



May 2021
Number 110 (2)

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*

Grief (Supplement)

A Longtime Grieving for My Mother Who is Still Here

Sally Campbell

*She faithfully cooked every meal for us
for what must have seemed forever,
never complaining,
patiently enduring jokes about
burning the buns,
Now she no longer cooks.
The nursing staff feeds her faithfully,
patiently, lovingly
They delight in how enthusiastically she eats,
always saying it tastes good,
especially the cake with chocolate frosting
and whipped cream
they baked for her 95th birthday.*

*She raised four children, three boys, one girl,
and has eight grandchildren,
six great-grandchildren
and was always ready to give her loving
intelligent attention to each person she met
no matter how young, old or unusual
offering a cookie, a book or a hug or
whatever would be best for them*

*Now she rarely recognizes anyone
and needs hints to know it's me,
her only, her "favorite" daughter
But her wonderful smile shines forth for anyone
who greets her
and her kisses are just as heartfelt and sweet.*

*She loved books and had hundreds of them:
a whole set of Louisa May Alcott,
most of Adlai Stevenson's writings,
books about peace,
and books of poetry
that her father had read to her
when she was a girl
Now she has no books
They all are gone, sold or given away
along with the place
where she had lived by the sea
summers all her life,
winters from 1946 to 2001
But when I read a favorite old poem
she can say the final rhyming word
and she can still sing out Christmas carols
from memory especially those
that speak of peace on earth.*

*She stood in vigil against the Vietnam War
at lunchtime every Wednesday
on the New Haven Green for years and years
Now she no longer stands
but is pushed in a wheelchair
along the corridors of the nursing home
not knowing of our current war,
a blessing that she does not know
But her ability to be a peaceful presence has not
changed.*

Sally Campbell is a singer/songwriter, a member of Morningside Meeting (NYC), retired librarian and a Friendly personal organizer. Many of her songs are on YouTube under "Sally Quaker Campbell" <[youtube.com/user/scampfriend/videos](https://www.youtube.com/user/scampfriend/videos)>

Facing Racism Among Friends

Viv Hawkins

Death and dying generates a cycle of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Sometimes linear and other times all jumbled up, these facets of grief were first introduced to me in *On Death and Dying*, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' book on the topics in the title. So, I understood them in relation to the loss of a loved one, my mom sick with emphysema. But why have these aspects of grief haunted me so, in recent years?

Since 2014, I have actively addressed racism along with other members of the Undoing Racism Group (URG) at our Yearly Meeting level. Friends of Color, who have been raising their concerns for years, were largely unheard by the majority of Friends in the yearly meeting, who are white, middle class, and highly educated. When Friends of Color were heard, their concerns were often denied, deflected, or discredited.

With hopes of having those ministries be heard, URG offered 40 workshops over several years at the yearly, quarterly, and monthly meeting levels. They ranged from one that helps people see their privilege to another that explains a cycle of isolating and eliminating the "problem woman of color."

We shared resources used by cutting edge institutions and prepared white papers recommending areas of focus. We offered plenaries and met with people in their living rooms and meeting houses. We asked for but were refused the authority and responsibility which we believed necessary to make meaningful and lasting systemic changes in the body of our yearly meeting, where Friends of Color were suffering from actions of individual racism supported by systemic racism.

But we faced concerted and continuous resistance despite Friends being a denomination that professes to value "that of God in everyone" and integrity of thought, word, and deed. Friends largely identify as politically progressive, and have a long history of social action related to justice.

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, George Hebben, Lieselotte Heil, 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 communicate best to our readers focus on specific events and are written in the first person.

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

We welcome submissions of articles less than 1500 words and artwork suitable for black and white reproduction. Please send your text submissions in Word or generic text format and artwork in high resolution jpeg files. Photocopied art and typed submissions are also accepted.

