



August 2022
Number 115

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*

Truth

Knowledge of God

David Blair

My knowledge of God comes from personal experience. I know God as love, and I find love everywhere and at all times. Love does not conquer evil or death, but it is longer than death and present wherever evil is. I also know God as forgiveness. These truths came to me through experience and, I would add, through grace.

I do not know God as omnipotent or even omniscient. I used to express a wish and follow it with “God willing” or “inshallah.” I no longer say this, as I don’t feel that God is pulling strings and controlling the outcome of every event, or even abstaining from making those decisions, as in “allowing” a hurricane or a shooting or any other catastrophe.

However, I know people well who do hold this view of God as “in control” of all. Other dear friends have no place for God in their full and well-led lives. How does my truth live next to theirs?

First by being open to the possibility that my experience might show me something new. I hope I will not be too proud to change if I receive an unexpected teaching that illuminates a new part of my path.

Second by acknowledging that my experience is mine and not necessarily shared by anyone else, and certainly not prescriptive of what others should feel. I know that my “truth” may be considered subjective by others, and that is fine with me. It is no less true for me. I have no desire or need to impose it on anyone else, or even to prove to them that it is true.

I continue to be curious about what has brought others to their truth. I trust that in sharing we will recognize the light within each other.

David Blair David Blair has lived and worked in China, the Philippines and Vietnam. His inner journey has taken him to even more amazing places. David co-founded the Mariposa Museum and World Culture Center in Peterborough, New Hampshire, a museum dedicated to peace and justice through understanding across boundaries <mariposamuseum.org>. He is now a student at the Boston University School of Theology. He blogs at <orionblair.wordpress.com>.

From the Editor:

This issue has come together in an unusual way. At first there were wonderful submissions from some of our regular contributors, including a reminder from Sally Campbell:

“Think it possible that you may be mistaken.”

Roger Burns emailed me that he intended to contribute, but he wanted feedback on his submission first. So, he posted it on our email discussion group. Incidentally, he was the person who started that email discussion group a couple of years ago. We are grateful because it has given us a way to remind our community of upcoming issues of WCTS, which has increased submissions.

Roger posted his potential submission, which generated an email conversation that forms the central part of this issue. Thanks, again, Roger!

—Judy Lumb
Editor for this issue

Speaking Truth to Friends of the Truth

Jennifer Elam

What Canst Thou Say? (WCTS) is an independent publication co-operatively produced by Friends with an interest in mystical experience and contemplative practice. It is published in February, May, August, and November. The editorial and production team is Rhonda Ashurst, Muriel Dimock, Lissa Field, George Hebben, Lieselotte Heil, Judy Lumb, Grayce Mesner, Mike Resman, Earl Smith, and Eleanor Warnock.

Tell us your stories! **WCTS** is a worship-sharing group in print. We hope to help Friends be tender and open to the Spirit. Articles that communicate best to our readers focus on specific events and are written in the first person.

Although there are themes announced for most issues, we accept any expressions of mystical experiences or contemplative practice at any time.

We welcome submissions of articles of less than 1500 words and artwork suitable for black and white reproduction. 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 <wctseditors@gmail.com> or hard copy to **Rhonda Ashurst, PO Box 9032, Reno NV 89507.**

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Dear Friends of the Truth, can you hear my truth or is political correctness more correct today? Your lens of constant focus on black and white, binary thinking about black and white in the context of race is harming people; it has harmed me; it is harming many; race is not binary. We are all more than black and white; my truth is that black and white thinking about black and white is itself racist and discriminatory in impact.

Why is gender now not binary but race is more binary? My truth is that neither is binary. Can you hear me? We are all much more than that!

Can you hear me when I tell you how painful it is to be shunned as more racist than you, when I have lived my life in racial justice work? Can you hear me that it is painful, more painful than I can bear some days to be shunned by you, because you know you are more righteous than me?

How do I confront my delusion that you were my loving community of 30 years? How do I build a new life? How do I know where I belong now? Where is home? Where is my community? Where is my grounding? Where are the Friends of Truth that can hear my truth, let me become visible again, after being made invisible, only a projection? Where are those that see that of God in everyone and do not project themselves into that of God in me?

And while I am speaking my truth, can you hear me? "white Appalachian" is two words, not three: "white Appalachian racist."

