



February 2020  
Number 105

# 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*

## Healing

### A Mother's Heartlines

Judith Favor

Early-morning pages, written before my responsible self comes on duty, take me into deep, dark places and a few bright, clear ones.

My fifty-four-year-old son is dying of cancer, complicated by meth addiction.

Mary's question to the angel echoes within me: How can this be?

The answer, according to the Beatles: Mother Mary said to me, Let it be. Let it be.

"What are you seeing?"

Ray's last words were raspy, yet powered by the curiosity that propelled his entire life.

"I see you filled with light," I said, "and surrounded by light. I see you loved and loving, forgiven and forgiving."

With that, he slipped into stillness. No sign of pain. No sign he knew I was there, yet I knew it was the absolutely right place to be. I just knew.

How long can a mother gaze upon her comatose son, seeing that of God in his wasted body and paralyzed limbs?

One can live infinitely into a single moment, says Philip C.

When my oldest son phoned to take me to lunch, I said, "No thanks. I'm right where I need to be." I declined Michael's invitation to dinner, too, because I was beginning to feel something so unexpected, so far off the deathbed emotional charts, that I could barely name it to myself, let alone speak it aloud. It felt strangely like joy.

Joy? How could this be? I was losing my youngest son to cancer after decades of shared adventures, epic struggles and occasional unitive experiences in nature. Why joy?

Later it came to me: Holy obedience. Surrender to Love. All through Ray's final day, I sat where Christ guided me to sit. Kept silent until prompted. Spoke what Spirit directed

me to say. Personal needs, even hunger, evaporated into the mystery of grace.

How can a son's tragedy become a mother's grace? How could Ray's passing engender a joy huge enough to encompass all of his pain, all of my pain, and perhaps your pain, too?

Holding a loving, prayerful vigil with my dying boy lifted me through sorrow and beyond it to an astonishing fullness of joy. But even robust joy is fragile and fleeting.

Ten days later, grief yanked me down, pulled me deep beneath the strong dam of capability I had constructed to care for my husband as he weakens with Parkinson's Disease.

Triple sorrows smashed my carefully constructed dam. Loss of son. Loss of Partnering Pete. Loss of mobility and freedom. The combination brought me to my knees.

I cried and cried and cried and cried. How is it even possible to sob for so many hours?

Pete, helpless to comfort me, called the grief midwives. Friends Connie and Charleen came and knelt beside me on the floor. Time collapsed beneath floods of tears.

Losing a child is unspeakably difficult. I can manage only silence.

Lifting Heart Lines from my messy morning pages buoys me through the grief-bursts.

I swim infinity loops in the community pool, and dive deeper into stillness.

Sometimes I find a Heart Line in another's words. Sacred Veil lyricist Tony Silvestri: "Giving myself permission to write these texts allowed me to revisit my grief in a very powerful way. I understood I hadn't fully grieved, because I hadn't processed it in art."

Eric Whitacre's music and Los Angeles Master Chorale lyrics convey Silvestri's intimate expression of his young wife's death. "Primagravida. Retroperitoneal cystadenocarcinoma.

### **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, Eleanor Warnock, and Rhonda Ashurst.*

*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.*

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

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Adrenal cysts..." How do they manage to sing complex medical terms so tenderly, without choking up?

I sat at the threshold with my son, at the open door of Mystery, until Ray was ready to pass through it. He crossed a horizon as wondrous as the one we crossed together when I gave birth to him 54 years earlier in this same hospital.

In his end is my beginning.

Those words came in meditation. I wonder what they mean...

I travel to Quaker Center to renew body and spirit in the redwoods, to commune with Friends and place rocks of personal heartbreak in a communal grief-bowl of clear water.

I seek a weekend of contemplation for strength to tend Pete as health and memory fail.

I awaken at 1:40 AM to a delicious melting-chocolate sensation, as if I had melted into God. If I had stayed in bed to savor it, I'd still be ambulatory today... but I rose to go to the bathroom. Fainted. Fell. Heard my rifle-shot tibia fracture, saw ragged bone protruding through flesh and foot twisted at right angles.

"Uh-oh, compound," said the first EMT. "Not prepared for that," said the second.