Send via email to <wctseditors@gmail.com> or hard copy to **Rhonda Ashurst, PO Box 9032, Reno NV 89507.**

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For subscription rates, see the subscription form on page 9. Send subscription correspondence to George Hebben <wctsubscriptions@gmail.com> or **George Hebben, 2811 West B. Avenue, Plainwell MI 49080.**

An Embarrassment of Riches

The WCTS Team finds themselves in the happy financial situation of a significant balance. We propose to reduce the print subscription back to \$10 for one year and \$18 for two years, which it was before the increase came in May of 2017 to \$12 for one year and \$20 for two years. We will also grant a free year, that is, extend the subscription of all subscribers for one year.

Thanks to all our subscribers that keep What Canst Thou Say? in print!
—WCTS Team

Even the term “white supremacy,” defined by legal scholar Frances Lee Ansley as “a political, economic, and cultural system in which whites overwhelmingly control power and material resources, conscious and unconscious ideas of white superiority and entitlement are widespread, and relations of white dominance and non-white subordination are daily reenacted across a broad array of institutions and social settings,” raised the hackles of many Friends, some who refused to regard it as anything other than a descriptor of members of the Ku Klux Klan.

As a white person raised in a working class household where racial justice was a guiding principle, I was astonished to learn what other whites had been taught about Black people. As one who dated my Black classmate from up the street throughout high school, I could not fathom the absence of knowledge about racial and cultural differences. As an adult who was the only white person in many venues, I looked around Friends General Conference gatherings and lamented how majorly white the gathered people were.

Quakers drew away from me, even those with whom I had co-facilitated social justice programs and worshipped on a daily basis. I had slept in their homes and they had eaten in my home.

Some spoke to me about the anger they experienced from me. To me, it felt like despair, far deeper than depression. It was a wound which festered after I unsuccessfully bargained with

these white Friends to hear and heed Black Friends.

Many Black Friends have invited us into a more whole religious society, one that acknowledges its whiteness and changes to welcome people of other cultures to be fully themselves. Friends of Color have invited us over and over again into a deeper dive into Spirit. And, over and over again, for the most part the majority of Friends refused their invitation.

I began to see through a veneer of hypocrisy that Friends are not “what you say you be,” a phrase used by Friend Niyonu Spann in *Beyond Diversity 101*. Basic tenets of integrity, equality, and community existed, but only so deep. Love, too, seemed only deep enough to feel good in easy times; but it stopped far short of demanding justice or of transmuting pseudocommunity into true community.

My grief was deep. Breaking through my denial, I suffered bouts with depression, anger, and bargaining. It was a loss of innocence that resulted in a death of identity of who Friends say we are. I swam in a grief larger than any I’ve ever known as I came to know that I am a member of this religious society as it is but I don’t want to be.

In *Unmasking the Powers*, Walter Wink writes, “Human societies cannot face their own violence, [Girard] argues, nor can they permit endless retaliation against those who do express it. Therefore, they devise scapegoats who will act as lightning rods to draw away the volatile charge that would otherwise throw society into

a paroxysm of internecine strife.” (p. 46). According to the dictionary, “paroxysm of internecine strife” is a sudden attack or violent expression of a particular emotion or activity related to strife which is destructive to both sides in a conflict. This has been my experience of too many white Friends’ refusal to dive deeply into redeeming our racism.

So, I know deep grief at the scapegoating of Friends of Color who invite us into a more beloved community; deep grief at our religious society’s refusal to accept that invitation, which I believe is from Spirit and Friends of Color; and deep grief at the loss of the potential for what could be if we were to take the time to follow Spirit into and through the refiner’s fire and, like Lazarus, come back from the dead. I want to deny this death, to refuse to accept it even as I reel with anger, continue to bargain, and fall again into depression. What life is left in these bones, Friends?

Viv Hawkins (*Green Street Friends Meeting, Philadelphia, USA*) carries a minute of religious service to inspire, encourage, and empower people, individually and corporately, to live into our most sacred selves in harmony with creation. Through *LifeCalls*, she coaches spiritual changemakers and encore careerists, works and prays for racial healing, and administers Releasing Ministry Alliance to promote and support ministries. Viv loves nature, travel, and her life partner Lola Georg.



