Rex communicated his discovery to Friends in the 2001 Cary Lecture, and wrote *Light to Live By*, in which the entire meditation form is explained.

Over the past dozen years, a movement has sprung up within the Society of Friends around Rex’s discovery. It is a growing movement which held its first *International Gathering of the Experiment with Light* on September 27-29, 2013, at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre in Birmingham, UK.

I am fortunate to have been at this gathering, one of seventy-one participants from the UK, Palestine, Finland, Russia, South Africa, Austria, Canada, Sweden, Norway, and the USA. I was fortunate to have attended the “1652 Country” pilgrimage which followed.

For travel funds, I gratefully acknowledge the assistance provided by a Quaker Studies grant through the Education and Outreach Committee of Canadian Yearly Meeting.

As we gathered in the Cadbury room at Woodbrooke, Rex asked, “How far, how deep, how wide can you go this weekend?” He went on to say:

“If we are to deepen our meditation, we need to risk facing unpalatable facts about ourselves, and risk speaking about this with our group, and not get stuck at a comfortable level where we feel safe sharing with others. We can take the *Experiment with Light* farther, deeper and wider. That is our challenge.”

I had met Rex Ambler and had my introduction to the *Experiment with Light* at a Friends General Conference workshop at Amherst, Massachusetts, in the summer of 2004. Evidently the workshop not only inspired, it also empowered me. Somewhat surprised, I found myself on my feet after Meeting for Worship in Vancouver that fall, announcing that I felt led to organize a Light group, to share what I had learned, and to practise the experiment with Vancouver Friends. Since then our Light group has met monthly, and will celebrate its tenth anniversary next fall. A Light Group

is a meeting in which the guided meditation, the *Experiment with Light*, is practised, and the writings of the early Friends are discussed. The best way to understand this is to experience it for yourself. Dozens of Light Groups now meet regularly in the UK, and around the world.

Our weekend at Woodbrooke was beautiful in its intensity, its depth and breadth, and made an impact that we still feel in our lives. With effective and sensitive leadership, a caring spiritual community quickly formed. We engaged in a series of powerful large and small group sessions, then all too quickly ran out of time.

A fortunate eight of us, carrying the spirit of the Gathering within us, made a four-day pilgrimage to '1652 Country', the birthplace of Quaker faith. We stayed at Swarthmoor Hall, home of Margaret Fell and later, George Fox. It is now a Quaker retreat centre. We ventured each day by minibus to places steeped in Quaker history, where the storytelling could include "...and this is where it happened".

A host of volunteers, including Rex, spoke to us, bringing Quaker history to life. We climbed Pendle Hill, where George Fox had his famous vision, stood on cobblestone streets where George Fox had run for his life from angry mobs, sat in silence in Meetinghouses where Friends have worshipped for 350 years, and read from Fox's personal pocket Bible. Rex spoke at Firbank Fell, where in the summer of 1652, a thousand people gathered to hear Fox minister.

Plans are underway to hold a workshop on the *Experiment with Light* at Canadian Yearly Meeting in the summer of 2014.

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## Education & Outreach

The Education & Outreach Committee (E&O) offers grants and loans, or supports referrals to other funds, for members and attenders of Canadian Yearly Meeting who wish to pursue educational opportunities. Examples include attendance at the Friends General Conference Gathering, Pendle Hill and various Quaker-related conferences. In some cases the Pendle Hill scholarship has provided the space and supportive nurture for writing or artistic projects.

Details on CYM web page, or phone or write the E&O Grants & Loans Officer, Brent Bowyer, RR2, Wingham, Ontario. N0G 2W0 (519-357-1883)

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*Tim Bartoo*

*Vancouver Monthly Meeting*

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CFSC has prepared an Information Kit on syntheticbiology (available at <http://quakerservice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2013-CFSC-Synthetic-Biology-Kit.pdf>). The Kit identifies four relevant Quaker-Institute-for-the-Future booklets (#2, 3, 5, 6). Sets of these were distributed to Monthly Meetings. Each can be downloaded (see links in Kit). Appendix One summarizes QIF #2 *Genetically Modified Crops: Promises, Perils, and the Need for Public Policy*.

For a brief, 2013 update on synthetic biology, please see the following links from proponents of synthetic biology: <http://synberc.org/content/synthetic-biology-ted>, and especially George Church, *Regenesys*, March 2013; from those cautious about synthetic biology: <http://www.etcgroup.org/resources>, especially *Synthetic Biology: The Bioeconomy of Landlessness and Hunger* June, 2013. [See article on page 26].

# Why Does Your Fragrance Bother Me? *Dorothy Parshall*

The chemicals in fragrance hit my brain like a glass of vodka does a 'bad drunk'. These volatile chemicals affect my brain directly. They attach to receptors, reducing my ability to think compromising my coordination and they changing my mood. While 'under the influence', I may have trouble driving. I cannot hear or speak properly. I may become angry.

I don't mean to. It is a direct reaction to the chemicals. It may take me hours to recover.

The effect of perfume on my brain is immediate. I was interviewing a family, located close to a powder room with commercial "air freshener". After a short time, my eyes could not focus and my brain was foggy. I was struggling to continue. I asked that the "air freshener" be put outside. Fifteen minutes later, my brain and vision returned to normal.