A new me is coming, the new me that has so far survived. So far survived more pain than I can bear, no promises for tomorrow. That makes me different than before, but I don't yet know how. So far, it seems like compassion and Radical Love have grown in me. I hope so; THAT is my calling Radical Love for all; all God's Creatures, Critters, Brats and Chillun, got a place in the choir.

Jennifer Elam has been a Quaker since she fell in love with Berea Friends Meeting, Kentucky, in 1991. She moved back to Kentucky because when COVID hit, it became clear she could no longer lead her double life of going back and forth from elsewhere to Kentucky. In June of 2022 Pendle Hill will be publishing her pamphlet, **Hillbilly Quaker**, the story of how she turned her back on her "hillbilly" heritage, but later came to honor her heritage beyond the stereotypes. Jennifer is offering a workshop on "Mediating Trauma Through Creative Expression" with Gloria Stearns-Bruner. Trauma and grief can be stories that have forgotten how to dance. They will help participants learn to move toward healing. For more information or to join/schedule a workshop, contact gloriabruner@gmail.com.

Long Nurtured Truth Challenged

Elizabeth Mitchell

I held to the conviction that spirit is One, we are all little pieces of the light, and that in life, that light is hidden by bad habits, bad experiences, carelessness, lack of awareness, to greater or lesser degrees in everyone.

When my father, then my mother, died after I had spent decades as an adult, I found comfort in the feeling that I could communicate with their spirit which was now “one with the One”, and that we all understood from a different perspective that the mistakes we had made were now forgiven.

When my husband died, after more than twenty years of an imperfectly “perfect” marriage, at first I found comfort in the ideas expressed above. As the months passed, the realization of his absence made me appreciate his presence in a way I had failed to while I had the chance. The conviction of a spirit reality to which we all return, of which we all partake, and with which there is communication and forgiveness began to be sorely challenged.

I have been forced to realize that theory is all very well, but in practice... It is said the difference between theory and practice is will power. Now I am having to practice breathing, meditation, and the cessation of thought through the exercise of my will. Intellectually, I am as convinced as I ever was.

Practically, I have only just awoken to what an embodiment of such a belief would be. It is moment by moment awareness, at this moment transient in me; like enlightenment, which is said to be a state many experience once, or sometimes, in moments of perfection, feeling that unity of being. Enlightenment happens in little moments for many people. The idea is to enable more and more of those moments by practice and grace until all one’s life is that blessed flow.

Elizabeth E Mitchell was born and educated in New Zealand. She has traveled the world and became a US citizen in 1999. She is a self-taught artist, and made her living selling her silk paintings through galleries and the art festival circuit for a quarter of a century. Now retired, she teaches art, silk painting, and yoga in her studio. She has always written, but rarely submits for publication. She lives in Tampa and is an attendee at Tampa Quaker Meeting.

Me and the Vietnam Vet

Donne Hayden

One morning in the summer before the 2012 Presidential election (Obama vs. Romney), I went to Sam’s Club to buy a bunk bed mattress for my oldest grandson. The mattress wasn’t heavy, though a bit floppy and unwieldy. I loaded it on a long flat cart, wheeled it through the checkout stand, and was pulling the cart across the parking lot, holding on to the mattress with one hand to keep it upright when the far end of it started flopping, and it slipped off the cart.

A man who had just gotten out of his car stopped to help. As he hefted it back on the cart, I said, “Really, it’s not heavy—I just need to get it upright again...”

“I’ll help you load it in your car,” he said, taking the cart handle from me. “Where are you parked?”

“Over there,” I waved toward my car an aisle over, and he was already on his way. Oh no, I thought. He wore a Vietnam Veterans baseball cap, and he was headed for the back of my car where I had two bumper stickers: “War is Not the Answer” and “Peace Be With You.” In the 60s, I had opposed the war, but I had good friends who served in Vietnam. Knowing how fiercely defensive some of them were on the subject, I didn’t want to upset this man, or get in an argument in the middle of Sam’s parking lot.

I followed, calling after him, “I don’t want you to be offended by my bumper stickers.” Then added lamely by way of explanation, “I’m a minister ...”

He was already standing at the rear of my car and might not even have noticed the bumper stickers if I hadn’t called his attention to them.

