



May 2009  
Number 62

# What Canst Thou Say?

**Friends • Mystical Experience • Contemplative Practice**

*You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this: but what canst thou say?  
Art thou a child of Light and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest,  
is it inwardly from God? —George Fox*

## Strangers

### The Stranger Within

*Anonymous*

She came to us a two-year-old stranger, a foster child in need of love and shelter. By the time we were able to adopt her, she was no longer a stranger; she had been born anew in our hearts. So much did she resemble the members of our family that strangers thought she was our biological rather than adopted child.

For twelve years we lived together, knowing one another, or so we thought, not really noticing the stranger living within her for what she really was. The stranger showed herself now and then in a way that we attributed to mood changes, developmental growth shifts or miscommunication. Yet a time came when we knew our once familiar, witty, intelligent, beloved teen-aged daughter was a stranger in our midst. No longer was the stranger hidden within her willing to remain quiet. One person, both family and stranger, exploded in a reckless, dangerous outpouring of mental illness diagnosed as dissociative personality disorder.

We learned our daughter was a stranger and afraid, trapped in a condition she had not chosen; a condition created at an earlier age as her mind, in self-defense, protected itself from the abuses she suffered before she came into our lives. While she was safe in a loving home, those defenses

were dormant, but still they lingered within her, ready to reappear when the stresses of life called them forth. As our daughter grew, the simple stress of being left with a babysitter might bring out a small, temporary change in behavior. Each year, the awareness that one day she would have to leave the security of our home increased within her and odd behaviors gradually escalated until the anticipation of that dreaded day became too much to contain, and the stranger burst forth in full protective—by her standards—behavior that was unacceptable, unsafe and no longer necessary.

Hurt, confused, lost in our own family, we relied on the experiential knowing shared by George Fox that “there is one, even Christ Jesus,” who was able to speak to our condition. “Love one another as I have loved you,” Jesus commands us. We didn’t know the other or, in psychiatric terms, the “alter” in our midst. Yet, love we must the stranger in our daughter’s mind and so we did, in order to be healed and to restore our relationship.

Our family members were in many ways simply loving witnesses to a transformation as we kept our hearts open to the stranger/daughter in our

### **From the Editors:**

*Strangers. That is what we three editors were to each other when we started. We come from different parts of the country, do different work and don’t know each other’s stories. We share an enthusiasm for the topic, but we come at it from different perspectives.*

*Miyo is coming into the work of raising Friends’ awareness of issues of diversity and racism; Lois, a psychotherapist, is attuned to the stranger within. Mariellen wants to help Friends grow spiritually. Yet we found we had complete agreement on what to choose to achieve a balance of inner and outer. We were also delighted to discover, as the emails flew back and forth across the country, that we three were no longer strangers. We had become friends.*

*Lois Pomeroy, Miyo Moriuchi, and Mariellen Gilpin  
Editors for this Issue*

midst, despite the pain we sometimes experienced when the stranger in her midst came to visit. We know the young woman who visits us now, the one who again chooses to be present for family celebrations. She has learned to love and accept the stranger within her; the path to healing of this disorder. Could there be any more radical hospitality than that?

*The writer asked to remain anonymous to protect her daughter*



## Where Are You From?

I grew up a Quaker farm girl in New Jersey. I went to Moorestown Friends, Friends General Conference in Cape May, the local library and 4-H club, ate white bread and Campbell's soup, watched the Mouseketeers and played Parcheesi, all typical of an American childhood. Yet, early on, outside the circle of family, school and meeting, the seemingly simple question of "Where are you from?" was not simple. "Moorestown" or "New Jersey" was not the response strangers expected. People saw me as distinctive, different, foreign, other.

My grandparents emigrated from Japan around 1900.

If an American of European or African descent is asked, "Where are you from?," how likely is it that they would respond, "Norway" or "Germany," "Mali" or "the Yoruba tribe"?