At times, I find myself unable to comprehend the written word. I can read a sentence over and over, unable to make sense of it. When this first occurred, I finally realized where the problem lay and left the building as quickly as possible. After a few minutes in fresh air, I became clear-headed. It took me nine years to realize that some chemicals affect my ability to understand both oral and written language. When the level in my body gets too high, my brain turns off. I am like a "canary in the coal mine". Teri James Bellis' book, *When the Brain Can't Hear*, helped a lot. At last, a doctor who understands!

These hypersensitive reactions are known to be caused by chemicals in the environment. In North America there are many thousands of environmentally poisoned people. Twenty percent of the population suffers noticeably. Many more would notice an improvement in health and mental ability if they stopped using fragrances, perfumes and artificial fresheners. But some toxins are unknown and odourless. Tomorrow, after an unexpected exposure or a build-up of toxins in your system, it could be you.

I was a hard-working professional ten years ago, until the day I was poisoned. It was formaldehyde – a common chemical used to preserve dead bodies, or to stop fungus in furnishings. It was in carpeting on a stair. It was brand new, and it stank. By the time I had walked up one flight, I felt as though I were going to collapse. A co-worker exclaimed, "You're white as a sheet". I left immediately, but the damage was done and will plague me the rest of my life.

The Occupational Health Center had no idea what to do. I went twice. The second time, a doctor – whose son had been poisoned by drywall chemicals when he renovated his home – suggested I continue to see a holistic chiropractor. He was able to clear enough of the toxins for my brain to function.

The effect of chemicals on the brain can be worse than on the body. The brain is clouded; thinking is impaired. I was only just functioning. I had severe ups and downs. I did not realize it, at first, but a lot of things had changed. Language was severely handicapped. I was hypersensitive to loud noises; they made me angry. I had days when it was a struggle to get up. I was able to do very little and became depressed by my inability to function at my usual high energy level.

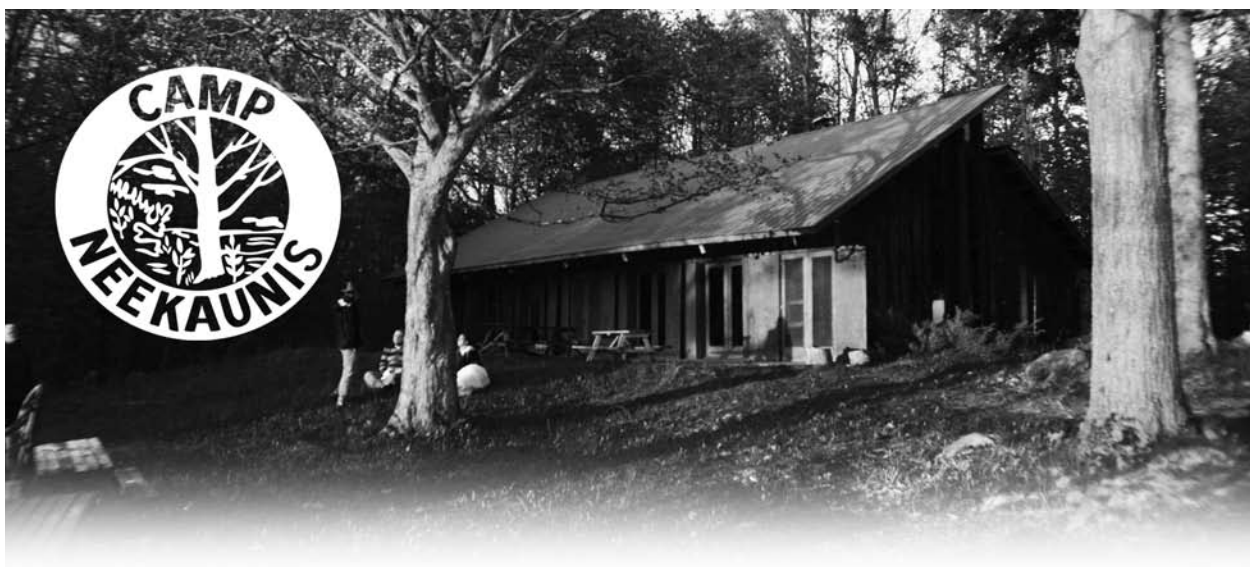
A friend suggested I try "detoxing". The practitioner lived an hour away; just getting there was exhausting. She gave me a handful of supplements and a horrible-tasting drink. Then she announced, "Now we need to walk for half an hour". Horrified, I said, "But I can hardly put one foot in front of the other!" Then I added bravely, "Alright, one foot after another. I will just keep doing it". I was desperate. I wanted to be better, or die.

I survived that first treatment, and four more like it over the next three weeks. Came the fifth session, miraculously I had my energy back. I had the energy of a hyperactive ten year old. Now I understood how the children with whom I was working felt, when told to "sit still". I was striding through life again, instead of dragging myself along. My brain worked better. Grace and joy seemed to pour into me, until life was full again. I was elated.

