



**Proceedings of**  
**Sharing Our Stories: The First Annual**  
**Gathering of Friendly Mystics**  
**Earlham College, Richmond, Indiana**  
**June 14 – 16, 2013**

*“ . . . an amazing, meaningful weekend; one of the best Quaker experiences I’ve ever had.” — Cathy Barney*

*“It was two days before my little feet really touched the ground again!” — Mariellen Gilpin*

*“It is a delight for me to gather with other mystics—to discuss our experiences without being considered either saintly or crazy . . .” — Pat McBee*

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2nd Edition  
with additional material and minor corrections

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## The Epistle

*Greetings to Friends everywhere from the participants in "Sharing Our Journeys: The First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics"*

*What Canst Thou Say?* (*WCTS*) is a Quaker journal, a meeting for worship in print. In a rare face-to-face meeting in October, 2012, the editorial team considered how we might assure the longevity of *WCTS*. Out of the worshipful silence came a clear leading, "We need to have a gathering!" We need each other for support of our spiritual journeys, and we expect that out of knowing one another in that which is Eternal, somehow the future leadership of *WCTS* will emerge. "Sharing Our Journeys: The First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics" was held at Earlham College June 14 – 16, 2013, with 46 Friends attending.

The first evening we gathered in worship was like a symphony. We could all feel the energy as worship went deep very quickly. Vocal ministry all centered around a common theme of help: "Can someone please help me?" Two songs were offered, "Give Yourself to Love" and "This Little Light of Mine." We were all surprised to find that our student desks rocked, an unusual Quaker Meeting for Worship in a room full of rocking chairs. Mystical experiences were defined as various situations when the power of God breaks into our lives and radically changes them.

We were honored to have among us Jean Roberts, who, along with Jim Flory, founded *WCTS* in 1994. She shared some of that history in a small group discussion and promises to write an article for the 20th anniversary anthology next year. The meaning of the journal title was emphasized as the quote was read from Margaret Fell in which she described George Fox saying, "You will say 'Christ saith this and the Apostles say this; but *what canst thou say?* Art thou a child of the Light and hast thou walked in the Light in what thou speakest; is it inwardly from God?' . . . This opened me so, that it cut me to the heart, and then I saw clearly we were all wrong."

The gathering served us by providing a safe place to share our mystical experiences, which is not always comfortable in our home meetings. There were no plenaries, committee meetings or Meetings for Worship for Business, but instead we focused on "sharing our stories." Meeting each other has built relationships between mystics from coast to coast and brought old f(F)riends together. We are already planning the second annual gathering of mystics here at Earlham College next year.

Out of worship there was a leading that this group of mystics was called to name the spiritual condition of the world. In response to this leading we intend to hold an additional gathering composed of extended worship next year to work together to receive God's continuing guidance.

## **From the Organizers**

Dear Sisters and Brothers (for such you have become to us):

We rejoice over our blessed time together at Earlham. We thank you all for the work you did in making it what it was. People opened themselves deeply and reached out warmly. There was an abundance of acceptance, concern and nurturing of each other's lives. We have lived out the Good News as we watched God at work. Many of us returned home having been moved along our spiritual path to a new place and new beginnings.

The *WCTS* organizers were often thanked, and we are grateful. We were not your leaders, but your servants. Our task was not to show you the way, but to provide a place where you could find your own way. We will work to again provide a container for you next year.

God Bless,

Mariellen Gilpin, Judy Lumb, Mike Resman

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## How Did It Come About?

*It was our first-ever face-to-face meeting. The editors of WCTS met at Scattergood School the last weekend in October of 2012: Mike arriving from Rochester, Minnesota, Judy from Belize by way of Fairfield, Iowa, and Mariellen from Champaign, Illinois. Shortly before Mariellen climbed in the car for the trip to Scattergood, she emailed Mike and Judy suggesting that we need to figure out how to assure the long-term future of WCTS. Mike had a long drive before picking up Judy. He was praying, and as he thought about the strange spiritual things that happen on the spiritual path and the solitary lives we often lead, he longed to spend more time with other mystics. But then he worried that his desire to be with other mystics was selfish.*

*The whole meeting was a wonderful experience, with the flow of ideas coming together in marvelous ways. When we turned to the question how to foster a future for WCTS, Mike said, "I think we need to host a Gathering of Friendly Mystics." Judy and Mariellen looked at him and each other and said, "Yeab!" We considered where to host the Gathering and Earlham College seemed the most welcoming setting for a group of Quakers who were frankly and openly mystical. We had a couple of suggested weekends in early June, and were surprised and pleased that Earlham had one of them available for the next June, 2013. And so the First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics came to be. (Gilpin, Lumb & Resman, 2013)*

The "First Annual" was not the first gathering of Quaker mystics. Jean Roberts and Pat McBee remember mystics interest groups that they and Ross Flanagan led at Friends General Conference gatherings in the 1990s, when they first began gathering names of mystic Friends interested in establishing some sort of regular communication (McBee, 2013; Roberts, 2014).

Jean reports an outpouring of shared experiences with her, following the interest groups that she led in 1993 at Friends General Conference Gathering and North Pacific Yearly Meeting. She wanted to support those who had experienced the mystical and share their stories with others. Then in 1994, Jim Flory was present when Jean and Harold Carson led an interest group on mysticism at Yearly Meeting. Afterwards, Jim mentioned that he wanted to start a newsletter for those who shared his interest in contemplative prayer. With Jean's list of forty people interested in mysticism, Jim's computer expertise, and their belief that contemplative prayer and mysticism were good topics to pursue under one banner, the first issue of *What Canst Thou Say?* came out in October of that year (Roberts, 2014). Two years later, the growing group organized two gatherings of Quaker mystics, one at Quaker Center in Ben Lomond, California, and one at Pendle Hill—and yet another at Pendle Hill in 1998 (McBee, 2013).

Judy Lumb recalls another gathering in 2007. In 2004, *WCTS* celebrated their tenth anniversary by commencing work on an anthology of selected articles. By 2007, the book, *Discovering God as Companion*, was completed and published. Pat McBee, Mariellen Gilpin, and Judy Lumb were at Friends General Conference and scheduled both a book launch and an Interest Group, *a gathering of Quaker mystics*. Mariellen and Judy assumed that Pat would lead the interest group because she had considerable experience with these gatherings and they had none. But, alas, Pat had a schedule conflict. She just told Mariellen and Judy, “People are hungry to talk about their mystical experiences. Just put them in small groups to do that and it will go fine.” So that’s what they did, after a brief introduction about the new book. And Pat was right. When the group came back together, they were very enthusiastic about *WCTS*. The two asked for and got many suggestions of themes and volunteers to be guest editors. They even recruited Mike Resman to become a member of the editorial team. (Lumb, 2013)

Through the years, many members of the *WCTS* community have volunteered to keep the network vital. In 1997, Marcelle Martin, Carol Roth, and Pat McBee assumed editorial responsibilities. They were followed by Kathryn Gordon, Linda Lee, Roena Oesting, Lissa Field, Kathy Tapp, Eleanor Warnock, Jennifer Elam, Ellen Michaud, and Chris Johns. Today, editor’s duties are shared by Mariellen Gilpin, Judy Lumb, Mike Resman, Earl Smith, and Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson. Other jobs—managing subscriptions and finances, graphic design, and other duties—have been taken on by Morgan Roth, Amy Perry, Lieselotte Heil, Grayce Mesner, Sue Kern, Margaret Willits, Judith Detert-Moriarty, Richard Himmer, Wayne Yarnall, and Joan Johnston.

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Sources:

1. Gilpin, Mariellen, Judy Lumb, & Michael Resman (2013). “How Did It Happen? The Organizers Describe the Leading to Hold ‘Sharing Our Stories: The First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics,’ ” <http://whatcanstthousay.org/gatherings.html>, accessed October 15, 2013.
2. History of *What Canst Thou Say?* <http://whatcanstthousay.org/history.html>, accessed October 15, 2013.
3. Roberts, Jean (February, 2014). Letter to *WCTS* editor Mariellen Gilpin.
4. Lumb, Judy (December 8, 2013). Email to *Proceedings* editor.
5. McBee, Pat (October 21, 2013). Email to *Proceedings* editor, reprinted herein as “A Place of Connection,” p. 40.
6. Gilpin, Mariellen (December 8, 2013). Email to *Proceedings* editor, reprinted herein as “Appendix B: Memories of a Gathering of Mystics at Friends General Conference in 2007 and the Launch of *Discovering God as Companion*, p. 56.

**Sharing Our Stories: The First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics**  
**June 14 – 16, 2013**  
**Schedule**

**Friday, June 14**

- Ongoing      Art Fair
- 3:00 – 5:30    Registration and settle in rooms
- 5:30 – 6:00    Supper
- 6:30 – 7:30    Worship
- 7:30 – 9:00    Introductions in large group / Home Groups *What are you hoping for here?"*

**Saturday, June 15**

- Ongoing      Art Fair
- 7:00 – 8:00    Early morning outside worship option
- 8:00 – 8:30    Breakfast
- 9:00 – 10:00    Worship
- 10:15 – 11:30    Home Groups — Share your joys and frustrations in your spiritual life: *What is in your way in your spiritual life? How do you see yourself moving beyond your personal obstacles?"*
- 12:00 – 12:30    Lunch
- 2:00 – 3:30    Interest Groups Session 1
- 3:45 – 5:15    Interest Groups Session 2
- 5:30 – 6:00    Supper
- 7:00            Open Mic Night — poems, songs, stories or interpretive dances. *Has a spiritual experience transformed your life? What have been your reflections on that experience? How does your spiritual life enter into your interpersonal relationships?*

**Sunday, June 16**

- Ongoing      Art Fair
- 7:00 – 8:00    Early morning outside worship option
- 8:00 – 8:30    Breakfast
- 8:45 – 9:30    Home Groups — *What have you learned/gained? What do you want to follow up with? What will you do when you get home?*
- 10:00 – 11:00    Worship with Clear Creek Friends Meeting
- 11:30            Wrap up — large group
- 12:00 – 12:30    Lunch

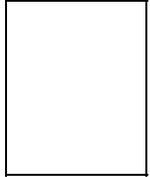
### 47 Mystics in Attendance



Eileen Bagus  
Montgomery, Ohio



Patricia Daly  
Brookhaven, Pennsylvania



Sirkka Barbour  
Sleepy Hollow, New York



Muriel Dimock  
Red Wing, Minnesota



Cathy Barney  
Milford, Ohio



Lissa Field  
Appleton, Wisconsin



Thais Carr  
Thompson's Station, Tennessee  
(singing praise)



Mariellen Gilpin  
Champaign, Illinois



Tina Coffin  
Little Rock, Arkansas



Stuart Greene  
Lisbon, Maryland



Linda Daigle  
Cincinnati, Ohio



Donne Hayden  
Cincinnati, Ohio



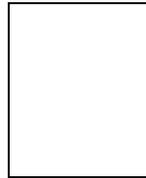
Gene Hillman  
Brookhaven, Pennsylvania



Linda Lee  
Indianapolis, Indiana



Virginia "Ginny" Johnson  
Rochester, Minnesota



Marianne Lockard  
Hope, Arkansas



Hazel Jonjak  
Hayward, Wisconsin



Judy Lumb  
Caye Caulker, Belize



Ann Kendall  
Indianapolis, Indiana



Jean Marie Marron-Beebe  
Champaign, Illinois



Sharon Elizabeth Kirmeyer  
Washington, D.C.



Marcelle Martin  
Richmond, Indiana



Rae Lawrence  
Milton-Freewater, Oregon



Patricia "Pat" McBee  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Mark McGinnis  
South Elgin, Illinois



Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson  
Cincinnati, Ohio



Paulette Meier  
Cincinnati, Ohio



Helene Pollock  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Janet Mullen  
Downers Grove, Illinois



Allison Randall  
Temple, New Hampshire



Diana Oleskevich  
St. Louis, Missouri



Michael "Mike" Resman  
Rochester, Minnesota



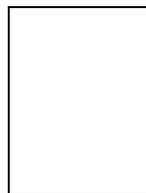
Jim Oleskevich  
St. Louis, Missouri



Jean Roberts  
Sultan, Washington



Amy Perry  
Fishers, Indiana



Carol Schlef  
St. Louis, Missouri



David Schoen  
Little Rock, Arkansas



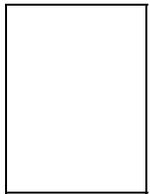
Julia Thompson  
Lafayette, Indiana



Susan Schoen  
Little Rock, Arkansas



Marie Vanderbark  
Eau Claire, Wisconsin



Janette Shetter  
Bloomington, Indiana



Bill Walker  
Temple, New Hampshire



William "Bill" Shetter  
Bloomington, Indiana



David Wixom  
St. Louis, Missouri



Earl Smith  
Barnesville, Ohio



Carol Ziel  
St. Louis, Missouri

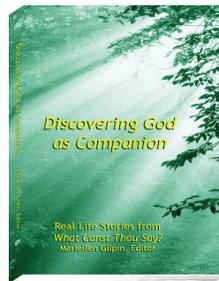


Janice Stensrude  
Houston, Texas (then)  
Parker, Colorado (now)

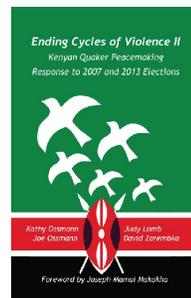
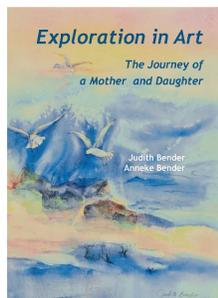
## Art Fair

A spacious conference room was made available for the Art Fair. Gathering participants were invited to bring their art and craft objects for sale. The Art Fair was open throughout each day of the Gathering. We were not able to get the names of everyone who participated. Apologies to those not shown here who exhibited their art.