In Trauma ICU, a nurse drew red balloons and wrote Happy Birthday on the whiteboard. My decidedly unhappy 79th birthday was brightened by my daughter's visit followed by assurance from two female orthopedic surgeons that their repair efforts were successful.

**Judith Favor** is nourished in worship and service by Claremont Friends Meeting in Southern California. An anchor committee supports her in writing "Friending Rosie: Respect on Death Row." <JudithFavor.com>.

## **Healed Scars Don't Hurt**

*Dimitri Mihalas*

I would be dead now if it were not for the force of GRACE. It took a long time to get "medically well". But I am still healing, and probably will as long as I live.

I remember when I was a kid in junior high school, we boys were in the showers after a P.E. class, and there was a boy who had a huge keloid scar from the top of his left shoulder down to the nipple on his chest.

Being "a brilliant diplomat", I said "Gosh that looks awful. How did you get that?" He said "I was burned in a house fire."

Continuing my "diplomacy" I said "Gee, that must have really hurt!"

He replied "It hurt terribly".

Then he did something that astonished me: he clenched his right fist and he hit that scar as hard as he possibly could, and said "But it is healed now, and it doesn't hurt any more."

I have never forgotten that: sometimes we do get burned, sometimes horribly, but after we heal, it doesn't hurt any more. The ugly scar remains: but no matter how hard you press on it, \*it doesn't hurt any more\*.

**Dimitri Mihalas** wrote *Pendle Hill Pamphlet #327* titled "Depression and Spiritual Growth" in 2000. Excerpts of this pamphlet were published in the February 2000 issue of WCTS on the theme, "Wholeness in the Midst of Brokenness." (see p. 7 of this issue). In his 2000 bio he wrote, "I now know that the light never fails and one need merely reach out to feel God's touch."

# St. Louis Cathedral

Maurine Pyle

While attending a conference in St. Louis in 1991, I took a stroll along the banks of the Mississippi River. I call it my sanctuary water because I grew up dreaming near its muddy banks in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Along the river's edge I spotted an old Catholic cathedral made of gray stone.

Even though it was many years before that I had left the Catholic Church and joined the Quakers, I was still curious about the architecture of old buildings. The sign out front said it was the first Catholic church built in St. Louis. I made my way down some narrow stairs into the gift shop where it was indicated I could enter the church.

An old gentleman behind the counter announced to me, "Mass will start in five minutes." Inwardly I groaned because I had no desire to be anywhere near a mass. As a recovering Catholic, I had taken the pledge to stay away from mass; however, I did attend church once a year when I visited my father, but only as a courtesy to him.

Ignoring the old man's message I decided to go into the cathedral for a quick tour. As I entered the church, I could hear people praying the rosary. It was Veterans Day, and the church was filled with people praying for the war dead. "What kind of Quaker could walk away from this scene?" I asked myself. So I knelt down to pray with them.

When it was time for mass, the Voice firmly said, "Stay." I agreed. I noticed that I felt comfortable being there. How strange! When it came time for the Eucharist, the Voice urged

me to join them at the altar. Again, I felt comfortable as I walked down the aisle and shared in this most sacred ceremony. With God's permission, I took the host and the cup for the first time in 19 years.

As I returned to my pew and knelt to pray, I heard the Voice once again; and the instruction was quite specific. I was asked to give a message to my friend Pat, a former nun and a fellow refugee from the Catholic Church. Right after hearing the message, I wrote it down on a postcard I found in the atrium. Here is what it said: "A renewal of faith and healing will extend to your community and to those whom they serve."

I knew the community meant the School Sisters of Notre Dame, Pat's former order. I did not know how my friend would react since she was an angry Catholic renegade just like me, but I took a risk and sent the message to her. Pat's response was to keep that message on her desk at her job for a year, and she read it frequently. By the end of the year she had healed her wounds and rejoined her order as an associate member.

Pat invited me to become an associate member as well, which I did. We have both found joyful renewal of our Catholic heritage among the radical nuns who had been hidden from my view. Their mission is: "To empower others, especially women and the materially poor; to evangelize and be evangelized, being sent, and supporting those sent to confront unjust structures and challenging situations." I have found that their

mission matches my own perfectly. The School Sisters of Notre Dame remind me of my favorite Quaker heroes. They support people who are imprisoned, empower the poor, and develop the gifts of women.