He was silent as I clicked my key to unlock the car, and then he said, “So you’re a preacher, huh? Guess I know who you’re going to vote for!” He grinned at me as we lifted the mattress into the hatchback and started wrestling with it.

Glancing at his Vietnam Veteran cap, I said, “I guess I know who you’re going to vote for, too.”

“Oh, no,” he said, “I’m going to vote for him, too. That other’un hasn’t done nothing.”

I assumed that since he wore a “Vietnam Veteran” cap, he was conservative and opposed to Obama. But

it hadn't occurred to me that he would think that, as a minister, I must be "Christian," and therefore conservative, probably a Republican, and definitely opposed to Barack Obama.

"Oh. . ." I said. "No." I really didn't want to talk politics; I couldn't think of what to say, so I added "I'm a Quaker minister."

He was very quiet as we struggled with the mattress which seemed like it might be too long to fit in my car.

After a long silence, he said, "Well, I didn't want to go to Vietnam."

I could see he was trying to make sense of it all; he was talking to a preacher, but evidently a liberal one opposed to war—he clearly expected criticism. I just wanted to get the mattress packed and end this uncomfortable conversation.

"I know." I said. "I know. I was there. I remember. If I'd been a young man in that place and that time, I'm sure I'd have gone, too." And that's true; given who I was in 1965, if I'd been male, no doubt I would have enlisted.

In a minute he said, "I didn't go to church for a long time, but now I go to the Southern Baptist church."

"I started out with the Southern Baptists," I said, intent on finding some common ground but also telling the truth. "And went on from there ..." I added.

"I'll go to any church as long as they teach moral values," he said heartily.

Finally, with my bending the mattress down in the front seat so he could push it from the back, we got the mattress far enough in the car that he could slam down the hatchback door.

"Thank you for your help," I said, with sincere warmth as I reached for his hand. "Thank you very much. May God be with you."

"And you," he said, holding my hand in both of his and shaking it. "May God richly bless you."

Both of us were surprised, I think, by the deep feelings stirred up in this mundane encounter in Sam's parking lot. It was a very human moment.

Would he have refused to help me if he'd known I was a liberal Obama supporter and a "peacenik"? If I'd needed help, would I have asked someone I assumed was a conservative Republican? I like to think so, but perhaps I would have looked for someone else to approach. As it was, each of us acted out of our basic humanness before we became aware of our differences. We were—each of us—caught in the act of being kind rather than being right.

Donne Hayden (now retired) has lived a rich and fulfilling life as an English teacher (including five years teaching abroad) and minister (among the UUs and Quakers). She currently lives with her daughter and family in Cincinnati, Ohio, and is working on a book.

WCTS has Two Blogs and an Email Discussion Group

What Canst Thou Say? has two blogs:

1) *Quaker Mystics: Gathering for Discernment of God's Guidance* was created to support gatherings sponsored by **What Canst Thou Say ?**, but is now being used to share writings from our community, especially poetry by Michael Resman <quakermystics.wordpress.com>.

2) *The Worship Sharing in Print* blog was created to publish essays between quarterly issues. It has also been used to publish a few submissions that didn't fit into the journal. <worshipsharinginprint.wordpress.com>

If you would like to contribute to either of these blogs, contact Judy Lumb <judylumb@yahoo.com>.

What Canst Thou Say? sponsors an email discussion group on mystical experience and contemplative practice. In May of 2020, Roger Burns, a WCTS reader, asked us to begin an email discussion group. Mike Resman and Judy Lumb of WCTS worked with Roger, who did the technical work of setting up the email discussion group.

Besides the email discussions of mystical experiences, the members of the WCTS editorial team use this email discussion group to remind our community of upcoming deadlines for future issues of WCTS.

If you are not already a member, please join by sending an email request to <WCTS.Owner@gmail.com> or Judy Lumb <judyumb@yahoo.com>.

Sometimes It Is the Messenger That Is the Message

Roger Burns

I believe there is something to be learned from every vocal ministry that we hear and consider. Beyond that, there will be times when the value of a message is not obvious, or the message may even contradict our usual assumptions. It will be well for us to consider that we have something important to learn—or to unlearn—from considering a new point of view.