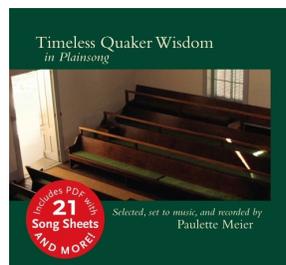
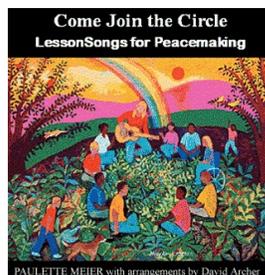
**Mariellen Gilpin, on behalf of *WCTS***, offered for sale copies of *Discovering God as Companion*, the compilation of selected *WCTS* articles published in celebration of the tenth anniversary of “the worship group in print.”



**Judy Lumb** displayed and offered for sale three publications of her publishing company, Producciones de la Hamaca: *Exploration in Art: The Journey of a Mother and Daughter*, *Men of Peace: World War II Conscientious Objectors*, and *Ending Cycles of Violence II: Kenyan Quaker Peacemaking Response to 2007 and 2013 Elections*.



**Paulette Meier** displayed CD recordings of her music.



**Allison Randall**, under the trade name Friendly Goods, displayed her Soothing Toys that she designs and makes for adults and children.



Hand to Hold



Peace Dolls



Blessings Dolls

**David Wixom** displayed his sculpture.

## Home Groups



Paulette Meier, Ginny Johnson, and Lissa Field share coffee and snacks before Home Group 9 convenes on Saturday morning.

During the first large group meeting after supper on Friday night, everyone was seated in a large circle when Judy Lumb introduced Home Groups, an idea she experienced at the World Gathering in Kenya. There would be nine, and Judy had group members assign themselves by counting off. The group then dispersed to the meeting places assigned to each Home Group. Home Groups met each day of the Gathering.

Friday, June 14, following 7:00 p.m. introductions until 9:00 p.m., the topic was *What are you hoping for here?*

Saturday, June 15, 10:15 – 11:30 a.m., topics were *What is in your way in your spiritual life? How do you see yourself moving beyond your personal obstacles?*

Sunday, June 16, 8:45 – 9:30 a.m., topics were *What have you learned/gained? What do you want to follow up with? What will you do when you get home?*

Home Groups were a great way for participants to become acquainted with one another and warm to the sharing that was the core of the weekend experience. In Home Groups, those who came knowing no one, ended their first day with a small group of acquaintances.

## Interest Groups

One person wrote about his experience in an interest group:

During the First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics, I heard an explanation during an interest group that spoke deeply to me. It was said that early Friends “led people to God and left them there.” Our task as contemporary Quakers was to speak about how God has come into our lives, providing an invitation for others to nurture their own relationship with God.

No doubt such gems were experienced in other groups. Another person’s choice of interest groups left him disappointed:

Interestingly, neither session, though useful, made my mind’s highlight reel. The spontaneity of the Spirit’s presence wasn’t as evident. At times the talking seemed secular, and so by contrast to other meetings, it was flat and at times even boring. Maybe there was significant worry involved in the planning process and/or human expectations present in the participants that may have distracted us from trusting the Spirit’s ability to lead the agenda.

Below is a listing of the interest groups listed in alphabetical order for each session. In a few cases, attenders or facilitators volunteered information about their interest groups. These contributions follow the list.

### **First Session**

Art and Spirituality: Living an Authentic Creative Life – Cathy Barney

Discernment – Allison Randall

Early Friends’ Texts in Plainsong: Sing and Reflect – Paulette Meier

Keeping It Spiritual with a Non-Quaker Partner – Linda Daigle

Planning Next Year’s Gathering of Friendly Mystics – Mike Resman

Religiously Wounded / Religiously Wounding – Mariellen Gilpin

The Walden Pond Lifestyle – Hazel Jonjak

Why I Live in Belize and Other Stories of Healing – Judy Lumb

Sharing Mystical Experiences That Were Turning Points in Our Lives – Eileen Bagus

### **Second Session**

Accompanying People on Their Spiritual Path at the End of “Earthly” Life – Carol Schlef

Mysticism and Young People – Lissa Field

Of Good and Evil: Is There One Without the Other? – Janice Stensrude

Poems, Music, and Depth to Share: Bring Yours – Marie Vandenbark

Sharing Our Mystical Life – Janet Mullen

The Transformative Spiritual Journey of Early Friends – Marcelle Martin

Writing an Epistle from This Gathering – Judy Lumb

**Religiously Wounded / Religiously Wounding – Mariellen Gilpin**

Like many others, Mariellen's unprogrammed meeting is home to a wide variety of opinions concerning the nature—and even the name—of God. For a decade, each time Mariellen gave ministry during meeting regarding her struggles and insights through her prayerful relationship with God, a nontheist Friend would immediately rise to engage in debate about religious language. Though Mariellen understood that this Friend had experienced a deep wounding in a childhood religious experience, she felt victimized—the wounded had become the wounder. Mariellen questions whether her interest group was of value to those who attended, but she reports that the process of sharing her experience discharged an anger she had felt for many years. As a result, Mariellen has written an essay on the topic, suggesting procedures that meetings could adopt to alleviate similar situations.

**The Walden Pond Lifestyle – Hazel Jonjak**

Hazel lives on land that has been in her family for many years, part of it devoted to a cranberry bog. She has always had a simple lifestyle, but it was made simpler still when the generator that produced her electricity broke down. She decided not to repair it. She described her life without a computer, television, or any other electrical appliance or gizmo that most of us consider necessities. She finds aspects of her daily life, such as picking berries and quilting, to be mystical. Her grandson is half Ojibwa, and she has been influenced by what she has learned about this group of Native Americans, deepening her already-keen devotion to preserving our natural environment. In addition to telling her personal story, Hazel invited those in attendance to share their thoughts about and experiences with “the simple life.”

**Why I Live in Belize and Other Stories of Healing – Judy Lumb**

Judy gives an account of her interest group and how it came to be:

I was asked to do an interest group on why I live in Belize by someone who didn't know the answer, but wanted to know. I agreed and called it, “Why I Live in Belize and Other Stories of Healing.” I told about how I got chronic fatigue syndrome at age 42 and had to retire early. After getting my sons through high school, I went to Belize for a couple of months total rest, thinking I would get well and go back to resume my active life. That didn't happen, but I learned to live an interesting life within my limitations based upon desktop publishing from my hammock. That got me involved in projects involving two of Belize's indigenous groups. I told of what led up to my miraculous healing at an indigenous ceremony after I had been in Belize for eleven years (and sick for more than thirteen years). Then I invited others to speak out of the silence, telling their stories. Since my story involved spirits, that reminded

some others of their stories of spirits. At the end of our time together, they thanked me for raising the issue of spirits as it was something they had not shared in any other context.

### **Of Good and Evil: Is There One Without the Other? – Janice Stensrude**

Because of a personal experience with someone in her extended family, Janice has been investigating evil—beginning with the writings of a 16th-century mystic (Pendle Hill Pamphlet 214: *Jacob Boehme: Insights Into the Challenge of Evil*), progressing through classic philosophy (primarily Susan Neiman’s *Evil in Modern Thought*), and ending with behavioral-science research (e.g., Simon Baron-Cohen’s *The Science of Evil*). Philosophers, including Boehme, classify evil as one of nature’s paired opposites. Psychologists define evil as a lack of empathy, the primary characteristic of sociopaths. Therapists seem to generally agree that hard-core sociopaths may get along in life without becoming serial killers (or criminals of any sort), but they are a powerful destructive force in a therapy group. Like most Quakers (see, e.g., *Twelve Quakers and Evil*), group members found disturbing the idea that an individual could be irredeemably evil. One group member had a similar family experience and had found that the best way to deal with a sociopath is to have as little contact as possible, which is the advice behavioral scientists are giving. Striving to end on a positive note, Janice pointed out that psychologists are as disturbed as everyone else, and despite their prescribing avoidance as the best possible way for the individual to deal with sociopaths, they are determined to find answers. Another ray of hope, not unfamiliar to mystical Quakers, is prayer. Physician Larry Dossey’s “sound scientific” research (participants prayed over petri dishes) suggested not only that prayer works, but that prayer motivated by good intentions is far stronger than prayer motivated by evil intentions (Dossey, *Healing Words*, 1995).

### **The Transformative Spiritual Journey of Early Friends – Marcelle Martin**

Marcelle prepared the following discussion guide and handed it out at the beginning of her interest group.

*New Birth as Sons and Daughters of God, Partakers of the Divine Nature*

2 Peter 1:4 – *He has granted to us his precious and very great promises, that through these you may escape from the corruption that is in the world . . . and become partakers of the divine nature, and may escape from the corruption that is in the world.*

Romans 8:14 – *As many as are led by the Spirit of God, are the sons of God.*

George Fox: “The living word of God, the Light of Christ, is a living hammer, and a living sword, and a living fire, to hammer, and cut down, and burn up that which separated and kept man from God; by which work man is reconciled again to God, which is called the word of reconciliation; by this word are men and women

sanctified and made clean . . . . And this is the work that makes both men and women divine, and brings them into the divine nature. . . . and by this word are they brought into a divine wisdom, understanding, knowledge, spirit and power.”

### **Awakening**

*Longing.* Mary Penington: “Oh! The groans and cries in secret that were raised in me, that I might be visited of the Lord, and come to the knowledge of his way; and that my feet might be turned into that way, before I went hence. . . . I would cry out, ‘I care not for [an inheritance] in this life; give it to those who care for it’ I am miserable with it; it is acceptance with thee I desire, and that alone can satisfy me . . . .’ I was like the parched heath. . . . so great was my thirst after that which I did not believe was near me.”

*Seeking.* William Dewsbury: “I met with none who could tell me what God had done for their souls, in redeeming them from the body of sin, which I groaned under, and which separated me from the presence of God; although I walked strictly with them in their outward observances and in running to hear one man after another, called ministers, yet I found no rest nor peace for my weary soul.”

*Turning Within.* Martha Simmonds: “. . . about the end of seven years hunting and finding no rest, the Lord opened a little glimmering of light to me . . . and then for about seven years more he kept me still from running after men.”

### **Convincement**

*Openings.* William Dewsbury: “And the word of the Lord came to me and said, ‘Put up thy sword into thy scabbard; if my kingdom were of this world then would my children fight; knowest thou not, that if I needed, I could have twelve legions of angels from my Father?’ Which word enlightened my heart, and discovered the mystery of iniquity; it showed me the kingdom of Christ to be within, and that its enemies being within and spiritual, my weapons against them should be spiritual—the power of God.” (Matthew 26:52-53.)

*The Refiner’s Fire.* John Banks: “I did not only come to be convinced by the living appearance of the Lord Jesus of the evil and vanity, sin and wickedness that the world lies in [and that] I was so much a partaker thereof; neither did I satisfy myself that I was reached unto by the power of God. But by taking true heed thereunto, through watchfulness and fear, I came by one little after another to be sensible of the work thereof in my heart and soul, in order to subdue and bring down, tame and subject the wild nature in me, and to wash, purge, and cleanse me inwardly from sin and corruption; for that end that I might be changed and converted. But

before I came to witness that work effected, oh the days and nights of godly sorrow and spiritual pain for many months and some years that I traveled through!”

*Being Gathered Into Community.* Margaret Fell (in an epistle raising funds to assist those traveling and suffering in the ministry): For every one, in their measures, may be serviceable to the whole body, in what is called for, and required: and who dwells in the Light, it makes subject, to be serviceable to the Body. . . . So let that Love constrain you to love one another, and that every one may be made willing to suffer for the Body’s sake, and that there may be no rent in the Body, but that the Members have the same Care one over another, and where one Member suffers, all the Members may suffer with it: And here is the Unity of the Spirit and the Bond of Peace.”

### **Faithfulness.**

*Leadings of the Spirit.* William Caton: “[I felt a] mighty clear opening of my proffering myself to take [Annekin’s] part in marriage. . . . This thing settled in me, and grew clearer and clearer, neither could I expel it as heretofore I could have done [a] flashing thought which have come as lightnings in some cases. . . . for the longer it continued the more assurance I came to have in my self, of the thing being of the Lord. . . . And in the meantime it came to be shown unto me, how I should proceed in the thing: As first of all, I was to propound it to some dear friends to hear and receive their advice . . . and so much subjection I found then in my spirit that if they . . . had no unity with the thing that then I could (I believe) have let the thing have fallen and have rested satisfied in myself about it.”

*Living In the Cross.* Barbara Blaugdone: They directed my mind unto the Light of Christ, therein to wait, which I was diligent to do, and found the Vertue of it; and as the Evil was made manifest, I departed from it, and willingly took up the Cross, and yielded unto it, in plainness of speech and in my habit: and the people were so offended with it, when I went into their Publick Places and Steeplehouses to speak, that they took away their children from me, so that I lost almost all my employment; and they kept me in prison a quarter of a year at a time: And great was my sufferings in that day, but the Lord so filled me with his power, that I was preserved through it all: And the diligent and faithful did prosper then, and so they do now. And therefore my counsel to Friends is, that they keep in God’s power. . . . For whosoever shuns the Cross, and goes out of the power, they lose their way, and dishonor God; but whosoever keeps in the Faith, and abides in the Power, they are in Safety: I have had living Experience of it, therefore I mention it.”

*Living in Divine Love and Power.* Elizabeth Hooten: “All this and much more I have gone through and suffered, and much more could I for the Seed’s sake which is

buried and oppressed. . . . Yes, the Love that I bear to the Souls of all Men, making me willing to undergo whatsoever can be inflicted.”

