



Number 48
November 2005

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

God's Humor

Getting Real with God

by Jennifer Elam

I had finished graduate school only the year before and was a temporary assistant professor at the university where I had gotten my master's degree. It was going quite badly.

My ex-professors turned colleagues could not make the switch, and I was devastated. I was living on campus, and one day I was home and very sad. I was crying, wailing actually. And

I started screaming at God. Being a person taught to fear God and be polite and please **everyone**, I never before had considered doing such a thing and actually did not consider it that day. It just happened.

I screamed at God for hours. I knew no one was home next door, but suddenly there was a knock on the door. I asked, "Who are you and

what do you want?" It was the campus plumbers coming to fix something I had asked them to fix weeks prior. I told them to come in at their own risk, because I was quite upset with God and was busy yelling at God at the moment. They started laughing and told me to give God a couple for them too.

They soon left and I continued to yell and scream and cry. I had had it. After about two hours, I suddenly got very calm and heard a soft, gentle voice say,

"It's about time you got more real with me. I can take whatever you have to give me."

Alone in my apartment, I was startled to hear the voice that was not mine. An image of God smiling came to me.

My relationship with God changed that day. It was forever to be different. Many times since then when I have been upset and fretting (about nothing worth fretting about), I have gotten an image of God having a belly laugh. And God's belly laugh always puts things in better perspective!

Jennifer Elam is the author of Dancing with God through the Storm: Mysticism and Mental Illness.



God's Humor: One Liners!

We were surprised that not a lot of material was submitted for the theme "God's Humor." Most were short submissions with more than one coming from some authors. Fortunately, new WCTS Editorial Team member Chris Johns offered to spice up the issue with cartoons. We have used the extra space to include a nice pair of articles about fear by Patti Nesbitt and Linda Theresa, and a lovely piece on angels by Allison Randall. We hope you enjoy this poignant mix!

A New Team Member for WCTS

An emergency erupted in mid-July: the layout of the August issue had us completely flummoxed—the articles were jumping around like kangaroos and rabbits. Mariellen Gilpin asked for help from Chris Johns, a longtime WCTS fan and a website designer. When the issue was safely in the hands of the printer, Mariellen popped the question: would Chris join the WCTS team on a regular basis? Chris was enthusiastic. Thanks, Chris, for contributing your creative juices to WCTS!

—Mariellen Gilpin and Judy Lumb, Editors



Jesus' Mop

Sally Campbell

One day in New Haven Friends Meeting I was checking my chakras and felt that my heart was so tight with all kinds of old junk (resentments, self pity, etc.) that it actually hurt. I called out to The Spirit (my name for that which I met in the silence in those days), "help me!" Immediately I was given the image of a small Jesus in a white robe carrying a string mop flying through the air and into my heart, and that was all for that day.

A few weeks later at early morning worship at Friends General Conference I heard a voice in my heart say, "I'm here now!" Apparently He'd been able to move those boxes and bundles of old stuff out of the way and cleaned up enough to be able to settle in, live in my heart. This in itself would be a pretty humorous version of "How I Became a Christian" but there is more.

The week after FGC, I felt a terrible pain in my side and thought it was my appendix. The emergency room doctor said it was not, but that I needed to go to my gynecologist who confirmed that I needed to have a hysterectomy. The timing was exquisite. I'd never had a child but I now had a resident Janitor in my heart to fill the vacancy. And his white string mop does tickle me still.

The Zinger

Sally Campbell

Soon after a million of us had gathered in 1982 to say "No, Freeze this nuclear arms race!", I went to Friends General Conference. While I was there I experienced my first opening. I was praying outside the dorm at about three o'clock in the morning and I heard the words "All is for Joy."

I began to sob, for this meant to me that even such things as Hiroshima and Auschwitz, all pain and suffering, were intended to move us toward joy.

My weeping awakened just one of the hundreds of sleepers in the dorm who came out and held me. She let me cry and tell her what had happened. Then she told me her name was Ann Lenhart but that her friends often called her a secret name... "Joy!"