But detoxing needs to be repeated. Every time I go into a place full of chemicals (i.e., any city), I have to come home and take a detoxing bath. If the exposure has been heavy, I may need to do it again in the morning. My awareness of my energy level lets me know what I need to do. I will never be able to stop detoxing.

I worry about all the others who climbed that stairway. How many of them had symptoms? How many are still suffering from that exposure? I am grateful for a friend's support all those rough years. Otherwise I would never have learned what was wrong with me or how to regain my health.

*Dorothy Parshall  
Montreal Monthly Meeting*



### location

Camp NeeKauNis is on a hill above the shores of Georgian Bay. The cabins, outbuildings, woods, and enhanced water-front provide the perfect location for kids and families to experience northern living within a community environment.

### real world skills

Our camp is rooted in the Quaker principles of equality, cooperation, and respect. The interpersonal skills campers learn here will become an invaluable asset in their lives as well as something they can pass on to others.

### campers : staff

Our camper to instructor ratio is one of the best and, depending on the camp, will range from 4 : 1 to 2 : 1. This allows each camper to participate in all activities with proper supervision.

### camp experience

Everyone has a passion and ours is making sure each camper has an unforgettable experience. Campers will have the opportunity to spend time at the water front, in the sports field, playing drama games, and leaving camp spiritually refreshed.

**Programs for families, children, young adults, and mixed groups are offered in a series of camps which provide opportunities for recreation, relaxation, and spiritual growth.**



For more information on camps and travel bursaries, or to download registration forms, please visit our website at [www.neekaunis.org](http://www.neekaunis.org)



# Reports Reports Reports Reports Reports

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## Note Name Change

Quaker Aboriginal Affairs Committee (QAAC) is now ***Quaker Indigenous Rights Committee (QIRC)***. It is so important to get the name right. Right?

At the autumn meeting of the Quaker Aboriginal Affairs Committee, concerns were raised that the committee name no longer expressed our function, and the way we do our work. We were seven people sitting around the library table at Friends House in Toronto.

A light went on when one of us said, "Our committee has the right to change our name. We have the naming rights. Right?" Agreed. Each committee member had concerns about one or more word in the name *Quaker Aboriginal Affairs Committee*. It had served us well.

We decided "Aboriginal" is no longer an appropriate word. The idea of an 'affairs' committee has a bureaucratic slant and doesn't reflect the partnership style. Our work is centred around the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We are doing human rights work. The committee name on our business cards and correspondence is confusing for many people.

We noted that in Australia, there is the Friends Indigenous Concerns Committee. One wag among us pointed out that two years ago the Feds, re-named their former Indian Affairs, to *Aboriginal Affairs*. That is reason enough for us to move ahead and drop the reference to "Aboriginal Affairs".

In moments, committee members were flashing name suggestions around the table and testing the acronym. Yes, our work was centred on implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. We would be the Quaker Indigenous Rights Committee (QIRC).

And what about the acronym – QIRC pronounced Quirk? We were all set to move beyond QAAC pronounced "Quack". Our acronyms have a sense of

humour! We all joyously sounded out the past and future acronyms. The library sounded like a barnyard. "QAAC QAAC QIRC QAAC QIRC QIRC."

We searched the resulting acronyms: Queensland Industrial Relations Commission; Quality Impact of Refractive Correction; Quest for Illegitimate Religious Certainty. That list of internet "hits" is now joined by *Quaker Indigenous Rights Committee*.

An internet search of Quaker archives turned up this reference: In 1837 Meeting for Sufferings of London Yearly Meeting established the Aborigines Committee.

In the after-moments of the acceptance of the name-change minute, the committee took time to honour our past. The CFSC Quaker Committee on Native Concerns was born in 1974, out of concern over mercury poisoning from paper mills in the Wabigoon and English River systems in north-western Ontario. In the 1990s the committee name was changed to Quaker Aboriginal Affairs Committee. And now, in 2013, we have the Quaker Indigenous Rights Committee.

The word *indigenous* is supplanting the word aboriginal in other cases. A resolution at the Assembly of First Nations winter gathering wants to change the name of June 21, from *Aboriginal Day* to *Indigenous Peoples Day*. The resolution cites a United Nations study that says: "...terms used to identify Indigenous Peoples as Native, Indian, and others of similar cast (including Aboriginal) were used by discoverers/colonizers and their descendants to differentiate themselves in a relationship of superiority-inferiority from the original inhabitants of the new territories". That resolution and citation speaks this writer's mind.

*Don Alexander, Pelham Executive Meeting  
Quaker Indigenous Rights Committee (QIRC)*

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QIRC, in partnership with others has printed and distributed more than 130,000 of the pocket-size (14cm X 10cm) booklet with the text of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. The booklet is now in a third printing. Article 13 of the Declaration speaks to the importance of names: "Indigenous Peoples have the right to...designate and retain their own names for communities, places and persons."