William Dewsbury: “I never since played the coward; but joyfully entered prisons as palaces, telling mine enemies to hold me there as long as they could. And in the prison-house, I sang praises to my God, and esteemed the bolts and locks put upon me as jewels; and in the name of the eternal God I always got the victory. For they could keep me no longer than the determined time of my God.”

*Perfection, in One's Measure.* Sarah Chevers: “The more we taste of this heavenly banquet, the much the more are we broken down into self denial, sealed down forever in the true poverty, and upright integrity of heart and soul, mind and conscience, wholly ransomed by the living word of life, to serve the living God. . . . [Then] we cannot hold our peace; the God . . . of glory doth open our mouth, and we speak to his praise, and utter his voice, and sound forth his word of life, and causeth the earth to tremble . . . my heart, soul and spirit that is wholly joined to the Lord, stream forth to you. . . . [I] am a partaker of living virtue.

Share your experiences of the spiritual journey.

A Whole Heart: a Blog

<http://awholeheart.com>

## Open Mic

### Saturday Evening, June 16

The following are contributions to Open Mic night. Unfortunately, the serendipity of the moment prevailed, and no one made a list of participants. Since we didn't keep a record of the order in which participants appeared, the listing here is alphabetical. Our apologies to those who have been left off this listing.

#### **Tina Coffin, A Reading of Her Essay About a Healing Experience**

**“Achmed”** (Names have been changed to protect the privacy of the Saudi students.)

Around 1994, a young man from Saudi Arabia was in one of the classes I was teaching at the University of Arkansas at Little Rock. He was a devout Muslim, so devout that he would speak to other Saudi students if they neglected to attend Friday services at the mosque, or if he saw them drinking alcohol. I knew this from Najat, an older Saudi student who was a good friend of my daughter, Letty. Letty, too, knew Achmed. She was teaching English to foreign students who still needed to take the TOEFL test, and it was Letty who told me one day that Achmed had been rushed to the emergency room one night and was in the hospital. It was a grim diagnosis for an eighteen-year-old kid so far from home. He had leukemia. He would have to undergo a course of chemotherapy.

When he came back to class after a few weeks, I took him to my office and told him I too had had cancer, and I too had had to undergo chemotherapy, but now seven years later, I was alive and well. “Chemo is no fun,” I said, “but it is life-giving.” I told him not to come to class the day after chemo, that I would give him a private lesson a few days later.

Achmed was a tough kid, tough on himself. He would show up in class white as a sheet, and knowing how sick he must feel, I would send him home. The start of Ramadan happened when he was in the middle of treatment. I asked him if he had to abstain from food.

“No,” he said, “the ill and weak are allowed to eat but I *want* to observe Ramadan.”

I had great respect for this commitment to his faith and religious observances—but I wondered if his parents knew and what they would want him to do.

When his chemo treatments ended, tests showed they had not been successful; he was not in remission. The leukemia was still doing its awful work in his young body. I could only imagine how devastated he was. Doctors told him his only hope was a bone marrow transplant. Achmed traveled home to Saudi Arabia, where doctors would try to find a matching donor. Before he left, he came to my office to say goodbye, and I told him I would pray for him.

It turned out that one of his brothers was a good match, and he wrote that he and his parents and brother were going to travel to Spain for the procedure.

The Sunday before they were to leave for Spain, I attended, as usual, the worship service at my Quaker meeting here in Little Rock. During our time of silent meditation, my thoughts were with Achmed. "Please, God, oh please," I prayed, "please give him life. He is *so* young." I couldn't think of anything else. I was overwhelmed by a sense of despair on his behalf that his life might come to an end. Then something happened that I still find hard to describe; it was as if the prayer for Achmed's life was being pulled out of me. I had no control over it anymore; it was like childbirth. With great force something made its way out of me: a plea for this very sick young man.

Afterwards I was a bit shaken by the experience but put it aside as one-of-those-things. A week later, a letter arrived from Spain; I recognized Achmed's handwriting. I opened the envelope with a sense of doom; perhaps the brother wasn't a match after all. With mounting surprise, I read an incredible story: When the doctor in Madrid had drawn his blood and came back into the room with an expected plan of treatment, he told Achmed that there was no evidence of leukemia in his body. To make sure, the blood test was repeated with the same result.

"A stone rolled off my shoulders," Achmed wrote, "the sky opened up; NO LEUKEMIA. NO LEUKEMIA. My mother is convinced that your prayers have healed me."

I was dumbfounded. I had never really believed that people could be healed by prayer or by the laying on of hands. And even if my prayers might have helped, it had not been me; the prayers had been forced out of me, like my little daughter was forced out of my body twenty-five years earlier. It had been through no will of my own.

After the summer break, Achmed returned to UALR, and one day he came to see me in my office. And then I did something incredibly stupid, truly stupid: I put my arms around him and hugged him. This devout Muslim young man stiffened and ran out of my office. And I didn't see him again for a long, long time; so long that when he came to my office again several years later, I didn't recognize him. "I am Achmed," he said, and this time I only smiled (well, perhaps beamed). We talked a little and he said his mother was still so grateful. "She thinks you're an angel," he said. He gave me a present she had bought for me, a case with four sets of diamond-and-gold earrings. I was overwhelmed and wasn't quite sure how to handle it. I didn't want to make another culturally offensive gesture. I told Achmed I would write his mother a thank-you letter and that he would have to translate it. I trusted he would omit anything that made his mother uncomfortable.

After that, I saw Achmed regularly. He would stop by my office to chat about his courses. He even had a girlfriend to take to the movies, he told me one day.

Not long afterwards, my husband John and I moved to the Netherlands for three years. Achmed would write me the most poetic emails. I was Mother Mrs. Coffin, and if you have ever read Rumi or other Middle Eastern poetry, well, that was Achmed's inspiration. On my twice-a-year trips back to Little Rock, he would often meet me at the airport holding a single flower.

It was during those visits that I would take him out to dinner. He would talk about his family. He adored his father. He would describe the way he would sit and talk. Clearly, Achmed was looking forward to being a paterfamilias himself. One day he brought a photo book of Saudi Arabia, and of course, I was struck by a longing to visit that beautiful and mysterious land. I asked him if it was possible for my husband and me to visit his hometown near the Persian Gulf, the town he had so lovingly described.

"Not possible," he said, "No foreigners are allowed to travel to Saudi Arabia."

"But what about the Hajj, the pilgrimage?" I said. "Many of those people are foreigners."

Achmed explained that pilgrims were only allowed to travel the official hajj route. Anyone leaving that path would be banished from the pilgrimage and sent back to their country. I had to accept that I would never be able to visit Saudi Arabia.

All this happened before 9/11. Achmed graduated in the summer of 2001; I had sent him a modest graduation present from the Netherlands. He had gone back home where his family had chosen a girl for him to marry. Then 9/11 happened and it effectively ended our email correspondence. I sometimes wonder if he is still free of leukemia, if he is happy in his marriage, if his parents are still alive.

And I wonder if Saudi Arabia will ever trust non-Muslim visitors from the U.S. to come to their country, that beautiful place on the Red Sea and the Persian Gulf.

**Rae Lawrence, Poetry Recital**

Rae read a selection of her original poetry.

**creative evolution**

volcanic eruptions  
     a clash of tectonic plates  
 the very earth in a violent clash of emotions  
     and growing pains  
 alpine snows  
     wide basins of convoluted typography  
 glacier gouged.

water, wind, sun, snow & blue birds

flora and fauna in slow evolutionary change  
     second thoughts? after thoughts?  
 and humans a tiny speck  
     in the scheme of things

galaxies, planets, stars  
     energy in unfathomable forms

clouds, sun, wind, snow

solitude broken occasionally by a vehicle  
     its occupants on the way to somewhere else  
 I also, but,  
 I may pass this way but once  
 so I pause, and wonder, and bask,  
     I muse and am fed

I am peaceful here atop the mountains

    reluctant to move on.

6/13/2013

Hwy 14A, between Lovel & Burgess Jct, WY

### Quebec terrain

glacial scouring strips soil from bedrock  
 here & there rock,  
 not big enough to be boulders  
 not small enough to be rocks  
 pulled out of the ground to make a field  
 piled in rows, some combined w/split rail fencing  
 other places miles of rock outcroppings  
 river plane in corn & soy

8/28/2013

Ottawa to Lanoraie, QC

### Violent Shaping

volcanic eruption  
 pounding surf  
 howling winds  
 salt air  
 shaped this bit of terra firma  
 over eons  
 where the Appalachians  
 meet the sea

9/2/2013

E Quebec La Haute – Gaspesie

### Judy Lumb, Tunes on a Penny Whistle

Judy played a medley of three Celtic tunes on her penny whistle: Over the Waterfall, Angeline the Baker, and Dancing Bear.

### Paulette Meier, Quaker Wisdom Sung to Original Music

Paulette began putting snippets of Quaker wisdom (such as George Fox's "Be patterns, be examples in all countries . . .") to music to help her memorize them. She has recorded these on a CD that was for sale at the Art Fair. She sang several for Open Mic, inviting the group to join in.

**Amy Perry, A Dance**

Amy choreographed her solo dance to the Lord's Prayer when she was making a solitude-and-silence retreat in the Arizona desert about ten years ago. The audience of gathered mystics sang the Lord's Prayer—Amy asked that “father” be changed to “mother”—for this first public performance of her work.

**Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson, A Shared Experience**

Rhonda gave an account of a leading that came from her worship experience:

During the second meeting for worship on Saturday morning, I heard that God had called this meeting (the First Annual Gathering) and that we were being called to “name the spiritual condition of the world.” Later, after talking with a couple of Friends, I learned that I was to share this call at the Open Mic, which I did. Since the Gathering, I have had many experiences that have either helped me to clarify or to confirm the leading. I have written and will write more about it in the gathering blog (<http://quakermystics.wordpress.com>). In short, I believe this call to “name the spiritual condition of the world” is an opportunity for Friends to live more deeply into our prophetic role in the world.

**Michael Resman, Poetry Recital**

Mike read four selections from his collection of original poetry.

**Hide**

So, who's going to explain?  
They won't believe me,  
even if I'm able to speak.

So I hope I never collapse in public  
from adoration of You.

My downcast eyes  
hide  
tears of joy  
gathering in the corners.

I'm trying,  
to live  
normal  
in the world

But it's getting so hard  
when Love breaks through.

(Spring '94)

**Holy Spirit, Mother.**

Holy Spirit, Mother.  
Like an infant calling  
I am hungry, tiny, helpless.

Crow wings scratch across the sky.  
Chickadees flutter near my head,  
chirping gently.

I long for you.  
In silence,  
my soul cries out.

But I am here.  
A bubble trapped beneath the surface,  
unable to spring free.

Come for me,  
for I know not  
how to go to Thee.

Lift me.  
Hold me in your arms.  
Holy Spirit, Mother  
Comfort me.  
(Winter '07)

**Human**

Help me Lord  
for I've fallen again

and I'm afraid you won't help me up.

Lying face down before you  
is perhaps where I should stay.

How many times have I offered  
the lame excuse  
I'm only human.

Each time you lift me,  
dust me off,  
caress me.

I've lost count.

I watched for days last summer  
while wind blew through my soul.

And saw how my being  
affects others.

Help me.  
Help me Lord.  
For I am only human.

(Winter '07)

**Veiled**

were that there  
was a hole

torn in the veil

so I might glimpse

but I would not be content  
even then

nor will  
ever be

till you draw  
back that veil  
and welcome me home.

### **Julia Thompson, A Shared Experience**

In my early twenties, I had a spiritual breakthrough. It was rather intense and lonely. During that time, I read *The Stormy Search for the Self: A Guide to Personal Growth through Transformational Crisis* by Stanislav and Christina Grof. I identified with what they called a “spiritual emergency” and wanted to find others in a similar situation. And so I posted an ad on Craigslist. A woman responded and we became great friends. The following story is an email I sent to her, in the midst of this spiritual breakthrough, regarding an evening of bowling.

#### **Why Can't I Just Effin\* Bowl!**

I walk into the alley after work with my friends. It's nice. I have a beer, and we go to our lane. In the first three frames I do well—two spares and a strike.

Wow, maybe I should become a professional bowler. I imagine my life—the fame—some random person out of nowhere becoming a professional bowler. It will make an interesting chapter in my life story.

My ego swells. I start to lose my newly found talent, and my skill slowly decreases to my normal, subpar ability.

“Maybe it's because I was refusing to feel the pain after the spare,” I tell myself. “It is suffering. After every high there is a low, so I need to feel the sadness that comes after the strike . . . then I can be a better bowler.”

I try, it works for a frame, and then I fail again.

What is it? Am I not enlightened enough? Jesus could bowl a perfect game. But then again, Jesus would not flaunt it or try to use the skills for anything special. So that's it! I need to not care to win, and that is how I can win.

“Okay,” I think to myself, “don't care . . . don't care . . . don't care . . .”

The game is over. I didn't do well.

A cigarette break!

I walk back in feeling crappy. I know I must be present. Focus on my breathing and let whatever arises just be. In . . . out . . . in . . . out . . .

I feel sad, and I just got two gutter balls. Is it the music? If there was happier music would I be happier? And then . . . then . . . could I bowl better?

John points out that I am bending my elbow. So that's it! I need to not bend my elbow, then . . . then I will be a better bowler, and therefore . . . enlightened.

Oh great. Ashley notices that I looked sad. What do I do? She always picks on me for always being sad. Should I relax into the sadness—her uneasiness of my sadness is due to her uneasiness of her own sadness. Not now. Now I will pretend to be happy, not to upset her.

Great . . . now I am awkward. I hate being awkward. Buddha would never be awkward . . . but would Buddha bowl?

