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What Canst Thou Say?

Friends • Mystical Experience • Contemplative Practice

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

Anger at God

Convert

Michael Resman, Editor

It is often thought that spirituality is all sunlit flower gardens and butterflies. Spiritual paths can also include frustrations, failures, loss and pain. I experienced this most pointedly years ago, as told by the following poem.

All right, I'm through with whining —for today.

*For years I lived crouched
in a bubble frosted
with my intestines—torn out and smeared
to shut out what I couldn't stand.*

*I found a way out.
Others, then You helping
and stood squinting, amazed
at sun and flower petals and butterflies.*

You warned me.

*Showed me a horrendous pain
and asked if I would pick it up.*

*Reluctantly, I said yes,
thinking it would be physical, public—
noble perhaps.*

Hah!

*So now I've cried for two weeks
and screamed inside my head so loud
that I will ride that sound for years.*

*And in silence I've converted
a lifetime's loss*

without needing to know why.

The conditions referred to still exist for me. No, I won't name the loss I continue to struggle with. That's more sharing than I'm comfortable with.

So what's the deal? God is love. How can it be that pain can be associated with growing into loving God?

My answer is that this physical world is too beguiling. First there are the physical pleasures, grabbing our attention and efforts. Add to that the abundant emotional and intellectual possibilities life provides, and there can be little left for spiritual hunger.

Yet hunger for God is the basis of spiritual living. We have to be willing to turn away from things of this world to fix our gaze on The Other. It then becomes easier with time to give over to God, but those first steps can be monumental.

Anger can impel us toward God. While not the kind of prayer we usually think of, being furious about our circumstances is a powerful method to turn our faces to the Divine.

In the midst of a dysfunctional childhood, John Edminster demanded an answer from God, "Why don't you show yourself?" Charley Earp shows us how religion can be brewed into a poisonous concoction when mixed with child abuse. Catherine Scott demonstrates God's majesty encompassing the horrors life on earth can bring.

These authors give us hope, showing how they moved beyond their anger and pain. It is reassuring as well to encounter these examples of God's steadfast love and mercy. We can be broken, angry, and in despair, and still be welcomed when we reach for God.

Screaming Anger at God

Catherine Scott

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

Tell us your stories! **WCTS** is a worship-sharing group in print. We hope to help Friends be tender and open to the Spirit. Articles that best communicate to our readers focus on specific events and are written in the first person. We welcome submissions of articles less than 1500 words and artwork suitable for black and white reproduction.

Please send your text submissions in Word or generic text format and artwork in high resolution jpeg files. Photocopied art and typed submissions are also accepted. Send via email to <wctseditors@gmail.com> or hard copy to **WCTS, 815 9th Street SW, Rochester MN 55902.**

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On a spring day, May of 1984 it was,
in Littlestown, Pennsylvania.
I was walking the fields
following two terrible deaths in two weeks.
Brother and niece.
Suicides.
I was reeling in numb, a thick fog of shock.
All of us were.
Slowly grief began merging with rage deep in my loins.

Only some Force, very big and unknown, but imagined,
Could hold that kind of pain.
People said some thoughtless, mindless things.
Twisting the knife in my belly.

Walking through the woods,
I watched my self pick up a fallen limb
Smash it against its mother tulip tree.
Again with a maple branch.
Then a tough tall oak that took three hits to crumble.

Now I was cussing and crying.
I stumbled into the house
And slammed pillows, pots and pans,
anything that wasn't breakable or nailed down.
I screamed and shook my fists at God,
yelling every rage-full word I could think up.
Maybe for hours.

When the ghoul had frothed its full,
I sank to the floor.
Surely the lightning will bolt through the window
And strike me senseless.
I just cussed out the God of the Universe.

I guess I fell asleep there on the floor.

At daybreak I sipped coffee on the deck.
Discovered I was dazed,
Not dead.

It dawned on me then:
If God is not big enough to handle our hideous suffering
And its poisonous offshoots,
He/She/It is of little use to the world.
If He/She/It can't deal with our holy insanities,
The release of our terrible feelings and sufferings,
Then She is not Love.
How could some lesser Force than Love create universes?

Catherine Scott lives in France, but sojourned in Urbana, Illinois for 6 months and had the great privilege of attending the Urbana Friends Meeting each week. Her stay was a writing retreat to work on a book. Learning about Quaker thought was a deeply informing joy for this curious contemplative!

