



The Quaker Heron

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Newsletter of the Patapsco Friends Meeting

Letter from the Editor

This newsletter is functioning as much as a journal of ideas as an informative newsletter. I think this is

appropriate for several reasons:

first, the meeting is more than the sum of its committee meetings and external activities. Who we are as a meeting is made up of our internal beings, our spirits, our thoughts, our dreams, and our revelations.

Presumably, these internal leadings should manifest themselves in our actions and activities as a meeting; in reality, the relationship between the two is not always clear and thus becomes an area to ponder and discuss. I think sharing our deeper thoughts is one of the most significant things we can do. On a more practical level, people in our meeting are willing and able to write thoughtful and insightful essays. Also, the newsletter appears infrequently and thus cannot be fully up-to-the-minute. Factual information on events can be obtained from a variety of sources, including the web site and the silent announcements. However, it is important to include news and events of meeting for the sake of people who don't attend our meeting or who attend infrequently. We encourage people to call us too; we are looking for members and welcome your queries.

When I view the meeting I see that we are growing and maturing. We have a Bible study, spiritual

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Inner Simplicity?

By Scott Garrison

Living a simple life does not seem to come easily for us. Even with a sincere desire for simplicity, we are faced with many competing goals and impulses. Does owning a car — or multiple cars — complicate my life or simplify it? Does buying inexpensive imported goods undermine domestic labor standards? What if my career or community seems to call for dressing or entertaining in a manner that conflicts with my efforts to simplify?

Why should simplicity be so fraught with complexity? Everyone I have spoken with who has tried to simplify their life has remarked on the struggles they have faced. And continually confronting these conflicts over and over again, many of us abandon the effort to achieve simplicity.

I am coming to believe that we need to distinguish between an outward simplicity and an inner simplicity. What I wear, what I eat, how I speak, how I spend my time and money, are all outward signs of who I am. Hopefully, these outward signs are all tending towards simplicity. But if I am in constant inner turmoil over how to manifest simplicity, I have not achieved any measure of inner simplicity.

So long as we try to define our goal of simplicity by its outward signs we can only attain an image of simplicity. Buying a broad-brim hat and suspenders and addressing all as thee or thou, by itself, will not bring me inner simplicity — it would just be play acting in an image of simplicity. Likewise, shopping at thrift stores, raising all my own food or joining a monastic order would not, by themselves, produce inner simplicity. Adopting one or more forms of outward simplicity as a discipline may help me simplify my life, but it might also distract me from the goal of inner simplicity.

A number of years ago, I heard something on the radio that has significantly influenced my thinking about simplicity. It was an interview with one of the few remaining Shakers, and the conversation had touched on the Shaker belief that the end of the world was imminent, and the simple beauty and utility of their handcrafts. The interviewer then asked this old Shaker why, if he believed the end was at hand, was he taking such pains to make such fine joints on the chair he was building. The Shaker replied, if the world is about to end, what is the point of rushing the job?

To me, this is a profound example of a life lived fully in the moment. The man builds a chair because a chair is needed. If you need a chair, let its design be economical and without ornamentation, because the end may be at hand. But build it to the best of your ability, because this moment is the moment you have devoted to chair building, there is nothing more important to do with your time.

The way I see it, this Shaker's belief in the imminent end of the world served as an organizing principle that produced a life of marked simplicity. It produced an inner simplicity, that in turn naturally and effortlessly manifested itself as simplicity in outward ways. To me, this inner simplicity is the truly important simplicity; the outer simplicity is merely a consequence of the inner simplicity.

It seems to me that the inner simplicity must be essentially a matter of spirituality. I find that all of the convincing exemplars of simplicity ground their simplicity within their spiritu-

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On Simplicity

ality. I conceive of spirituality here as the alignment and harmonization of one's spirit with a coherent set of fundamental beliefs. Only when you bring your spirit fully in line with your beliefs can you "walk it like you talk it." Only when your simplicity is a natural outgrowth of a simplicity of spirit is it truly simple. What I want to achieve for myself is a simplicity of spirit that effortlessly produces unmistakable outward signs of simplicity.

I'm not entirely sure how to achieve this inner simplicity, but I think that the mindfulness exhibited by this old Shaker is an important ingredient. If I decide that it is good for me to build a chair, then I want to be fully engaged in the building of that chair. I don't want to let myself be distracted by thoughts of what else I might be doing with my time, or dividing my attention unnecessarily. If something more important arises, then I should leave off building the chair and become fully engaged in the new matter. And when my end comes, I want to rest easy knowing that I was fully engaged in whatever was most important at that moment, be it work or play. At that level of mindfulness, it seems to me that every act becomes a sacrament.

Such mindfulness is difficult in our culture of busy-ness. I read while I eat. I listen to the radio while I drive. My mind wanders while playing with my son. I listen to my voicemail while scrolling through my e-mail. I multi-task proudly. But every now and then I act mindfully, giving my best unstintingly, living fully in the moment. And that, to me, is the virtue of simplicity.