There may also be times when a message is coming from a limited viewpoint that originates from assumptions that our inner wisdom knows we should not readily embrace. It will be tempting to simply dismiss such messages out of hand. But there is a particular spiritual exercise that may be useful to take up in such instances.

When we hear a vocal ministry that feels wrong, we should then in some cases consider how a person's life path might have evolved in such a way that they would feel led to offer the vocal ministry they have shared. A more important truth may then be discovered by trying to understand the messenger rather than focusing solely on the words of the message itself. In fact, gaining insight into the Friend who is giving the message may help us better understand the greater context of the larger world within which we are all living.

In regard to this, I have noticed that some Friends insist on something that I find I must challenge. I have heard a number of Friends insist that every word spoken in vocal ministry during worshipful silence is sacred and must be absolutely and literally true. And that the only challenge for us is to understand and accept what has been given. It may disturb some Friends to consider what I am about to claim, but I declare that such an insistence is simply not wise. To claim that all vocal ministries as given are always true is an extreme view.

In scripture, the man from Nazareth said, "Know the truth, and the truth will set you free". But he never said, "Believe every claim that others insistently put to you in a religious setting, and such claims are what will set you free." Similarly, George Fox bid all of us to

walk cheerfully over the world and answer to "that of God in everyone." But Fox never claimed that every word offered as vocal ministry in a weekly meeting for worship is always sacred in every instance and must be considered undebatedly accurate and truthful.

To insist that all words offered in vocal ministry are always sacred and must always be true in a literal sense is an extreme that reminds me of the claim made by some that every word written in the Bible is always true in a literal sense and in every single instance.

This diatribe of mine may seem strange and burdensome to the many Friends who have never heard this extreme claim. My apologies to you. But the fact that I have heard this insistence in more than one monthly meeting tells me that it is worthy to comment on this phenomenon.

In those instances where Friends may feel led to offer vocal ministry during worship, there are three things that are going on. First, we ourselves hear something inwardly. Then we may voice that message to our worshipping community. Lastly, our fellow seekers listen and consider what we have shared. In my view, the deep listening done by ourselves and by our fellow seekers is a sacred act. But the act of our voicing that ministry is not itself necessarily a sacred act.

Please keep in mind, our meetings for worship are open to all—including complete strangers and one-time visitors. There is nothing magical about Quaker worship wherein God or the Universe ensures that vocal ministry is always offered only by those who are genuinely inspired, or who are in some manner seasoned.

In scripture, Christ strove to lead us to his kingdom. But he made plain that his kingdom is not of this world. We should indeed seek perfection. But we are mistaken when we are certain that we have found it in our earthly existence, even if we feel we have found it in some portion of our Friends' meeting—such as in every vocal ministry that is ever offered.

So yes, I agree that there is always a deeper truth available to be discovered in every vocal ministry that is offered to us. But just not necessarily the face value of what every messenger has consciously chosen to convey to us. A spiritually mature listener will consider the full truth of both the message and its messenger.

We are called upon to love and accept each messenger, not necessarily every message just as given. There is more sacredness in the listening than there is in the saying of it. Sometimes it is the very nature of the messenger that is the true message.

Roger Burns attends at the Adelphi Friends Meeting (Maryland). *“This is a topic that has been on my mind for some time, but I have never had a substantive discussion with anyone about it. Here I criticize something that to some Friends is a sacred cow. I’ve tried to avoid having my wording create too much friction, but I have not shrunk from my main point.”* Jennifer Elam contributed editorial advice and Roger also received the following feedback from the online WCTS discussion group:

Mary Kedl: Roger, what you hold is why I was able to speak out of the silence. It was not my call to know what my message was...I was aware that the revealing of myself could be that message, not the words. Thanks for expressing this!

Wendy Clarissa Geiger: Roger, you are sooooo right on! This essay is absolutely brilliant. Thank thee so very much for articulating this truth. When I heard someone use “He” for God, it used to repulse me. Then, in recent years I have been fine with it. I think, “this is where this person is at.” Truth evolves. A long-ago letter to the Editor of *Friends Journal* wrote of understanding the expansion of the Universe as God breathing out. When the Universe contracts (in some distant future), that is God breathing in. Friends, I love “feeling where words come from” in vocal ministering in meeting for worship.

