October 8, 2015: Report to Education and Outreach Committee

From: Margaret Slavin (writer’s name: Margaret Slavin Dyment)

I applied to you for the Dorothy Muma Memorial Bursary, and was very pleased when you awarded it to me. Thank you!

I told you about the year’s-worth of poetry that had arrived at bedtime, one per day, from mid-August 2012 through to the same time in 2013, and my struggles to edit the work and to imagine what the next steps might be. It has been difficult for me to value the work and also very difficult to value time spent on it more than time spent on social justice issues and committee work for local Friends. Yet I felt certain that this work needed to be done, if only to create new patterns and disciplines in my life as I make changes and grow older—aiming at less “busy-ness”. I said that I would focus on it in June and July, when I would move to a reduced space in my house and intended to make a higher priority of my writing.

All that happened, thank you. Because I had the grant from you and because I wanted to be faithful to my commitment to you, I did indeed work for at least an hour a day, often several hours, throughout those two months. It is very unlikely that I would have if I hadn’t had this commitment to you.

I am still struggling to be true to the sense that this move upstairs in my house is associated with finishing writing projects which have remained incomplete. But with the election work now over, I will try again. Writing this report actually helps me to re-focus.

Working in June and July and part of August, with sporadic stabs at it since, the poetry project moved very far along. I did complete the transcription of all the edits to that date. I then went through them again and again and drew out several sections—the themes I indicated in my application, plus a surprising number of poems that had to do with death and dying, and another group which are more general, more or less about the meaning of life.

I winnowed it down to a few more than 50 poems, and put them into a booklength document and wrote an introduction. I researched what publishers might still be publishing poetry, wrote to my first choice and received back from them their guidelines for a proposal. That is where I am now, and expect to move forward on that proposal to them next week.

Meanwhile, I submitted poems to 3 competitions, with more submissions planned. Two have not yet reported, but one did accept the three poems I sent, and they will be published in the Windsor Review.

I will close with a poem which I drafted at CYM gathering in 2012, and which at present I plan for the first one in the proposed book:

**WITNESS**

Waiting around for everyone else to

grow up, I find I’ve grown old.

Sitting on a tree stump reading about

Quaker finances, I hear a squeal of brakes and a thump.

Expecting to come home to a maturing of

relationships, I read a note that will make things much worse.

Emailing all and sundry about freezer space and

invitations to present, I try a phonecall and it works.

Setting out for a week on an unknown campus,

I’m told the distances require a fleet of cars.

Looking up from my stump, I see a white-haired woman emerge.

She has struck the side of a car driven by a young man in a jersey.

I feel grateful I don’t have a car, annoyed about

Quaker finances, tense that much may be made

of my removing the note, weary at the thought of distances.

I make a plan to take walking shoes, and feel as if

some things are falling apart, though others cohere.