## Around the Family Around the Family Around the Family

**Argenta Monthly Meeting** hosted a celebration for the life of Agnes Herbison, Sunday October 13, 2013. Family, community, gardening, politics and social justice were among the issues dear to her heart and informed her actions throughout her long life. She was made a lifetime member of the NDP in 2002, was an active supporter and fundraiser for SOS Children's Villages, kept abreast of world events and donated generously to causes she believed in, wrote countless letters to politicians. Most of all, Agnes believed in the power of love, a belief she demonstrated beautifully even during the last months of her life. Agnes was predeceased by her husband, Hugh, in 2009. She will be greatly missed by her five children: Kathie, Wendy, David, Brenda, and Nancy; by her nine grandchildren, six great-grandchildren, and many in-laws.

**New Brunswick Monthly Meeting:** October 18-20, 2013, we gathered at Goéland Centre, Wellington, PEI, amid wonderful fall weather and tall strong trees. It was only a short walk to the waters of Northumberland Strait. This was a special time, spent with our facilitator, Elaine Bishop, and her traveling companion, Charlotte Burch, both of Winnipeg Monthly Meeting.

The theme for the weekend was *Listening For the Heartbeat of God*. Elaine shared with us that God continuously invites us into relationship. We spent time building community and reflecting on ways of spiritual listening through worship.

### **Woodstock-Houlton Worship Group of NBMM:**

A rousing choir of Christmas carols was enjoyed by members of the Woodstock-Houlton WG of NBMM, well into the New Year of 2014. Blizzards, snow, rain and ice storms blanketed NB and Maine for most of December and into January. They caused us to cancel four weekend Meetings. We were happy to have nine-year-old Hope performing on her violin, mandolin, and drum for different carols as we all joined our voices together in celebration of the magic of Christmas. We missed the Sadler family and all the talented young people who traditionally performed for this annual event since the Sadlers had moved to Tennessee in October. We appreciate so much the place of music in our Meeting and look forward to this event every year at Christmas time.

**Yarmouth Monthly Meeting:** Mary Edgar is in Uganda for another winter with Alternatives to Violence (AVP) and other workshops, including organic gardening to support women and their children. Sheila Havard took needed medicines there from our Meeting. We are grateful to all who support the projects. Jesse Zavitz is an assistant cook at Olney Friends School in Barnesville, Ohio. The school's organic farm provides much of the food. The students, who come from many nations, work in the gardens and with the animals. Their full academic program also includes sustainable energy resources, and environmental study of the local watershed. Its Board has refused to accept a lease for fracking under its land. Monthly Meeting for Worship for Business will now be held on the fourth First Day, and Quaker Education class will meet before Meeting for Worship on the third First Day. Interest is high in these fruitful hours. We continue to meet comfortably, with heat from our wood stoves. A work bee cut and split downed wood from the grounds after Christmas.

**Montreal Monthly Meeting:** Vigilance GMO came to talk to us about Genetically Modified Organisms during a potluck after Meeting. We are very happy farmers, realizing the importance of growing unaltered seeds, using compost as fertilizer. We encourage Quakers to keep a watchful eye on science. In December, we held an Open House potluck on the topic of Simplicity at Christmas time. This topic was met by personal examples, reinforcement, enthusiasm, and spirit-led resolutions.



African Quaker  
Workcamps 2014  
The African Great  
Lakes Initiative  
of Friends Peace  
Teams is sponsoring  
intergenerational  
workcamps in  
Burundi & Kenya

June 28 – August 2. Workcampers will build a peace/community center - no skills needed. All ages welcome - including families.

Contact [dawn@aglifpt.org](mailto:dawn@aglifpt.org).

## Book Review: *Keith R. Maddock*

*From My Demi-Paradise: Memoirs*, by Kathleen Hertzberg. Self published in 2012.



Kathleen Hertzberg is a passionate Friend. That much is evident whenever she stands up to share ministry during Meeting for Worship. She carries her concern for the future of the Quaker movement into Meetings for Worship for Business, and consistently expresses interest in the activities of younger Friends.

Behind the Kathleen we know and love is a lifetime of courageous witness and personal sacrifice. Her understanding of the Peace Testimony, as described in her autobiography, is firmly rooted in memories of a young woman working with the Friends Service Committee in Germany, shortly after the Nazis came to power. She later helped Jewish refugees find a safe haven in Britain. This, is a first-hand recollection of living adventurously that few of us can imagine today. Yet it is a story we can confidently share with other Friends, as well as with members of other spiritual communities seeking inspiration for their promotion of peace and social justice.

Kathleen's story is an important part of our heritage as Friends, not just in war-time but also in her story of romance, loss and celebration, separation and adversity, adjusting to life in a new country after the war, raising a family who share her convictions and contribute to the growth of her community.

For those familiar with the writing of her late husband, Fritz Hertzberg, through the translation of his journals as a prisoner of war, the latter half of Kathleen's memoir, focusing on their love story, is a fitting sequel.

Kathleen's style, expressed in contemporary, plain language, is hopeful and intimate. For those of us who have been privileged to know Kathleen in person, it is something to be treasured.