We help each other expand our senses/understandings/ponderings of living, dying, and carrying on. This is being human. This is being Quaker. We are in different realities from one another. Reincarnation and rebirth are very much aspects of my life making any sense whatsoever. In my father of blessed memory’s 91 years of living, he experienced a wisp of one mystical experience. Being raised Quaker, encouraged in the mystical experience of meeting for worship, I have spent my 58 and a half years of this lifetime basing my spirituality on “being honest.” My father could not understand how I live my life, with mystical experiences multiple times a day.

So important in your essay, Friend Roger Burns, is the understanding the messenger’s experiences we know nothing about, yet assume these unknown experiences are present, are valid, are acknowledged as important or, at least, aspects of their lives...which we respect...this, Friends, is being human, being Quaker.

Friend Roger Burns, you did good. I approve. This Friend speaks my mind. Or, as Young Friends have interpreted that previous sentence: This freak spends my mind. (Just some Quaker humor). Utmost respect and gratitude, Friend Roger Burns. If Friends want to read transcribed vocal ministry that I have delivered in meeting for worship since the early nineties, Southeastern Yearly Meeting published my first book, *My Life Is A Quilt: A Book Of Quaker Messages*.

Friends truly have no idea how revolutionary and revelatory, how profound, how courageous, how guiding and encouraging and mystical we are, because we don’t share our vocal ministry much beyond a specific meeting for worship, a specific group of Friends. Friends, we are offering the same vocal ministry all over this country within a week or two.

But we don’t know it, because we don’t tell others in other meetings, in other yearly meetings. With my book, I hope that changes. I hope we regularly share to wider Quakerdom our vocal ministry. Only one “public” Friend agreed to write a blurb for the back cover of my book. Friend John Calvi’s blurb was long, so it is the forward to the book. A Friend in Southeastern Yearly Meeting explained no “public” Friend wanted to risk their reputation by blurbing such a book, as in, “how dare any Friend write down their messages?”

Furthermore, as much as we Friends go on and on about listening for God, God, God, heeding God’s leadings, blah, blah, blah...it is typical to look askance at Friends who claim to have heard from God. (LOL)

As Lily Tomlin (written by Jane Wagner) stated: “When you talk to God, that’s called ‘prayer’. When God talks to you, that’s called ‘schizophrenia’.”

Thank thee for this faithfulness, Friend Roger Burns. Thee is on to something precious. To respect “where someone is at” in their journey, in their life, is to “answer that of God” in them. They are human, like you/we/I am human. It is profoundly Quakerly.

A Mundane and Nasty Truth

Janice Stensrude

As I was pondering a high-minded dive into the nature of spiritual truth, my attention was shanghaied by a mundane and decidedly nasty truth that turned my emotional life upside down.

A year ago, my former husband had a heart attack. Just two years before, he had lost his wife of 40 years, a woman 15 years his junior. As is not so unusual for an 85-year-old confronted with serious illness, he began to take stock of his life, and in the process of luxuriating in the alarmed attention from the two sons that he and I share, he began talking to them about our marriage and how it ended 45 years before. I will never know if he lied deliberately, or if he has repeated the story so many times that it has become his truth, but the effect it had on my relationship with my children was shattering. My younger son confronted me with the accusation that I had made a selfish decision to divorce, never considering what it would do to my children — and further, it will take him a very long time to forgive me.

So much for all the professional advice that children should not be burdened with the details of a divorce. At the time, I had simply told my children that the 15-year marriage had become too difficult to manage. Neither asked for details and I didn't provide any.

We married because I became pregnant during an episode that today would be labeled date rape. Not a violent episode, I just said that we shouldn't be doing this, and I didn't kick or scream or push him away. And as one does, I reframed my reality. I accepted that my virginity was a lost cause and that being someone's lover was preferable to being someone's victim.

I had just begun to suspect that I was pregnant and was in the early stages of wrestling with my options when my ravisher asked me point blank, "Are you pregnant?"

"I think so," I replied.

He found a doctor, made the appointment, and accompanied me to the doctor's office. With the pregnancy medically certified, a few weeks later we were married in a Presbyterian chapel. He would not even consider any other resolution to our problem. I thought him to be such an honorable man.