Okay. My mind wandered away again. Focus on the breath . . . experience what is real and now.

Damn it! I am sad.

Why does everything have to be so dramatic for me. Why can't I just effin\* bowl?

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\* \*!!☆#★

### **David Wixom**

David showed one of his sculptures and shared his process and the meaning of his work.



**Sunday Morning Worship with  
Clear Creek Meeting in Stout  
Memorial Meeting House on  
Earlham Campus**



After Sunday worship, the group gathered one last time outside Stout Memorial Meeting House, where Paulette led the group in singing.



## In Our Own Words: Sharing the Experience

### Cathy Barney “Living Into the Loving Hands of Surrender”

The ride to Richmond from Cincinnati was shared, slow, intentional, filled with steaming cups of Starbucks and a living in the present. My fellow meeting mystic and I have accompanied one another for a long while, but never traveled together. We wanted to make the most of this blessing. We each struggle to live with a beloved, non-Quaker partner.

Upon arrival, we encountered a couple looking a little lost.

“What yearly meeting are you from?” we were immediately asked. *Oh no*, I thought, *it’s going to be one of THOSE gatherings.*

“Wilmington, but does that really matter? I don’t like labels,” I boldly ventured.

“Me either,” came the response, and we all chuckled.

The First Annual Friendly Gathering of Mystics would be like no other, an answer to prayer for me. Never did I have to explain myself or define the *kind* of meeting to which I belonged. Judgment was, thankfully, absent.

From the first piece of vocal ministry at opening ministry—a prayer for help—until it was time to depart, this was sacred ground where unbelievable holy events transpired, touched my spirit deeply, permanently, and continue to move me. The ethereal quality of the weekend was balanced by processing with a trusted friend and grounding ourselves by “sneaking” out for a bottle of red wine and dark chocolate one night, gathering with her former ESR (Earlham School of Religion) cohorts the next.

The simplistic rhythm of worship, small groups, shared meals, and self-formed interest groups cleared ample time for Spirit. We embodied “When two or three are gathered, there I am among you” (Matthew 18:20) in every small group I attended. What began rather tenuously—five of us thrown together with no other instruction than to meet—transformed when one felt safe enough to question herself, in ways I am certain we all have, aloud. Somehow we ended embracing each other, God’s healing energy coursing through this collected body. We were reluctant to let go.

That reluctance followed me to every small gathering:

- in prayerfully discussing how art and spirituality meet and feeling affirmed enough to share my heart;
- in being carefully instructed by our convener, most attentive to God, to “choose the juiciest” mystical experience to share and witnessing something magical swirl among this group of women that was raw, organic, and birthing itself that we, as mothers, understood; and
- in finally locating the seed of God within myself thanks to the tendering of another.

This weekend opened me in new ways. Enough so that I could hear God in Stout Meetinghouse command me to “lay down on the pew and surrender.” Of course, like my 12-year-old, I argued. It went something like this:

*Lay down on the pew and surrender.*

*What? You’ve got to be kidding? Really—right here, right now, just lay down on this pew?*

*Yes.*

*What will all of these people think? Maybe that I’m just tired?*

*Lay down on the pew and surrender.*

With heart palpitations mimicking the ones I get when I have vocal ministry, I recognized I could not deny this request.

*Well, if anywhere has ever been safe to do something like this in public, it would be here with all of these mystics. OK. I’m laying here, now what?*

*Surrender.*

*I don’t know how to do that. I need help, God. Human help.*

*Then ask.*

Worship ends, a gentleman walks over me to shake hands with my neighbor, and I am still lying there, unsure what to do, but not moving. A female voice says it’s time for prayers, and I find myself rising and blabbering, *God just told me to lay down on this pew and surrender, and I don’t know how. Can you pray for me and help me?*

...

*Did I really just do that? No one much would have noticed me if I had just lain there. But did I have to dramatically rise up and say something?*

*Yes.*

No sooner had I asked than a warm pair of hands was holding my feet and soon another was at my head offering a hand, then a clean handkerchief. I grabbed at the hands by my head. As people began to clear, I looked up to see the person, who showed me the seed of God within me, attached to the hands I clasped.

My angels sat with me, then guided me outside to a bench, and my seed sower fetched a drink for me. “It’s all your fault,” I giggled at her. “You and that tiny seed idea.”

As I re-entered, people came by with hugs and well wishes. Someone proffered that we had tended to our spirits, but perhaps, not to our physical needs during the retreat. Others said this was not unusual after a deep gathering. I had totally opened and trusted.

Another meal and surprising goodbyes. Unexpectedly embraced with a knowing hug, I jokingly hissed, “This clearly was your fault. You were the one who asked *help me* in our first worship.”

A quiet, thoughtful artist said I'd been an inspiration, and we began the new chorus of "until next time" instead of goodbye.

Then my grounded, loving weekend roommate offered to drive home.

How do you come home from that?

One way is to seek a clearness committee on the message from worship. In July, my ministry care group met me to help me with discernment. They listened intently, asked some thoughtful, provocative questions and reflected back my own words.

The message is slow to interpret, and I have finally connected it to the experience of the energy burst in the small group. When I mentioned it to a healing-touch practitioner, she said I had a gift. I hadn't thought of it that way, yet when I placed my hands on her broken ribs, we both felt the jolt. Perhaps this is where Spirit is asking me to surrender.

As I continue to live with and into that command, I fondly remember that sweet time in Mid June on the Earlham campus when I felt accompanied by those who understand. Those who live from the heart as I do.

### **Thais Carr "An Abundance of Inner Riches"**

Many thanks to all Friends. The deep worship and fellowship was exactly what I needed. The abundance of inner riches continues to nourish me.

### **Lissa Field "A Nonjudgmental Context"**

Most of all I liked meeting people at the conference who were actively engaged in sorting out the truths of their experiences against mass-market "spirituality" or "mysticism."

Conversations comparing experiences and sharing vocabulary pointing to what happened to us in particular were very helpful. The conference provided a nonjudgmental context where participants could focus.

### **Mariellen Gilpin "Light Enough"**

*During Sunday worship with Clear Creek Friends Meeting, I told this story.*

I was ten years old, lying on my stomach on the living room rug, reading. (This is an athletic feat I haven't undertaken recently.) My mother came to ask me to go with my father to help find a little calf that had gotten separated from its mother. I'd been so focused on my book that I was puzzled: "How do you know that?" I asked her. She said she could hear them calling to each other, and sure enough, when I listened, I could hear the little calf crying and its mother calling to it. When an animal is separated from the herd, it's vulnerable—coyotes, for instance, mostly attack an animal when it's somehow separated from the herd.

I went to my room to get my barn jacket and looked out my bedroom window. There was no moon. No stars. It was pitch black out there. We had black cattle. I thought, "How

are we going to find a little black calf when it's this dark outside?" I found the very biggest flashlight we owned and met Daddy at the basement door. He looked at that flashlight and said, "You can carry that if you want to, but we are not going to use it." I wondered at that; later I realized how scary a flashlight bobbing around in the dark might be to a cow.

We stepped outside. The light from the windows of the house allowed us to sort of see where we were going, but once we'd passed through the gate into the pasture, it was completely dark. Our feet found the cowpath toward the bottomland. Ours was a small family farm, and the cows were members of the family. We had maybe a dozen, and we were on a first-name basis with them. Daddy and I walked toward the herd. The cows, other than the mother and baby, were silent, unmoving, watchful. They weren't grazing—on duty, I think. I never saw so much as a cow's silhouette against the black sky. We walked silently past the cows to where the calf and cow were calling on either side of a big wooden gate. This is an image I really want to emphasize, because you may be in a very dark place sometime in your own life: I couldn't see the cows and never touched them, but when I passed the lead cow, I sensed her commanding, gentle presence. Somehow I knew each cow by her personality—her characteristic way of being.

I was a properly brought-up farm girl, and it's always the younger person who opens a door for the adult. We reached the gate and found the little calf right there and its mother immediately on the other side. I matter-of-factly walked toward the gate thinking, "This is simple: Open the gate, let the calf join the cow, close the gate." But the little calf, already upset and anxious anyway, ran away. In a few minutes it called again—from the far side of that field of corn stubble. Behind the calf was a ditch. On the other side of the ditch was a remote, uncultivated part of the farm. Whatever we did, we had to keep that little guy from getting so scared that he crossed that ditch. I hitched the gate behind Daddy and me. We just stood there, silently.

I asked hopefully, "Could we just open the gate and let the cows back into the cornfield for the night?"

"It's not good for the cows to be so far from the house at night," Daddy explained. We stood there. Finally Daddy said, "What do you think we should do?"

It most certainly was not the case that Daddy didn't know anything about herding cattle. He could perfectly well have said, "Do this, do that." When Daddy phrased it as a question, basically he was gathering the sense of the meeting.

Daddy was on my right. I said, "I'll walk to the far left of the field and walk up the fence line till I reach the ditch, and you walk to the far right and walk along that fence. When we reach the ditch we walk toward where the calf is and try to get between the calf and the ditch. Then we walk a little behind and on either side of the calf and bring it back to the gate." We began walking.

I walked next to my fence line thinking, “How am I going to know when I’ve found the calf?” Even the mother cow was silent now, as was the baby. I wondered if she knew we meant well and her silence was reassuring to her calf. I continued to walk until I reached the ditch, then turned and walked along the ditch. To this day I am amazed—I *found the calf because I heard it breathe*. His breathing was slow and relaxed; he was no longer anxious. I stopped where I was and stood silent until I could hear Daddy’s footsteps approaching from the other side. I said quietly, “The calf is here, between us now.” Daddy said nothing. Then, we slowly turned and silently walked the calf back toward the gate.

As we approached the gate, the little calf started trotting toward where his mother waited silently. Again I moved ahead to open the gate, wondering if he would run away again. But when I picked up the heavy, creaking wooden gate and moved it to let him through, he unhesitatingly joined his mother. I fastened the gate behind us, and the cow and calf joined the herd. The herd moved off together.

During a very, very dark period of my life, it was this memory that gave me the courage and faith to move toward healing. I knew there would always be light enough.

### **Stuart Greene “Q & A”**

*What is the first thing that comes to mind as you look back on the gathering?*

Amazing—but that doesn’t say anything—then this came to me: “A moment in the school of heaven.”

*What was the outstanding moment for you?*

Most: The ceaseless opportunities for growth and giving.

Least: I can’t remember so much of what happened. Maybe it’s like not being able to remember vocal ministry.

*How did you get to the meeting and who was the first person you met on arriving?*

- Drove alone. Way didn’t open for riding my motorcycle or carpooling. I like to look at cows ’cause I used to raise them. On the trip through Ohio, I noticed cows who had gotten out two different places about twenty miles apart. The first was only a single cow who was eating forbidden high grass in an adjoining fenced field. The second was a group of about fifteen, which had just entered a field with very tall grass and no visible fencing. After going a little ways down the road, wanting to alert someone, I decided to turn around and arrived at the field just as the lead cows were about to enter the roadway. I scared them back when another driver stopped behind me who knew the owners and said he could take care of it from here. The timing was too perfect to be anything but divine intervention. :)

- First people met: In the parking lot I met five Friends but don’t recall their names. Each one seemed to be 80+ in age, and one humorously wondered if I, at 61, would be the youngest person attending?

*What were your experiences with the various activities?*

Registration: No hitches. The registrar turned out to be my roommate.

Meals: Food and service was excellent. I got along on the grazing cuisine better than I had imagined. Actually, a woman behind the counter offered to make me a real hamburger (I hadn't asked; she must have seen the look in my eyes) but I didn't accept, the current choices being very acceptable.

Dining Hall discussions: A rich experience every meal. On the last day I dined with a man from Maine who was hilarious—just what I needed after the intensity of the preceding days.

Worship: I have no words to express the abundance and the perfection of the Spirit's workings that I witnessed in these meetings. It is so humbling for me and joyous to have been a part of such meetings.

Early Morning Outside Worship: Perfectly Rich. In Saturday's meeting I was graced with an opening that prepared me for the work and learning to come later that day. It's so cool that the Spirit knows just what I need and provides it just when I need it. :D

Home Groups: Power packed and Spirit rich. Energized off the chart. Lives seemed changed as a result of these meetings. Friends were open and candid as if intentionally standing naked before God. It was true seeking in action and more than any station in life, I revere the Seeker.

Interest Groups: Interestingly, neither session, though useful, made my mind's highlight reel. The spontaneity of the Spirit's presence wasn't as evident. At times the talking seemed secular, and so by contrast to other meetings, it was flat and at times even boring. Maybe there was significant worry involved in the planning process and/or human expectations present in the participants that may have distracted us from trusting the Spirit's ability to lead the agenda.

Open Mic Night: I didn't attend. I was tired and put a priority on being fresh for the next day's activities.

The Final Gathering: A most powerful meeting with a Friend being called to the ministry in its midst.

Saying Goodbye: Most memorable for me was meeting for the first time Cathy, who "blamed" me for mouthing the word "help" in the first meeting for worship. The Spirit's message behind the word had struck such a strong chord in her and had resonated in her throughout the gathering, culminating in her receiving God's Call in the final meeting for worship. Oddly enough, when she shared this with me, I couldn't remember having said it.

Final Comment: As rich and life changing as this event was, and even the fact that Friends feel clearly led toward such a gathering next year (the leading to name the condition of the world is resonating in me as well), I feel a concern about the temptation of considering that this gathering might become an annual event. I do not feel that a series such as this should

be contrived by Man. The idea of “annual” cuts out the Spirit spontaneously leading us to the next opportunity. Nothing can be taken for granted in this business, especially the gathering of mystics. With such power there is also danger. We must be aware of this continually, or our work can take a wrong turn without our knowing it. Along these lines, we may need more Elders at the next gathering.