*Keith R. Maddock*

*Toronto Monthly Meeting*

## Archivist's Corner:

*Jane Zavitz-Bond*

Recently, several volumes of history, biography and historical fiction have been added to the Dorland Library Collection at the Archives. All were written by, or have some relationship to Canadian Quakers. Some were generously donated. Among these are: the translation of Fritz Hertzberg's account of his World War II imprisonment in Russia; Kathleen Hertzberg's account of her long, full life; Mazo de la Roche's life story, by Heather Kirk; and two historical novels for youth, which any of us may read. *Emma Field – Book III*, by Carol Williams, completes a series about a girl from Prince Edward County in the 1800s, who is concerned with abolition of slavery and rights for all. Another book by Kenneth Leland, recounting experiences during the War of 1812, will be reviewed soon. Stanley Fulecki's story of a black brigade in the War of 1812-14, formed by those escaping slavery via the Underground Railroad, is to appear soon. The authors researched in the CYM Archives. It was a privilege to meet and work with them.

The archive request that Canadian Friends who have created works of art in any media, consider donating a copy of book, tape, musical score, or photo of your creative objects to the Archives. A description of the items and where the original is held should be included with the deposit by the artist. Do consider increasing the richness of the Archives' art holdings representing Friends in Canada. Your creations are ministry.

We ask that all Monthly Meetings send a brief history of the Meeting to be placed at the front of their File of Minutes. Please include date of origin, how established, and meeting places. Clerks' names are helpful. Records Committee suggests that the histories should be updated every decade, as most changes occur gradually, without recognition, and often without recording! A photograph of the Meeting when most members are present, labelled with date, place, occasion, and names of those in photo, would greatly add to the record. Thank you, Friends.

The Records Committee and the CYM Trustees have contracted to share our early Canadian Quaker Records with Ancestry.com. They are to be put online. The International Quaker Index will be free for all to access. It is good that our Canadian Quaker Records are included.

*Jane Zavitz-Bond*

*Yarmouth Monthly Meeting*

# Couple Enrichment

Signy Fridriksson with Steve Fick

Steve and I believe that healthy relationships are important to overall physical and emotional wellbeing. Fortunately we have had the privilege to have our relationship strengthened – both as participants and as a Leader Couple – in Friends General Conference *Couple Enrichment* (FGC-CE) program.

*Couple Enrichment* began as a Quaker initiative in 1969. David and Vera Mace were Quaker marriage counselors, who lamented that couples were only offered support once their relationships were in crisis. They wanted to find a way to support stable, healthy marriage, and help couples navigate the challenges all relationships encounter. In response to that concern, FGC *Marriage Enrichment Program* (FGC-MEP) was born. Broadening out from Friends, the Maces founded *Association of Couples for Marriage Enrichment* (now *Better Marriages*) in 1972 as an umbrella group encompassing Friends and mainline churches. ACME, however, insisted that Leader Couples must be legally married, thus in 1975, the decision was made by FGC to separate and *Marriage Enrichment* was changed to *Couple Enrichment* to reflect our support for same-gendered and common-law relationships. *CE* is built on the “Three Golden Threads” – Effective Communication, Creative Use of Conflict, and Commitment to Growth – and has as its objective to allow us to know our partners better, to know ourselves better, to know our relationships better, and to build a supportive community of couples.

Steve and I attended our first *Marriage Enrichment* workshop in 1983, then again in 2002. Following that workshop, we and four other couples formed an *Ongoing Growth Group* that met for eight years. In 2010 we took the intensive, five-day training as *Couple Enrichment* Leaders. We have since attended three continuing education events for FGC-CE Leaders. Drawing on its Quaker roots, CE takes an egalitarian approach. As a CE Leader Couple, we do not set ourselves up as experts intending to tell everyone how to do their relationships right. We practise certain skills to sustain our relationship, and have learned to teach these skills to others. We lead by example, using situations from our own relationship; we are not only CE leaders, but also CE participants. During a workshop we work to improve our relationship alongside everyone else.

This summer we led two CE events – an FGC Gathering workshop and a Special Interest Group

(SIG) at Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM). When putting together the workshop proposal for the 2013 Friends General Conference Gathering, the title *Couple Enrichment – Transitions and Growth* struck us as right. After all, doesn’t “transitions” describe every relationship, and aren’t we all hoping for growth? Underlying the challenges that drew each couple to us, issues like: caring for elderly parents; caring for young children; adjusting to an empty nest; moving from long-time homes; struggling with health issues, job insecurity, and job change; building new relationships following past failures – was the sincere desire to strengthen their own relationships.

The feedback from our FGC workshop was gratifyingly positive. Our participants said they gained much from our time together – a sense of renewal, celebration, gratitude, and greater confidence to face challenges.

Our SIG at CYM, *How to Have a Strong Relationship – whether you are in one or not*, was an opportunity for us to branch out from our couples’ events. In addition to an introduction to FGC-CE, we looked at significant relationships in a broader sense, not just romantic relationships. For example we explored family relationships, friendships, work relationships, and Meeting relationships. We each looked at one relationship to name what was going well, what could be improved, and what we could do to make things better. Steve and I also taught the communication skills of ‘Speaker and Listener’, giving the participants a chance to practise these skills in groups of three. This was our first non-couple event. We appreciated the helpful feedback from participants. It was great to hear of Friends’ interest in learning and using *CE* skills within the Meeting setting, as well as their interest in attending a CE workshop with other couples.