We had been married several years when he surprised me with the confession that he had intended to get me pregnant so that I would have to marry him. I was taken aback but decided to think of it as flattering — and then I got the rest of the story. The woman he loved had rejected his marriage proposal, telling him, "You're not husband material." Shortly after that, I became the pawn in his scheme to get even with her.

Our marriage unfolded in alternating cycles of romance and emotional abuse. I attributed his bad moods to business pressures and tolerated his cruelty, looking forward to the romance and flowers that seemed to cycle round about every three years — until it got stuck in an increasing cycle of cruelty that lasted for five years.

When I married, I promised myself I would never, never, never get a divorce. Now faced with a situation I had never imagined, I reconciled the situation by filing for legal separation. It wasn't divorce, I told myself, and maybe we could salvage something after a cooling down period.

The ink of the agreement was barely dry when my husband walked through my back door, slammed his hand down on the kitchen table and demanded, "I want a divorce and I want it now!" The legal separation was quickly converted to a divorce action under Texas's new no-fault statute. But there was another surprise in store.

One of our mutual friends called to ask why I was pushing for immediate divorce. When I confronted my husband about this variation on the truth, he responded, "Well, I only said I wanted a divorce to make you come back home where you belong."

Already emotionally exhausted and resigned, it was a straw that I chose not to grasp.

Two years after our divorce, I turned down another of his periodic efforts to reconcile. Ten days later he married one of his girlfriends, though he continued his affair with his secretary, as well as his customary recreational dalliances, including his new wife's "best friend." My marriage had been lived in the shadow of his "true love," and now his second wife's marriage was being lived in the shadow of "the neatest thing I ever owned," as he described me.

So there I was, 45 years later, committed to the truth, but conflicted with how much I should reveal. Eventually, I wrote my son a long letter, detailing some of the cruelties and quietly tiptoeing around others.

I didn't hear from my son for more than a year after that, and then he called to chat, as if his stunning words had never been spoken.

Recently, I have revisited my notions of why my ex is who he is and why he does what he does. Instead of picturing him as a scheming, hurtful deceiver, completely devoted to his own pleasure, I constructed a view of an insecure man, who worried about his manhood, a worry he had once shared with me. Another time, in a voice filled with puzzlement and wonder, he had even told me how his teenage self had been mean to his girlfriends because he liked to see them cry. Looking back, I can now imagine a very

Before the elusive particle could be discovered . . . it had to be imagined.

The Higgs boson discovery was the result of a search for the answer to a basic question: If mass comes from molecules and atoms, and molecules and atoms come from electrons and quarks, where do electrons and quarks come from? If you are as ignorant as I am about quantum physics, you might well find Brian Greene's brilliant essay, "How the Higgs Boson Was Found," a great help in beginning to understand.

<<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/how-the-higgs-boson-was-found-4723520>>

human but imperfect young man, wounded when the woman he loved told him he wasn't husband material, and how he became determined to prove her wrong. I was swept up in his plan to prove to her (and to himself) that he could be a good husband.

A friend, currently navigating her own difficult situation, describes herself as "a haunted house." "Everyone has their own narrative," she says. "If your son chooses to validate his father's narrative, so be it. We live in a world of narratives."

But the truth! Where is the truth? I must find my peace without the answer, resigned to living in a house haunted by narratives, each demanding recognition, each a version of someone's truth. I recall years ago when I stumbled upon the realization that behind every truth is a greater truth waiting to be discovered. A few years later, I laughed out loud when I read that, after years of searching for the "God particle," a sort of fundamental mother of all life, physicists had found it, only to discover that it, too, had some unidentified source hidden behind it. I have no doubt that hidden truths in my personal history will continue to reveal themselves. That's just the nature of life.

*In search of a spiritual home, Janice Stensrude has tasted Catholicism, a dozen or more varieties of Protestantism, Spiritualism, and even Sukyo Mahikari. In 2003, as a final effort, she decided to visit a Buddhist sangha. She had no sooner made a list of Buddhist meeting locations when she awoke one morning to a neon sign before her eyes: "Christ is the Answer." So much for Buddhism. Soon after, an internet search for Quaker genealogy records landed her in the lap of a Quaker meeting website with a short description of Quaker beliefs. Bingo! She became a regular at the Quaker meeting located only a block from her high-rise home in Perth, Western Australia. Through the magic of the internet, serendipity soon delivered her into the hands of Mariellen Gilpin, and her relationship with **What Canst Thou Say?** had begun. Since returning to the U.S. in 2010, she has attended meetings in Houston and Galveston, as well as a single meeting with the sole Quaker in Nacogdoches, Texas. Now living in a Colorado community where there is no Quaker meeting, the magic of Zoom allows her to worship with Quakers in Pendle Hill, Pennsylvania, as well as her previous meeting in Australia. Janice's lifetime of paper pushing has evolved into a career as a writer/editor. At the age of 81, she continues to find the Russian-doll search for truth compelling — and frequently humbling.*

