



The Quaker Heron

Newsletter of Patapsco Friends Meeting, Ellicott City, Maryland
May 10, 2009

*Editor's note: This issue of **The Quaker Heron** is dedicated to Susan Rose and focuses on the prison ministry at MCI, Hagerstown, which was initiated by Susan and others, at the request of Richard Sutton, currently incarcerated there.*

South Mountain Friends Fellowship by Jim Rose

When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? Or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee? And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me. (Mat 25:38-40, KJV)

Let your lives speak. (George Fox)

On May 14th, 2004, Patapsco Friends received a letter from Richard Sutton asking for help in establishing a Quaker Meeting at the Maryland Correctional Institute at Hagerstown (MCI-H). Hagerstown is over an hour's drive from Columbia and Friends were not

immediately led to respond. However, in September one Friend recognized that this was not impossible, that this was indeed an important opportunity. Her leading was announced after worship and six Friends joined with her in forming the Prison Visitation group.

Today South Mountain Friends Fellowship is a worship group under the care of Patapsco Friends Meeting. Prison gatherings cannot be held without at least one, and not more than two, outside visitors in support. We have been successful in finding that support to nurture the six to ten inmates who wish to worship in the manner of Friends each week.

The Friends in prison are extraordinarily grateful for our presence. That support gives them both respite from the noisy environment of prison life, and provides needed contact with the outside world. They have consistently joined together to write a spiritual state of the meeting report each year. Excerpted from those reports:

Our regular weekly meetings for silent worship, worship sharing, and

fellowship provide for a unique setting for those who are led to attend. A spirit-filled atmosphere of peace and tranquility survives in a state prison system that remains classified as one of the most dangerous in the nation. Since our last report a second correctional officer was senselessly killed, as were numerous prisoners across the state. The high level of violence, the increasing gang activity, and the accumulating frustration felt by most of the prison population continue to reflect a system in crisis.

How does a man in the dark prison environment follow his leadings, adhere to the foundations of his faith and live in the Light? Queries such as these are what bring men to Quaker worship. Queries such as these provide guides as we seek for to find our way. The men at South Mountain Friends Fellowship are grateful for the path that has remained lit for us, and for others to follow.

As minuted by Patapsco Friends to establish this worship group:

For those of us who have had the opportunity to support them, it has been a time of testing. Friends have no creed, no catechism. What do we teach and how do we teach it? Again and again we have been brought back to the foundations of our faith: that Jesus taught us to love God, to love our neighbors as ourselves, to love our enemies. We teach by our faithful attendance, by our care and concern for the attenders of this meeting and for their community, and by modeling Friends exploration of their spiritual experience through queries, in worship sharing and in silent worship. They think our presence is a miracle.

It opens us to the power of the advice of George Fox: "Friends, meet

together and know one another in that which is eternal, which was before the world was." We're not sure any of us know exactly what that means, but we all know what it feels like.

What do we do? The Meeting for Worship is held each Saturday from 9:30 to 11:00 am in a small room inside the prison. The meeting is only slightly programmed in that we usually have 20 minutes of silent worship followed by discussion, reading, worship sharing or free conversation. If other Friends or attenders wish to join our small group, please contact the Clerk of Patapsco Friends Meeting at 410-465-6554 or patapsco.friends.meeting@gmail.com.

Letter from Susan Rose to Richard Sutton, September 16, 2004

Dear Richard Sutton,

I have to tell you that when I read your request for Patapsco Meeting to support you in having a Meeting at MCI-H, I said to myself, "Impossible. It's simply too far. I don't want to do it. Neither will anyone else."

But there was your request, a request I found I could not ignore. So, of course, I tried to pass it on to others. I talked to a member of Frederick Meeting and found that they had folks going into MCI-H, but he has not told me who those folks are, and while I was waiting for his response or for me to pick up a phone and call the Clerk of their Meeting, your "impossible" request was working in my mind.

The other morning, I woke up thinking about you and it was clear to me that you have made a very simple request. I found myself thinking of Jesus' words to his disciples. "I have called you friends . . . when I was in prison, you visited me." I say that Jesus is my guide, my teacher, my friend. Is

that baloney or is it true? “When I was in prison, you visited me.”

“Simple,” I said to myself.

“Richard has offered me what Quakers in days past called an ‘opportunity.’” It was clear and compelling. So, last Monday, I called Miss Mill, your VAC. She told me that I needed to talk with your chaplain, Sally Jo Day, which I did today.