We are very excited about the gift that *Couple Enrichment* offers. If your Monthly Meeting, Worship Group, or Gathering is interested in learning more, please contact us. Our visit may simply be meeting with you for a potluck to talk about why *Couple Enrichment* speaks to us. We could also present an evening teaser – *A Taste of Couple Enrichment*, a one-day communication skills workshop for the Meeting community, or a weekend *Couple Enrichment* workshop.

Signy Fridriksson  
Ottawa Monthly Meeting

## Web Editor Required by Canadian Yearly Meeting

Canadian Yearly Meeting (CYM) is seeking to contract for services of a Web Editor, for its site at [quaker.ca](http://quaker.ca). If you are able to provide the services outlined below, please send a proposal to Clerk, Publications and Communications Committee, 91A Fourth Avenue, Ottawa, ON, K1S 2L1, or FAX 613-235-1753, OR to [pubcom-clerk@quaker.ca](mailto:pubcom-clerk@quaker.ca) for receipt by 16:00 hour, Friday, 21 March, 2014.

### Job Description:

The Web Editor is responsible for content and images on the website. S/he will plan, research, write copy, solicit material, and edit the content of the 'open' portion of [quaker.ca](http://quaker.ca). S/he will work with other contractors and volunteers to assist committees using, and configuring, the *business* ('closed') side of the website.

### Specific tasks:

- Produce new content as requested by the Publications and Communications (P&C) committee
- Ensure submitted copy as approved by the relevant party is correct, professional, and consistent in style.
- Respond to enquiries sent to [webeditor@quaker.ca](mailto:webeditor@quaker.ca) in a timely fashion.
- Source and post images and writing of interest to Canadian Quakers, from events, Meetings and other sources.
- Liaise with the editor of *The Canadian Friend* to highlight recent issues with select articles for reading on-screen in e-Pub, or other e-reader-friendly formats.
- Assist in production of an occasional newsletter.
- Follow the guidelines in CYM Website Policy, Website Usage, and Draft Communications Plan (available on [quaker.ca](http://quaker.ca) or from [webminder@quaker.ca](mailto:webminder@quaker.ca)).

### Skills Required:

- Excellent communication skills in e-mail, written material, and by telephone.
- Ability to communicate clearly with people across a broad range of ages and experience.
- Familiarity with editing, grammar, style and proofreading.
- Ability to prioritize tasks.
- Awareness of, and care for, the public perception of Canadian Yearly Meeting

### Experience Required:

- Demonstrated experience writing and editing in a professional context.
- Experience with the conventions required of web copy and best practices.
- Experience editing and modifying WordPress pages, sites and online content management generally.
- Experience moving text among programs and conversion of images among formats such as InDesign and digital photos, resizing and adjusting as required.
- College or university diploma/degree in a relevant field or comparable work experience.
- French language an asset. Familiarity with Quakers is a significant advantage, but not a requirement.

### Duration of Contract:

This contract is currently considered to require 10 hours per week. The time may not be evenly distributed over a regular work-week. This contract is offered for an initial period of 7 months, from June 1, 2014, to December 31, 2014, followed by a one-year contract during 2015 if performance has been satisfactory. The hourly rate proposed may range from \$28 per hour to \$33 per hour, commensurate with experience. The rate includes allowance for vacation days, sick days and statutory holidays, in accordance with CYM Personnel Policy, and a 5% RRSP contribution that the contractor is responsible for managing him/herself. The contractor is responsible for paying taxes, CPP, EI, and other statutory deductions. Applicants are to provide their own office space and data-processing equipment, including up-to-date internet access (broadband and high speed).

**Proposal Should Include** (minimum): Cover letter detailing why the applicant wants the contract, and how the applicant's experience and skills match these requirements; résumé with links to examples of website work completed by the applicant; names and contact information for three references required.



# Healing Touch

*Joy Belle Conrad-Rice*

During her ninety-one years, she had been a daughter, a wife and a mother. No-one wanted her to go out like this. Her massive hemorrhagic stroke had sent her into a deep coma. She was in a Catholic hospital in Washington State that specializes in heart and stroke conditions.

As Mother lay unresponsive, four of us in the family took turns sitting with her. I took her hand and talked slowly. It was up to her and her relationship with her Maker, I said, over and over. Some minutes passed and one of her eyelids twitched. I ran to inform a nurse. The next day, Mother's comatose condition was slightly improved. Her legs had begun to twitch.

On my third visit, I did my version of Healing Touch. My hands hovered over her head, open to energy coming and going. I was concerned however that I might do some harm. I wasn't trained thoroughly and wanted a practitioner who knew what she was doing.

When I asked whether there was anyone available in the hospital who did *Healing* or *Therapeutic Touch*, the answer was 'Yes'. Gwen was a motherly looking woman who didn't want to be called 'Sister Gwen'. She asked me how I had heard about Healing Touch. I explained I had taken a mini-course in it years ago at Friends Meeting House. With decades of experience meditating in unprogrammed Meetings for Worship, I had found it easy to learn the basic principles of Healing Touch. I had tried it on my young son. I knew it was powerful.