My First Prayer Was One of Rage

John Jeremiah Edminster

I was raised an atheist, and taught to be cautious about who I let know about it, particularly Grandma, who would be upset. Grandma carried a four-ounce medicine bottle full of holy water in her purse and gave us scapulars to wear. I wasn't sure what her religion was about, except it had to do with her rosary, the Bible, and never touching oneself.

"Johnny, never touch yourself," she admonished me one day.

I had no idea what she was talking about. I walked around for a minute or two trying to keep my fingers from touching one another, then gave it up as impossible. When I was a little older and could read, my big sister and I looked into the Bible. I wanted to see how the book ended—and what I saw was horrifying: God had the fearful, and the unbelieving, and all liars thrown into a lake of fire. I was an unbeliever, and I had told lies, and now I was fearful, too: three strikes against me. I didn't want to believe in God at all.

But by the time I was ten, Grandpa was dead; Grandma was dead; and Mom was dead, dead of cancer at forty-eight. And Dad, who was always drunk now, who made me sleep with him, and who kept a pistol in his nightstand, could easily be dead in a heartbeat—possibly by his own hand.

I was starting to read books about science, which told me that the universe was mostly empty blackness; human bodies were mostly water; and the state of a system at time T must be completely determined by its state at time T minus 1. How this deterministic bag of mostly water that was myself managed to experience consciousness was inexplicable to me. How could meaning or value emerge—but it couldn't.

It had to be unreal as a dream. As

for consciousness—here today, gone tomorrow, like Mom's. Faced with a meaningless world, I comforted myself with candy bars and *Tales from the Crypt* comic books, which showed corpses rotting, the fact of life no one talked about. Fortunately, I had one friend, Donald, and a dog who loved me.

One night I took a notion to try praying, and reckoned it was to be done kneeling at my bedside, the way it was done in book illustrations. I remember the coarse-woven, blue-grey bedspread with black, red, and white stripes. I must have had my shoulders hunched up in fear of being caught. I feared looking like a fool, or worse, for Dad to walk into my room and catch me at prayer, which would have been ten times more humiliating than if he had walked in and caught me—well, you know.

I half-whispered my words, half-mouthed them silently, "If You exist—You probably don't, but if You do—If You exist, why don't You show Yourself?"

My heart was filled with rage and grief. I'd been told that Christians believe that God wants everyone to believe in Him. But how was that fair? He gave no evidence of His existence! Believe in Him, why? And then throw people into the lake of fire if they don't? I hated such a God who stacked the deck against His creatures by demanding belief and then making Himself invisible. I guess I wanted God to exist, but not if God was going to be cruel or crazy like that. When, later in life, I read the psalmist's comparison of God to a strong man who shouteth by reason of wine—that was just the kind of God I didn't want. And no lakes of fire!

It was a kindness to me that God courted me slowly. Dad sobered up and

remarried, a Roman Catholic woman eighteen years his junior. I heard him say the "Our Father" at an Alcoholics Anonymous meeting. I never told him how much that meant to me, though he lived another thirty years in sobriety. Toward the end of my teens he was reading Suzuki's *Essays in Zen Buddhism*. And my stepmother, God bless her, never twisted anyone's arm to "get religion," as I half-expected all Christians to do. But she seemed to know just the right moment, in my early twenties, to give me copies of *The Practice of the Presence of God* by Brother Lawrence and *The Cloud of Unknowing* (14th Century, author unknown).

I have an abiding tenderness toward people who are angry at God—the Jobs, the Jonahs, the Holocaust survivors, and the old Quaker woman in the red hat, Dot Pierce, who gave vocal ministry about being angry with God. I learned that she'd been locked in a closet for punishment as a small child. I couldn't blame her.

I like that God wipes away all tears from our eyes in the end, as faith tells me God must. I like that God jokes with angry Jonah about his sulking "even unto death." I like that God has expressed God's all-forgiving, all-saving inclination toward the repentant and the thankful through the character of Jesus. I love having a God who is Love. Love casts out fear, heals all anger, and in the end must reconcile all creatures. I'm grateful to have started my relationship with God by expressing rage. May it help me better to serve as one of God's comforters to the angry.