### **Donne Hayden “A Safe Place To ‘Come Out’ ”**

I attended the Friendly Mystics conference at Earlham College with five other Quakers from Cincinnati. About 45 people came from as far away as Belize, Washington State, Washington, D.C., New Hampshire, Texas, and points between—all of us longing for a certain kind of conversation, a safe place to “come out” of the mystical closet.

The first night, when we broke into small groups, we didn’t know each other—people were restrained and cautious in my group. Finally, a woman from Wisconsin spoke and named the reluctance she felt to talk about her mystical experiences, even among Friends, even in her own meeting, even in this gathering of self-identified mystics. Others in the group echoed that sentiment.

The reluctance to speak about mystical experiences may reflect an intuitive sense that they were intended as individual instruction on the spiritual journey and not for everyone. Certainly a reluctance to talk about one’s mystical experience is a response to the attitude toward such things, not only in our contemporary culture, but in earlier times and cultures. In general, society does not welcome mystics.

*The preceding is a segment from a message that Donne delivered to Cincinnati Friends Meeting on June 30, 2013. The entire message is included in this Proceedings document as Appendix A.*

### **Hazel Jonjak “A Call to Friends with a Minimum of Oil Use and Computer Skills”**

Tears rise again. I have opposing reactions within myself. *The* strongest moment was the younger woman standing at the end of Mic Night saying we are called to look at the “condition of the world” as earlier Friends did.

My soul-spirit leapt, saying “Yea!” and tears filled me.

But the logistics of traveling to Earlham College again appall me. I so appreciate Lissa Field from Appleton, Wisconsin, renting a high-mileage car and implementing three of us riding with her. But seeing the traffic and freeways around Chicago and Milwaukee makes me despair. Where are the plants and birds and soil that once were an eco-system? Why have humans overruled other species of being?

I live in the woods, without a car or running water. I walk or ask for rides with people who are going where I need or want to go. I’ve modeled my life on Henry David Thoreau and my Polish grandma who traveled to Ironwood, Michigan, when her husband finally

could afford her passage in 1907. I'm so out of the "Loop"s that it's difficult to take in what the majority of Americans' lives are made of.

Then in terms of responding to the condition of the world, I believe I'm more impatient with incremental political change than most Friends. I *hate* war. I *despair* for the Earth. I'm comforted by Native ceremonies and practices that lead in a spiritual process, yet I'm embarrassed to say I want to lean on elders, traditions like the Haudenosaunee Tree of Peace, rather than being in a pivotal leadership role myself. With my difficulty traveling and the nearness of the Lac Courte Oreilles Ojibwe Reservation, I gravitate toward ceremonies and political actions at home, or have traveled to Friendly Gatherings to be with Friends in Unity with Nature or Pagan Friends. Yet I feel I need to do more, to find others who are ready to join in nonviolent civil disobedience or larger networks of nonconventional people. It occurs to me I should find a ride to the Penokee Hills here in northern Wisconsin to oppose the mining project that is starting up. I'm struggling to envision the world my fourteen-year-old Ojibwe grandson will know when he reaches Grandfather stage.

I met Friends who inspire me at the Friendly Mystic Gathering: Muriel from Red Wing, Minnesota, the woman from Texas who cared for an Aborigine elder in Australia, the sculptor-in-wood, triptych seamstress, mystic poets and storytellers of Open Mic Night.

I write this giving honor to elder Don Klaber and other eccentrics of Duluth Meeting long ago. I hope to join with other Friends with a minimum of oil use and computer skills.

### **Pat McBee "A Place of Connection"**

It is a delight for me to gather with other mystics—to discuss our experiences without being considered either saintly or crazy, but just exploring how the experience was and how we are responding to it. Thank you to everyone who came and shared and grounded one another. It was a privilege to be with you.

Another delight was a late night conversation with Jean Roberts, remembering how a small number of Friends in the early '90s began to create a network of Quaker mystics and began *What Canst Thou Say?* Jean, Ross Flanagan, and I began having interest groups at the FGC Gathering and collecting names of interested Friends. Then Jean and Jim Flory began *WCTS*. The growing group worked to organize three gatherings of Quaker mystics: In 1996 there was one at Quaker Center in Ben Lomond, California, and one at Pendle Hill. In 1998 there was another at Pendle Hill. Then, to my knowledge, no more until this one at Earlham.

In the meantime, *WCTS* has been a steady place of connection for us. There is a long list of Friends who have taken responsibility for keeping *WCTS* going. We are fortunate to have one another's support and fellowship.

**Janet Mullen “First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics Recollections”**

In driving to Earlham College in Indiana, I was unaware I had crossed a timeline. I was puzzled when I found everyone already gathered in worship as I arrived, so without meeting a soul, I settled in with everyone in worship. Taking a few deep breaths, I was soon enfolded in a deep yet vibrant peace, feeling strangely connected to people I’d never “met.” It was clearly a gathered meeting, one which felt like I had been drawn to the center of gravity of my existence. I was infused with a sense of belonging, of “coming home” that would continue throughout the weekend.

The small group was another highlight for me. Four of us gathered in chairs on the lawn and began with silence and inviting Spirit to speak to us, guide our direction. We began to share about our own path of discovering mystical experiences, and as we spoke, we became awed by the manner in which the separate threads of our experiences wove together. Connecting more and more deeply, we became aware of the gathered nature of this meeting. Laughing, listening intently, empathizing and feeling in wonder, the time flew by. Noting that this was a privileged experience, being able to share these experiences which are so out of the ordinary, so strange to many people, all expressed a relief at not having to feel wary at whether such revelations would be accepted by a listener. We felt, in a word, safe. We had a desire to create this space of safety for others who might also be cautious to share their mystical experiences, and began to think of ways to offer this as we returned to our daily lives.

**Diana Oleskevich “Acceptance and Shared Wonder”**

Our experience was rich and meaningful. I was delighted to “sink” into the environment where there was acceptance and shared wonder among Friends in sharing mystical experiences as “normal” and not be looked at askance! The home group concept allowed me to build trust, to listen deeply and to reflect on Spirit’s manifestation in the mystical realm. I learned again that Ordinary times and daily routines can be full of mystical meaning when we are awake and conscious, aware of the Holy Mystery in our lives. I appreciated the openness and joy of all of us who shared the weekend at Earlham—what a perfect location for our gathering!

I was introduced (again) to *What Canst Thou Say?* and invited into a circle of Friends who share a wonder in the amazing ways God becomes known to us. Thank you.

**Amy Perry “I Felt Like Groucho Marx”**

I have to confess that when I learned of the gathering, my ambivalence about the mystic part of me gave me this feeling: I felt somewhat like Groucho Marx said when invited to join a club—he didn’t want to belong to any club that would admit him! But I am very glad I went.

I really enjoyed the gathering—the people I met, the people I knew whom I got to know better, and the processes I learned. Also I was glad to be able to share the dance, because I think I had showed it to only one or two other people.

### **Rhonda Pfaltzgraff-Carlson “A Call To Friends”**

*published on the Internet at <http://quakermystics.wordpress.com>*

During the First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics, I heard that we were being called to “name the spiritual condition of the world.” Mariellen later encouraged me to share the story of that leading. Given that the story is somewhat long, I have . . . removed some of the less relevant and most personal details.

As I sat down to write this story, an image-feeling came to me; it was of energy radiating from a center. I realized that it was a representation of the calling—of the inward experience that led up to, composed, and followed it. Then I realized, from the side view, that the image of radiating energy looked like a mountain. So I will share the story as it happened chronologically, but urge you to keep in mind that inwardly it was like climbing a mountain.

#### *The Climb Up*

On the morning of Thursday, June 13th, I woke up from a dream. *I had dreamed that I was in the church I grew up in. There was to be a wedding after worship in the main sanctuary, but then it appeared that there was going to be a smaller wedding in the room off the sanctuary.*

*No one had set up for the wedding. The bride was trying to do everything herself. The bride’s and groom’s families and friends were not helping. The groom seemed immature. He was there and willing to do things but was not taking any leadership. I saw that they needed help, so I got involved.*

*There were a number of people milling about, seemingly unaware that there was going to be a wedding. I tried to get the attention of the people in the room who were guests. I couldn’t get their attention.*

*I decided that the pocket doors that would close the room off from the sanctuary needed to be closed. I thought that if I could get them to close, I could get the people to hear me and then take some appropriate action.*

*My mom came and saw that the people weren’t paying attention to me, even when I was talking to them in my loudest voice. She told me just to start taking action.*

*Later, I dreamed that I was with my immediate family. We were going to be part of a worship service in a very large room. There were chairs in rows. For some reason, Reid was moving the chairs around so there were spaces between the chairs. As a result, I was not going to be able to sit by my family.*

The next morning, Friday, June 14th, the first day of the gathering, I had this dream. *I am associated with a man. We are in underground terrain. He is leading a group. I am not in the group. I am going along with him but alongside, not part of the group. He is trying to get them to sing.*

*We are on a bus trip. We stop at a gift shop where I find a camera. It is in a box. I look at its features. It is a 35mm camera. It has a lot of components that go with it. The film case seems like the toner*

*cartridge—it's not just a cylindrical drum. Even though I don't fully understand the camera, I decide to get it anyway. I believe I can figure it out after we leave. I am confident it is what I am looking for.*

Later that same morning, I received a letter from my brother. In the envelope was a card, a picture of him, and a letter which documented an intense dream. After seeing all the contents of the letter, I felt stunned. Soon, I could tell that I was not allowing my feelings to surface. After I allowed, felt, and processed them, I realized that my brother trusted me and was willing to be vulnerable with me. I treasured that; I saw it as a gift.

Upon reflection, I realized that what my brother shared with me and my associated reaction to it had additional significance. My feelings associated with caring for him allowed me to see that other caregivers who are open and receptive to the people they care for might also feel as I did. In particular, it helped me to perceive that I was being cared for in this way without previously being aware of how my caregiver felt about me.

Later that same day, when I was reflecting upon this experience and my recent dreams, I recognized that masculine and feminine aspects of myself were preparing for a joint action, that I had an inward maternal figure helping me, and that I had the tool (the camera) necessary to capture a true image of myself.

Before going to bed the first night of the gathering, I realized that I was loved by my caregiver. I revelled in the feeling.

Then, at about 4 a.m. Saturday morning, I woke up from a knock inside my head, which was soon followed by light pouring into my consciousness. I hadn't experienced either before, so I got up, as a way to note the reality of the experience and, ironically, to help myself go back to sleep. Getting back to sleep was important to me, because I really wanted to attend early meeting for worship the next morning.

After I fell asleep, I had a dream. *In the dream, I found Marcelle. I was looking for her because I wanted to ask her about what I had experienced. When I asked her, she responded by saying it was wind. She said it in a way that I could not tell if "wind" meant nothing or something.*

Upon waking Saturday morning, I realized that wind was another name for the Holy Spirit.

#### *At the Top*

The second day of the gathering, after breakfast, everyone met together for meeting for worship. As I was sitting in worship, I had the sense that "God had called this meeting" and that God had called it for the purpose of our "naming the spiritual condition of the world." I felt my heart pounding in my chest. I desired to be faithful, but I hesitated to share what I had heard. My sense of the message was that it was big and might be difficult for people to hear. I decided that I would only speak it if I was pushed to my feet or if it seemed to be in unity with the other spoken ministry.

I listened to the other messages. They seemed to be going a different direction. My heart stopped pounding so urgently. In the meantime, I received other pieces associated with the message:

- a) *God had called us from the edges of the Empire to come to this place, Richmond, Indiana.* Rather than the gathering being composed of people from the Midwest, we had gathered from across the United States: from New Hampshire to Washington state, from Minnesota to Texas, and many places in between. The net had been cast wide. Prophets were being called to rise up from the ground that needed to be cleansed.
- b) *The purpose of naming was to identify that which has otherwise been left unnamed.* I was already aware that sometimes all that needs to happen to change something is to bring it to awareness and identify it as what it truly is.
- c) *This call was a challenging spiritual task.* While we had been reflecting at breakfast that this gathering was quite lovely because it was so informal (there were no business meetings to attend nor minutes to write), we had been unaware that the work that we were being called to do was profound, uncustomary and deeply challenging.
- d) *While this task was not new to Quakers, it would demand that we step out of our familiar routines.* We are already aware of the deep environmental and social challenges of our world, but we were now being called to perceive and name the underlying, unmanifest spirituality that the physical and social conditions reveal.

After the meeting for worship, a Friend came up to me and said something to the effect of (I wish I could remember his exact words) “what this generation doesn’t do will be passed on to the next.” I noted his words and felt reassured and empowered by them.

After lunch, I shared with Marcelle what I had experienced during the night and heard during meeting for worship. She suggested that I share what I had heard during the open mic. It didn’t seem the type of thing that one would typically share during an open mic, but given my trust of Marcelle’s judgment, I agreed. I told her I also planned to share it with the interest group that would be talking about planning the next year’s gathering. She supported the idea.

I was still wary to share what I had heard, but I also felt it was the appropriate time, so I shared what I had heard during the interest group for planning the next gathering. Mike Resman, the convener, responded by saying, “I have been sitting with this for ten months.” I felt he was open to what I had heard because it seemed to answer a question that he had been holding. He welcomed the leading and asked me to share it during the open mic. While I had thought that everything would be downhill from there, on Sunday morning I found out otherwise.

I woke up that morning feeling odd inside. I had a sense that “I wasn’t sure where I was.” Objectively, I knew that I was in a dorm room at Earlham College, but internally I

could not find myself. As I sat with the feeling, I got the image of a butterfly getting ready to come out of a chrysalis. By reflecting on it, the thought, “I have become who I’m meant to be,” came to mind.