The Portal of Grief

Nancy Bieber

*O God, in our season of new beginnings,
may we choose our beginnings wisely.
May we choose to be open
to the journey of healing
here within our world of conflict.*

*In this time of new beginnings,
the journey of healing
begins at the portal of grief.*

*We bring our grief for the pain we have caused,
for the hatred we blasted at each other,
for the blinders that narrowed our seeing,
and the indifference of our listening.*

*We bring our remorse,
knowing true new beginnings are rooted
in the soil of remorse,
rooted in our horror at the deaths
of those who should have lived.
They paid for our blindness,
for our disregard, our turning away.*

*O God, out of the depths of grief,
we call to you, but we know
our lament has no power unless it pierces us.
Our lament has no power unless we weep,
acknowledging we are complicit
in the brokenness around us.
For our silence, our walking on the other side,
our shrugging lightly when it is time to tear our clothes,
for all this, others have paid.*

*O God of love and mercy,
we desire a new beginning.
In the midst of our grief, may we birth love.
Surrounded by wreckage from the storms,
broken open by our lament,
teach us to live beyond our fears,
to embrace the other and love generously.
In place of our blindness,
may we give ourselves to the work
of clear-eyed seeing, whole-hearted listening,
until the pangs of deep compassion stir us
to live and love as if our souls depend on it.*

*O God, may walking the path of grief
bring us to the healing work
of a new beginning for this time.*

Nancy Bieber, a member of Lancaster (PA) Monthly Meeting, is a spiritual director and retreat leader. She is the author of *Decision Making & Spiritual Discernment* and *Fianna's Story*. She regularly posts spiritual reflections on her website <nancybieber.com>.

After

Libby Falk Jones

I.

Thirty Junes ago
my father lifted my train,
his hand gentle
on the Schiffler lace,
as we rounded the church corner
where my husband-to-be
waited.

 This June
my husband hugged me,
quick and hard, before I flew
to my father's side.

Again we meet in church,
the three of us.

II.

Panting down the gravel path
knees rounding my ears
heart pumping
I lift my legs higher
stretch out my calves

surely those regular hoarse breaths
are his, he paces me—

at the end he lies still
legs still heart still
while my pumping subsides.

III.

Three weeks after he died,
before the moving truck arrived,
I cleaned out my study, letting go
old maps of Louisiana, notecards
for my dissertation, bags of receipts,
brochures for soccer camps,
medical insurance reports
from the last dozen years.
From the floor I scooped papers
into white plastic bags,
sending out the body of my past
without a toe tag.

 What's left
went neatly into two shelves,
four filing drawers, the empty
slots now shining, ready
for his continued life.

IV.

The gods took my father but left me
my old cat—on the deck he sleeps,
chin on bent paws, he lifts his head,
sights me, stretches, curls again
into sleep.

 My father slept,
turned on his side, left arm tucked,
head nestled into the pillow from home
with small holes in the case. I sang
“*Loverly*” as a lullaby, tucked
the sheet around him, gave a kiss.

Across the deck I watch
the orange fur rise and fall.

V.

I never danced for my father, never
spread white crane's wings,
never waved my hands
like clouds or stepped back,
my warrior arms repulsing
monkey, never brushed
left knee or right.

 Tonight
at T'ai Chi I bend and reach,
shoulders straight,
breathing slow, my grace
is his, he waves me in,
our wings brush light.

Libby Falk Jones has been an attendee at Berea Friends Meeting since the early 1990s. She is the author or co-author of two books of poems (*Balance of Five*, Berea 2015, and *Above the Eastern Treetops*, Blue, Finishing Line 2010); a new chapbook, *Southern Ladyspeak*, will appear in Fall 2021. Her poems have been included in many national and regional journals and anthologies, most recently in *Mountains Piled Upon Mountains: Appalachian Nature Writing in the Anthropocene*, *Accents Literary Magazine*, and *The Heartland Review*. She taught writing, including creative writing, at Berea College for 29 years and currently co-leads “*Coming of Age*,” a project for Kentucky women writers over 60.