John Jeremiah Edminster is an M. Div. student at Earlham School of Religion and a member of Clear Creek Monthly Meeting (OVYM) in Richmond, Indiana. He carries a concern for promoting the use of early Quaker writings available online.

Healing Thyself

Charley Earp

Jeff, Bev, and I were meeting in her office for an extended session of healing prayer. I had been seeing Bev as a counselor for several years. Jeff was a close friend with a ministry of healing who I had come to call my own personal pastor. I was struggling to hold my life together, raise my two children, and keep my marriage healthy. I was unable to keep myself gainfully employed. Depression and post-traumatic stress syndrome bound my soul, frustrating all my attempts to live the life I longed for. Religion was both part of the violence that had wounded me and, it also figured in my efforts to become whole.

Dad was a Pentecostal preacher and, like many boys, I wanted to grow up and be just like him, ministering the gospel to a lost world. Church became an alternate reality where I danced with Jesus and sang with the tongues of angels. Home was the real world of fear and pain. Mom and dad fought constantly; my siblings and I were enmeshed in a dysfunctional system. Religion was both disease and cure.

I grew up enthralled by biblical stories, which I blended with a love of science fiction. A perfect garden of Eden, fabulous miracles of liberating Hebrew slaves, the rebel Jesus preaching love and salvation, and some day we all would walk golden streets where there was no more weeping or dying. No human utopia could ever compare with the golden bejeweled city of New Jerusalem. And, if I only obeyed every little commandment, repented all my sins, and threw myself on the perfect blood of the Lamb Jesus, I would have an immortal body in that endless blissful realm.

I was around eight years old and we were living in a small town in western Illinois where Dad pastored. One day I was walking the few blocks

home from school and one of the bullies decided it was time to ramp up his thus far mild harassment of a sensitive, awkward, and shy boy. He followed me home, throwing punches and kicks at me, and cursing me with words I barely understood. I rushed my way home—though it felt like hours—as this kid I can't even name today made my existence pure torture. Once I made it to my driveway, I broke into a sprint to my front door.

“Yeah, run, you fucker!”

I felt safe, grasped the doorknob, turned my head, and shouted, “You're a fucker, too!”

I pulled the door open and a big dark body was coming towards me. My father was unleashing his belt as he pulled me inside. From the frying pan into the fire, my whole being burned with panic. I screamed; I begged; I repented; I wept. He yanked; he pushed me onto the bed; he rared back and struck me, repeatedly. Again, it felt like hours of red pain. Whether my dad stopped from exhaustion or belated remorse, I can only guess. This beating was the worst I can remember, though there were many others.

My mother took pity and came to me later to half-apologize for my father's rage. I was unbruised, though there were small welts on my legs. I had fallen asleep by the time she came home. As she assured me that she knew my father's punishment was excessive, she offered me a bit of advice.

“When Daddy is spanking you, don't move, talk back, or cry, just be as still as you can. It will be over soon.” I nodded, as if in a bizarre waking dream. I could do that. After all, my other hero beside Jesus was Mr. Spock from Star Trek who had the super-powers of perfect logic and control of his emotions. I would survive and fly away to the stars someday! I learned much

later that my mother had given my little brother this same advice and he had thought my mother was insane. He recalls my immobilized silence during spankings with complete puzzlement.

I could recount even more abusive episodes and the pattern of trauma I endured. I could tell you how I came to forgive him, though he never apologized for his violence. I fell into depression and stress reactions in my late teens. I couldn't hold a job for more than a year and half as a young adult man. I married at age 19, grasping for a permanent love, fathering two wonderful children, terrified that I would scar them as I was scarred. I sought healing, therapy, and escape into fantasies, theology, and imagined utopias.

When I was 23, I decided to move my little family over 1,000 miles from Texas to Illinois in search of heaven on earth in the form of a Mennonite intentional community. Since church was my alternate reality to my dysfunctional family, it seemed that living in a setting that was both church and home might bring me peace and healing, and a chance to become the minister for Jesus that I wanted more than anything else. I could become a better preacher than my own father, I imagined.

Weekly potlucks, group meetings, daily neighborly encounters, and truly incredibly loving people began to show me that life could be so much more. I began to realize just how much pain I was in and to do the work I needed. Years of counseling climaxed in that marathon healing session with Bev and Jeff.