Later on, I met my 90-year-old sponsor, Sister Anne Mayer, who invited me to attend the 150th anniversary of the founding of the order. I tagged along with her, and after the main program had ended, Sr. Anne declared it was time for lunch. She ushered me into the dining hall where she declared, "Let's sit here!" As I sat down, I scanned the table and noticed that she had not been shy. Our lunch partners included the leader of the worldwide order and the Papal Nuncio, the Pope's representative to America; a kindly gentleman, he quickly fixed his gaze on me. Apparently deciding I must be a novice, he called me to his side for a special blessing. All the while he was blessing me, I kept wondering, "Should I tell him that I am really a Quaker?" I chose Quaker silence as my answer.

For my own healing with the church of my childhood, God had sent me back in time. Without my being aware of it, I was led to return to my childhood faith tradition while still remaining a Quaker. What a neat trick God played on me.

*Maurine Pyle is a member of Southern Illinois Quaker Meeting. She joined Annapolis Friends Meeting at age 25 and has been a Quaker for 45 years. She is also an associate member of the School Sisters of Notre Dame but no longer calls herself a practicing Catholic.*

# *This Little Light*

*Rhonda Ashurst*

In March 2017, I spent a week on retreat in a small cabin on the banks of the Trinity River in California. It was a journey into myself and my past. I carted along all my journals from high school to age 50, determined to go through them, hoping to find peace. I brought my favorite spiritual books to support me, my laptop, a scanner, pre-prepared food to sustain me, coffee for the mornings, wine for the nights, and a yoga mat.

Days unfolded without agenda, at first frenetically, as I relived years of being lost, mostly in other people's agendas and needs. Yet somehow the flame of my own fire and truth continued to burn.

I struggled with addiction, capitulation, escapism, depression, anxiety and guilt, but I also had an inextinguishable resilience, a faith that love and good were stronger than darkness, a true desire to be a comfort and support to others in their own struggles. As I read my life story, I cried; I laughed; I yelled; I walked along the river; I did yoga; I prayed; I journaled; I read. With time, I became more peaceful and my frenzy slowed.

I began to see the longer lines of my life's journey. By some grace I can never explain in words, I let go of the guilt I had always felt about not being perfect, and I could see it was all perfect. I knew that every step had brought me to where I was and every one was needed, especially the missteps that taught me the most in hindsight.

In my prayers I asked for guidance about where to go next. At 50, it felt as if I were crossing a threshold into a new phase of my life and I wanted a map.

On my last morning, I sat meditating and praying on my yoga mat. Suddenly, I dropped down into the very core of my being and everything else fell away. I heard the Voice Within start singing that old song I learned as a child, "This little Light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine." The Voice Within transmitted this message in a thought form:

You are always looking outside yourself or somewhere else for answers or a mission to complete. STOP. I AM RIGHT HERE INSIDE YOU. You don't have to go anywhere. Pay attention, I will bring to you all you need and all who need you. BE STILL, KNOW YOU ARE ONE WITH ME.

It was one of those sublime moments I will never forget, filled with grace and peace and deep knowing. As I have returned to my normal life, this knowing fades in and out. But some channel opened in that mystical moment and I can tune into it if I am still and quiet my mind. I have discovered I am the one who leaves mySelf, who forgets that of the Light is within me and everyone else.

***Rhonda Ashurst*** lives a quiet, contemplative life with her partner. She attends the Reno (Nevada) Friends Meeting. She practices yoga, serves the cat, and writes a blog <[rhondaashurst.com](http://rhondaashurst.com)>.

# *Holy One I Love You*

*Michael Resman*

*Holy one, I love you  
more than life itself  
come, oh come to me*

*You pull me  
as the moon pulls the sea  
gentle, hidden, soft  
irresistible*

*I ache for your embrace  
never enough  
couldn't be enough*

*My soul sags  
mind weary  
heart hopeful  
ever hopeful*

*To know you  
hear you  
be touched  
comforted*

*The crickets and I  
will sing this song  
through the night*

***Michael Resman*** is one of the WCTS editors. He worships with Rochester MN Friends Monthly Meeting.

# Healing at an Indigenous Ceremony

Judy Lumb

I am very grateful for a healing I experienced at 4 pm on August 6, 1998, in the village of Barranco in southern Belize. I am in Barranco now as I write this and wondering what new perspectives I might have 21 years later. I have told my story in previous articles in *WCTS*, but here is a summary:

I was already at work at 8:15 a.m. on February 26th, 1985, when I suddenly felt ill, like I was coming down with the flu.