Shift to 1971. I am riding a train in Tokyo. I look to the right and to the left and sit back—astonished. Everyone has black hair, brown eyes and my skin color. I was in the racial majority for the first time in my life. I drew no extra seconds of examination or stares. There were no assumptions about my language fluency, values or belonging. However, I did not belong! I was not Japanese—barely knew a dozen phrases—and the cultural norms and nuances were beyond me. As soon as I opened my mouth it was evident: I was gaijin, a foreigner.

In 1973 I backpacked around Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia and India, all new worlds to me. I was amazed: I "passed." In India, a man asked if I

was from Sikkim! If any local truly surveyed me, body language, gestures, shoes and other clues would reveal me as an outsider. Had I been blond, tall and fair-skinned, I'm sure I would have been approached for money or English practice or accosted. As in the U. S., my answer of "America" to the inevitable "Where are you from?" did not satisfy. It seems there is a universal insistence on categorizing others.

So what to do with this odd reality of often being considered a stranger in my own country and a native in much of Asia? I am not alone. Anyone who has adapted closely to another culture and language changes inwardly. One can have an

expanded sense of belonging. For me, crossing national and racial cultures has usually been an opening to the wonderful abundance of humankind. When met with like soul hospitality and loving connection, the answer to "Where are you from?" is simple: We are all from the same Source.

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*Crossing national and racial cultures has been an opening to the wonderful abundance of humankind.... We are all from the same Source.*

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**What Canst Thou Say?** is an independent publication by and for Quakers with an interest in mystical experience and contemplative practice. It's published in August, November, February, and May. The editorial and production team is Lissa Field, Mariellen Gilpin, Lieselotte Heil, Richard Himmer, Chris Johns, Joan Johnston, Judy Lumb, Patricia McBee, Grayce Mesner, Mike Resman, Eleanor Warnock and Wayne Yarnall.

Please write for WCTS! Instructions to authors are on page 8. Send editorial correspondence to <mariellen.gilpin@gmail.com> or WCTS, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820. See the WCTS website for a history of WCTS and updated queries for future issues: <whatcanstthousay.org>

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*Agnes Miyo Moriuchi serves Friends through her volunteer work for Friends General Conference. Previously on Ministry and Nurture Committee, she is currently the clerk of the Committee with Ministry on Racism. She sojourns with Chestnut Hill meeting in Philadelphia. Miyo has taught English in Japan and Thailand and presently teaches English as a Second Language to Koreans and West Africans. Her daughters are in South Africa and New Delhi.*



# Community of Strangers

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*Strangers live here in this house  
Some for many years, mixed in—No—balanced with later arrivals.  
The old ones teeter and the toddlers totter around some empty fulcrum.  
By and large they don't communicate.  
It's as if by agreement, this ignoring, to preserve some seeming peece of ignorance.  
There's one loser who keeps, well, losing things.  
She puts the same things away in different places every time.  
Her stuff is strewn around, usually in plain sight for all others but her to locate.  
"Have you seen my stuff?" she says out loud to her self.  
Her foil is the finder. He's the one who is always making discoveries.  
That's the passion—the finding.  
He tells jokes. "This coffee is muddy—it was just ground this morning."  
He finds and grinds the same lines over and over without ever getting to ground.  
They play freecell at a distance: one for the security of controlled chaos at the start  
and the other for the ephemera of closure.  
We got this six-year-old kid—just yesterday it seems—damaged goods.  
Says he got beaten up a lot for having killed somebody named God.  
His assailants also were six-year-olds  
and they just wanted to see the horns and the tail in his jeans  
that the nuns had told them about.  
Gramps talks with him once in a while.  
He talks to all of us once in a while. He doesn't listen a whole lot—says his hearing is declining.  
Gramps, we call him Wilt, tells the kid, Bud, the god thing is just a reasoning, not the cause.  
The kid doesn't get it and Gramps goes on, it's the tale in the genes—  
Just cubs in packs with neo-alpha males contesting testes  
and god is just  
the current bone of contention, a mouthful of mete.  
All the kid knows is the hurt and the fear.  
Lessen learned—unless that kid's a loser, too.  
I guess you could call them Rumi's roomies, these house guests;  
they keep their own schedules and connections, and  
meet up mostly in the common room as they are pausing through  
on the way to some other earlier or later time.  
You should hear the arguments:  
the Huggies customer and the earth hugger;  
McDonald's beefs with the vegetarian and the dieter with the die-eater;  
the heavy walkers and the lovers of quiet—  
who roar when the mindfields, the mine-fields explode;  
Rod on the prowl parsing Chastity's towel.  
The Genes and the Jeans and Don and Don and Joan—  
and me, this house, my house. I live alone.*