I recounted in that session more details of the stories of my abuse. I let myself cry, complain, and curse the pain. We lowered the lights; I laid down on a mat; and I prayed for Jesus to heal me. Memories of abuse

appeared in my mind as a toxic swamp and I floated atop the poisons in a prison cell. As I retold that worst beating of all, I came again to my mother's advice to control my reaction to the pain. A part of me was proud of how much pain I could endure. Jeff, my best friend and healer, looked into my eyes as I lay prone on the floor. He seemed to perceive something in that moment as he took in the story and my silent stoic armor.

"Charley, what did you say to your father before your mother's advice?"

A small voice began to cry and scream in my head, a voice I had not let speak for decades. I broke, I bled, I dissolved into sheer endless grief.

"Daddy, please don't, I'm sorry, I won't ever say that again, never, please don't spank me, I'll be good, please, Daddy, don't, don't, don't."

Again, time stopped, hours seemed to pass as I wept and held onto my inward child for the first time ever so tightly since I had locked him in that cell so long ago. He was bruised and

bleeding and so lonely, so forsaken. I would never leave him in that toxic swamp again. I kicked open that cell and we both walked out onto dry land. We pushed the cell into the poison and acid and it melted into mist and smoke.

My father told me that his grandfather was a drunk and gambler who died at a New Mexico racetrack.

My grandfather, who I loved endlessly for his gentleness, was "pushed from pillar to post" among his aunts and uncles, since his mother was barely sane herself.

Paw-paw became a teen-age street kid in Abilene, Texas, headed for nowhere when he came across a Pentecostal storefront mission when he was 14 years old where the joyous music lured him close one night.

My other grandfather, a deacon of the mission, pulled Paw-paw inside and that night he gave his life to Jesus, throwing away his brand new pair of dice. He became a Pentecostal preacher, married the deacon's daughter, and they raised my father and his

siblings in the fear of hellfire and clinging for dear life to the promises of Jesus.

My dad can recount his own tales of physical beatings, yet he never connected them to his own depression and stress disorder. No one could ever convince my father to get the help he needed to heal his own traumatic childhood. He never trusted psychology since it wasn't in the Bible, that perfect book.

My healing work wasn't over that day I embraced my wounded soul. I needed medication, more dreaded science, to finally drive depression from my life. I have held a job with the same company for 12 years. I quit spanking my own children once I made the connection between my illness and that practice, though it wasn't soon enough, no doubt.

Preacher, heal thyself.

Charley Earp lives in Evanston IL and is a member of Northside Friends Meeting of Chicago. He has a love-hate relationship with religion and thinks a Quaker meeting is a great place to work that out.

Conversation with William Shetter on WCTS Blog

In the May 2018 issue of *What Canst Thou Say?*, William Shetter celebrated his 90th birthday with an inspiring poem entitled "A Milestone Birthday."

*"Who among us, dear worship-sharing companions, can observe that **ninetieth** without seeing ahead with a fresh clarity the now foreshortened span of time ahead?"*

Shetter's submission led to an email conversation with Editor Rhonda Ashurst who had some interesting questions. That conversation was printed in the May issue and the conversation continues on the WCTS Blog <worshipsharinginprint.wordpress.com>. Readers are invited to participate in this interesting conversation. Just go to that website to find the continuing conversation and feel free to make a comment.

WCTS Has Two Blogs

1) Quaker Mystics: Gathering for Discernment of God's Guidance <quakermystics.wordpress.com> was originally created to support gatherings sponsored by *What Canst Thou Say*, but since we are no longer sponsoring gatherings, this blog is available for other purposes. Michael Resman has been publishing his wonderful poetry. Readers are encouraged to become followers of this blog.

2) Soon after creating the Quaker Mystics blog, the editors found the need for another blog to support the journal *What Canst Thou Say* <worshipsharinginprint.wordpress.com>, for continuing conversations like that with William Shetter. Also on that blog is a series of essays on "Attachment and Detachment" by Mariellen Gilpin.

To contribute to either of these blogs, contact Judy Lumb <[judylumb@yahoo.com](mailto:judy@judylumb@yahoo.com)>.

Thank You, Carol Roth!