I had a couple of warning dreams before this. One had flashing lights around the outside of a billboard that said: "Your mind is completely degenerated and it will take a lot of rest, at least eight hours of sleep a night, to regenerate it."

I eventually got a diagnosis of Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. During the next two years my two sons took care of me as they finished high school. I wondered what I would do when they graduated. At that point I saw my cousin, who had just come back from Caye Caulker, Belize. He told me two things, "They have electricity, but nobody wears shoes." That sounded just right to me, "Surely a couple of months of total rest on the beach and I would be well."

So on June 25th, 1987, I went to Belize for a couple of months. But instead of getting well, I learned to live an interesting life within my limitations based on publishing from my hammock. We now have about 40 books for sale, half for Belize and half for Quakers in the U.S., Canada, and Kenya.

Belize is the only English-speaking country in Central America, but it has a great diversity of cultures. Ethnicities are delineated by the languages one speaks. Everyone speaks English and

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there are four indigenous languages and a culture to go with each, Maya Mopan, Yucatec Maya, Q'eQ'chi, and Garifuna. If a person still knows a Maya language, they are considered Maya Mopan, Yucatec Maya, or Q'eQ'chi. If they are of Maya heritage, but now only speak Spanish, Creole and English, they are Mestizo (mixed Maya and Spanish). The Garifuna people are a combination of two South American Amerindian groups, Arawak and Carib, plus Africans from crashed slave ships or runaway slaves.

We just had the 19th of November, Garifuna Settlement Day. While the Garifuna people are only seven percent of Belize's population, a national holiday celebrates their arrival over 200 years ago. I think one of Belize's gifts to the world is living and thriving with cultural diversity.

I now understand that my healing was payment for my answering two calls. In The Garifuna belief system, favors are granted as payment for good works.

The first was in Hopkins, a Garifuna village. One day on Caye Caulker two little boys came selling bread. I asked where they were from and they said "Hopkins."

"I have been wanting to go to visit Hopkins," I said.

"Mrs. Marcella Lewis teaches Garifuna to people like you," the little boy answered.

That seemed like a clear sign, so I went to Hopkins and went to take Garifuna lessons from Marcella Lewis. I quickly learned that she had written many poems and stories. I asked if they had been published and she said someone was working on it.

A year later I returned after having published my first book and asked again if her work had been published.

"Not a thing has happened," she said.

"I don't have so much money to pay you for lessons this year. Suppose we use your work for my lessons and in return I make a book of your writing," I proposed.

"Better than that would be nonsense!" she said with a big grin.

So I published Marcella's book and we had a grand celebratory book tour to all the Garifuna villages to launch Marcella's book, 10 days in 10 villages.

The second call I answered resulted in a new organization for indigenous people to manage a national park. I was invited by the twins who were on Marcella's Book Tour, Sebastian and Fabian Cayetano, called "Sab and Fab," to a Garifuna ceremony called *dügü* in 1996. It is a week-long ceremony to honor ancestors that involves making a Thanksgiving dinner for them, and much drumming and dancing. It was only because of that intense spirituality of the ceremony that I heard the second call.

I knew that the new Sarstoon-Temash National Park had been declared south of Barranco. Elsewhere in Belize a tradition had developed of co-management of protected areas like by local, often indigenous people. The Belize government doesn't have the money to manage these areas, so they are willing to cooperate with local people. This is another of Belize's gifts to the world, co-management of national parks and wildlife sanctuaries by local, indigenous people.

I was sitting in the *dügü* and I heard, "You should have a workshop to see about Barranco and the other four villages managing the Sarstoon-Temash National Park."

"I can't even stand and talk at the same time. How can I hold a workshop?"