Simple Action

By Jean Leslie

Like many others, I have numerous opportunities to learn, to work, and to play. My life consists of a long list of organizations, families, jobs, hobbies, friends. And I am blessed with enthusiasm: I want to help others, work, and learn. My life is a rich, complex fabric.

But I don't feel that I practice simplicity in daily action. Each time I add "one more thing," I partition off a piece of time and energy. And I make a new file in my file drawer,

reminding myself of another division in my life. At times I yearn for a simpler way to live.

I often think of simplicity as dealing with the quantity of material possessions I own. Yet the concept of simplicity—freedom from complexities and divisions, according to the Random House dictionary—can as easily apply to the way I spend my time.

Mother Teresa was a person who practiced simplicity in a supremely busy, often tumultuous life. In a center of selfless calm, she carried immense responsibilities—attending to the dying while managing large convents around the world. Her life was full of complexities, yet Mother Teresa simplified her actions by focusing diverse activities into one point—on her faith in God.

So if I want simplicity in my complex life, then I need to replace my "to do" list with a wheel. The hub is the Light and the activities and responsibilities are the spokes revolving around it.. If I examine new activities in the Light before I add them and toss out former activities that don't fit, then with time, my life will simplify.

In a word

*Quiet
Silence
Simplicity*

*Justice
Equality
Simplicity*

*Plain Dress
Plain Talk
Simplicity*

*Truth
Openness
Simplicity*

*Mindfulness
Peace
Simplicity*

*In a word,
Simplicity*

— Jim Rose

Simply Trying

By John Buck

My personal symbol for simplicity used to be the rocking chair I saw in a Shaker-village-turned-museum. The clever chair had plain lines that somehow radiated beauty, and rocking in it gave me a comfortable, timeless feeling. Another personal symbol for simplicity has been an old-fashioned straight razor, Ockham's razor, slicing away tangled thought. William of Ockham, a 14th century English monk, laid the foundations of modern science by declaring that the simplest explanation, the one with the fewest explanatory concepts, is the true one.

Unfortunately this rocking chair/razor definition makes simplicity seem impossibly difficult, something achieved only by master craftsmen or groups of scientists searching for years to uncover elegant connections underlying complicated phenomena. Our culture generally supports my old picture of simplicity, supports the feeling that simplicity in our lives comes only after a sweaty struggle in the

*“When thine eye is single, thy
whole body also is full of light.”*

Luke 11:34

brambles of complexity. For example, one can find whole books on “The Art of Simplicity.” One is supposed to K.I.S.S. (keep it simple, stupid). I’ve certainly felt the burden of too many conflicting demands and the stress and despair of seeing no escape from the demands.

Recently I’ve begun to understand simplicity in a new way. The seemingly innocuous statement about simplicity in Faith and Practice, p 13, is actually quite radical: *“The simplicity of Friends’ worship results from an emphasis on the reality of the inward experience. Direct communion with God — the experience of the Holy Spirit — makes the observance of outward rites unnecessary.”* So, there is that of simplicity in us (including me!) that arises not from outward struggle but from that of God in each. In *A Testament of Devotion*, p.91, Thomas Kelly comments, “Complexity of our lives cannot be blamed upon complexity of our environment, much as we should like to think so. Nor will simplification of life follow simplification of environment. I must confess that I chafed terribly, that year in Hawaii, because in some respects the environment seemed too simple...The true explanation of the complexity of our program is an inner one, not an outer one. The outer distractions of our interests reflect an inner lack of integration of our own lives. We are trying to be several selves at once, without all our selves being organized by a single, mastering Life within us.”

I am only beginning to learn how to change my “committee of selves” from a collection of “snaky,” shouting individualists to an harmonious gathered crew. As the Bible puts it, 2 Corinthians 11:3: “But I fear, lest somehow, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, so your minds be corrupted from the *simplicity* that is in Christ.” As I’ve lately made a conscious effort to try to touch that of God each day, I’ve noticed that my personal “frazzle index” hasn’t been going into the red zone quite as much. I’m grateful for our Meeting’s gentle disciplines: meeting for worship, meeting for healing, friendly bunches, spiritual friendships, discussions, and our retreat. They have been helping to guide my learning by nudging my attention back to the Light.

Spiritual Simplicity

By Stephen Leslie

The key to simplicity lies in having a firmly grounded spiritual practice. For me, the practice of meditation is the most profound “work” of a spiritual seeker. I define meditation as the art or science of stilling the mind, of fixing the mind on one image, thought or sound. Meditation, if practiced daily, for a considerable period of time, eventually leads to a deep inner peace, an acute mental clarity, and the ability to see the world as it really is. Meditation is the journey to the Infinite.