In October of 1994 Jean Roberts and Jim Flory started *What Canst Thou Say* (WCTS). In 1997 Marcelle Martin, Patricia McBee, and Carol Roth took over the responsibility for WCTS. Carol Roth has been a supporter of and contributor to WCTS ever since. We have been informed that she died on May 30, 2018. We want to say, “Thank you, Carol!” She has articles published in issues: #12, 13, 20, 21, 25, 29, 35, 38, 43, 52, 54, 60, 70, 72, and 73. All but the first three of those issues are available in the back issues on the WCTS website <whatcanstthousay.org>. We want to share a couple of those articles here. But first Mariellen Gilpin explains how important Carol has been to her. —The Editors

Thank You, Carol Roth!

Mariellen Gilpin

I first met Carol during a phone meeting with the editors when I joined the team in 1998. I was a newly recovered mental patient—that is to say, I had been bent, folded, stapled and labelled by a number of different doctors. I was a very shy person, used to keeping my cards close to my chest. I was also a Quaker, whose recovery had been sparked by multiple mystical experiences. I had recently discovered WCTS, and noticed in their most recent issue that they were in need of editorial help. I wanted to help!! But... I was crazy. But...they mentioned they needed proofreaders. I could probably proofread for them...So, I emailed an offer to proofread.

That evening, I began scribbling on the backs of old envelopes—proposed themes for future issues of WCTS. Next day I sent another email, with some eight or nine themes, each with the sort of questions for going deeper which Quakers call queries, to

inspire Friends to share their experiences on the various themes. One of those themes was really scary for me: Wholeness in the Midst of Brokenness. Maybe a week later, I joined the phone meeting with the editorial team. I remember Pat McBee and Carol Roth were on that call. We talked about who would be lead editor for each of the next four issues. Pat asked me to lead an issue about a year later—on that most scariest theme of all.

“I don’t know anything about editing a newsletter,” I said hesitantly. What I didn’t say out loud was, “I don’t know nothin’, no way no how, how to go public about Wholeness in the Midst of Brokenness.”

“We’ll teach you!” Pat said cheerfully. Confidently.

And I agreed.

So far, Carol had said very little. But she asked me to stay on the line at the end of the phone meeting. I vividly remember her words: “I read your list of themes and said to myself, ‘This is a lady who’s had a lot of really deep spiritual experiences.’ I really want to get to know you. I look forward to working with you.” We talked a little more, sharing our lives. Both of us had been abused children, she very much more than I. It was clear to me that Carol was straightforward, deeply honest and deeply kind. I had a new friend when we hung up.

As I began to write for WCTS—as I began to “come out” about my mystical experiences, which many MDs with PhDs had told me were mentally ill experiences—it was Carol who first saw those early drafts. She was an excellent editor and teacher of editorial skills, and unfailingly supportive and respectful of my experiences. By the time I had been lead editor for my first issue on “Wholeness in the Midst of Brokenness,” I was a

confident member of the editorial team of WCTS. Whenever I work with new authors, I try to be as kind and supportive and respectful of others’ experiences as Carol was for me when I was the newbie on the editorial team.

Carol was my model, my teacher, my confidant, my fellow pilgrim on this journey to God. I love Carol. I look forward, when it’s my turn to join her across that great divide, to many more deep and meaningful conversations with Carol. Thank you, Carol, for showing me I’m ok, and teaching me how to be who I really am.

Love, Mariellen

(This remembrance was read at Carol’s Memorial Service.)

Giving Witness to the Light

Carol Roth

From February 2000 *What Canst Thou Say* where it was reprinted from *Friends Journal*, September 1995.

In the darkness and despair of a dysfunctional family, my early experiences of Light were rare but powerful to me: a smile from a kind teacher, time spent alone in awe and reverence at the beauty of nature. These were gifts I treasured. They brought joy into the years of abuse and poverty and into my role as caretaker and rescuer of my siblings. There was also something else that sustained me and strengthened me during those years. It was a deep, innate knowledge that the violence and unhappiness in our home was not the way God intended us to live. Somehow, despite the bitter messages from my parents that faith was hopeless, that unhappiness and pain were all we could ever expect in life, I had an inner conviction that whispered to me that Love was the real way. I tried

to cling to this inner voice but it was difficult, for human voices, thick with ridicule, said that God didn't care: to hope for the gift of God's love in a world that was cold, ugly, and devoid of tenderness was only a childish illusion.

