



The Journal of Patapsco Friends Meeting

FALL 2011 ISSUE

**Editor's note** by Ramona Buck

This issue of the Quaker Heron “fell together” by my putting people's contributions in these pages in the order in which they came to me. I had thought that I would paste in all the items and then go back and decide a logical order, switching them around. But, after reading them all, I realized that there is a wonderful intrinsic value in the progression of the articles as they stand.

After the first article received, “God is Love,” by Jim Rose, we have Susan Bullock's lovely poem about forgiveness as love, followed by Spiritual Journeying by Karen Ownbey, which focuses on the queries which mean the most to her. And she quotes Rilke's poem – which Jim had also mentioned. Then, Susan Rose Hills' sensitive piece arrived about music and spirit - and about the power of listening, followed by Bethanne's beautiful poem written with input and support of her son, and which, for some reason, brought me to tears (maybe someone can explain why it is so touching – I am not sure).

Then came Stuart Greene's article about sacred space and about messages in Meeting which come to more than one person simultaneously. While I was admiring and considering this concept, John Farrell sent the article on piano keys and the spirit – a wonderful image to epitomize keeping ourselves open and available for the light in our lives. So, Friends, I have not done any work editing (other than to add a few commas here and there). Instead, I offer this issue of the Quaker Heron as an offering of the Spirit, by the Spirit, and for the Spirit, within us all.

**God is Love** by Jim Rose

Gosh that sounds ponderous, even theological. But I don't mean to get up on my specially built pulpit. I just want to relate a couple of events that happened to me during Baltimore

Yearly Meeting's annual get-together.

The day we arrived in Frostburg, Susan purchased several books at the bookstore. Among them was a work by J. Brent Bill on *Holy Silence*. This is a short book, an introduction to Quaker spirituality, written by a Quaker pastor. Early in this book I came across the first of his “Quietude Queries” where he suggests that we consider: “Have I ever had questions I wanted to ask God?” The author encourages the reader to ask that question (and others), start up a conversation with God.

I fell asleep with that question on my mind, and when morning arrived, I had an odd awakening. My question for God was “Why is there so much suffering in the world?” And I felt that the response was immediate: “Why is there so little love in the world?”

My normal pedantic reaction was something along the line of “Do You always answer a question with another?” And again I got an immediate response that “Questions are the only answers. Live the questions.” I was immediately suspicious of the answer since that's right out of Rilke's poem. It's my subconscious at work again. But perhaps God uses one's subconscious or whatever is available.

This story needs another step. Friday night Phillip Gulley, another Quaker pastor, gave the Carey Lecture to the assembled Friends. It was a great speech given by a professional speaker. In his talk he made much of our promise to welcome everyone, emphasizing that we had better mean what we say. “Everyone” includes gays and lesbians,

blacks and Hispanics, ex-inmates, the troubled, and the poor. And we are not led to just ‘tolerate’ others, but are led to welcome them. There is a fundamental, a substantial difference. Are we serious about living up to the theme of the retreat: “Moving Forward In Community: Welcoming the Divine, Welcoming Every Person”?

But the part of his talk that spoke to me most is his story about his discussions with an atheist who showed up at his Quaker meeting. He didn’t want to convert the new attender, he was really interested in why the newcomer had come to his church. The focus of his discussion was principally to ask: “Tell me about the God that you don’t believe in.” An hour later he informed the newcomer, “That’s is precisely the same God that I don’t believe in.”

An outstanding thought: what is the nature of the God I don’t believe in? And what then is the nature of the God I do believe in.

Considering my brief conversation with God of last night, I had a glimmer of what we might have been talking about. The God that I believe in is not all-powerful, all-knowing, all-whatever. The God that I believe in is not responsible for the suffering. For much of that suffering we – all of us in the human race – are responsible. (There might be a caveat here about tornadoes – for which it is difficult to maintain that man is responsible. But that caveat doesn’t necessitate that if man is not responsible then God (or the Devil) must be so!)

What would the world be like if the first motion were truly Love? I truly believe that what was suggested by God was that a great deal of suffering is caused by man, by ourselves. By this Being which is capable of love. By this Being which fails to express love and compassion when it is most needed. When we ask about the suffering in the world, we need to also ask whether there is enough love in our hearts to address that suffering.

Susan had a slightly different question. One of the stories told by Phil Gulley was about a man, a derelict, who at his most debased condition felt a wind sweep over him and woke renewed, no longer a victim of alcohol. “Why,” Susan asked, “does God save that one, and not others with the same or even more severe conditions?”