Unfortunately, there are many that talk the talk but few who walk the walk. We, as Friends, have a dual duty to not only seek peace and justice in the world but to be at peace within. When the mind is bathed in the beauty and wonder of the inner world the desire for a multitude of possessions and outer experiences drops away of its own accord. The interest in the outer world ceases as the mind is pulled into the wonder of this new inner world. In my mind the way to simplify our lives is arrived at by simply sitting on our meditation seat. By keeping our meditation seat warm, the world will automatically simplify itself, effortlessly.

This happens because our attachments for material goods will diminish from the experience of inner contentment from the deep well of our spiritual experience. It’s that simple.

Simple? Not!

By Susan Rose

This past month, I have started three or four times to write on “simplicity.” Here’s what I’ve learned: for me, simplicity isn’t simple. As soon as I start thinking about simplicity, I start thinking about “things” and that’s not simple. Until two weeks ago, we had two residences. Well, we simplified. We sold our condominium at the beach. Now I have two sets of everything: sheets, spices, mustards, glassware, pictures. I also have lots of cash. So now I have a bunch of problems: what to do with the sheets, spices, mustards, glassware, pictures, cash. And that right away gets to the crux of my problem with things: how much is enough? Okay, I have two, at least, of everything: mustard, paprika, garlic presses, CD players. I also have my ten-piece setting of china and my mother’s twelve- (or is it ten-) piece setting of china (her’s has a gravy boat, mine doesn’t) and my silverware and hers. I have my grandmother’s linen table cloth, too big for any table I have ever owned, and a couple of dozen of linen napkins large enough to diaper a baby. And I’ve gotten myself mixed up with Quakers, and they keep querying me about simplicity and that immediately sets me to thinking, “How can I call

“So do not worry, saying, ‘what shall we eat?’ or ‘what shall we drink?’ or ‘what shall we wear?’

myself a Quaker, when I’ve got all this ‘stuff?’ Well, you never know when you might have twenty people in your Friendly Bunch and you just might need these things.

Here’s what I really want: the tenderness and the health and happiness of my family and friends, warmth in the cold, opportunities to cook wonderful food and share it with others, a painless death, the generosity to share my unbelievable good fortune with those who have less, the knowledge that if I lost all I own tomorrow, “God’s eye is on the sparrow, and I know he’s watching me.” Almost all of this is totally out of my control. Being at peace with that is, perhaps, the beginning of being simple. “Proceed as the way opens.”

On Simplicity

By Scott D. Hagaman

There’s not enough time in a day, nor days in the week, to do all the things I have to do. That’s a fact. Yet I know, on a fundamental level, that I have plenty of time to do all the things I *need* to do. I once had too much time on my hands. Rather than sitting idly, I developed hobbies, cultivated interests, acquired objects that needed tending to, joined groups that needed my help, and formed relationships that needed nurturing. *This was living!* It seemed like the less time I had, the more alive I was! I now know enough about the world to know there are many lifetimes of truly wonderful things for a person to occupy himself with. Now I’m trying to learn what I *need* to do. Surely it is much less than everything in this wonderful world that there is to do. The fact is, my life is cluttered. I need to unload *a lot of* hobbies, interests, objects that need tending to, group affiliations, and personal relationships. That’s hard to do, because they all feel like a part of me. I also need to change my orientation to “my schedule,” so that I no longer think of it as something that needs to be filled up. Being less busy (reactive) and more contemplative (thoughtful)—this is what I think of when I think of “simplicity.”

*All these are things for the
heathen to run after, not for
you, because your heavenly
Father knows you need them all.
But seek first his Kingdom and
his righteousness, and all these
things will be given to you as
well.”*

— Matt. 6: 31-33

Simplicity

By Phyllis Keenan

I have a lot of thoughts on simplicity. Here are a few that are present for me now. First is a song:

“’Tis a gift to be simple
’Tis a gift to be free
’Tis a gift to come down where you
want to be
And when you reach that place just
right
You will be at the valley of love and de-
light

When true simplicity is gained to bow
and to bend
We shan’t be ashamed to turn, turn, to
turn just right
’Til by turning and turning we come
’round right”

Second is my memory of reading that George Fox said: “Friend, wear thy sword as long as you can.”

I think of simplicity as living one’s life in congruence with one’s own values. For example, I worked in the defense industry. I had chosen that area because I felt that the specific work I did was interesting and did not involve killing people. The pay was good, and I worked a daytime schedule with little weekend, evening, or overtime requirements. This allowed me to enjoy nature and other leisure activities during my time off. I felt as though I lived two lives: Work was something to get through, and I enjoyed the company of my coworkers and the mental stimulation. Those at work with whom I interacted were not interested in growing personally or spiritually. The rest of my life was for me to express myself and connect with nature, others, and the spirit. Yet those in my out-of-work life were not interested in my work since it went against their values. They accepted that I was, in the words of Fox, “wearing my sword as long as I could.” Eventually the stress of work not fitting my values expressed itself physically: my breathing and eyesight were affected at the office and on the weekends were fine. One of my friends said to me, “what is it at work that you don’t want to see and that makes you gasp for air or feel suffocated?” I gave up my “sword” a couple of months later, and my eyesight and breathing have been fine. I finally reached a place where I realized that all work in the defense industry is about war and killing. Yes, some particular projects are about deterrents to war and about sizing up the enemy so as to avoid war. That thinking is what allowed me to wear the sword for the years that I did. However, I had finally come to a place of true simplicity: I was no longer ashamed of my work and of my life outside of work to those at work. I had freed my soul to heal and to move forward. That transition in my life was very important in my spiritual journey.