*"Sab and Fab know all the languages. They can facilitate the workshop."*

It went on like that over the next few days with my excuses always answered. I ended up taking a tour of those other villages. They had to find me a horse because there were no vehicles or roads, only trails. The workshop happened and out of it came a new organization, the Sarston-Temash Institute for Indigenous Management.

Two years later I was invited to another dügü in Barranco. I had four invitations: in person, on the phone, via email, and from a spirit. I was at another ceremony and was called into the inner sanctum where a spirit named "Tony" was speaking through Aura who only spoke Spanish and Garifuna, but Tony was speaking to me in English. After thanking me for helping my friend, he said, "Now I think you need my help, so you will allow me, I want to help you." He asked me to see Aura the next day and she would make some herbs for me. Then he said, "I will see you here in August." That was the dügü.

I dragged myself there a week before the dügü started on Sunday, and had been in bed and hammock resting. I heard the women were going to clean the temple at 4 pm Thursday (August 6, 1998). I thought, "Maybe there is something I can do sitting down. I haven't even seen anyone and I have been here four days." So I dragged myself down a gulley and up a little hill to the temple. As I passed through the door into the temple, POOF! My illness was gone, after more than 13 years! And that continues today. I am aware it is remission because a few times I have been pushing myself and I felt it coming back, so I stopped everything. I am very grateful!

**Judy Lumb** is still a member of Atlanta Friends Meeting even though she has lived in Belize since 1987, where she publishes books for both Quakers and for Belize under Producciones de la Hamaca <producciones-hamaca.com>.

## The Healing Process

Earl Smith

Healing. The process can go on and on and on. Pain killers can't heal. Antibiotics can't heal; they just make the healing process bearable. Sometimes our bodies are injured through disease, sometimes through accident. And sometimes we have spiritual or emotional events from which we need to heal.

During my recovery from polio my healing involved constant rest. I had developed polio in September of 1952 during my first week of first grade. Although I was not hospitalized I spent several months in bed. It was then that I developed a liking for the radio and the sound of mourning doves. While in bed, I had three choices: I could read, I could look out the window, or I could listen to the radio. I suspect that I developed my interest in current events during those months.

Some of the damage caused by the polio virus was not immediately apparent. Several years later, my optometrist discovered that my eye muscles had been affected by the virus, in addition to the muscles in my lower limbs. Surgery was recommended. Although only the muscles of one eye were worked on at a time, I needed to have both eyes covered following each surgery. This left me, in effect, totally blind for one to two weeks.

During one of those recuperation times, I received a gift of a toy xylophone from one of my grandparents. That brought a time of enjoyment to both me and those within hearing distance. One nurse who heard the sound had to find out where that pretty music was coming from (hospitals didn't have tv or radio like today).

During another time of hospitalization the time went by faster due to the fact that someone had brought in to us boys a copy of *MAD* magazine.

The unfortunate aspect of this was the articles were so funny that one night we were enjoying ourselves too much and our laughter was making so much noise that one of the nurses had to come in and remind us that it was after hours and we should consider going to sleep.

Last spring when I broke my ankle, I spent many hours in the nursing home. One hour each day was devoted to physical therapy, the rest of the time I was in bed or sitting in a chair. It could have been depressing but I decided to put the time to good use and studied internet marketing.

As I have been writing, I am realizing the importance of a positive attitude in regard to healing. Patricia Neal said a strong mental attitude will create more miracles than any wonder drug.

Henry Nouwen, writing in the *Wounded Healer*, points to the importance of hope and faith in the healing process: "Faith in the value and meaning of life, even in the face of despair and death, . . . is so obvious that it is often taken for granted and overlooked."

Robert Frost once said, "In three words I can sum up everything I've learned about life: it goes on."

**Earl Smith** is a member of Stillwater Meeting (Ohio Yearly Meeting Conservative) near Barnesville, Ohio. He has served the Meeting in many capacities including legislative advocate and minister.



## If You Lead Me

Mariellen Gilpin

God said to Jeremiah, “*Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations.*”

“Ah, sovereign Lord,” I said, “I do not know how to speak; I am only a child.”