I’m not sure I can guess at God’s response to that one. Does God really save people? Or do people save themselves? Can an individual through some sense of inner conviction change their addictions, change their ordinary way of addressing the world and its problems? But isn’t that the province of the God that I wonder about: the movement, the spontaneous eruption of inner light, that is inherently possible for each of us? Why one and not the other? Why is light kindled here and not there?

I am beset with mysteries. I wrote long ago about how human behavior was so easily explained except for one instance. I can explain our exhibitions of avarice and greed. I can explain hate and revenge in terms of the hurt and pain that was caused at some other time. I can explain each of the seven deadly sins (oh, with the exception of sloth). But I cannot explain love.

When I witness a Mother Theresa, a Martin Luther King, at their best moments I am left speechless – at a loss for words to explain. These are extremes, of course, but there are equally generous and careful gestures I witness each and every day – gestures that I cannot explain. What motivates love?

Well, my conversation with God that night has led me to an explanation. Love is motivated by a higher power within us. If it weren’t for God, I suspect there would be no love in the world. If there were no love in the world, there would, for me, be no God.

### **Forgiveness Is Love’s Best Expression**

By Susan Bullock

Forgiveness is love’s best expression  
Opens up my heart  
Lets me see us both as human  
Has lessons to impart.  
You’ve brought me so much pain and sadness  
Yet I know it’s true  
That you could not have hurt me so  
Had someone not hurt you.

I’m stuck inside old feelings  
Trying to get out

Living in the present  
Is what it's all about.

The bitterness devours me  
Makes body weak and sick  
The courage of forgiving  
Restores the candle's wick.

It doesn't mean my pain no longer matters  
It doesn't mean I have to want you now  
It's just my way of saying yes to living  
The magic of forgiving shows me how.

Forgiveness is love's best expression  
Forgiver is set free  
Forgiven might not change a bit  
And that's all right with me!  
*Susan Bullock © 2008*

### **Spiritual Journeying**

By Karen Ownbey

#### ***Wandering Queries***

Wanderer, your footsteps are  
the road, and nothing more;  
wanderer, there is no road,  
the road is made by walking.  
By walking one makes the road,  
and upon glancing behind  
one sees the path  
that never will be trod again.  
Wanderer, there is not road—  
only wakes upon the sea.

By Antonio Machado, "Proverbios y cantares" in  
*Campos de Castilla* (1912)

I first heard two lines of this poem as  
"Walker, there is no road, the road is made by  
walking." Only one word difference, yet I resonate  
more with "wanderer," especially as it relates to  
my spiritual journey.

I thought my spiritual journey (and life in  
general) would be linear. First this, then that,  
followed by the other. Like lining up dominoes. I  
also thought that my spiritual journey meant  
finding "the" answers. So I'd have "the" answers

to pass "the" test. Or that if I could find the  
"right" group with the "right" answers, then I'd  
know how to line up my dominos and  
everything would fall neatly into place.

Yet as I glance back, I'm surprised,  
dismayed, not so surprised, amused, like "duh"  
to see that my wandering spiritual journey has  
been no where close to a linear path. Harry  
Chapin was on to something with his lyrics "No  
straight lines make up my life, all my roads are  
bends...."

Wandering, stumbling, dancing, crawling,  
stretching, falling, gathering, sharing, strolling,  
climbing, tight-rope walking, dreaming,  
flowing...

Wandering from church to no church and  
back to church; to labyrinth and retreats; to  
dream circles and fire circles; and most recently,  
into Quaker meeting.

And what a refreshing surprise not to be  
given any answers but loads of questions and  
queries!

I've been savoring this Rilke quote in the  
*Faith and Practice* book (p 19):

Have patience with everything  
unresolved in your heart and to try to  
love the questions themselves....Don't  
search for the answers, which could not  
be given to you now, because you would  
not be able to live them. And the point is  
to live everything. Live the questions  
now. Perhaps then, someday far in the  
future, you will gradually, without even  
noticing it, live your way into the  
answer."

Rainer Maria Rilke, 1903 in *Letters to a  
Young Poet*

I realize that I've been so preoccupied in  
find "the" answers that I really don't know what  
the questions are. "Live the questions  
now." Wow. I am glad I wandered in.

## The Spirit and Music

by Susan Rose Hills

For me, the Spirit and music are intertwined. The difficulties on my spiritual journey have often showed up in my music making: difficulty being in the “solo” spot, performance anxiety, fear of screw ups. The experience of Quaker worship, joining with others in Silence, has somehow helped me learn to simply express music without myself being in the way (sometimes, anyway) – to learn to hear and respond to the spirit. It has also helped me sense community in the musicians I play with, coaching me on how to “tune in” to see where the music is going – much the way we Quakers follow Leadings.