During the past ten years I have worked in massage therapy and teaching. I saw my work as a way of bringing a peace to each individual which would then affect those that they were in contact with during the time of being more peaceful and loving. Some of my

*“Life from the Center is a life
of unburied peace and power.*

*It is simple. It is serene. It is
amazing. It is triumphant. It is
radiant. It takes no time, but
occupies all our time. And it
makes our life programs new
and overcoming. We need not
get frantic. He [sic] is at the
helm. And when our little day
is done we lie down quietly in
peace, for all is well.”*

— Thomas Kelly,
A Testament of Devotion,
“The Simplification of Life.”

clients found peace the form of relieved pain and greater relaxation. With others, peace came from connecting with another person who was present or through learning something which empowered them. I was able to feel the presence of the holy spirit working through me much of the time and thereby, have felt my work was spiritual.

Once I became pregnant with Scully, I prioritized his needs, which meant cutting back my work hours and spending much time resting during my pregnancy. After his birth, I went back to work, which I enjoyed, yet I missed Scully and started to feel that I was no longer being lead to massage work. I often felt *busy* in my life and unable to be present. After some weeks, I decided to stop and took some time to close my practice in a way that felt comfortable to me. During that time, I attempted to prioritize taking care of Scully over working. Yet, because my reality was that I was still working, I often felt torn and confused and not connected spiritually at work. I feel much more at peace now.

To me, simplicity is about embracing change and about changing those aspects of my life that no longer fit my values or that no longer fit in with my spiritual journey. “When true simplicity is gained to bow and bend/ We shan’t be ashamed to turn, turn, to turn just right/ ‘Till by turning and turning we come ‘round right.”

Some thoughts on simplicity

by Diane Reynolds

As many of the essays in this newsletter point out so beautifully, simplicity comes from within and emerges when we keep our focus on God. When we live in God and cling to God and love God with all our hearts and souls and make God our center, life becomes simpler. However, this is not easy to do with the world howling all around us. We tend to look at and evaluate ourselves by what our peers say and do. We want what others want. Thus we are pulled in two directions and our

inner peace—our single-eyed simplicity—is challenged. We begin to sink under the morass of competing responsibilities and distractions.

A most graphic symbolic depiction of this truth is the Biblical story of Peter walking on the water. As Peter walks towards Jesus on the water he sees the wind and becomes afraid. As he is distracted by the wind and his own fear, he begins to sink. When I take my eyes off of God and look around me, I too can feel myself sinking into fear and confusion, into the wind and the waves, pushed this way and

that way. This shatters my peace and complicates my life. I have to remember to keep my eyes on God. But I forget.

Simplicity and glamour

Simplicity is the opposite of glamour. Glamour is never simple. Simplicity can become glamorous; at that point simplicity has been twisted into something other than itself. In many places in our culture simplicity is glamorous. We are so turned around that we don’t know what is simple and what is not. But we do know that true simplicity is not merely an aesthetic.

I recently read an article I read from an Amish publication. It talked about how the term “Amish” is being appropriated as an adjective to describe all sorts of products that are not Amish. “Amish-style” furniture is often produced in a factory with materials and processes that are anything but Amish. “Amish chickens” are advertised, which makes the Amish laugh as there is no such thing as an Amish chicken any more than there is a Roman Catholic chicken or a Methodist chicken—chickens (to our knowledge) lack the cognitive abilities to embrace religion. A label has been assigned to objects that carry none of the important attributes of the real thing. However, the label evokes an *image* that is desirable. People buy the image believing that they will get the underlying “real” thing itself. At this point, people are in the realm of glamour.

I think it is important for Quakers to carefully distinguish between simplicity and glamour, because so much that is simple has become chic and glamorous. When the restored Quaker meeting house becomes the height of chic to the style makers of society, maybe it’s time for the Quaker meeting to move into the split-level tract house—or the double-wide mobile home. If we are hanging our laundry outdoors and making our own soup (preferably from organically homegrown herbs and vegetables) primarily to score ecological points with our Quaker peers, it may be time to open the Kenmore dryer and can of minestrone. We need to do what we do because our focus is on God. Then, even if our simplicity looks bizarre to our neighbors and

*“Come to me you who are
weary and heavy-laden...for
my yoke is easy, my burden
light.”*

Matt. 11:28

friends, it will be true simplicity and we will experience peace.