But the Lord said to me, “*Do not say, ‘I am only a child.’ You must go to everyone I send you to and say whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you and will rescue you,*” declares the Lord.... “*I have put my words in your mouth.*”(Jeremiah 1:5-9)

I’m like Jeremiah: I don’t have the resumé to be a minister. I’m mentally ill. A certified nutcase. If I say, “This is what God told me,” people will roll their eyes and say, “Yeah, right.”

But God is healing me. There’s not been just one miracle but a whole series of miracles to bring me to this stage of wellness. I’ve also worked very hard to change my ways – so that God could create those miracles.

This rationalist culture is all about saying, “God helps those who help themselves” but really means people help themselves. That’s not my experience. Yes, I’m better because I worked hard, but sometimes a decades-long problem disappears in a few minutes. I want to tell the world that God is alive and well and still in the business of changing lives. I’m a storyteller. Telling stories about how I helped God help me can be my angle in order to talk about God in this secular world.

Being a mental patient is not a good way to build lots of marketable skills. All I could do for almost a decade was sit in a corner and type nonsense alphanumeric strings. I had written a few little pieces for Friends Journal. Stories, all of them.

Then I heard:

*There’s this little newsletter for Quakers who have mystical experiences called What Canst Thou Say? (WCTS), and they’re saying they need editors.*

“I don’t know anything about editing a newsletter. I’ve spent most of my working life writing and editing. All academic papers and reports. Advancing other people’s careers. Never a newsletter.”

*They also need proofreaders.*

“I want to help. I could proofread for WCTS,” I wrote in an email.

I sent the email. I dipped my toe in the water. Thank you, God, for meeting me where I was.

WCTS called itself a worship-sharing group in print. They recruited authors by publishing the themes for upcoming issues. A few queries related to the theme were the seed for the worship-sharing.

That night at home I sat with a stack of old envelopes and drafted queries for about a dozen themes. The very last query on my list was the one that scared me the most: “Wholeness in the Midst of Brokenness.” I sure didn’t have the resumé to write for that one. Yet I’d written that query from my gut. What comes from the gut is always spiritual. I added it to the list and sent WCTS an email with my dozen suggested themes.

Shortly, the new WCTS team met by conference call. I introduced myself as a proofreader. We were deciding which team member would edit which issue, and what the themes would be. The other new editors had written and published not one but multiple books. They volunteered with utter matter-of-factness. We needed to decide on the last issue in the next year’s series of themes. Pat McBee,

the team leader, says to me with utter confidence, “Mariellen, would you edit an issue on Wholeness in the Midst of Brokenness?” The scariest one of all!

“I don’t know anything about editing newsletters,” I stutter. That ain’t the half of it, Lady; I don’t know anything about Wholeness in the Midst of Brokenness. Nothing. No way, no how.

But God is healing me. I want to tell the world that God is teaching me how to be whole.

With cheerful certainty, Pat says, “We’ll teach you.” She actually seems to assume I might be teachable. And that I might be worth her trouble. Lots of shrinks hadn’t done as much. Just because I had two master’s degrees didn’t mean they had talked to me, let alone listened. Lots of bosses, good bosses with compassionate hearts, hadn’t tried to teach me new skills. Never occurred to them.

I jumped in at the deep end. “Yes,” I said. Thank you, Pat.

As we were ending the call, an experienced team member, Carol Roth, asked me to stay on the line for a few more minutes. She said, “I read that whole long list of queries you wrote, and I thought here is someone who really has lived and really tried to listen to God. I want to get to know you.” We exchanged email addresses. And shortly we became spiritual penpals. Thank you, Carol.

Pat and Carol were as good as their word: they taught me. Curly quotes versus straight quotes, em dashes versus en dashes. Pat told me to decide the order in which the articles should appear, and gave me some pointers. When I sent her my proposed order, Pat praised me for putting two articles with contrasting

## *If You Lead Me (cont'd)*

points of view next to each other. I think I actually admitted to her that I had known they needed to be together, but hadn't articulated to myself why. If I didn't say so then, I'm telling you now, Pat. Thanks.

I recruited someone to write whom I barely knew. She had had an authentic spiritual experience, and all the pieces of her story were there. There were some eloquent phrases; it had been a life-changing experience. But it was not a narrative. More like a laundry basket. Each individual element of the story needed to be taken out, the wrinkles shaken out and the hem straightened, and pinned to the clothesline with the towels together, the sheets together over there. Just how attached to her exact words was she? How could I save her experience from getting all musty there in her jumbled basket?