I didn't want ever to believe that the statements from my parents were true, but when I was raped at age 18, the small, inner voice inside of me was no longer able to persuade me to listen to it. Nor could I see Light anymore, not in others, not in nature, and especially not in myself. When I looked around, all I could see was fear. When I glanced into a mirror, all I saw was shame. There were no support groups for victims of rape, and I couldn't tell my parents, so I kept everything inside: all the shock, the horror, the anger. I didn't own any of it, nor did I discuss it with anyone. I let all the feelings of shame and disgust grow and fester inside of me until in my own eyes, in my own heart, I was a non-person. I was convinced I was filthy, not worthy of human love, and not worthy of God's love.

With that sort of victim mentality, I married the first man who asked me, grateful that someone would even consider me as a wife. We had a daughter I adored. In her pure and loving spirit I saw once again the innocence and wonder I had fought so hard to retain as a child. I clung to her and she did to me, for we needed each other desperately. My husband was a spouse abuser. For years, I kept his beatings a secret, for I was certain there was something I was doing wrong that was the cause of his unhappiness and cruelty. When our child was four and my husband's violence threatened to turn in her direction, I knew that this living hell could not go on. I am certain that even though I had turned off the small, inner voice, God had not deserted me, because my daughter and I managed to escape with our lives.

This miracle of escape, of a chance at a new life, enabled me to hope, to open the door to trust in the possibility of happiness and love again. As my child looked to me for stability, direction, and protection, I also wanted to be an example for her that our world held Light, not only darkness, that if she would only reach out, love would be there. So I reached out, and someone reached back: a gentle man, a good and decent man whom I married. We had a son, and we were given two years of joy and happiness together. Then a shadow called cancer came into our lives, and in our fourth year of marriage, at the age of 31, this gentle man died.

My spirit died, too. My body was alive. It moved with me to feed my children, to care for their needs. But their love for me, and my love for them, could not penetrate my inner darkness. I was filled with anguish, with overwhelming loneliness and torment at this loss of this man. I hated God for the first time in my life. I hated even the idea of God. All the time I had spent as a child trying to retain the illusion of God, the insane idea that God existed, all that energy spent trying to believe in God—for what?

Wrapped in my own self-pity, I moved like a zombie through the summer and fall months after my husband's death. Winter came and I was relieved and glad to draw the heavy, lined draperies across the windows. I wanted no bright sun in my eyes. I wanted it dark, as dark and black as I felt in my mind and heart. Spring came again and another summer. Still, I kept the house dark. I would never, ever, allow myself to believe in Light again.

Then one night, as I sat in the darkness, from inside of me something cracked in the core of my being. Tears surged up, ripped through the surface, and exploded in racking sobs I could not stop. It was my own soul that was crying, weeping bitterly for all the hurt,

all the pain, all the struggle. The little child in me that was never allowed to cry or express her emotions gave vent to all the feelings until, trembling, exhausted, spent, I pleaded for God to rescue me from the darkness in which I was imprisoned.

Light came. It filled the room. It was under me, on top of me, surrounding me. Warmth flooded me. Light was in me, pouring into me, coming out of me. I was one with the Light. I was enveloped in it. This Light had no shape, no form. It was pure, radiant Light. It stayed in that room with me, comforting me, loving me as a mother's or father's arms must feel to a child. I don't know how long it flooded me. I had no sense of time. The Light was still with me as I rose and went to the door and opened it to a day filled with early morning. I crossed my front yard, unable to comprehend what I was seeing. Radiant, silvery, golden Light was everywhere. Everything shimmered, everything was changing before my eyes. I could see the veins in the leaves of the trees above me and the veins were moving, dancing with some kind of life force. The trees emitted a kind of current, as did the roadway before me as I opened the gate to the picket fence, which seemed to pulse under my fingers. I could see into everything I looked at, and all was motion and force, pulsing with incredible, light-filled energy.

Somehow I was able to see in a way beyond our normal way of seeing. There was no sense of time, no boundaries of any kind. My sight expanded and I saw scenes before my eyes: an Indian walking through the forest, bow slung across his shoulder; a Chinese woman with an infant bound on her back, bending over as she planted rice seedlings, her sturdy legs immersed in mud. I saw a black slave, his face sullen as he stripped cotton, iron chains around his bare feet, dragging, as he slowly moved across the red earth.