I didn’t know how to respond emotionally. I reflected back to a situation when my caregiver had told me, “Enjoy it!” So I decided to do just that. The song “How Can I Keep from Singing” then came to mind. I decided to look it up in the hymnal during early meeting for worship.

There were no hymnals in the meeting room at Stout Meetinghouse, which was not unexpected, given that it was primarily used for unprogrammed worship. So I decided to find it later and centered myself in the silence.

It’s hard to describe what happened next, but three elements clearly stand out in my memory. The first thing that I remember happening is my consciousness enlarging. The internal image I had was that I was pregnant, with the “bubble” starting at the top of my head, extending out in front of me, and running to the end of my trunk. I also remember being in the Presence of God and witnessing God’s majesty. I was left with the sense that God was huge (so large that even a small part of God didn’t fit into my enlarged consciousness) and I was small—not insignificant, but definitely very small relative to God. Finally, I remember the strain of being there. It felt like something was being ripped out of me. I felt I could take the strain, so I stayed with it; but I also wanted, very badly, for meeting for worship to end.

My sense of the experience was that my leading was “the real deal.” It’s one thing to think about “naming the spiritual condition of the world,” as I had in the past while reading and writing about what I’d learned from Walter Wink’s trilogy on *The Powers*, but it’s another to be called to do it.

I was shaken by the experience and wanted to talk with Friends about it. I met Mike on my way out of the meetinghouse. I mentioned it to him. He affirmed the humility that I associated with witnessing the majesty of God and reassured me that we were going to be okay because we were going to be following the call together.

During breakfast, I briefly mentioned my experience of worship. A Friend mentioned that she spent much of the time reflecting on what I had shared at the open mic the night before. She admitted that, while she abhors some elements of the world, she really enjoys others. After that, the conversation shifted.

I brought a hymnal in with me to the second meeting for worship. I let the words of the hymn resonate with my experience from over the previous couple of days. My experience during that service was more typical for me compared to the meeting for worship earlier that morning. However, I received another surprise after meeting for worship.

The conveners of the gathering had decided to close our time together with two songs. They were led by Paulette Meier; one was a hymn and another was a Quaker quote that she had put to song. At the end of the second song, a Friend interrupted the schedule by requesting that we sing another song, “Pass It On.”

I immediately asked a Friend who was standing beside me if I could hold her hand. I knew that I was unstable internally and needed the grounding that another human person could provide. I was afraid that that song, in particular, would shake me up, given my previous experience of it and the meaning it held for me.

I had sung that song at church camp when I was a teenager and had started hyperventilating in response to it. It had made me aware that I did not know what love was and that I was separated from it. But rather than the song taking me back to that scary place, this time it confirmed that I was known and that the leading that I had received was true. We were being called to participate in spreading the fire that Jesus had started (Luke 12:49). *Rhonda continued to have experiences of the Spirit in the weeks and months following the gathering. She has written about these in the Quaker Mystics blog.)*

### **Janice Stensrude “Three Days in June”**

I keep a journal. There are seventeen pages for the three days in June 2013, the days I spent with more than forty Quakers who identify as mystics. It’s odd to see that I mostly wrote surface observations—about the challenges of four women of a certain age sharing one bathroom, the deafening flush of eco-correct toilets, sturdy furniture of simple design, semi-rocking chairs, and a bossy woman whose penchant to organize everyone in sight fascinated me. I wrote about the food, mostly good, but noting that they could use some recipes for soy-free vegetarian meals.

I am surprised at the things I failed to record—things like my first contacts with Rhonda Pfaltzgraf-Carlson, Mariellen Gilpin, and others to whom I felt drawn. I was flying in from Houston and needed transportation from the Cincinnati airport to the Earlham campus. Mariellen, the only person coming to the gathering whom I knew, suggested I contact Rhonda.

I was seated on the plane before I realized that I’d left Rhonda’s name at home. I would have to depend on her self-description of a woman with long red hair and glasses. I quickly lost myself in my book, pushing aside all the catastrophic scenarios my mind created around the loss of that name. The description proved sufficient. After approaching a 60-something woman with glasses and dyed-red hair, I saw another candidate—a much younger woman with hair not so intensely red. We spotted each other almost simultaneously.

The drive to Earlham was lovely, through rural greenery and small towns. I got a sense of the geography when I learned that the airport was located in northern Kentucky on the

Ohio border. We soon passed into Indiana, and I added three more states to the list of those I'd traveled to or through. In the course of our conversation, I told the story of how Mariellen and I had met and how this would be our first face-to-face meeting.

It was January 2008 when I posted a review on Amazon of *Walk With Us* by Elizabeth K. Gordon (Kathryn, who wrote the lovely piece on page 60), who was at that time an editor of *WCTS*. Elizabeth saw my review, read it, and wrote to thank me. "You write like a mystic," she said in her response. As convener of the Library Committee at my Quaker meeting in Western Australia, I had chosen the book for the meeting library. Elizabeth lost no time in introducing me to Mariellen, and the two invited me to submit writings of my mystical experiences to *WCTS*.

I had read Mariellen's Pendle Hill Pamphlet and admired her style as a writer and a spiritual thinker. Missives between us gradually increased in frequency—sometimes a chat about daily activities, sometimes lengthy and deep philosophical discourse. When I had the opportunity to visit the U.S., we talked about meeting up. At the time, I had no idea that I would be leaving Australia in another year's time. We began to recognize that we were, indeed, spiritual sisters—very near in age, very different in experience, and very near in Spirit.

We never did get our face-to-face, so I was excited to learn at registration that Mariellen was to be my roommate. Then as Rhonda and I were leaving registration, she pointed out Mariellen in a group coming towards us. "I'm Janice!" I said with a simultaneous hug. It was a meeting five years in the making.

Buried in my journal, between pages of furniture, food, and noisy toilets, are my notes from Home Group and Interest Groups—scribbled phrases as I attempted to catch the thoughts of participants in their own words. I recall how valuable Home Group was for me. It was a great getting-to-know-you activity, as well as an opportunity for a bit of spiritual exploration. We spoke of our personal experiences and exchanged the titles of cherished books. One woman spoke of her experience with letting go and letting God: "When I stopped trying to heal, I healed." Another spoke of her struggle making a decision to become a member of her Quaker meeting. She "didn't want to go through another divorce," she explained. Her words spoke to my condition. I had likened membership vs. attendership to marriage vs. living together. Though I had fully participated in the life of my Australian Quaker community, I had balked at taking my commitment to the next level. That is a story for another time.

At the beginning, Home Group was a warm-up for our day's activities, and at our last gathering on Sunday morning before worship, it was a way to begin our release of the three-day experience.

I attended Hazel Jonjak's Interest Group on her chosen life of simplicity. Not that many people with graduate degrees choose to live without electricity. For years, the road to her house was not navigable by automobile. As soon as it became passable, she said, Jehovah's Witnesses came, giving a whole new meaning to "build it and they will come." She expressed her joy at the wild flora, some yielding edible produce. "I like to gather, not garden," she said, something that differentiates her from her Polish forbears. She has frequent visits from family and friends, and particularly cherishes visits from her half-Ojibway grandson, who shares with her lessons from his Native American culture. "I feel in the arms of the people I love," she said, "intellectual, mystical people that I love."

Only one person had signed up for the Interest Group I had volunteered to lead on the topic of good and evil. That suited me. I had my eye on a group I wanted to attend. My plan was to meet up with that one person and convince her we should attend the other group. That plan was foiled when five people showed up. I had been studying my topic for two years, but I wasn't as prepared as I thought I was. Three of five people had close personal experience with sociopaths, the people whom social scientists label as "evil." It can be a depressing topic, and I struggled to bring it to a close on a positive note. Someone requested a moment of silence, and I was reminded that every Quaker get-together for any purpose begins and ends in centering stillness, which brings more gentle closure than any words can achieve.

Sunday was a day of thanksgiving and goodbyes. As usual, I chose extra sleep in lieu of attending the 7 a.m. worship. I showered, dressed, and piled sheets and dirty towels on my bed, as instructed. My suite mate, Linda Lee, had provided a pillow and blanket for me—a service she had lovingly offered to anyone who was arriving by plane. Not finding her in her room, I added my borrowed treasures to the pile of returned pillows and blankets that were stacked by her door. I rushed from breakfast to Home Group, where we pushed the limits of our time and arrived a few minutes late to join Clear Creek Meeting for Sunday morning worship.

I visually absorbed the old meeting house, whose slave balcony gave a clue to its age. Later I sketched the layout from memory onto the pages of my journal. It had been months since I had been able to attend a meeting. It was a wonderful sort of homecoming, and I quickly slipped into the silent search to align my mind with the mind of God. Afterwards, our group gathered outside for a photo and sang a few hymns, then joined our host meeting for tea and biscuits. Then it was lunch and a round of goodbyes.

I wondered if our reluctance to leave the Spirit-infused atmosphere contributed to the little snags that delayed our departure. Rhonda could not find her car keys. After a search of her room, she returned to the car to see if she had left them in the ignition. That was when she noticed a note on her windshield. She had left the keys in the trunk lock on the day we

arrived. The note gave instructions for where she could find them. Finally on the road, Rhonda was going to be late for the Father's Day celebration that she and her children had planned for her husband. I would have a few hours at the airport to read and reflect before my flight departed. That was the second snag. My flight was delayed. I had been dreading the after-dark arrival, and now it was to be an hour later.

I didn't unpack anything that night. I dropped into bed, noticing the bedside clock telling me it was just past midnight. My final goodbye to the final day of a remarkable weekend.

### **Marie Vandebark "Living Water"**

For me, the first-time-ever Quaker mystics retreat was living water to refresh my soul. I was comfortable sharing experiences and feelings in any large or small group. Sharing writing and stories felt good because it felt safe to be myself. I came to feel a connection to Friends in my home group and among the group of riders that came together. I believe that, at least for many of us, we found the people we need to find. I got insight into other people's experience. It was good not to have an agenda.

What was new for me was the idea that contact with the dead was somehow part of being a mystic. More than one Friend spoke to this. Another topic that moved me deeply concerned the experience of abuse in spiritual communities. I hope more will be done to build on the sharing of ideas and experience that occurred around this topic.

Since coming home, I have found myself telling stories I heard—about finding cows, about being wounded, about a turtle box, and more. I have reached out to non-Quakers and found many telling similar stories, some dramatic and some more personal. The sense of belonging I took from the retreat gave me strength and confidence to open up to a wider circle of local folks than I might otherwise have tried. I cannot help but judge the retreat and much that has followed an answer to prayer.

Earlham College was a wonderful host. Mike and others on the steering committee worked hard. Everyone came together to make it a meaningful and easy-to-enjoy experience. Thank you all.



## Appendices

## Appendix A

### Coming Out as a Mystic Message Given at Cincinnati Friends Meeting June 30, 2013

by Donne Hayden

[Donne began her message by reading the following passage from a 1913 journal.]

*March 6, 1913—My mental condition lately has been so abnormal, that I dare not tell anyone what I am passing through. Indeed, I hardly dare dwell upon it myself even in my own lonely thought. And yet I am even more afraid of dismissing the subject and ignoring its significance.*

*I am visited, almost haunted I may say, by Visions of a glorious Being Whom I cannot help identifying with the Christ.*

*Yesterday afternoon I spent two or three hours in a lonely, sheltered spot between the cliffs and the sea. I was reading—Samuel Butler's Erewhon was the book, so that could not have originated what followed—when all at once, I became aware of the Presence, invisible at first. I closed my eyes, for I knew what was coming, and I feared exceedingly to see the Face that I had seen before.*

*Then came the message.*

*Now a curious thing about these messages is, that though I have tried again and again, I always fail to embody them afterwards in separate words; each message somehow seems one and indivisible, not to be told in common language. there is always something urgent, entreating, and yet awfully authoritative about it, and I am impressed with a crushing sense of past and present failure, error, selfishness, sin, and the need for readjustment of all things connected with my life and thought.*

*Through my eyelids I saw the brightness of the Presence, and for one instant, opening my eyes, saw the Vision in a flash, differing from all past Visions in the intolerable light that streamed from the prints of the wounds in hands and feet. I had to shut out the sight at once, and suddenly I felt and knew that I was alone again.*

*It was beautiful and wonderful, but terrible! I cannot go on like this. I am loth to accept either the hypothesis of its being unreal, or that of its being real. Either would mean so much. Ought I to consult a doctor?*

This passage comes from a book published in 1920 titled *Visions of the Christ and Other Experiences of a Quaker-Mystic*. For some of us the phrase “Quaker-Mystic” is needless repetition—we are attracted to Quakerism because of its affinity for mystical experience.

Perhaps the most well-known and beloved passage from George Fox's *Journal* is this one—many Quakers can recite portions of it by heart:

But as I had forsaken the priests, so I left the Separate preachers also, and those called the most experienced people; for I saw there was none among them all that could speak to my condition. And when all my hopes in them and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do; then, oh! then I heard a voice which said, "There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition": and when I heard it, my heart did leap for joy. . . . and this I knew experimentally.

In a very real sense, Quakerism was founded on such mystical experiences—early Quaker journals are full of references to visions, voices, prophetic dreams, and miraculous healings. Some would say that *all* religions are founded on the mystical experiences of someone who has a direct experience of the Divine or Enlightenment, and that Jesus and the Buddha and Mohammed and Lao Tzu were all mystics. Other people are outraged at the suggestion that the great spiritual leaders were mystics, a term they consider derogatory. When I was in seminary at Earlham School of Religion, I remember listening in astonishment to a heated argument in the dining hall over whether or not George Fox was a mystic. For some of us, being a mystic is something to be admired and desired; for others, having mystical experiences calls into question one's sanity.