A turning point for me occurred only a few years after I started attending Quaker meeting – sometime in the 1980s. I saw an advertisement for a workshop on improvisation in music facilitated by Paul Winter, the jazz musician, in Baltimore. He said anyone could come, no matter their level of proficiency. I filled out the flyer and took it to the mailbox without pause. I’ve seldom felt so clear so fast.

His method was very Quaker-like. He literally invited people to play out of the Silence. For small group improv, about five people went to the center of the room and began to play when they felt so moved. We had few instructions: you can echo or support music from others, you can suggest a new direction, you can simply be silent and wait. The music that emerged was magic, and it worked regardless of skill level. At one point, a young flutophone player and a professional violinist were in the same group. Everyone had the same power. Ego? Don’t be silly. It was about listening.

And to what was everyone listening? Ah, now that’s the spiritual mystery of it. You could say people were listening to each other, but that would still yield a chaos of egos. It was more that Music emerged, something with its own direction and pulse and openings. We were all listening to something more than any one person and trying to honor and follow it.

This experience led me to explore improvisation in other fields of art and to offer workshops on improvisation and spiritual openness. I considered it a way of practicing spiritual openness. “Improvisation” means “without provision”: you walk into the wilderness, and you leave your “stuff” behind. You trust that what you

need will be provided. That attitude tends to take the focus off the ego. If you’re waiting for manna and not toting a heavy backpack, it’s clear that you are not controlling what happens.

As a clarinetist who had always played with sheet music in front of me, I found it very hard to begin improvisation. A lot of people were very, very charitable as I tried to learn. I don’t practice much and I have limitations. Yet, with a few friends who like to play traditional music with a clarinet, I’ve experienced a deeply spiritual sense of listening, a community moving through time making music together. Breathe in, breathe out: sing, play. Use your instrument, whatever its qualities. How well you play is not the point. It’s how well you listen.

**Poem and commentary** from Bethanne Kashkett:

*Our son Joshua completed a beautiful poem for his 12th grade English class. The poem was about the journey your life takes. Each stanza begins with the words "I am from...". I love poetry, but I don't venture into writing it often. But, his poem touched me so deeply, it gave me the inspiration to try and write one myself. Joshua kindly offered to help me and this is our collaboration:*

I am from spiral shofars lining the shelves  
of childhood  
Classical music blaring through the house  
and heard down the street  
Jelly cake baking with cinnamon and  
damson plums  
The sound of my mother and grandmother  
bickering nearby  
Fishnet stockings, lipstick and Moody  
Blues, I never was a part of  
being the youngest of three sisters  
and sharing square pizza and Pepsi with  
my father

I am from waitressing through college  
Studying music and therapeutic recreation  
Transcendental Meditation sessions in the  
student union  
a high school friendship transforming into  
marriage

I am from a Jewish background filled with  
noise  
Spirituality meeting Universalism  
Hindu chanting  
Buddhist teachings  
Quaker silence blending with meditation  
practice  
Finding my home with this group of Seekers

I am from teaching myself to quilt  
colored stacks of fabric  
Cut up old clothing  
Button collections in glass jars  
Knitting as my favorite pastime

I am from a love of hand work and home  
spun  
Braiding bread dough  
Gardening soil under fingernails  
Vinyls of Joni Mitchell  
Strummed guitar strings and piano keys  
echoing in sunshine

I am from needing to feed others  
big pots of soup  
Washed vegetables scattered across counter  
tops  
Vegetarian at 15 from meat and potato roots  
Steamy cups of tea  
and Chinese food enjoyed anytime, anywhere

I am from books on nearly any subject  
Volumes on simplicity and cooking  
Storytelling with painted illustrations  
and stacks of paperbacks waiting to be read

I am from the deep passion of motherhood  
Rocking through sleepless nights  
the smell of baby powder and Ivory Snow  
Handcrafted wooden toys and fairies  
Three sons and one daughter

I am from woods studded with wild  
raspberries  
Mint and basil climbing over oregano  
Buddha contemplating columbine  
Cats lounging on porches  
And the journey continues on.....

## **Sacred Space** by Stuart Greene

### *Preface:*

For some years now I have held a spiritual concern for over-dependence on the technology of language, both verbal and written, and have felt led to practice and encourage other means of communication. I suspect, as research and personal experience over the millenniums have suggested, much unrecognized communication goes on continually. One of the things that has inspired me was hearing and reading about people practicing the Quaker way of worship who had messages that rumbled in them as if they would soon be called by the Spirit to give Vocal Ministry, but while they waited for the Spirit's prompting to rise from their chairs to speak the Word, another Friend rose and gave essentially the same message. For emphasis, I was privileged to experience this phenomenon first hand during my initial decade with Annapolis Friends. At this point in the mid 1990s I had found myself speaking in Meeting for Worship pretty often for a couple of years when there came a period of about three months when I wasn't called to speak even once. Instead every week I would feel a message churning within me that another friend would rise and deliver. It wouldn't be in the same words but the same Divine intention was communicated. It was joyous and amazing!