**Steve Kohn** practices Vipassana Buddhism in Highland, New York. "I got the houseful by 1) my ancestry stretching back about 3.5 billion years, and 2) having survived long enough to get Social Security. This house can never be paid off, although I do hope it stays in good repair until the foreclosure at the end of a renewed 30-year mortgage."

## No Us and Them

Nils Pearson

In my forties, an awareness of the connections of life came to me. It wasn't a flash but a growing awareness of how we are all connected. There is no separation one from the other, no us and them.

Part of the knowledge came from a great tree outside the window of our meetinghouse. Next to the tree were stone steps for early Friends to descend from their carriages. The tree and steps were touchstones for my wandering thoughts, reminding me of earlier Friends and their practices. Thoughts of the changes that the tree had been through during the life of the meeting would stir my mind toward how the horses had contributed nitrogen to the soil for the tree to grow, and in turn the tree had provided oxygen for those early Quakers to breathe, and the Quakers, carbon dioxide for the trees to build with. So the tree contained atoms that had at one time been a part of the horses and early Friends.

The thought continued to the realization that probably all of my body was made up of particles that had been a part of many other things at some time or another, and the atoms would continue to participate in creation long after they departed my body. That led next to the understanding that we are not individuals standing alone, but are in fact all connected by the myriad chains of atoms we are constantly cycling through our bodies. The name for that connection that indeed holds all of the earth's living things could only be Love.

*Nils Pearson is a member of North Central Wisconsin Worship Group, under the care of Madison Meeting, and has been attending Mount Toby Meeting in Western Massachusetts. He writes, "My spiritual practice is to fill my heart with love whenever needed, find it in the air or sky or in the trees and grass. Love is the connection that exists within all things. I find joy in holding others in love and connecting with them on that level."*

*There is no "out of love." It's what we are, deeper and richer than all the spiritual promises and far more ordinary and real. We don't fall in or out of love, because we are permanently in the flow of love itself. Love is the way we are meant to live; love is the measure of the meaning of life.... When we touch life with love, it grows warm and shines down the corridors of the mind with a light that does not fade but grows brighter and more beautiful with the years. When love is present nothing is the same. Even the drab gray walls of this prison begin to glow. It's as if we are transported into a different world, love's world. Then things are seen through love's eyes. Then the pain may turn into a poem, and the sorrow may blossom as a ministry. Love is what shines from our eyes, beats from our heart, speaks with our voice, and meets itself everywhere. Sooner or later, love will reclaim us all. But to let that happen now, to die into love now, before the body dies...Ah!*

—Charles (Tom) Brown

Contributed by Helen Siciliano

## The Stranger in the House

Elizabeth K. Gordon

One Christmas Eve when I was eight, my father came home from work with a stranger, a man my father's age (late twenties) with a kind face and friendly manner. The snowstorm filling our windows with white had rendered the roads impassable. The stranger's car had skidded into a snowdrift. He wasn't going to spend Christmas at home, but thanks to my father neither was he going to have to spend it sleeping, or maybe freezing to death, in his car.