She told me that it would be good for you to talk with her so that she can tell you how to proceed. (Ed note: the paragraph about the prison requirements for visitors has been left out .) I was interested in Sally Jo’s telling me that there was a Quaker Meeting at Hagerstown for many years, but that it was laid down six or seven years ago. I hope it was because all of the attenders won parole or finished out their time. . . .

I believe the other necessary thing for us to do as we try to set up a Meeting there is for you and me to meet, which I understand we can do if I put myself on your visitors list. . . . It is important for me to know what you know about Friends and what, if anything, besides nostalgia for the river and the trains motivated you to make this request. And, also, I want to know your vision for this Meeting. George Fox was telling people to “meet together,” so let’s do that.

I wonder if you keep a journal. I do in a very sporadic way and it is always enjoyable for me to stir up memories of times past. Sometimes I think I write about them well enough that others might enjoy reading about them too. You write well and I’m interested in the “old” Patapsco Valley. I must confess that though I live near it, it really has no reality for me.

Well, it has taken me some time to respond to your last two letters. There is this thing I call Quaker time. It took some Quaker time for me to see your request as really quite simple rather than impossible as I first saw it. And, until then, I found it impossible to take the next steps toward building, perhaps, a Quaker Meeting at the Old Jail.

Peace, Susan Rose, Clerk

Ministry and Care

Patapsco Friends Meeting

My Experience at South Mountain Friends Fellowship and an Appreciation of Susan by Daniel Snodgrass, 154670

Two years ago, a friend who is from my home in East Tennessee invited me to attend Quaker worship with him. I can’t thank my friend, Richard Sutton enough for this. Each free world Quaker I’ve met at our meetings have been very nice folks.

One lady, Ms. Susan Rose was the greatest of the great. Susan reminded me of my grandmother and I told her so. When Susan talked, she not only talked, she taught. Many times, it was plain to see that Susan felt bad, but still this lady made it to Hagerstown to be at the worship which she loved so much. So, I will always be at worship with memories.

February 21, 2009, after our service, I thanked Dave for coming and thanked Susan and gave this special lady a hug. I told her she was loved and that I felt that everyone who knew her loved her. And I walked away.

February 28, 2009, Susan and her husband, Jim, came to our worship. Close to the end of a nice meeting, Susan told the group that she’d not be back because of her medical condition. I felt my heart shake, and again told Susan

that she was loved and shook her little hand. I then said good-bye and shook Jim's hand and had to walk away so that Susan wouldn't see my tears.

Attending these meetings and knowing Susan and others has changed my life. I think of Susan and it's so hard to know she'll not be back. Now I know that Susan is in Heaven. God needed and took her. No matter who speaks at a Quaker worship, I know Susan will be there.

The world lost a great lady and Heaven received a great lady.

A True Soldier in Christ

By Gabriel A. Cannon #257-863

I confess that Susan Rose was the founder of a gang of smugglers. Yes, Susan Rose smuggled contraband into MCIH Prison for years, until her dying days. And, all volunteers from Patapsco Friends Meeting are guilty of conspiring before and after the fact. Under Susan Rose's guidance and leadership, something worse than drugs and weapons was and still today is being conveyed weekly here in this institution. Yes, I, Gabriel Cannon, witnessed these unforgettable acts committed by Susan right under the nose of the Division of Corrections. Today, I am willing to testify before a grand jury in exchange for a reduced sentence of anger, jealousy, pride, rudeness, impatience and hatred in my heart.

Many people claim to be Christians, but a few practice Christianity. Susan truly practices what she believes in. One parable in the Bible states, "I needed clothes and you clothed me; I was sick and you looked after me; ***I was in prison and you came to visit me.***" And the king replied, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did

for me." Mt 25:35. Many folks forget about that last part, but claim to be Christian.

For four years now, I have attended South Mountain Friends Fellowship. I had the privilege to have met and spent time with Susan Rose. During our mostly unorthodox meetings for worship, Susan inspired, educated, delighted, encouraged and most important, strengthened my spirit despite the many setbacks. I was fortunate to have met Susan prior to her departure. Words cannot express my gratitude and appreciation for her and all the volunteers' attentive ears and spiritual mentoring. I had the opportunity to experience true love without judgment from a complete stranger.