So it was with relief that I watched Gwen walk toward Mother's bed and heard her inviting me to stand nearby. I centered myself, and with arms outstretched palms up, watched reverently as Gwen used her knowledge, training, experience, and her relationship with life energy Qi (pronounced Chi).

Standing beside Mother's bed, Gwen lifted both arms, and with hands close together, began long flowing arm movements that traveled slowly and efficiently at various heights over all parts of Mother's body. At times she laid her hands upon Mother's head, arms, and hands. Gwen said because of Mom's position (slightly sideways on the bed), she was finding it hard to *get deep*. She finished each pattern by swishing her

hands downwards from above Mother's head toward open space next to the bed, and shook her fingers and wrists once or twice, like people do when their hands are wet and there is nothing to dry them with.

That afternoon, Mother's legs stopped twitching. The next morning, she was more alert. All her vital signs were normal.

Gwen came again, accompanied by a colleague, Sister Maria. We stood next to Gwen with arms lifted toward practitioner and patient. Gwen had taken off her suit jacket and as she moved around, I could feel the heat emanating through her blouse. Perspiration dotted her forehead and cheeks.

This time the pattern was different. Gwen focused on certain parts of Mother's body. Her arms flowed purposefully. At the end of a pattern, again she flicked her wrists quickly through the air. She had received something she wanted to get rid of.

Later, Gwen explained that the first time she was trying for deep healing; the second time she was rebalancing the energy centers.

That afternoon, Mother was even more alert; the next day she was slightly better overall. I was sitting beside her when we received a call telling us that a bed had been found in a nursing home nearby. But before she was discharged, these healing practitioners would do one more session.

I was invited to stand with Maria and "Hold up The Light". Again, a dense and purpose-filled energy dominated the space. The healer's arms and hands moved together in flowing motions over the patient from high to low, low to high. Then, with a deft flip of her wrists, she shook off whatever had been accumulated.

Soon after her treatment, Mother was transferred to an ambulance and our vigil moved from hospital to nursing home. The next day, Mother's open eyes recognized us. Gone was the dull, opaque vastness. Some part of her was back and available to us. When I put my cold hand against her cheek in greeting, she cringed from it. Animation. Now we were talking, not of dying, but of adaptive living. We would have her for another one and one-half years.

*Joy Belle Conrad-Rice*  
*Vernon Monthly Meeting*

[Reprinted by permission from Friends Journal, February 2013 issue. >[www.friendsjournal.org](http://www.friendsjournal.org)<].

# Move Over Nature (and God) – Synthetic Biology to the Rescue!

*Fred Bass*

*Homo Evolutist*, published in 2010, celebrates synthetic biology. It names and defines the species that is about to succeed us: "...a hominid that directly and deliberately controls evolution of its own and other species...". This may or may not bring comfort to those who worry about what our governments, corporations, and other folks have been up to.

So what is synthetic biology? It's a new field that combines genetics, engineering, laboratory, and computer sciences to produce new forms of life to meet human needs such as food, fuel, pharmaceuticals, pollution control, cosmetics, and information processing.

Synthetic biology doesn't just change the genes of existing creatures. It creates new creatures, new bacteria, plants, animals, and perhaps, people. Proudly and immodestly, Nature's laboratory – evolution – may soon be replaced by science and technology.

Who's involved? Researchers and academics around the world, from MIT, Harvard, University of California, and many more. They are supported by major corporate investments and a little funding from government. The world's largest chemical, energy, grain-trading and pharmaceutical companies, e.g., Monsanto, DuPont, British Petroleum, Shell, Novartis and International Flavours & Fragrances, have invested billions of dollars in synthetic biology. Government regulation has been minimal, nationally and internationally.

What resources does synthetic biology require? University students, faculties, facilities, and corporate research laboratories are essential. To capitalize on what is learned will require massive amounts of biomass (earth's biological productivity: plants, soil, plankton, forests, etc). Large quantities of land in Africa, Asia, and Latin America have already been purchased by corporations and some universities, in order to gain access to biomass, water and other resources. This acquisition is displacing local, traditional agriculture.

What social justice and ecological issues does synthetic biology present? A few are obvious: agricultural land grabbing; prioritizing cosmetics over food; defining the roles of the public and private sectors; solving safety issues and maintaining the health of natural ecosystems. How can potential threats from synthetic biology be prevented while gaining its benefits? More than one

hundred international, environmental, social and faith organizations, including the Biotechnology Reference Group of the Canadian Council of Churches (BRG/CCC), have called for implementing the *Precautionary Principle* before releasing synthetic biology products for sale. This would include: independent supervision of synthetic biology research and development; establishing safety measures; surveillance and protection against unintended effects.

In 2012, Canadian Yearly Meeting affirmed the following actions regarding synthetic biology: that the BRG/CCC raise awareness of the social and ecological issues related to development of this field, among all faith groups; that the Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) provide Canadian Monthly Meetings with basic information, and alternative perspectives, so they can address three queries. These are: Can the benefits of synthetic biology be applied equitably? Can damaging consequences to eco- and social systems be foreseen and forestalled? Are there zones of activity that should be set as off-limits for synthetic biology?