Simplicity and aesthetics

Christmas is a subject I have been thinking deeply about in terms of simplicity. I think about it because through most of December I am harried, upset, distracted and usually make myself physically sick. I am not experiencing the love, peace, and joy that the birth of Christ is supposed to represent. I've grasped that something is wrong with this picture, and I'm trying to understand how to change it.

I understand that my desire to have a picture-perfect Christmas comes out of the distress I experienced as a child when Christmas fell apart. I carry with me the child's conviction that if I could just get the aesthetics straight, the true spirit of Christmas would emerge from that. If the tree is right, the presents right, if I've baked cookies, and if our house looks like the set for a Martha Stewart Christmas special, shouldn't Christmas be filled with love and joy? Well, no, because I am so harried trying to conform myself and my family to a pre-set standard that I am a nervous wreck. I also get consumed with worry that my children will not like their gifts, and then I worry about how much money I am spending trying to equalize everything and please everybody. Plus, the Christmas setting is an image—a fantasy—and as such, something reality can never live up to.

I realize that aesthetics are a superficial response to the question of how to experience Christmas deeply. I am still trying to understand how to keep the focus of Christmas on God. I am trying to understand how to get past the aesthetics to the reality of God's love during the celebration of Christ's birth, necessarily without hurting anyone dear to me. In essence, I am trying to understand how to

express God's love more fully to those around me during Christmas as well as the rest of my life, understanding that if I live in love I live in God. But I am not "there" yet. I cannot, like the early Quakers, shed the "celebration."

I had a similar situation when I first became interested in religion. I was determined to find a church that looked like a traditional church. No Interfaith centers for me! I thought (not too consciously) that if the aesthetics of the building were right, I would experience God more fully. I was mixed up, but at that time I was groping in the dark. For years I tried to conform myself to my "nice" church and always felt something was wrong with me, that I lacked the faith or goodness needed to feel fully at home. Then, as I began to truly grasp what the Gospels and Jesus were all about, I understood that true religion had nothing to do with a building. (At that time, I became a Quaker attender, not knowing that my discarding of the "steeplehouse" was shared by the early Quakers.) I began to understand that God would meet me where I was. Now, I would gladly worship in a basement if that would bring into closer relationship with God. All interest in the building is gone. If I can worship in a beautiful building like Hebron House, I am grateful for such a gracious gift from God. But I no longer need it. In this one area, I have achieved simplicity. I have peace. I am free. I have no worry for where we will worship if this meeting house goes away. I can trust in God's provision because I do not need to control it. This is the simplification life.

Simplicity and authenticity

It should almost go without saying that as we become simple our authentic, God-given selves will begin to emerge. To be simple is to be freed to be ourselves. To be simple is to live in the image of God.

Books about Simplicity

Diane Reynolds

About 8 years ago, when I began to feel overwhelmed by caring for a child and working, I began reading books about simplicity. I found they fell into two categories. Category one included the “pastoral living” books in which simplicity was synonymous with living a more natural, organic life. These books discuss starting your own organic vegetable garden, canning, keeping bees, making your own clothes, baking your own bread, and living frugally so as to reduce dependence on a cash economy. Category two books advised simplifying a frantic life by recommending that we buy more services and goods. In these books, we are advised to hire lawn services, cleaning services, shopping services, and home delivery services. We simplify by getting carryout, eating prepackaged foods, dining out, throwing out, and hiring out. The two concepts of simplicity are obviously at odds, and I found neither particularly realistic nor compelling. I could find a few hints to help my life but I could not afford to buy my way into simplicity and I was not prepared to go back to nature.

Then I discovered that the two paths I had been exploring—spirituality and simplicity—were merging. I found some extraordinary books that spoke, either explicitly or implicitly, to the spiritual basis of simplicity. I also began to discern that some books dealt deeply and some more superficially—or aesthetically—with the spiritual aspects of simplicity. A few that got me thinking are listed below:

Background Books:

Thoreau, Henry David, *Walden*
Schumacher, E.F., *Small is Beautiful*
Woolman, John, *Journal of John Woolman*

Bender, Sue, *Plain and Simple*

In this book Bender writes of her love of Amish quilts and her desire for a less harried life. Through persistence, she is able to live briefly as a guest among the Amish on two different occasions. The book has some interesting insights, the chief of which is that being Amish is not the magic ticket to happiness. The Amish life-style can be a path opening the way to enlightenment, but it is not the destination. As the Amish life-style brings us into

a closer relationship to God, we achieve the inner peace we so desire. Leading the Amish life without a relationship with God is as hollow as any other life-style, as indicated by Amish rates of suicide, depression and drug use which rival those of the larger society. The biggest issue I had with the book was Bender; she seems somewhat unconscious of the vastly privileged life she leads. Yet because in many ways she shares a common viewpoint with us, her book becomes an interesting read.