I called Carol. She agreed the story needed to be included, if we could finesse this need for lifesaving surgery. We figured out a strategy. I called the author and explained that we needed to save space and asked permission to tighten her piece a bit. I would make sure she was comfortable with what I had done. "Yes," she said.

Did she have email? No. Time was too tight to do this by letter. So I said I would read it to her over the phone when I had it revised. That was fine with her.

Permission given, I matched the socks and hung them on the line. I called Carol; she thought I'd been faithful to the author's intent. I had changed very little, except for getting things in logical and chronological order. The author was thrilled. We were good to go.

Other authors sometimes say, "You made me sound better than I am!" Most of our authors are excellent writers. I'm not sure why God gave me

that especially challenging editing job on my very first WCTS issue. Maybe He just wanted me to know for sure He and I could handle anything.

"I will go, Lord, if you lead me. I will hold your people in my heart." (*Here I am, Lord. Send Me.* Hymn by Daniel L. Schutte)

Then it was time to write the editorial. I had been dreading writing that editorial practically since I had said yes. Like, probably nine months.

One day I was sitting under my apple tree with another Friend who was mentally ill, leading her by walking beside. In order to walk beside her, I needed to bring up a problem too. I mentioned I was scared to write that editorial. She wanted to know what it was about, and then said, "What are you going to say?"

I knew. Something like, "We measure our wholeness in minutes and our brokenness in lifetimes, but there is wholeness every time we choose to do the right thing in spite of pain and fear." She nodded firmly. And so I learned that spiritual mentoring opens us to being mentored. What goes round comes round. When mentor and mentee both have a "don't know" mind, God can get a word in edgewise.

Then, with all these new things learned and the issue laid out and almost put to bed, Pat sent me another article she had solicited, sent to her well past the author deadline. I fussed and fumed. Then I read the story, and knew how important it was to include it. And so the layout wizard and I dickered and squeezed, trimmed here and there, and found a way to shoehorn that very late article in a logical place within our page limit.

I know exactly why God sent that very late article on that first editorial stint: I learned not to expect to be

done with an issue until the right story or poem arrives. I learned that no one is waiting by their mailbox with a stopwatch for WCTS to arrive. Quakers who are mystics know all about things happening in God's time. We really appreciate when an author lets us know their story will be a few days late, but we aren't bent out of shape when it simply appears. God is a God of wonderful surprises. We try to stay open for the latest surprise.

I breathed a huge sigh of relief when we finally went to press with that first issue I was responsible for. And I was hooked. I wanted to do that again and again. I was utterly addicted to the whole process, the necessity of proofing each issue many times, and being fed spiritually with each proofing.

I was thrilled when opening my email at least once a week I got to be the first to read a perfectly wonderful story. I was hooked on corresponding with the authors, first as editor and later, as spiritual penpals. "Sometimes it feels like we've been friends forever. Ever since we were little kids and Jesus was our neighbor, and we sat at Jesus' feet together, listening to him teach," one Friend wrote. I don't know that myself; she's reporting her experience of other lives. All I know directly is that there is often a deep heart connection from that first email or sound of a voice on the phone.

This is an email ministry. This is what you are here for. Hey, it's all addiction. All you have to do is choose to let your addiction to serving God take precedence over all your other addictions to lesser things. This heartfelt, prayer-filled sharing of your lives via WCTS and email are ways you get to serve God. Thank you, God.

God is like the wind: you can't see it, but you can see the results. When you tell a good doctor you got better



## If You Lead Me (cont'd)

without a pill, she says, "Whatever it is you're doing, keep it up."

The original draft of my article on Shame had been an email to a spiritual penpal, Rhonda Ashurst, in heartfelt response to a deeply sharing message from her. I was quite busy when I needed to revise that email for the Shame issue, and a different spiritual penpal, Rosemary Blanchard, offered to draft a revision. She did a super job of filling in some necessary explanations in the revision. Her version flowed better. I wrote effusively grateful thanks, and asked if she'd be comfortable with a title like, "Horny for God." Did it feel irreverent to her? Would it turn readers off? She loved it. I shared "Horny for God" with Judy. She replied "You were so ashamed that you never actually said what you were ashamed of!"