Many people feel reluctant to comment on synthetic biology because it appears to demand highly complex and technical knowledge. Quakers, more than many people, recognize other means of knowing, particularly when ethical issues are concerned – a direct, non-mediated wisdom derived from the Power that lies within.

Ursula Franklin, a prominent Quaker and research physicist, noted that technology comprises more than machines or gadgets. It is a comprehensive system that involves "...organization, procedures, symbols, new words, equations, and most of all, a mind set...". That system, in Franklin's view, is bent on "...turning the globe into one giant commercial resource base, while denying a decent and appropriate habitat to many of the world's citizens...". Franklin also maintains that the uses of technology should not be preordained but adopted as a result of conscious choices.

In a democratic society, this means choice by an informed public. That includes you. A Special Interest Group on Synthetic Biology will be held at the 2014 Canadian Yearly Meeting in Winnipeg.

*Fred Bass*

*Vancouver Monthly Meeting*

[Note reference material on page 21]

‘Healthism’ is a holistic ideology which focuses on an individual’s responsibility for his/her health, based on informed choice. Health promotion is deeply embedded in this ideology. ‘Healthism’ is the culmination of individualistic and consumerist thought, making one’s body the sole focus of values and decisions. Health – as a narrowly defined medical standard – and beauty – as defined by outward physical appearance – become the most important indicators of personal well-being. In combination with these individualistic thinking patterns, the physical environment is seen as a constant threat to human health and well-being.

‘Healthism’ is an expression of extreme privilege. It makes us believe that we can be creators of our own fate and destiny. The marketplace supplies, for those who can afford it, beauty and health. On the foundation of this belief, we can pretend that we can avoid and prevent disease and illness at will, and with ease. We can live predominantly with the illusion that we can achieve physical and mental perfection and live forever if we use scientific knowledge and exercise appropriate discipline. In a quest for eternal youth, and in defiance of death, ‘healthism’ encourages society to war against diversity and aging.

All physiological aspects of a human being get compartmentalized, reduced, and looked at individually. We are looking for direct cause and effect: I press the button, and the desired effect happens, predictably and instantly. That makes the selling of vitamins, micronutrients, gadgets, gym memberships, and wellness procedures profitable.

People become so absorbed and obsessed with their individual health that it becomes difficult to maintain wholeness - and, subsequently, also holiness. Each week another study is published that promotes yet a new discovery of how to live a longer and healthier life. This appears to be manipulation of desire - the management of behaviour that is made possible through a complex persuasion system that moulds the consumer’s mind to the needs of the market.

However, if we could follow all the published evidence, living would become impossible. It would not be practical to ingest all the suggested nutritional ingredients and observe all the healthy physical practices, and at the same time avoid all the things that could be harmful for our bodies.

Martin Heidegger, author of *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, says that by seeing one’s being-in-the-world (*Dasein*) as the only reality, one forgets and loses connection with one’s *Being* and with one’s central purpose and meaning. The individual’s obsession with personal and commodified well-being precludes a meaningful, deeper interaction with the world around him or her. This leaves out the capacity to act as a social being beyond consumption and results in a one-dimensional human being.

‘Healthism’ has a strong moralistic flavour. It becomes easy to assign blame. It seems to be instantly recognizable who did the right things in life and who did not. A person who becomes ill or gains weight must have not followed best evidence-based practices. It must be his/her personal fault or shortcoming. Period. That brings us close to a religious attitude of a punishing God and the discourses of sin and salvation.

Wholeness is never found in a shame-based culture. Wholeness is love and interconnectedness.

Ageing and death are integral aspects of life. So are illness and disease. Most pathogens are equally part of creation as are human beings. The question for me is how do we take care of creation as a whole and of our health in particular? Instead of fighting specific disease, would we not make better stewards by accepting that most viral illnesses, for instance, are cured by giving the body much needed rest? We are given an immune system that is designed to keep us healthy. However, we have also created environmental conditions that strain the capacities of our immune systems: pollution, constant stressors, over-stimulation; to name a few.

As a member of the Religious Society of Friends, I am concerned about discerning God’s will and shaping my life in the world, based on our callings. I doubt the faithful life strives for perfection of physical appearance and a disease-free state. Instead, I am called to reflect on how my everyday actions are interconnected with the misery and disaster that many other beings in this world are suffering. I am called to simplicity. I refuse to promote the paradigm of healthism. Instead, I keep in mind a definition of health described from Cree experience: Health is a complex, dynamic process that has to do with social relations, land, and cultural identity. All are linked to quality of life. This way, I contribute to the wholeness and well-being of all.

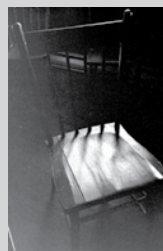
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# *The Canadian Friend*

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## Themes & Deadlines for Submissions

June / July 2014	Memories / Quaker Connections	April 1
Fall 2014	Canadian Yearly Meeting and... Memories of CYM Past	September 1
Winter 2014	Making a Difference	October 1
Spring 2015:	Places of Unknowing	January 1
Future or alternative themes:	Gratitude Aspects of Peace	



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