Specifically, Mrs. Rose, along with each visitor, showed me what true love is: love that is patient, kind, does not envy, does not boast, and is not proud. Overall, Susan manifested that LOVE is in everyone and it never fails. By actions and not just words, she proved to me that there is "that of God" in every person.

I do not receive visits from siblings, relatives or past friends. Throughout the legal struggles, disturbances, assaults by inmates, guards, unhealthy food, strip searches, misery and depression, I managed to have a weekly silent moment with a few Friends. Without Susan's inspiration to go inside the prison, I would be without these precious moments.

There were times that I wanted to give up and just become a "con" and not be a role-model inmate. However, sometimes I received a small note of encouragement from Susan. Or, during our worship sharing, she would make everything I am experiencing seem minor and insignificant.

Time during the holidays and birthdays are some of the most troubling for a prisoner. What made Susan so God-given were the small things she did for me. For instance, on one occasion, I was deeply down because of another court postponement and because a small riot had occurred. We were locked down for weeks, with cell searches, forced visual cavity searches, and surrounded by many angry prisoners, I received a greeting card in the shape of a green pickle. It said, "Bet you didn't expect to get a paper pickle for your birthday!" Another one read, "Dear Gabe, I want to hold up your forbearance in the face of the challenging circumstances of life behind walls. May your plea be favorably heard and may you find small joys each day to strengthen you in your difficult journey. Peace be with you. -- Susan."

She made me smile, laugh and experience more deeply the Spirit inside me. Things like this made Susan Rose very special to me. I will remember her until my dying day.

Remembrance of Susan

By Joe Evans # 162725

By way of the Quaker Heron newsletter, I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge the passing of Susan Rose, whom I will greatly miss and always remember.

Most members and attenders of Patapsco Friends Meeting and Sandy Spring Friends Meeting know of Susan's leading in 2004 to establish a meaningful place of Quaker worship at the Maryland Correctional Institution at Hagerstown (MCIH). And, despite the initial resistance by the prison administration as well as the concerns of making such a commitment, other members of PFM came to this prison to help establish such

a place of Quaker worship. The Meeting here at MCIH is now recognized as South Mountain Friends Fellowship.

Since January 2005, our time together seemed to pass as quickly as a shooting star across the sky. And, like a shooting star across the twilight, it gives pause and a moment of reflection, just as Susan did in my life.

Susan came into my life here at this prison, but also into my wife, Karen's, life, as well. On many occasions, Susan provided inspiration, direction or a solution when everything else appeared improbable. Words alone cannot express our sadness with her passing. Once an angel among us, now perhaps a passing star above us.

We miss you, Susan. It is my hope that your leadings, inspiration and vision go on.

One of the Spiritual State of the Meeting Reports of the group:

Stardust to Stardust is such a short span of time in the realm of the Great Mystery. Could it be that humankind's greatest struggle comes from the fact that maybe we lost sight of the fact that we are spiritual beings, temporarily flesh and earth-bound?

The earliest Christians have written testimonies of miracles of biblical proportions. New Year's Day, 2006, three inmates met in a side hallway for discussion, prayer and worship in the manner of Quakers. This act of faith and practice was the birth of South Mountain Friends Fellowship (SMFF) which is under the care and guidance of Patapsco Friends Meeting (PFM), Ellicott City, Maryland. There are a total of about 9 volunteers from Patapsco Meeting and they travel two at a time weekly to Maryland correctional Institution in Hagerstown, Maryland

(MCI-H). It is a prison regulation that at least one member of PFM be present so that SMFF can hold regular weekly Meetings. We begin each year in faith and hope that our inmate attender members will continue and will increase in number.

Each week as this dedicated group forms a circle and enters into the silence of expectation and worship, the clamor of prison existence fades. There is that of God in all people and all things. We have become convinced that the ultimate answer is the Light of God within.

The MCI-H is a dangerous environment and daily situations can become explosively violent instantly. In the midst of this draconian backdrop, you may hear a voice filled with hope, faith and love giving some small amount of consolation and comfort with a blessing. There are other voices of broken children in adult bodies raging and cursing. You may hear anguished cries of, "Where is God now?" Our convinced members strive to answer that cry for divine help as we meet as George Fox advised. We are seekers of awareness, understanding, redemption and forgiveness as we try to follow the teachings of Jesus. We are learning to love ourselves and God so that we may truly love our neighbors as ourselves. We strive to do no harm and to forgive our enemies. It is no small task to live the "peace testimony" in prison.