I saw cities also, filled with people cloaked in darkness, unaware of the Light so alive within themselves and others. I knew Earth and all in it contained this living Light. I was given to know (not audibly but from inside of me) that spirit is eternal. We can't comprehend this because our human sight is limited.

I was also given to know that what happens to us, how our lives are lived, is related to how we think and how we perceive. If our seeing, our feeling, is one of darkness, it is often because we are choosing to see, to feel, this darkness. It does not mean that the Light is not there. The Light is real, in us, always available to us. We may try to deny it. We may try to empty ourselves of it.

But we are part of it as it is part of us. If we only allow ourselves to believe it, truly believe it, we will be able to see, to feel, the Light in ourselves and in each other.

The luminosity of the Light faded. I was filled with joy, awe, and wonder at what I had experienced. I felt that my limited, human language could not ever hope to convey what had happened to me.

This gift of Light did not blast away all my darkness forever. When I do not focus on the Light, when I lose my way, I am capable of much hurt to others and to myself. This gift of seeing the Light so clearly also did not mean that I would not struggle or have pain or sorrow in my life. But this experience did teach me that when I am weary or afraid, I can draw strength from the power of the Light. I am learning to choose to see Light when I look at myself, at others, and at the world around me. This changes my perception, and in turn this helps to influence the way I think, feel, and act. I am not always successful at this way of Seeing, but I am determined to keep trying, for I know the Light is real. I know that what Thomas Kelly

wrote is true: "The Light for which the world longs, is already shining...." It shines, dear Friends, it shines.

Carol Roth is a published writer and poet residing in South Jersey, where she now intends to write full time after having raised a large family. She became a member of Mickleton Meeting (NJ) in 1986. She also is an active member of the National Alliance on Mental Illness, which advocates for those who are stricken with mental illness.

Opting To Live

Carol Roth, a member of the WCTS editorial team, sends her deep gratitude to those who responded to the call for prayers in the last issue of WCTS. She has sent us the following report on how the Spirit is finding her as she recovers from orthopedic surgery and lives with Barretts Syndrome, a painful and potentially fatal condition of the digestive tract. (WCTS # 29, February 2001)

I have decided to opt to live. For a while there I let myself get so tired of the pain that I really became depressed. Having had experiences wherein I have been to other levels and I know of the peace and beauty that awaits, I began to yearn to go home where pain would be gone. But something happened this past week that has turned my entire thought system around. What I am going to relate is just an incident but boy, what it did to my soul is amazing.

On a windy day last week our overhead gutters were clogged with leaves, and I wanted to spare my mailman hubby, Martin, more work. After surgery on my shoulder I couldn't move my arm to use the wire brush to sweep out the gutters, so I asked my daughter Morgan to help.

Morgan is 20 and lives at home while attending college. She was born with what are called "essential tremors." Fine tremors run through her body, especially her hands, constantly. She is also a tiny slip of a girl, weighing at the most ninety pounds. We got out the ladder and since I couldn't

sweep out the gutters, Morgan got onto the top rung of the ladder. My role was to stay under her, holding onto her legs, which were shaking just as much from the cold wind as from her tremors.

We did the entire back of the house. We moved around to a one-foot section on the side where the drain spout came out of the gutter. In only a moment we would be done, back into a warm house for lunch and hot tea. I said to Morgan as I looked up at her, "Be careful, honey. Don't let the wire brush fall into the downspout." A second later came the thunkety-thunk of the long-handled wire brush going down the downspout.

She looked down at me, her eyes wide with disbelief. I helped her down off the ladder, where we both collapsed in laughter, sitting on the cold ground, just hugging each other, laughing like crazy. I bet we sat there for fifteen minutes, hugging and laughing.

We knew we had to get the wire brush out from where it was stuck, in the curve of the drain spout as it neared the pavement. But how? It was a stiff wire brush with a very long handle. The curved end of the downspout was riveted together, not screwed or bolted. If we left the brush in, the spout could be clogged with ice come winter.

I asked Morgan to unwind the hose and drain the water out. I had the idea that the hose would be flexible enough when free of water. I would put it in the down-spout underneath the brush and push it straight up until the brush popped out of the top of the downspout.