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*Does the stranger remember the little girl basking in the light he brought to our kitchen, in the strange joy of seeing, briefly, the real man, the giving man, who lived in the stranger she called father?*

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I was proud of my father for having helped, and intrigued: sitting with the stranger at the round table in our small kitchen, my father seemed a different person—happy, eager to impress, warm. He suffered from a melancholy bent that would nowadays be called depression. Holidays made it worse, and Christmas was the worst of the holidays. What was it about the stranger that brought out this relaxed, convivial side of my father? Two strangers, it seemed, had come in from the storm. The glow of something shone off them.

Less than ten years later my father was dead. Ten years or so after that I came to understand that much of his unhappiness was rooted in the early death of his father, and in the absence of his older brother James, who had

become a father figure. James was captured early in World War II and spent four years as a prisoner of war—four years that must have spanned the end of my father’s childhood.

Looking back, I saw how he had always longed for the companionship of men, for their praise and love. I had cause to suspect that this longing, or just plain genetic tendency (or both), had shaped him into a bisexual or even a gay man, but ever closeted, and in that violently homophobic time tormented by self-hate.

I don’t remember the morning, whether or not the stranger stayed and watched us open our gifts, how he got back to his car. Maybe the road crews had been out by then and my father drove him. I doubt they hugged goodbye. Probably they shook hands.

Does the stranger, if he lives still, remember that night? Does he remember the little girl basking in the light he brought to our kitchen, in the strange joy of seeing, briefly, the real man, the giving man, who lived in the stranger she called father?

The challenge of my life has been to understand “the chronic angers of [our] house” (to quote Robert Hayden’s “Sunday Mornings”), to forgive that stranger, my father. It helps me to imagine him on a country road on Christmas morning, waving as the stranger’s car disappears between snow banks, thinking, feeling: *I miss my father. I want to be a better man.*

*Elizabeth Gordon is a member of Binghamton Monthly Meeting, New York, and the author of Walk with Us, an account of her journey with triplet boys and their teen parents.*



## A Love I Could Not Put Into Words

Helen Siciliano

I had been meditating every afternoon for the last year and a half. On this lovely spring day, upon completing my meditation, I arose with the calmness and peace associated with a lengthy meditative state. I noticed as I looked out the window that I was one with the blades of grass and the rocks in the road. I was enveloped in a love I could not put into words. This divine love was in everything and everyone. At the core of my being I was this love, and so was everyone else.

In this state of grace, there was no right or wrong, no good or bad, no winning or losing, no judgment whatsoever. Fear was nonexistent! There was no death, and I knew that we all live forever. Everyone I met was love. It did not matter what they looked like, behaved like. I was them and they were me. We were all connected. The utter joy was indescribable. The peace and bliss were beyond words. I became aware that a Presence other than what I usually think of as myself was looking through my eyes. I had become one

with this infinite awareness that simply sees without judgment. It was the very essence of life, eternal life. I wanted nothing, needed nothing. It was peace that passeth understanding.

For about two weeks I was in this state. During this time I came upon a man who ordinarily I’d have seen as drunk and disheveled, sitting on a curb. I saw his true being. He was love. There was no judgment. He was as worthy as everyone else. He

was loved as much as everyone else. I was seeing beyond appearances. I understood that this is our natural state. This is how we are meant to live. It did not matter

what I did or had.

There was Joy in every act, every chore, every occasion. Love and joy pervaded everything. The energy of the universe was love and it flowed through us all. We were all a part of this love. We were all one with God. As the Bible taught, we live and move and have our being in him. As Christ taught, the Kingdom of Heaven is within us.

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*When I tried to describe the experience, my ego came back....One cannot take credit for God.*

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### Tell Us Your Stories!