Friending Rosie: A Review

Judy Lumb

Judith Wright Favor, 2021. *Friending Rosie: Respect on Death Row*. Conneaut NY: Page Publishing.

Judith Favor with Rosie Alfaro, 2021. *Friending Rosie on Death Row*. Pendle Hill Pamphlet 470

Judith Favor is an author and frequent contributor to **What Canst Thou Say?** You may have seen recent practical books on *Sabbath Economics*, or her novel, *The Beacons of Larkin Street*. *Friending Rosie* is about finding truth on death row. It first appeared as a book, alternating writings by Friend Judith and the inmate with whom she began corresponding in 2000. It also includes some of Rosie’s art.

Friend Judith begins by commenting that modern social media have turned “friend” into a verb, which she did way back in the 1960s and now reclaims in the title. With encouragement from members of Quakers United in Publishing (QUIP), Judith later condensed her Quaker testimony into a Pendle Hill Pamphlet.

“Rosie’s words and mine have come together in these pages to make a larger story. The practice of rereading brought out themes, like becoming better women. When we keep moving through the written word, hearing and seeing it again, we are likely to notice things we didn’t see or hear the first time.”

Rosie writes, “Here’s my Serenity Prayer: God grant me the forgiveness for committing murder ... The strength to one day forgive myself before I go insane or die ... And the wisdom, no matter what, to realize and accept that I am and can be a better woman. Help me. Amen.”

As with her other books, I found *Friending Rosie* a compelling read. The personalities of both authors come shining through. Here is truth in a poignant form:

“Whenever we speak truth, or write truth, or hear truth, a kind of internal yes occurs. The chest may expand. The face may light up. Tears may well up in our eyes. We may tip our head back for a moment and press our eyes shut. Perhaps we place a hand on our chest or form our fingers into a steeple and press them to our lips. Our shoulders may lift and straighten. If someone is near, we may move closer to them, reach out for a hug or lay a hand on their back or shoulder. The Truth receiver in us senses the presence of the platinum thread and wants to savor the moment.

“The breath gathers in each new truth and lets it out. Ah Yes. This is true. There is a feeling of rightness. Some mysterious bodily sense lets us know when the right words do come, words we can trust.” – Judith Favor, *Friending Rosie*.

Appendices provide useful information on Restoration and ways to support women prisoners.

Judy Lumb is a member of the **What Canst Thou Say?** editorial team. She is a member of both Atlanta Friends Meeting and the Belize Friends Church. She splits her time between Barranco, Belize, and Atlanta Georgia.

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November 2022
Spirit-Led Action
Editor: Rhonda Ashurst

Looking back over the past month, year, or decade, what are the times that you knew Spirit was answering your need or guiding your actions? How do you experience these leadings? How do you test/season your leadings? Has a leading turned out badly? Have you believed you were misled only to find that, in hindsight, you were led to exactly where you needed to be?

Deadline: August 15, 2022

February 2023
Unitive and Numinous Experiences
Editor: Michael Resman

Academics divide mystical experiences into two categories, unitive (being one with everything) and numinous (the presence of the divine). There's debate about whether one is more advanced than the other. Have you known both? How did they differ? How do they fit within your spiritual life?

Deadline: November 15, 2022

May 2023
Angels
Editor: Janice Stensrude

Some of us have reported feeling the presence of angels, some few have reported seeing angels, some have received some miracle in the nick of time, convinced that the mortal helper was an angel appointed by the Divine, and yet others have wondered at their own improbable actions, feeling themselves appointed to an angel's task. Have you seen or felt an angelic presence? Has someone helped you in such a way that you saw the Divine working through them? Have you been the angel in someone else's life?

Deadline: February 15, 2022

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