Elgin, Duane, *Voluntary Simplicity*

This is one of the first books (1981) in the current wave of “simplicity movement” books. It is important for two reasons: 1. It distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary simplicity. Simplicity is a first world, middle-class phenomenon which can have implications for social justice. People in poverty, however, are not practicing “simplicity” and we need not impose this on them as a “value.” They don’t need to learn the virtues of doing without. 2. Simplicity starts where you are. It isn’t about moving from the suburbs to the farmhouse. However, it can be about growing tomatoes in pots on your townhouse deck. Or walking to the local convenience store instead of driving. This book is ethical rather than religious.

Foster, Richard, *Freedom of Simplicity*

I found this book by accident when I was a spiritual neophyte. I thought it was the best simplicity book I had ever read, explaining as it did that simple living is spiritually based. In essence, the book says the key to simple living is not found in an external formula, but in putting God first. Put God first, put God first, put God first. Then—put God first again. Make God the center of your life. Not just very important in your life—the Center. Live all of life sacramentally. Refer to God before you make a decision. Follow where God leads. As long as God is first, everything else will fall into place and become simple. This is Quakerism in a nutshell, but at the time I knew nothing of Quakerism.

Kelly, Thomas, *Testament of Devotion*

Some years after reading *Freedom of Simplicity*, I read this wonderful book. It repeats many of the themes of Foster’s book (actually, it was written well before Foster’s, so it is likely Foster borrowed from Kelly) and as

such, emphasizes the importance of living from the Center and putting God first. I was struck at the time by the chapter on Holy Obedience, which stresses the importance of following your leadings, and the chapter called *The Simplification of Life*, in which Kelly writes eloquently and convincingly that simplicity is not a product of an external life-style (see John Buck’s essay) but the product of a life lived out of the Christ-filled Center.

McKibben, Bill, *The Hundred Dollar Christmas*

This is a book that is instructive because it does not go far enough. McKibben has decided to lead a simpler, more God-centered life, but he still has baggage to shed. The book is largely devoted to a history of Christmas as a holiday, with a special focus on the commercialization of Christmas over the last 175 years. While beautifully written, I felt the book was a little thin on ideas about reducing Christmas excess, and I found McKibben a bit preoccupied with aesthetics, though I don’t think consciously so. Setting came across as very important. I wonder, do you have to have a rustic home in the Adirondacks to enjoy a simple Christmas? Would the Catskills be too gauche? Could you do it in a trailer camp? In Florida? However, because of its shortcomings, I found the book thought-provoking. I think with Christmas especially, we tend to rely on aesthetics. We have certain ideas about how Christmas should “look.” Getting beyond the look to the reality of what Christmas is supposed to be about—love, peace, hope joy—is the challenge. Achieving the look often causes us to sacrifice the very things the look is supposed to represent.

Scott Savage, ed., *The Plain Reader, Essays on Making a Simple Life*

Scott Savage and his friends at the Plain Journal are on the farther edge of the simplicity movement. These essays, taken from Plain Journal, challenge normative middle-class behavior. For example, I mentioned to Roger the essay on hand washing clothes. “Oh,” he said, “I suppose you need to get a washboard?” “Oh no,” I answered, “the essay says a washboard makes everything too complicated.” While I personally could not agree with everything put forth in these essays, I found them quite provocative. These people really are living the plain life. Some of the best essays to challenge aesthetic simplicity were written by plain (Amish) people. As you are

Friend of the Issue:

Ken Stockbridge: Searching for God's Truth

Ken Stockbridge was born in 1959 in Baltimore, the youngest of 4 boys. His mother was raised as a Quaker, but he was raised in the Presbyterian church of his father's family. Ken has lived in Maryland all his life except for his college and graduate school years. He majored in Economics at Middlebury College and received a Masters degree in Economics from Brown. Especially in school, singing in choruses has been an enriching part of his life. Music has played a tremendous role in his emotional and spiritual development.

Ken's first Quaker meeting was his grandmother's memorial in 1979. Ken says, "I suppose the very first thing that drew me to Quakerism was the mystical experience I had at my grandmother's memorial, which opened me to the possibility of spiritual levels of existence I had previously dismissed. I was also drawn by the unprogrammed nature of worship and the testimonies, especially simplicity."

After attending Quaker meetings from time to time, Ken was gradually drawn more and more deeply into the Young Adult Friends (YAFs) community. Just as Ken was on the verge of aging out of YAFs, way opened, and a YAF friend introduced him to Trudy Rogers at Yearly Meeting. This connected him with others interested in starting a meeting in Howard County. While he feels a sense of accomplishment from his role in helping to start and sustain the meeting, he is also struck by the critical roles others have played.