Morgan drained the hose and brought it over to me. So I took the hose in hand and stuck my right hand in the spout with the hose.

Good. There were the stiff bristles of the wire brush. This would be so easy . . .

My hand got caught. It was caught in between the wire brush and the hose. I tried to slide it out. No way.

The wire bristles were cutting into it. The hose was up against my hand, and there was no way to get my hand out. Morgan said, "Mom, what's wrong?" I replied, "My hand is stuck. It is really, really stuck. I can't get my hand out."

She plopped down next to me. We looked at each other and started to laugh again. We howled, we giggled, we laughed and laughed. The wind was fierce and we were so cold and yet, I was so happy because I felt so grounded in the sense of the moment we were caught in. My daughter's eyes were beautiful, her laughter so rich and full. The wind was delicious. I was fully human, fully alive, totally in tune with the earth, with the soul beside me. I wasn't thinking of being far away from pain, of leaving the earth. I was filled with love for where I was, who I was as a human being, and I knew that I wanted to feel the cold, the wind against my face. I wanted to be here when Morgan graduates. I wanted to live . . .

I asked Morgan to go into the house and call 911. We needed help. She wanted to know what to say and I said, "Just tell them that your mom has her hand caught up in the downspout. We'll take the police, a plumber, just send some help." Morgan was aghast. "Oh, Mom, just keep trying to free your hand, just try once more."

I did. And it worked. I managed to ease my scraped hand out, pushed the hose against the wire brush and there it went, the brush popped out of the top of the downspout. We did it! Success. Hugging, laughing, now exhausted, we entered the house.

When the wire brush flew upwards out of the top of the drain spout, it was as though something that was clogged inside of my own soul simply burst

Submissions Encouraged

We are encouraging submissions from our readers/writers community. For the last few issues we have had fewer submissions than usual. We are missing Mariellen Gilpin's strong recruiting efforts from which she has retired. She is still a member of the WCTS Editorial Team, but is no longer taking the bulk of the responsibility for recruiting and receiving submissions for WCTS as she did for many years. Her efforts were very successful in encouraging submissions. Now it is up to the rest of us.

Do you have a story about insights from your ancestors? Please write for the November 2018 issue. Check to make sure it is not too late. Have you been with the dying? Please share your experience with the rest of this community for the February 2019 issue. Are you an elder? Have you experienced being elderd. Please write for the May 2019 issue sharing your experience with eldering.

*Thanks from the rest of your editorial team:
Judy Lumb, Michael Resman, Rhonda Ashurst, and Earl Smith*

through as well. This seems so silly. But it was a turning point for me. I opt to live. There is such conviction in me now. I have chosen to live; I will live with full attention and full awareness of the time I have to spend here. I will live in attention, in awareness, in

appreciation that I am just as human as I am spiritual. I will work to help the healers help me, and I will do the best I can to live a life filled with humor and awe.

Blessings and love,
Carol

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November 2018

Buried Treasure: Insights from My Ancestors

Guest Editor: Betty Brody

A reflection on the lives of our ancestors can help us construct an awareness of the whole fabric of who we are. To be whole is to be healed on a deep level. What spiritual or emotional journeys have been inspired by learning about the lives of your family members who have passed on? Whether you have experienced them as positive or negative, what gifts of healing, awareness, challenge, teaching or inspiration have you received from family members?

Deadline: August 15, 2018

February 2019

Being with the Dying

Editor: Susan Greenler with Judy Lumb

How then shall we live? Have you supported loved ones with their final journey on earth? How have you and they faced this holy time: creating space for a hope that is ever changing and sharing what needs to be shared in words, touch, or through hearts? How may we and our loved ones feel complete with this life, softening into a future that will be forever changed, living into this time, moment by moment?

Deadline: November 15, 2018

May 2019

Eldership

Guest Editor: Alison Levie with Earl Smith

And dear people of God, be tender over the least breathings of God's Spirit in one another and all wait to be clothed with a healing Spirit.—William Dewsbury

What is your experience with spiritual eldership? Has someone acted as a “midwife to your soul”? Have you witnessed Friends speaking both kindly and clearly in response to Friends’ choices? Have you seen the skills needed for this important role nurtured? Does Spirit-led eldering deepen the faithful vitality of Friends’ meetings?

Deadline: February 15, 2019

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**Anger at
God**