Two weeks ago, along with five other Quakers from Cincinnati, I attended a Friendly Mystics conference at Earlham College in Richmond, Indiana. About 45 people came from as far away as Belize, Washington State, Washington, D.C., New Hampshire, Texas and points between, all of us longing for a certain kind of conversation, a safe place to "come out" of the mystical closet.

The first night when we broke into small groups, we didn't know each other—people were restrained and cautious in my group. Finally, a woman from Wisconsin spoke and named the reluctance she felt to talk about her mystical experiences, even among Friends, even in her own meeting, even in this gathering of self-identified mystics. Others in the group echoed that sentiment.

In part this reluctance may reflect two characteristics of mystical experience William James identified in his book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, i.e., *ineffability*, or "the inability to capture the experience in ordinary language" and a "*noetic quality*," or "the notion that mystical experiences reveal an otherwise hidden or inaccessible knowledge."

Philosophy professor Douglas Shrader explains in "Seven Characteristics of Mystical Experiences," that such an experience is first,

in some sense *beyond* expression (. . . it is indescribable or unspeakable), and second, that *expression is in some sense forbidden* (that any attempt to do so would be unfaithful or untrue to the experience). In somewhat stronger terms, there are those who regard discussion of such an experience as not

only unwise, but taboo; that these are things whereof one should not speak.  
 [The italics were not in Shrader's work, but indicate where Donne emphasized the text in her reading of it.]

The reluctance to speak about mystical experiences may also reflect an intuitive sense that they were intended as individual instruction on the spiritual journey and not for everyone. Certainly a reluctance to talk about one's mystical experience is a response to the attitude toward such things, not only in our contemporary culture, but in earlier times and cultures. In general, society does not welcome mystics. For instance, in the preamble to the act against Quakers passed in Virginia in 1660, in his journal, Fox described them as

an unreasonable and turbulent sort of people, commonly called Quakers, who contrary to law, do daily gather unto them unlawful assemblies and congregations of people, teaching and publishing lies, miracles, false visions, prophecies and doctrines, which have influence upon the communities of men, both ecclesiastical and civil . . .

Skepticism toward mystical experiences influenced even the *Journal of George Fox* that we know and love today. What we read is not all that he wrote. The Friends who collected and published George Fox's writings after his death edited them thoroughly, eliminating references to miracles and healings for fear that such claims would lead people to dismiss Fox as a lunatic and Quakers in general as misguided fanatics. Fox's references to miracles have since been "re-constructed" from an index in a 17th-century catalog of Fox's writings and published in 1948 as *George Fox's Book of Miracles*.

Another example of reluctance to "come out" as a mystic occurs in the book I quoted a passage from earlier: *Visions of the Christ and Other Experiences of a Quaker-Mystic*. Even the editor of the book preferred to remain anonymous. In the Foreword, the editor explains:

This book is not a literary fiction.

The "Quaker-Mystic" is a sane man, still living in the flesh, and his Journal forms a very bulky manuscript. He lent it to me to read, and, on the expression of my interest, asked me to edit it. At first I altogether declined the undertaking, but on further thought I decided to extract all those portions of the Journal which deal with "spirit" appearances and messages and give them a literary *format*.

The actual matter I have edited, but without altering its sense, and I have included sundry passages and allowed various phrases to stand with which I do not agree. On the question of the subjectivity or objectivity of the "visions" I say nothing. The dates in the Journal are authentic, and it will be noticed that the "Quaker-Mystic" received, by some means, a foretoken of the Great War.

There is much of the matter which will interest many classes of readers, and there is not a little of it which should do more than interest.

It is telling that neither man was willing to have his name appear in the book.

Comedienne Lily Tomlin once put the question: “Why is it that when we talk to God we’re praying, but when God talks to us we’re schizophrenic?” Today, even among Friends, there is disagreement over the validity of mystical experience. On one side, we have liberal nontheist Friends who embrace Quaker testimonies, but don’t believe in a god of any kind. On the other side, we have fundamentalist Quakers who consider themselves Christian first and Quaker second, who seem to be threatened by the idea that their beliefs might be based on something revealed to individuals now or in the 1600s rather than on the Bible—words written down by individuals in the 1st, 2nd and 3rd centuries after Christ. One Christian group has launched an all-out campaign against mysticism and regularly lambastes certain Quakers whose names we would recognize—Richard Foster, Parker Palmer, Philip Gulley. Quakerism, however, was founded on *experiential* faith and continuous revelation of truth, both arising from mystical experiences of early Friends.

What do you believe about mystical experiences? Have you had one? How freely do you talk about it? Are you willing—or able—to come out of the mystic closet?

## Appendix B

### Memories of a Gathering of Mystics at Friends General Conference in 2007 and the Launch of *Discovering God as Companion*

by Mariellen Gilpin

The book launch was scheduled in the afternoon. I'd never done a book launch before and didn't know how it was done. Pat had advised us and given me pointers what to say. Still, I was afraid of letting down Pat and Judy.

That morning I was in a workshop by Elaine Emily—someone I knew only because of Kathy Maia Tapp's interview, published in *Discovering God as Companion*. Elaine gave us the assignment that morning of holding each other in prayer during a half hour of silent worship. I felt so scattered, an abject failure at being spiritual. I admitted afterward I was launching our book in the afternoon, and my mind kept rehearsing instead of focusing on praying for the group. Once I spoke, others also admitted they'd been rehearsing for their presentations, too. No wonder I'd felt so scattered! I was so touched, then, when I showed up for the book launch and found two other members of Elaine's workshop already in the room, holding us in prayer.

Jim Flory was at FGC, and we recruited him to come to the book launch and tell how he and Jean Roberts decided to start *WCTS*; we also first laid eyes on Mike Resman at FGC. I knew Mike as the author of the very moving poems we'd included in *Discovering God as Companion*, and so we invited him to read his poems at the book launch. Mike told us that his mother-in-law thought the poems had been written for Mike's wife, rather than for God—proof positive, I thought, that the poems were indeed *love* poems to God. Shortly thereafter, Mike volunteered to become an editor. Marcelle Martin and Elizabeth K. Gordon also read their stories from the anthology—each telling how they came to follow a leading that resulted in their meeting releasing Marcelle for her ministry. Judy, Pat, and I also read our offerings from the anthology.

It was at that Gathering that I also met for the first time Kat Griffith and Eleanor Warnock, and looked up during my presentation at the book launch and met Hazel Jonjak's eyes for the first time. How did I know it was her? I just did.

The book launch was held next door to the FGC book salesroom—fancy that!—and Lucy Duncan looked at me with stars in her eyes: she'd sold eighty-two copies of *Discovering God as Companion* immediately after our presentation. That was when I started to breathe again.

## Appendix C

### **Mystics Among Friends Today Conference, Pendle Hill, October 25-27, 1996: A Singular Observation**

by **Carol Roth**

*Reprinted from WCTS, Number 12, December 1996*

The winding, leaf-strewn paths that led from Brinton House, from Waysmeet to the Barn where worship is held on the Pendle Hill campus, began to fill with humans engaged in conversations. The voices hummed into the cool, sweet autumn air, and the golden, scarlet, tan, and burnished brown leaves dangling from trees and piled up on the pathways could not help but eavesdrop. A brilliant orange-colored leaf, busy pivoting on its stem to show off his colors, yawned and shrugged as the figures neared. After all, in his short summer reign, the orange leaf had become accustomed to these strange people, to the weighty, intellectual debates they seemed to delight in when they wandered about the grounds. The leaf had better things to do, for he knew it was only rightly ordered in the brief time left to him that he celebrate his life by displaying the many varied hues and shades endowed to him by the Creator. It shook slightly and began to pivot again, but stopped as it heard the branch it clung to whisper, "Enough. Settle down, little one. Listen. Be still and listen."

The leaf, puzzled but obedient, stopped its cavorting and tipped its right side down further in the direction of the figures strolling underneath him. Soft voices filtered upwards and the orange leaf twitched in amazement, for it heard statements such as these:

"I saw an angel at the lake last year, I want so much to tell of it, but oh, how can I speak of it in my Meeting? I'm afraid they'll think I'm crazy."

"Own your experience, Friend. Did thee not hear all the testimonies that spoke of similar events? Thy truth may not be welcomed by all, tis true, but thy soul will become enlightened."

"Something, Someone, I don't really know how to name it, woke me from sleep, and I was so incredibly overwhelmed by the sense of this Presence loving me. I had to come here. I had to share this with others."

"I know what you mean. I feel as though my own experience has been validated. Now I can begin to witness, and oh, what a relief it will be to be able to relate to others that God has become real to me. How precious it is to say the name of God."

The orange leaf shivered with excitement. Was it really hearing correctly? This wasn't the typical Quaker dialogue it was used to. Why, it didn't involve stilted ponderous intellectual dissection, and missing was the heavy insistence on following the correct Quaker process. No, this talk was different. There was a new tone in the air, a tone of awe, of reverence, of

wonder that came from deep within the souls of the Friends. And look at their faces, radiating such joy, such Light! The leaf began to smile, and the smile did not go unnoticed by the branch that supported him. "See," the branch exclaimed, "I knew that this cycle would come again."

"Cycle?" the leaf blurted out. "You mean this has happened before? When?"

"Oh, yes, indeed," responded the wise and seasoned branch. "Be still and listen carefully, for I will tell you the tale of these early Friends and their leader, George Fox. Now, *there* was a man unafraid and unashamed to speak the name of God. Why, so convicted was he of the existence of God that he charged his followers to "spread forth over the earth, displaying the Light within." And they did so for many, many years.

"They did? You mean they spoke of God out loud in their meetings? They said the name of Jesus also?"

"Of course they did," the branch answered. "What could be more rightly ordered than to share knowledge of the Great Creator? The seekers who had found God were not timid men and women. They were forthright, for they spoke of God from their own experiences. Oh, my, I see that you do have a lot to learn, little one. It will be my pleasure to tell the history of the Children of the Light."

Overjoyed, the leaf did a graceful bow in the branch's direction as it said, "Oh, tell, please tell. But first, please give me your opinion. Will these present-day Friends gathered here today carry forth the ancient Quaker tradition? Or is this just a temporary conference thing that will bear no fruit for others who are hungry also?"

Just then, another group of people came walking down the path. The leaf stared down at them, struck by the God-light flowing from their joy-filled faces. The leaf chuckled and said, "Never mind. I think I have my answer."

The old branch nodded in assent. "Amen," it whispered fervently. "You do, little one. Amen."

## Appendix D

### Mystics Among Friends Today Conference

by Marcelle Martin

*Reprinted from WCTS, Number 12, December 1996*

The conference at Pendle Hill on “Mystics Among Friends Today” this past weekend was a great success. With 51 participants, it was one of the largest conferences ever held at Pendle Hill. Our final worship lasted an hour and twenty minutes, because nobody felt moved to stop it at the expected hour. For me, it was the most powerful corporate worship I have experienced. As Bill Taber said in a closing prayer, “Much spiritual work took place during that worship, and many inner impediments to the Spirit were removed. I believe that we will see changes in the Society of Friends as a result of this conference and the twin conference being held in California in two weeks.”

Note from the *WCTS* Editors: Marcelle also sent us a copy of an article from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* that reported on the conference. The article had several fairly long quotes from Pat McBee, Marcelle Martin, and Bill Taber. It also described George Fox as a mystic and commented on how Quakers were known as social activists in the area, but not as mystics.

## Appendix E

### A Report by Kathryn Gordon: A Mystical Weekend

[October 1996]

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#### Friday

Six hours of Interstate, Parkway, Turnpike, then again Interstate before I turn off onto a tree-lined street for Pendle Hill. I quiet the engine and get out. I have been here before, an April daffodil day. Good Friday and Passover. Now fallen leaves give their “little noiseless noise” and mulch-scent to the air. Surrounding this peace is the roar of the Blue Route—eight lanes of superhighway whose construction Pendle Hill and neighboring Swarthmore College tried to stop for years. Stillness is reached now despite it and within it—a metaphor, I think, for contemporary Quakerism’s challenge in a rush-hour world.

The oaks I walk beneath must be as old as the society itself. I am struck by the clarity I feel. The confusions and evasions of the last six months come into focus: my choices have moved me in the wrong direction. With this clarity comes a confident, unrecriminating urgency: I have work to do and will do it.

Approaching Brinton House, I notice a man standing alone on the walkway. He glides forward, opens the door, then disappears. I find registration, feeling anxious and exhausted. Have I missed dinner? Can people tell just by looking at me that a few hours before I was stuck behind a Garden State Parkway toll booth screaming with frustration? Do I deserve to be here?

Off to the side of the registration table stands the same man, hands folded before him, eyes forward, like an usher at a theater. Odd, I reflect, as I receive my room assignment. Odd how calm I feel now.

After dinner we assemble in the Barn Meeting Room—more women than men, more grey hair than not, fifty-one participants from fourteen states, five leaders: Marty Grundy, Marcelle Martin, Pat McBee, Mike Resman, Bill Taber—four convinced, one birthright, respectively. Hung above the facing benches is a quotation from Galatians: “The fruit of the spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against which there is no law” (5:22-23 RSV).

Pat McBee, conference co-leader and clerk of Central Philadelphia meeting, provides an overview, emphasizing guidelines that recognize “the varied ways in which we have experienced the Spirit and of the tenderness with which many of us hold these experiences.” One way Pat herself has experienced the Spirit, she reveals, is through quaking. But she has never allowed herself to quake during Quaker meeting. When she raised the issue with the

leadership team, they suggested she “Let the Spirit move her even if it meant literally moving.” It did, and she would, a visible and entirely estimable testimony.