The village at work, inspiring a story and then helping shape and discern it. Thank you, Rhonda, Rosemary, and Judy.

The WCTS editorial team is an essential part of my village. We are

in different parts of the world: Mike Resman in Minnesota, Judy Lumb in Belize, me in downstate Illinois. We are held together almost entirely by email.

I've often had the experience of being moved to speak in worship and saying to God, "Do I hafta tell that?" I'm used to being asked to speak about something shameful in order to share a helpful insight. I've learned simply to wait, prepared in my heart to speak when the words are Given. I will go, Lord, if you lead me. The words are always Given. The healing of one generation also gets passed down to future generations. Pass it on. Thank you, God.

***Mariellen Gilpin** is a member of Urbana/Champaign IL Friends Meeting. For many years she was the heart and soul of What Canst Thou Say. This was written in 2012 in the midst of that time. She has taken a step back now to let younger editors take the lead, but remains a part of the Editorial Team. We miss her leadership very much!*

## Dear WCTS Readers:

Thanks, Louise Champagne, for sending the WCTS Editors such a thoughtful response to our concerns about a decline in submissions despite the fact that there has been no decline in readership. You have made several very useful suggestions and we want to take up some of them.

Personal Mystical Experience: WCTS is at the heart about "mystical experience and contemplative practice." Indeed, we want to encourage submissions about personal mystical experience at any time, even if they do not fit into an announced theme. To be clear, we have added a statement to that effect in our request for submissions in the Staff box on page 2 of each issue.

Afterthoughts: We plan to start a new section called "Afterthoughts" and invite readers to respond however briefly to particular WCTS issues, not necessarily the most recent issue. We will publish these.

Mystical Experiences of Others: The strength of WCTS has been publishing personal experience, not second-hand stories. The WCTS Editors have discussed this idea and we are reluctant to change that policy. We would like to hear from readers on this question: Should WCTS publish mystical experiences of others, such as those encountered in literature, movies, theater, or conversations?

As always, write to us with submissions, Afterthoughts, or Letters to the Editors at <[wctseditors@gmail.com](mailto:wctseditors@gmail.com)>.

—**WCTS Editors:** Mariellen Gilpin, Judy Lumb, Michael Resman, Earl Smith, and Rhonda Ashurst

### SUBSCRIPTION FORM

**Please send this form to:** WCTS c/o Michael Resman, 815 9th Street SW, Rochester MN 55902

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## Please write for *What Canst Thou Say?*



May 2020

### **Gratitude**

Guest Editor:

**Marcia Nelson** with Judy Lumb

The German mystic Meister Eckhart said: "If the only prayer you say in your life is 'thank you,' that would be enough."

What are you thankful for? Has gratitude made a difference in your experience? Are there times when gratitude is a challenge for you? Have you experienced any situations that have been transformed by gratitude? Do you have any spiritual practices involving gratitude?

Deadline: February 15, 2020

August 2020

### **Poetry as Prayer**

Guest Editor:

**Janice Stensrude** with Michael Resman

Robert Waldron writes, "The source of poetry is our deepest inner selves.... Poetry, like the mystical prayer of the saints, plunges us into the spiritual depths where there can be a real encounter with the Divine." Have you read a poem or poems that have brought you into that "real encounter with the Divine"? Have you been inspired to write poems as an expression of your "deepest inner self"? How has this experience affected your reflective life?

Deadline: May 15, 2020

November 2020

### **Jesus: Love in Action**

Editor: **Rhonda Ashurst**

The Religious Society of Friends is rooted in Christianity and has always found inspiration in the life and teachings of Jesus. How do you interpret your faith in the light of this heritage? How does Jesus speak to you today? Are you following Jesus' example of love in action? Are you learning from his life the reality and cost of obedience to God? How does his relationship with God challenge and inspire you? (Advices and Queries #4, Britain Yearly Meeting)

Deadline: August 15, 2020

## **What Canst Thou Say?**

WCTS c/o Michael Resman  
815 9th Street SW  
Rochester MN 55902

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*Healing*