Coronavirus, COVID 19 Hits the World

Jennifer Elam



The Light of Day is Covered by Fear



Growth Tries to Move through the Fear



Pandemic, Epicenters Abound & People Die

Confusion Reigns

Where is Truth?

Where is Healing?

HIDDEN

Where is Redemption?



Where is the Promised Land NOW

Clarity Comes For a Moment





*We All Relate Differently Now:
More Separate and More One*

Then Familiar Paths Become Shaky

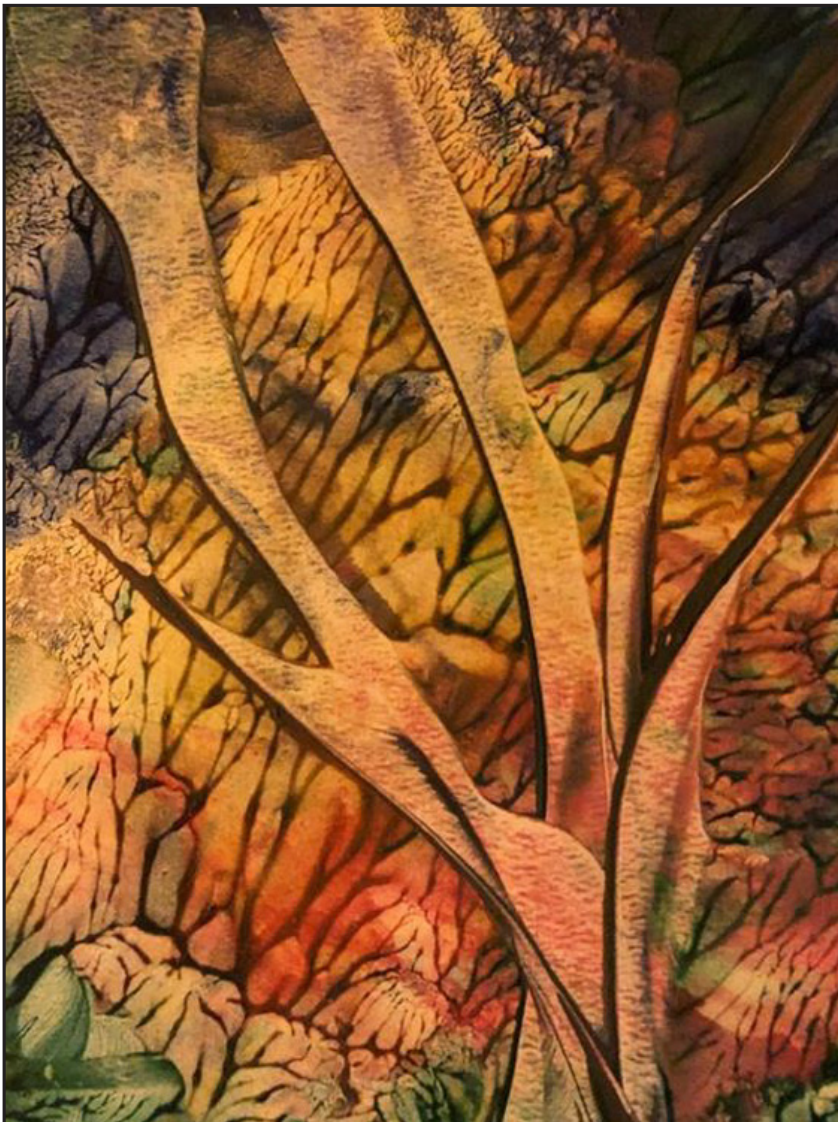


*Familiar Paths Become Pathless
Back and Forth, Up and Down We Go; Feelings on a Roller Coaster
Sunshine to Clouds; Hope and Faith to Fear and Back Again*