During the winter of 2010 a friend of Patapsco FM (my new Quaker home base) suggested that I might write something about Friends faith and practice regarding the 'sacred space'. I felt honored by the request and I spent a good deal of time thinking and writing about it but a useful written product to my mind, wasn't forthcoming; so finally, admitting to myself that I wasn't being led in this way I laid the project down. One day however, during the course of my contemplation, this message for writing came through me.

This may be an odd piece of work to read. It seems to contradict itself, has brief periods where it seems to ramble and has moments of something greater than the printed words. I felt led by the Spirit while writing it, indicated by the words coming to me in a gentle and easy flow punctuated by a definite ending point. But when the euphoria wore off in a day or so, upon rereading. I thought I noticed lots of

problems with it. but I was not allowed a sense of ease to change it. So in that spirit I submit this work – a first and last draft for whatever it's worth knowing that it may not speak to most readers but the hope is that it will speak to the need for which it is intended - in reverence and Joy.

### **Where Is the Sacred Space?**

During the several weeks I contemplated writing something about the sacred space my thoughts were stuck largely on the question: What is the 'sacred space'? I wondered if Friends used the phrase much since I hadn't observed it in Quaker literature very often. It was, however, the phrase that if I were to pick one that illuminated the activities of my last five years, it would have to be 'the sacred space.' It has been a phrase of mission for me. I was led to acknowledge it and revere it, welcome it into my outer consciousness and invite it to stay and, if it liked, to become richer and thicker with the thought that it might also become more apparent to others.

For this writing, I intend to use few labels, especially the common ones because people get annoyed if certain words are used and people get annoyed if they aren't. So I'm attempting what seems impossible – to communicate in writing without using words. For most of the world's population, these aren't words, only squiggles on a white sheet of paper if the onlooker doesn't read English or can't read my handwriting. Even if one can read, it can't be done without the space between eyes and paper, and it's in this space initially where ideas are kept, ripe for the plucking. This is where the story of the first person of creation (Adam) starts making some sense to me, if the apple is used as a metaphor for an idea he wasn't supposed to have. The idea of a solid fixed "thing" was that idea he wasn't supposed to think. It's not what we are supposed to think either because we are Adam. In this moment we are given the same opportunity as "Old Adam". Early Friends spoke of old and new Adam imploring people not to see the apple, but to see the spaces within and around that merge in and out of the ghosts of "things". This movement and merging of seeming nothingness is what makes us one. One "thing" that isn't a thing.

In this blip we label 'Earthly Life,' times of this recognition are to be cherished and the opportunities for its renewal protected. This is our one important earthly mission. For this Space is sacred

because it is the spring of life and living. The Space is accessible. It is in and around our ghosts of form and even without the form it is us (me, you and beyond creation). Us is 'what is'

*by Stuart Greene's ghost -  
Communicated by Us, for Us*

### **Best Dental Whitener Ever?** By John Farrell

Several years ago I had a console piano from about 1930 which I loaned to a friend who needed a piano so his children could take piano lessons. So I loaned him mine. The piano dated from a period when it was common for pianos to have ivory keys, although my piano itself was barely above average in quality.

About ten years later, the piano was returned, and I was shocked to see how much the ivory keys had yellowed. I knew immediately what had happened. Being mindful to take good care of the loaner piano, my friend had faithfully kept the keyboard covered and it was not exposed to light for almost ten years.

Most pianos nowadays have plastic key covers so exposure to light is really a moot point and there may even be more benefit in keeping a keyboard covered when not in use.

Recently when asked by a client how to care for a piano with ivory key tops, I recalled my experience, and emphasized the need to expose the keys to light as much as possible to keep them from yellowing.

So what does all this have to do with Quakerism? One of my favorite teachings from Thich Nhat Hanh is that smiling 'is the most basic kind of peace work'.

Thus it occurred to me that like an ivory key board on a piano, perhaps if we smiled more frequently, whole-heartedly and joyfully we might find that our own 'ivories', too, would brightened!

*(Tongue in cheek? I don't recommend it...that would likely detract from your lovely smile!)*

The Quaker Heron is a sometime publication of Patapsco Friends Meeting; Editor: Ramona Buck, ramonabuck@gmail.com.