Ken has thought deeply about Quakerism. He notes that he cherishes the Quaker concept of continuing revelation. As a result, change will happen as leadings evolve and way opens. Further, he has lately wondered

whether more of us should think of ourselves as part of the broader Quaker community, including but not limited to Sandy Spring. His experience has exposed him to many different meetings and opportunities for connecting with other Quakers through yearly meeting, the FGC gathering, and Pendle Hill. He believes there is much to gain and much to offer from interacting with Quakers from other meetings.

Ken brings integrity and Quaker practice into his work life. Since high school, Ken has been interested in government and politics as a way to help society meet its many challenges. As he learned more about economics, he came to appreciate how critical it is in helping understand government's role in society. Since graduate school, he has worked at the U.S. General Accounting Office. "I do feel a little sense of accomplishment for a few of my somewhat individual efforts at GAO, such as my recent report on rates of return on Social Security contributions... there is little doubt in my mind that GAO's work has had an impact on the Social Security reform debate by helping focus attention on key issues, fighting misconceptions, and telling Congress and the public what they need to hear, not what they want to hear. As a result, this work seems to be very much in keeping with the Quaker testimony on integrity."

With a concern for integrity that cannot ignore what it truly sees, Ken has "struggled with a 'profound ambivalence' about life." Ken says, "while I have a deep appreciation for life's joys and beauty, I also have a deep awareness of its sorrows and challenges. The close balance between these two makes it hard for me to embrace life wholeheartedly. Recently, I have seen a similar pattern in how

I view my connections with other people, focusing on the potential for disappointments as well as shared joys. While I've become rather accustomed to living with this ambivalence, when I think about it, I think God wants us to love life and each other as unconditionally as we can. That is a continuing challenge for me."

Ken shared an opening he had recently had on this issue. In the Bible, James speaks directly to the issue of life's sorrows when he says, "Count it all joy." James explains that every trial is an opportunity to get closer to God if we choose to make it so. In his book, *James: Faith in Action*, David S. Young speaks to this point when he notes that the mountain flowers of the high Rockies bloom in brilliant colors—live to their fullest—despite the harshness of their circumstances. This ability to live wholeheartedly, embracing all that life holds, occurs when we are aware that the joy and power of God is available to us all the time, in the harsh as well as the happy moments.

If integrity involves this wholeness—or wholeheartedness—then understanding the need to embrace the whole of life is part of the process that forms integrity. In Ken, we see an individual involved in that process, integrating work and faith, sorrow and joy, all as parts of an integrated and God-led life.

Books on Simplicity

(continued)

picturing the clapboard farmhouse, the red barn, the waving fields of corn, the blue sky, the sturdy brown horses, the wooden plough, the apple trees, the fresh baked bread... they are writing about plopping a trailer in the field behind the house as the plainest solution for housing a widowed parent. It breaks the mood. It seems all wrong. And then you

realize that you were romanticizing the Amish, romanticizing simplicity, turning them and it into a middle-class pastoral fantasy... and you realize that to get simple, there's a lot left to shed. With the warning they are very Christ-centered, I would recommend these essays.

Come Visit Us

We invite everyone to our Meeting for Worship, 10:30 Sunday morning. We offer First Day school for all children.

We meet at Mt. Hebron House. To travel to Mt. Hebron House from Columbia, take U.S. 29 north to Old Frederick Road, then go left on Old Frederick Road for a quarter mile, right on Mt. Hebron Drive, and left on Calvin Circle. Mt. Hebron House, a 19th century stone manor, is off Calvin Circle on the right side on the grounds of Mt. Hebron Presbyterian Church. Please park on the street.

Simplicity and The Mixed-Up Chameleon

Most of you have probably read Eric Carle's story of the Mixed-Up Chameleon. It is really a story about simplicity. In this story, the chameleon takes on all the body parts of the different animals he admires at the zoo. He makes himself a little like the polar bear, the fox, the flamingo, the fish, the deer, the giraffe, the turtle, the elephant, the seal and the human being. By the end of all his wishing he has a trunk, a shell, fins, a bushy tail, a long neck, flamingo legs, and even an umbrella! You can hardly see the chameleon because he is so covered up with stuff. He is no longer simple. In fact, he has made his life so complicated that when gets

very hungry...he can't even catch a fly to eat! All these new body parts just get in his way. They don't make him better. They make him a little silly. In the end, he says, "I wish I could be myself." His wish comes true and he catches the fly!

What we learn from the chameleon's adventure is that you can't be everything. You can't be everybody else. If you try to be everything and everybody, you end up not being able to do the simplest things. You end up losing You under all that other stuff.

We live in a world that can be like the zoo. Sometimes it seems to be telling you that you can be everything and everybody. Sometimes it tells you that you aren't good enough UNLESS you HAVE everything and are everybody. But to be truly happy, you have to focus on being YOU. God created a wonderful being when he created you. God wants you to be that person he created. That is simplicity. Quakers try hard to be simple.

First Day School News

Eight-and-up class

Currently, we are learning about the life of John Woolman.