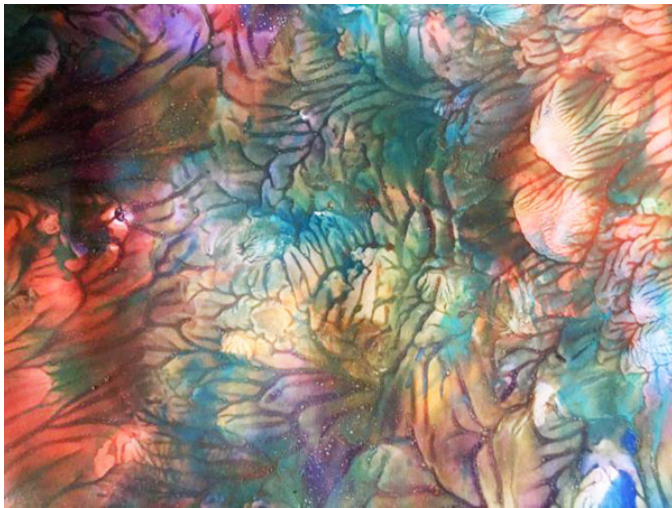
Fear to Growth and Hope: Transformed Yet AGAIN?

For a moment...

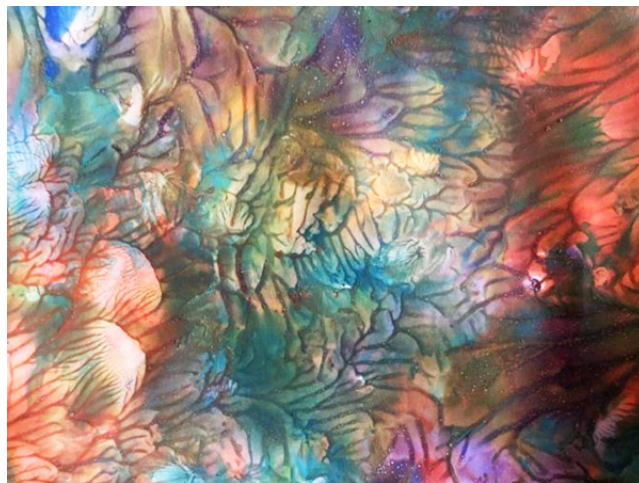




UNCERTAINTY



The World Turns Upside-Down



Ode to Corona

Jennifer Elam

Corona hits fast and hard, far and wide.
Life changes instantly.

Fear abounds
Where am I going NOW?
What am I doing NOW?
Where is my home NOW? Am I lost, alone?
The blackhole threatens
Unknowns... uncertainty threatens faith
The fear of the Abyss of Forgotten slips in
Breathe...breathe...breathe
But, what if...

Corona, who are you?
Why do you take our breath?
What do you want from us? What do you want from me?

A friend offers me a place to be.
Oh, now I can breathe...
Now, I can see the daffodils, the tulips, yellow and red
Mother Nature is so happy.
Fierce springtime for fierce, separate lovers.

Now, I learn to Zoom, I connect,
I worship, I exercise, I share,
Oh Zoom, my new friend.
And YOU don't require me to sit.

Unknowns...uncertainties still there
But, for now I am not alone.
Not alone, I see more clearly.

For NOW, I am exactly in the place in the Universe I am to be
Soul's flowers can grow in the darkness,
Bloom in the Light.
Darkness and Light both needed for Soul's Flowers to Blossom.



Jennifer Elam has been a Quaker since she fell in love with Berea Friends Meeting, Kentucky, in 1991. She recently moved back to Kentucky because when COVID hit, it became clear she could no longer lead her double life of going back and forth from elsewhere to Kentucky. She continues her passionate writing and has created three art shows in 2020 related to COVID.