Through leadings, faith and practice, SMFF has become a safe haven of worship and is a thriving Quaker group. Remarkable? Not really. We are just another recorded miracle and SMFF is a gift from God. Our members are living testimonials to the foundations of beliefs of the Society of Friends. We are a new community in the Garden and we

ask to be held in the Light as we continue to hold all God's communities in the Light. We thank Patapsco Friends for helping to establish SMFF and for their continued support. We thank the Quaker community at large. We thank God for sending us these ambassadors of hope and love.

Peace, SMFF Attenders

Jean Pfefferkorn, Patapsco Friend, writes:

AT MCI-H, I am a student. I have received an education about how people practice individual spirituality in the difficult circumstances created by life in the criminal justice system. I have learned that human creativity helps the prisoners to improvise ways to make their own lives more humane, such as Eddie's privacy walls made with cardboard, and the way Joe and Richard have learned to mentally close off their surroundings while they meditate.

I have learned that the prisoners in South Mountain Friends Fellowship have hope for their own betterment as well as for that of others. Several of them volunteer for a prison organization called PATT--Prisoners against Teen Tragedy--that work to prevent in others' lives what happened in theirs. They care about their families and some are working on completing their educations.

The most important lesson that I have learned is that I have more in common with the men at South Mountain Friends Fellowship than that which separates me.

John Farrell, Patapsco Friend, shares the following:

Each time I worship with our friends of South Mountain Friends Fellowship I experience ease, comfort and the presence of God. The time with

South Mountain Friends is honest and real. We see the walls and barbed wire that hold us captive, the sounds that threaten our silence, yet peace and love are ever transcendent. I think of the time with South Mountain Friends as an example of what happens when I chose to take Jesus seriously ("I was in prison and you visited me" Matthew 25:36). Taking Jesus' teachings seriously is both comforting and challenging. We might become radicalized and troubling to authorities.

Susan helped me to be reminded of this and to act. Susan's leading to do prison ministry opened this path for me and Patapsco Friends and I am grateful. Thank you, Susan.

Ramona Buck, Patapsco Friend:

My drive to MCI-Hagerstown starts out on busy 270 North, continues to Frederick and then goes west. Fields and clouds beckon, and finally, mountains appear and we reach our destination. The trip feels a little, at first, like an outing into the country. But then, the cold stone towers of the prison appear, set sternly in front of South Mountain. Inside, first there is the gauntlet of ID's and of the metal detection gate before we go outside once more to follow the sidewalk to the next building. The yards of the prison are neatly kept, and flowers bloom, tended by the prisoners. The whole trip illustrates both the feeling of joy and freedom and the ever-present stern fact of incarceration.

This feeling is accentuated as we sit in our small meeting room next to the noise and chaos of the halls and of the loud walky-talkies and guard's chatter. We try to make a small oasis of quiet, calm and meditation. And we hope that our friendship can leave a small candle

of light behind us as we soon leave and the gates clang shut behind us once more.

Linda Pardoe, Patapsco Friend:

Participating in the SMFF at Hagerstown has deepened my spiritual life. The men have showed me that patience and perseverance are necessary to live from one's spiritual center. The men in prison face a litany of injustices and challenging situations every day and yet still find a way to go within and connect with Spirit. In their lives, I can see the power of living from the center and can better put in perspective the distractions of my life that pull me away from my center. Every day I have the choice, just as the men do, to focus on what is most important to me.

Bob Rhudy, Patapsco Friend

I remember when leadings were discussed at a leadings workshop at Patapsco. Susan spoke then about the prison ministry as a leading, and how others had decided to support her in following this leading.

Those of us in the prison ministry learned what it was like to travel on a Saturday morning to Hagerstown and to meet with the guys. We learned who they were and why they wanted to be in our worship sharing group. I can remember a lot of Saturday mornings, traveling with Susan and discussing many issues. We even disagreed at times about what should be covered at the meetings with the guys.

Over time, however, we learned to leave some of the direction to the men and we became inspired by them. They are dealing with many serious issues of their own in prison, as well as their family matters, such as deaths or a family member being in need. These

family challenges are doubly difficult for them since, as inmates, there is nothing they can do to help.

The group has developed into a very close group, caring both for each other and for us. So, on the drives back home, we often feel in a glow from our visit and sharing.

I cherish the experience for our Meeting which has developed because of Susan's leading. I feel that the fellowship in the prison has enriched both us as individuals, and our Meeting as a whole.