Prior to that, the class was following the curriculum, "Jesus, Who was He?" published by Friends General Conference. The students used their Bibles to explore the life of Jesus, as well as working on occasional craft projects related to holiday themes such as Christmas and Kwanzaa. On one Sunday the class did a worship-sharing exercise on the topic of Christian Love. The children were given several cards with Bible verses about love printed on them and asked to select one and tell why they picked it. As the exercise progressed the children discussed examples of the kind of love expressed in the verses (Love for en-

emies, Love for your neighbor, Love for God).

Learning to speak out of the silence is a real challenge for this age group. Pretending to be asleep was one way they were able to stay quiet for a brief period.

First and second grade class

The first and second grade class has been learning about John Woolman. Among other projects, the children have created their own journals and collaboratively written a poem about Quakerism.

4-5 year-old class

This class has been focusing on Old testament Bible stories, such as those of Moses, Noah, David and Goliath, and Joseph and the multicolored cloak. The children have been drawing pictures of and playacting the stories. One day the class made a burning bush out of construction paper. Recently they have started journals.

0-3 year-old class

The 0-3 class continues to hear stories, draw pictures, play with toys, sing songs, practice a minute of silence and go to the playground when the weather allows.

Quakers
Quiet listeners
Listening to God
Happy, cheerful, and great
Weird

— Phillip Garrison, Elly Girbach
and Brian Palmer

Elena Manzenara and Elizabeth Saria have been welcomed into the Meeting.

The Ad Hoc Committee for Peace and Social Justice has chosen an issue for the meeting. The issue—homelessness and hunger in the Howard County area—enables involvement by everyone in the meeting. Friends have also suggested that homelessness and hunger is such a profound problem in Baltimore City that we might consider placing our efforts there; that we might contact the Mount Hebron Presbyterian Church, who are already cooking large amounts of food for a Baltimore City shelter to find out how we might participate with them; that we might get a speaker to talk to the meeting about the needs of homeless people in our county.

After much discussion at the last Meeting for Business several people objected to our signing the Health Care for All Petition sponsored by the Columbia Cooperative Ministry. Jim Rose has sent a response to the petition. While generally supporting the idea of universal access to health care, objections were raised as to the wording of the petition, and to a process which asked us to sign the petition but afforded no opportunity for input into the writing of it. At this point, 400 organizations have signed the petition, so it would not be realistic to expect the Columbia Cooperative Ministry to rewrite and recirculate it.

Our Meeting is scheduled to host the June 2001 Quarterly Meeting.

Our Minute on same-sex marriage is in the process of being revised. If you would like to review or make comments on the current minute, which supports treating couples equally regardless of gender, please contact Ramona Buck.

The Ad Hoc School Committee has decided not to pursue the idea of a Meeting school; it is looking into the possibility of an after-school program.

The Ministry and Oversight Committee is seeking people both from the committee itself and the Meeting, at large, to be in charge of child care on a per event basis.

Please forward newsletter items to Diane at diane_reynolds@yahoo.com

Letter from front page

friendship groups, friendly bunches, a book discussion group, a robust children's religious education program, a meeting for healing, and a new advancement and outreach committee. We are addressing peace and social justice issues. In general the meeting is running smoothly. We are willing and able to host the Quarterly meeting in June 2001, and we are planning a second retreat for our meeting. Ministry and oversight is planning several adult religious education events. On a spiritual level, I hear people articulating the importance of placing Quaker process over any outcome, and I hear people reminding us that we are here first and last to do God's will. As for this newsletter, it has been a gift to have so many people offer their thoughts on simplicity. I hope everybody will enjoy and benefit from them.

Calendar of Events

April 9

Bible study, James, 9:15 AM, Hebron House

April 9

Meeting for Healing, 7 PM, Hebron House

April 16

Retreat Planning Committee meeting, rise of meeting, Hebron House

April 16

Discussion Group, 7 PM, Hebron House

April 21

Bible study, James, 9:15 AM, Hebron House

May 5-7

RE Teachers Retreat, Camp Shiloh, for more information email: BYMRE@aol.com

July 1-8

Friends General Conference, Rochester, New York

Jul 31 - Aug 6

Baltimore Yearly Meeting

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- Meetings for Healing meet the second Sunday of the month at 7 PM at Hebron House
 - The Bible Study meets the 2nd and 4th Sunday of the month at 9:15 at Hebron House
 - The Discussion Group meets the third Sunday of the month at 7 PM at Hebron House

- Meetings for Worship with a Concern for Business meet fourth Sunday of the month after rise of meeting
- Meetings for Worship: Sundays, 10:30; First Day school same time; child care provided to younger children



Patapsco Friends Meeting

Mt Hebron House • 2331 Calvin Circle
Ellicott City, MD 21042

Web: <http://www.geocities.com/athens/forum/4135>

Phone: 410-997-2535