The Depth of Our Belonging: Mysticism, Physics, and Healing

By Mary Conrow Coelho, 2021

Reviewed by Judy Lumb

In *The Depth of Our Belonging*, Mary Coelho explains quantum physics, the discoveries that atomic particles are a very small part of the atom, that it is mostly space, but highly energetic space. She goes on to show how mystics are describing the same energy and shows how this understanding has profound healing for her. The book is enhanced by the author's beautiful paintings, four of which are shown here.

Talk about grief! Mary Conrow Coelho was born into a situation of profound grief. While she was still in the hospital, just born, her

four-year-old brother died in the same hospital. She suffered from long-term effects of her mother's grief at the loss of her son. Mary studied biology and then became a teacher but could not reconcile her mystical experiences with the determinant world she was teaching. She gave up biology and went to Seminary looking for answers. When she learned of the "New Story" based on quantum physics' understanding of the structure of the atom, she discovered answers to her life's quest.

"It is not easy for Western people to embrace the breakthroughs in our understanding of human

identity and the nature of the natural world now available to us from the integration proposed in these pages and knowledge from many great figures. But it may well be a gift to us as a threatened species because it can strengthen the witness of many people, as exemplified by Jesus of Nazareth, and broaden the scope of our witness. This fullness may be expressed by many people in different modes of being as courageous witnesses for the well-being of Earth. A more inclusive truth struggles to be born." (p.70)

Judy Lumb is a member of the WCTS editorial team. She is still a member of Atlanta Friends Meeting (Georgia), but has lived in Belize for 34 years. She also has an apartment in a senior center in Atlanta.



Everything Has a Within

*The Depth of
Our Belonging:
Mysticism, Physics,
and Healing*



Mary Conrow Coelho

Producciones de la Hamaca 2021



Belonging

Mary Conrow Coelho, 2021
*The Depth of Our Belonging:
Mysticism, Physics, and
Healing*, Caye Caulker, Belize:
Producciones de la Hamaca.
Available on Amazon.com. Ask
your local bookstore to order it.



The Beauty of Ancient Earth



New Tiffany Window

All three paintings and this stained glass window are by the author, Mary Conrow Coelho.

"In Mary Coelho's courageous book, we are invited to move from self-doubt and alienation to deep belonging in a universe that unfolds with endless creativity. Highly recommended." — Brian Thomas Swimme, Professor of Cosmology, California Institute of Integral Studies

SUBSCRIPTION FORM

Please send this form to: WCTS c/o George Hebben,
2811 West B. Ave, Plainwell MI 49080-8601

Enclosed is my check to *What Canst Thou Say?*

- \$ 10 for a one-year subscription \$18 for two years
- \$ 5 for a one-year electronic subscription
- \$ 100 for a complete set of back issues to the most current
- \$ 20 for any set of 20 issues (1-20, 21-40, etc.)
- \$ 1.50 for individual past issues

Enclosed is a contribution of \$ _____

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Please write for *What Canst Thou Say?*



August 2021

Approaching the End of Life

Editor: Rhonda Ashurst

As the vessels that hold our Life Light dissolve, we are poured into the Ocean of Light from which we came. For most of us, this is a slow process that happens over decades. As you approach death, what is falling away? What are you learning about who you really are? How are you preparing for death? What advice would you give younger people about living life fully?

Deadline: May 15, 2021

November 2021

Cultivating the Mystical

Editor: Judy Lumb

Rufus Jones wrote "The mystic ... is not a peculiarly favored mortal who by a lucky chance has received into his life a windfall from some heavenly Breadfruit tree, while he lay dreaming of iridescent rainbows. He is, rather, a person who has cultivated, with more strenuous care and discipline than others have done, the native homing passion of the soul for the Beyond." How do you cultivate the mystical and what has been your experience?

Deadline: August 15, 2021

Feb 2022

Empowerment

Editor: Earl Smith

"You must never be fearful about what you are doing when it is right." –Rosa Parks. What gives you courage to stand in your truth and speak with integrity? How do you encourage and support those who are disempowered to make a stand? Tell us your stories of empowerment.

Deadline: November 15, 2021

What Canst Thou Say?

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Grief