**What Canst Thou Say** is a worship-sharing group in print. We welcome submissions of articles of 350-1500 words and artwork—line drawings or artwork suitable for black and white reproduction—that illustrate the theme of an issue, or that we might retain for use in future issues. Please send your text submissions in Word or generic text format and artwork in high resolution jpeg files. Photocopied art and typed submissions are also accepted. Send via email to <mariellen.gilpin@gmail.com> or diskette, or hard copy to **WCTS, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820.**

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This realization changed me forever. I was in the world but not of it. For two glorious weeks I went to sleep with a smile on my face and awoke smiling in utter joy. On the fourteenth day, I was having a telephone conversation with my mother, and she too had noticed the profound change. I guess on this day I felt I should tell her. When I tried to describe the experience, my ego came back; for the experience was not me but what was coming through me, which could not really be spoken of—there were no words to adequately describe it. The expansion dissipated as suddenly as it had appeared. One cannot take credit for God.

I didn't know what to do. I was now in ordinary reality, or the relative world as I've come to call it, but with the knowledge of the Greater Truth/God. It was the separation all over again, thrown out of the garden. "How do I live like this?" I asked myself. It was most difficult to listen to the world news, to see how we are to each other.

My experience had changed me forever. To know that we were all connected in Spirit, and to have witnessed the oneness of all creation in a state of love and bliss, was to glimpse God. The experience of feeling something other than myself as myself, yet that had its own identity, had changed my perspective on life in a way that is difficult to express.

It was then that I began to search for others who could relate to such a

revelation, and I found myself at the University of Connecticut in a support group for people who had had near death experiences, who understood that one can touch the center of one's being without the body dying, but by dying to the self instead. It wasn't long after that my search for a church that exemplified love and unity began, and it was my son, Joe, who led me to First Church of Christ.

So dear friends, as we come to know that we, all of us, are unconditionally loved by the Beloved of all hearts, may we begin to sense our shared oneness with love. As we come to understand that there is but one being that each of us participates in, we may begin to sense our oneness with all. Everyone has been aware of eternal moments, be they in nature, in a child's birth, in listening to sublime music, in glimpses of wonder or in the sudden sense of Presence within us; each a hint of heaven here on earth, of our own consciousness being expanded out into the infinity of oneness that we are. Fear and all its companions have no home here. For in the end, love is all there is! It is my hope that we will one day have Heaven on Earth and live as Christ has taught, loving our neighbors as ourselves. Amen!

*Helen Siciliano retired from banking, has three grown sons, and has been married 48 years. She belongs to First Church of Christ in New London, Connecticut. She began meditating at 45, just as a way to relax.*

WCTS Editor Mariellen Gilpin was interviewed about the book listed below on "Keepin' the Faith" November 25, 2007. You can listen to it at: <will.uiuc.edu/am/ktf>

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## A Storehouse for Our Journals

*Editor Mariellen Gilpin recently wrote to the Curators of Quaker Colleges' Quaker Collections. The following is their dialogue:*

I am in regular correspondence with several of our authors. I am not the only one of those who read WCTS who keeps a journal. Many of us have kept journals for several years, trying to sort out our mystical experiences and learn from them. These journals are a rich treasure trove for future researchers in Quaker spirituality. I hate to see these journals get thrown in dumpsters upon the deaths of the writers. Would your Quaker archivist be interested in becoming a storehouse for these journals?

**Thomas Hamm at Earlham College:** We are interested in your journals and the journals of other Friends. We'd be delighted to have any whose writers would like to have them preserved. Imposing access restrictions during the lifetime of a donor is not uncommon. We could draw up gift agreements individually, so that each writer would be comfortable. <tomh@earlham.edu>

**Gwen Gosney Erickson of Guilford College:** The Friends Historical Collection does include personal papers and welcomes additions that document Friends in the southeastern United States. Please see our collection development statement on our website for a fuller description <guilford.edu>. Note that the Friends Historical Collection does not accept personal papers on loan. Individuals are asked to complete a donor agreement in which they can specify copyright and any other restrictions on use of their papers. Individuals interested in donating their papers to the Friends Historical Collection should contact me directly so I can address any specific questions.