Each leader will speak to us of his or her journey, starting tonight with Marty Grundy and Marcelle Martin. With humble dignity Marty Grundy speaks not of sudden transformations, but of growing acceptance that in her day-to-day life she was a mystic. She might for example be writing in her journal and discover that by the end the words were coming not from her, but through her. For a time she could discern when Spirit was speaking through someone at meeting and when it had moved on. This ability left her one day, only to resurface in another member. She distills a theme that will emerge strongly in the conference—gifts come to individuals for the good of the group.

Then it is Marcelle Martin's turn. I recall a night fourteen years before when she was seated in my audience as I am now seated in hers. We were in the same graduate writing program, and I was reading from my novel-in-progress, which though I didn't consciously know it at the time was about the childhood incest I'd repressed. Her presence guided me then, as it would throughout my struggle to regain wholeness. I am grateful and moved to be here. She stands and after a silence begins.

In 1985, she was walking out one night under the stars. It was during a period of questioning about the nature and meaning of life. Though she was half way through the four year program, she knew she would not find the answers there. She was feeling sorry for herself. She looked up at the stars and thought—they're so far away, I can have no connection with them (as a child she had supposed that she could). Then suddenly she experienced the reality that she and the stars and all the cosmos were one, indivisibly united in a single whole. With this realization energy began streaming through her—up her feet, legs, into her heart, through her arms and out her fingers into the world.

She knew that this power was divine and could easily heal the world and all its problems. She knew her role was to be a channel for that healing power. There followed a period of fierce seeking. She sometimes wondered if she was crazy (an experience shared by others at the conference). There were many psychic openings. While teaching one day she was filled with a golden light. Emanating that light, she understood this to be her real teaching. It was hard after that, she joked, to talk to her English Composition students about paragraph structure.

Often as she spoke she brought her hands together and touched her fingertips to the center of her chest. Making a point, she would cast the hands toward us, as if spreading seed from a supply stored there in the heart.

If I say I was moved, how can I say how much I was moved? I had been both a beneficiary of the light coming through this generous, steadfastly opening heart and a witness

to the continuing travail such opening demanded. Here was a flowering of that now eleven-year-old vision.

### **Saturday Morning**

The silent usher who silently greeted me turns out to be co-leader Mike Resman. He introduces the day's topic—"How Mystical Experience Informs and Transforms Our Lives." He tells of his first mystical opening, which I read about the day I was here last April ("The Teacher Within," April *Friends Journal*). At meeting, while praying for his spiritual mentor, who had been badly hurt in a car accident, he was shown heaven. He knew himself to be in God's presence, whose love he experienced as "greater than the love of all mothers over all time."

Mike Resman's story is the one with which I will identify most because it starts with damage and anger passed on to him by his mother. Recently I have befriended three men who were severely abused by their mothers. I am learning that the damage done to girls by fathers is not more tragic than the damage done to boys by mothers, nor is the resulting anguish greater. Although I had hoped to be in Marcelle's group, it seems right to me when I learn I've been assigned to Mike's.

After meeting for worship, we break into our small groups. Mistakenly, I take a chair that's already been taken. An elderly man enters, looks at the chair and at me. There is a scuffle of sorts as he insists I keep the chair and I insist he take it back. I move to the sofa directly to his right.

The room is large and comfortable—two couches facing, a few upholstered chairs, pleasant light. Above the mantle is a painting I've seen in the library of my meeting house: old time Quakers gathered, all heads bowed but one—a young woman looking up at the translucent Jesus figure who hovers above the elders' bench, arms open in blessing. Does she see Him, or is it faith that lights her face?

After a silence, the elderly man begins. With growing emotion he speaks of letters from his estranged daughter—fantasies, accusations. I know she is accusing him of incest. I love him completely. The past, his or mine, seems irrelevant. Healing is happening and I believe my concentration can help it along. Maybe that makes me a mystic. Maybe that makes me alive.

The worshipful openness of this first sharing sets the tone. From the silence come accounts of both sudden and gradual transformations: careers and marriages changed mid-course; healing gifts discovered and nurtured; new and strange fields of study opened; childhood trauma healed; visions: of Jesus, of a large blue-robed woman experienced as Christ; knowings: an either instantaneous or evolved certainty that a particular course is divinely guided. These Friends speak with an authenticity and care I have come to identify with Quakerism. These are not people whose veracity or motives one tends to doubt.

I think I am moved to speak, beginning with a joke—I still don't know if this feeling in my stomach is a leading or fear. But after all, I've only been attending a year. We laugh, but now I have to step toward the layer of feeling I've been avoiding for six months. I think to say that when meditating I often hear the word "representative" and wonder what I might be a representative of. Then a wave of grief rises and I say, "I suppose I represent the dead." I don't know what I mean by that, but then I think of my mother, dead a year, and her sisters, alive and addicted, and my sister, and my cousins, and the next generation—all, I fear, dead to the Light. I want to speak on their behalf before this select group—many of them healers. I feel I am the head of a body just emerging from a black bog. Because of the light in which I am held, I can open my heart to the buried parts and yet still look up toward the sun. That must be why the tears on my face are so hot.

Rhythmic entrainment—a term used by physicists to describe a common phenomenon. It's explained by inventor-physicist Itzhak Bentov in his amazing little book, *Stalking the Wild Pendulum* (Destiny Books 1988). Oscillating fields of energy tend naturally and easily to fall into one rhythm: fireflies landed on the same bush begin to blink together; the pendulums of grandfather clocks hanging on the same wall begin to swing in sync; oscillating electronic circuits in a television fall into the same frequency, with the slower increasing to match the faster. "When a strong harmonizing rhythm is applied to [the] matrix of interlocking fields," he writes, "its harmonic influence may entrain parts of the system that may have been vibrating off key" (36).

Is this a metaphor or a literal description of what happened at the conference? I don't know, but I do know two things: I was in the presence of "a strong harmonizing rhythm," and much of the world is indeed "vibrating off key."

### **Evening**

Bill Taber speaks of "Grounding our Experience in the Quaker Tradition." I recall by contrast some of my early mystical experiences. Ungrounded in a faith community, I suffered from self-delusion and ego-inflation, which polluted subsequent experience. To adapt a metaphor Bill Taber used, I thought I was the light and not the lantern, so nothing shone. Now I sit among lanterns who seem to feel neither grandiose nor worthless (sides of the same coin); who are steady, solid, and—when united as now—breathtakingly bright.

Throughout his talk people nod and smile. He speaks of radiators, members who silently channel the uplifting Light into the meeting. He tells of being recorded a minister by his meeting and how soon after they requested to release him. He was, he said, troubled by that, not wanting to appear to be a hired minister. But after prayer he realized his meeting ought to have the opportunity to recognize that God was working through him. He speaks of many things, which at this writing I can't clearly recall. I know I wished I'd brought a notebook. I know in meditation after I heard, "Now you are a Quaker in your heart," I was glad.

At a meal, I overhear Bill Taber telling a woman how he grounds himself. He says sometimes he simply rings a small bell, and listens. I picture a bare, sunny desk, a plain bell with a wooden handle motionless in the center of the sound it has sent out. Bill Taber's talk seems to me such a bell, its clear pitch offering Friends a centered grounding force.

### **Late evening**

I find the elderly man. We sit in the dark diningroom drinking tea. I ask him about his daughter's accusing letters. She is accusing him, he says, of sexual abuse. I admit I thought so, not because he seems an abuser—far from it—but because of the anguish with which he spoke. Slowly and carefully, he says that while there was one “totally inappropriate” event, her accusations are false. He trusts that she is getting the professional help she needs. He wants only to help her in any way he can.

He tells me how he shared his hurt with a man he'd selected as a spiritual guide, meeting regularly with him, working through the many feelings that arose. He asks what I know about false memory syndrome. I admit I have suspected it is society's defense against a distressing truth. I tell how I resisted my own retrieved memories, the first and clearest of which came during meditation in a sudden, seemingly guided re-enactment. I try to explain how the body embeds memories as pain and tension.

Through these two difficult tellings, we each listen to the God in the other. He doesn't challenge my version of my life and I don't challenge his. I am beginning to better grasp that word “tender.” What two people or factions, which dispute, cannot with such tenderness eventually reconcile?

The worst thing, I tell him, is that my father died young, long before our relationship could begin to heal from the hurt, anger, and guilt. I don't remember a single relaxed, affectionate moment between us.

Forgiveness, he says, is most freeing for the forgiver. “I know, I know,” I say, a defense, for though I may have read and heard it, I have not really believed it. Or done it. I open a little more, but the child in me who survived by closing down is tenacious.

Later he asks if I have written about my experience. I consider a long poem, “The Memory of the Body,” about this closing down. An excerpt seems enough:

Daddy in the doorway  
swaying like a sailor in a swell.  
The heart's valves clench.  
I crouch in a hollow auricle clutching a rock  
as on the sheet of every cell my mirrored self  
crouches clutching a rock.

The memory of the body is not false.  
 The memory of the body  
 is the lost black box  
 intact in the wreckage.

...

It is all recorded,  
 the rip of the wing,  
 the pilot's quick prayer—  
*Let me live.* I was four.

We've talked long. He goes upstairs to bed. I get a bowl of the popcorn someone has made and sit in the livingroom, other conversations going on all around.

### **Sunday**

I dream Marcelle invites me to get into a boat with her. A canoe. In the morning I can't remember much more of the dream than that, and her bright face. At breakfast, from the table behind me I hear at least four times the emphasized phrase, "Get in the boat. Just get in the boat." An important point in the conversation, it is repeated with emphasis and laughter: "And so I realized, just get in the boat and go."

I meet a woman from Wisconsin who is writing a Ph.D. dissertation on forgiveness, specifically "The role of transpersonal experience and social support in the forgiveness process."

Really? I ask later if "transpersonal experience" might be synonymous with mysticism, defined in Webster's as, among other things, "A belief in the existence of realities beyond intellectual or perceptual apprehension that are central to being and directly accessible by subjective experience, as by intuition." Exactly, she says.

My view of what's really real expands to include such graceful synchronicities.

### **The end of our last small group meeting**

When we stand to join hands, Mike Resman and I must hoist the elderly man out of his deep chair. Moved to tears, he thanks Mike for his radiating presence.

As the circle separates, I reach up to hug him. He says, "You know, last night you became as a daughter to me."

I nod yes but am too moved to speak. I have been given the reconciliation I thought I could never have.

What a brave man.

I feel joy, as well as grief—for the broken relationship, the lost love, my years of pathological anger, perhaps understandable, no less hurtful. I sit in the empty playground. The word "daddy," spoken aloud, is a switch releasing dammed emotions. This is more than I have ever felt at once, and exactly what I need to feel. Though I would rather have been

having visions and bliss, here is the work I came this weekend to do, the light at the end of the tunnel, and an answer to prayers, and mystical.

In the Barn waiting for our last meeting to begin, I consider the Galatians quote, cupping each noun like a sip of water in my palm. Love. Joy. Peace. Patience. Kindness. Goodness. Faithfulness. Gentleness. Self-control. Against which there is no law. Glancing around at the gathering faces, remembering the stories that have been told and how they have been told, knowing better now the truth of each person in my group, I see everywhere these qualities embodied. Thinking of the painting and the three centuries of labor; looking at these faces after three days of mysticism, I am filled with gratitude and hope.

Elaine Waddle, who in two weeks will co-lead a similar conference on the west coast, sits on the back elder's bench noticeably quaking, as she has been on and off all weekend. Waves of trembling pass through my upper body. Father-related emotion continues. I wonder if my energy is disruptive. It seems to me I am feeling rather than worshiping or waiting in expectancy. The flow jams in my throat and I must leave, coughing. I quickly come back.

Later I meet a woman who left during meeting because she heard Take your boots and go. Maybe I should have gone too. But I wanted to feel that current and hear those messages. One man asks us to consider addicts' addictions as attempts to ground themselves in their bodies. From another man comes an outpouring of prayer for more female images of the divine. A woman from my group who will later reveal that she "just does not sing," rises to sing "These are holy hands. These hands do God's work, and so these hands are holy hands." With verses for lips, eyes, and so on. It's an uplifting and effective affirmation. A woman speaks of a vision of Jesus she had the night before, and I am reminded of the thoughtful discussions I have heard here between Christ-centered and universalist Quakers, and of the need for such thoughtfulness elsewhere.

I can see the face and square shoulders of the elderly man. The rising current is unblocking my heart. My trembling increases. I ride and at the same time resist the flow. What would it feel like to give up entirely?

The Pendle Hill lunch bell ends our worship, which has stretched twenty minutes over the expected hour.

Much later, in the New Year, I call the elder I met in my small group. We talk about the weekend and my difficulties writing this. He helps me see that my problem rests in deciding whether to report or to testify. Immediately this clarifies things. He also supplies what I know will become the article's last words: "This was a weekend about mysticism among Quakers, and we didn't just talk about it, we found it."

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*What Canst Thous Say?*(*WCTS*) is a worship-sharing group in print for Quakers with an interest in mystical experience and contemplative practice. Our Internet home is

<http://whatcanstthousay.org>

The editors of *WCTS* are pleased to announce an extension of our presence on the Internet with the creation of two blogs.

The name of the first blog is *What Canst Thou Say? The Blog*. The intent of this blog is to share, from the perspective of Friends, a spiritual approach to life. Through our sharing of Friends' stories, we hope to model, teach, and practice listening to God, encourage new and old Friends alike to have a spiritual practice, and to document the transformation that results from our reaching out to the Universe for guidance. Visit this blog at

<http://worshipsharinginprint.wordpress.com>

The second blog, *Quaker Mystics: Naming the Spiritual Condition of the World*, is written by the *WCTS* editors and gathering organizers. A leading that came out of the First Annual Gathering of Friendly Mystics prompted the creation of this blog. To read about that leading by Friends who work to steep their lives in God and to learn more about the second gathering, visit

<http://quakermystics.wordpress.com>