<archives@guilford.edu>

## Letters to the Editor

The book *Extraordinary Knowing* by Elizabeth Lloyd Mayer concerns ways people have picked up knowledge that they could not ordinarily know. Many of her examples are in the telepathy category; others suggest out-of-body travel or waiting for a visual inspiration. I read some place that when Einstein was asked how he derived his famous equation for the relationship between energy and mass he said, "It was given to me." Such an intuitive experience has never happened to me—until recently.

I'd seen a geometrical puzzle involving a hypothetical farmer and an L-shaped plot of land that he wished

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*Getting the answer was nice but how it was given to me is far more interesting.*

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to divide among his four sons, giving each a piece of the same shape and area. If three of the sons offered to buy out the fourth son, then the division would be trivial, but otherwise nothing occurred to me. I thought no more about it, and then one morning I woke up seeing the mental picture of that plot of land with the correct dividing lines in place!

Getting the answer was nice but how it was given to me is far more interesting. Some say that the mind works while you're asleep, but I don't think I paid enough attention to the puzzle to deserve that. I have had the experience of being totally absorbed, day and night, in an engineering problem until I'd worked it out, but this was not like that. An engineering puzzle is solved by pondering and calculating; research problems may yield to

intuition. My experience was like an answer in a dream, except that it happened in the process of waking up.

Could my spirit guides have given it to me? I'm open to that idea. I keep a list of possible miracles that have happened to me, so for now I'll just add it to that list. —**Jack Fogarty**

WCTS arrived in today's mail. Thanks. I'm so grateful for you and the others who gather rain and sunbeams and turn them into rainbows for us all to read four times a year.

—**Wendy Clarissa Geiger**

Yesterday I received a copy of the marvelous WCTS issue about Gratitude. I am sending a copy of this issue to two dear friends. I resonate with Al-

fred LaMotte's "Discovery," and with Willing Madiera's "bellowing out" the doxology (a dear, elderly Friend once confided to me that in her first church experience at the age of three years she afterward announced she liked best the Woolly Goose song—"praise to the Father, Son and Woolly Goose." Jennifer Frick's concept of making a resentment list and a gratitude list, then discovering that often the same people and things show up on both lists, is a great help to me in working through my own life challenges. Spiritual heroines and heroes, all, in this wonderful issue of WCTS. Thank you!

—**James Baker**, a "Friend Away" from his beloved Illinois Downers Grove Friends Meeting, his other home.

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# Please write for *What Canst Thou Say?*

(See instructions for authors on page 8)



*August 2009*

## **Body Prayer**

**Guest Editor: Amy Perry  
with Mariellen Gilpin**

*David danced before the Lord* (2 Samuel, 6:14). All of our being belongs to God—our body as well as our soul. How do you use your body to come closer to God? What is your experience of God using your body as an instrument or vessel during prayer? How has a movement or a movement practice helped you spiritually? When have you felt that moving your body was prayer? Tell us about your body prayer.

Deadline: May 15, 2009

*November 2009*

## **Bread and Roses**

**Editors: Michael Resman  
and Judy Lumb**

*Man does not live by bread alone; he lives on every word that God utters.* (Matthew 4:4) To those who came to help, it appeared the people in this very poor village needed bread to eat, but one villager planted roses. Soon everyone else planted flowers. They may have been poor, but what their souls craved was beauty. What do people really need? How have you been led to service, to meet needs? How have those experiences changed your life?

Deadline: August 15, 2009

*February 2010*

## **A Covenant with Creation**

**Editor: Patricia McBee**

Everywhere we turn we are hearing about our planet in peril, global warming, degradation of air and water, extinction of species. How do these changes in the world affect your soul? Do you feel a special longing or drawing toward a new relationship with the natural world? What practices do you have to help you move toward right relationship with all of creation? How does the environmental crisis affect your relationship with the Divine and how does your relationship with the Divine guide your response to the environmental crisis

Deadline: November 15, 2009

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**Strangers**