Sally Campbell is a member of Morning-side (New York) Meeting, and a singer-songwriter, a personal organizer (so Jesus' mop comes in handy), and founder of Friends Access Resources Network <FARN.quaker.org> for sharing on disability issues.

Meant to Be

Shelley Kirilenko

My parents always impressed upon me the need for punctuality while I was growing up. They lived by the clock, and tardiness was not tolerated. There could be nothing worse than making someone wait. They also valued tidyness, keeping a neat house in which clutter was a rare and unwelcome guest.

In fact, my parents held periodic rummage sales during which they cleared the house of any superfluous items. (My brother and I made sure to hide the cats just in case.) And my parents taught both my brother and me to be tactful, to take people's feelings into account, to try not to offend anyone.

One day while sitting in meeting for worship, I was overcome with an immense urge to giggle. It suddenly dawned on me that God was having a little fun with me: The man I fell in love with and married is always late and often makes me late. As a result, I find myself stumbling over people in darkened movie theaters, walking into class after it has started, or keep-

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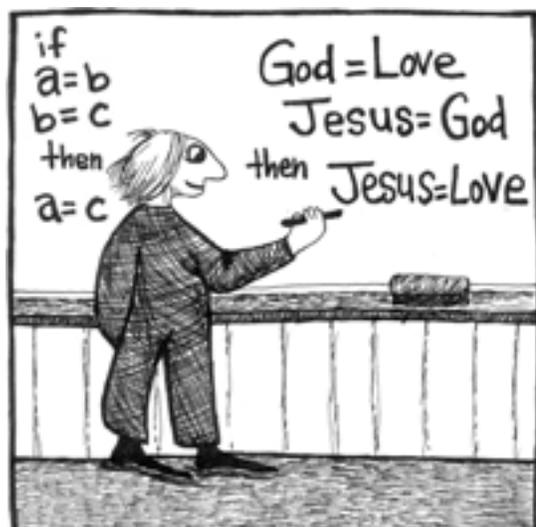
ing people waiting at a restaurant. All these things would horrify my parents and still manage to horrify me.

My brother, in the meantime, married a woman who never throws anything away. Ever. She puts dirty dishes back in the cupboard and lets her soiled clothes fall where they may. Stacks of paper, laundry, and assorted knickknacks clutter my brother's house and drive him to drink.

And both my husband and sister-in-law are blunt, causing no end of embarrassment to my brother and myself, even—especially—in my parents' presence!

That day during meeting I realized with a smile that that's exactly the way God meant it to be.

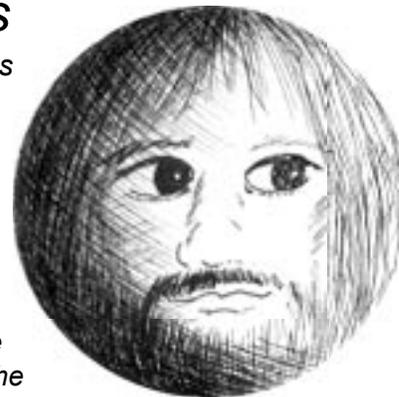
Shelley Kirilenko and her husband were moved by the miraculous birth of their son to attend their first Quaker meeting on Mother's Day 2003. They attend Bethesda (Maryland) Friends Meeting but have also been to meetings in Zurich, Philadelphia, and Missoula, Montana.



With Me Always

Jean Mayes

I didn't think very much about what God looked like when I was little, because my mother had that classic sepia portrait of Jesus, so I knew what Jesus looked like. We moved around a lot when I was growing up. I could see that same face of Jesus in the moon every night, no matter where we were. I found it comforting and felt he was with me always. I did like the full effect of a full moon, but any moon was a reminder that he was right here, right now. Talking out loud to him didn't feel private enough, so I felt unity with him and felt watched over lovingly by him. I still am not much with words. Grace before meals can be put into words fairly easily because it's about gratitude and thankfulness, pretty easy. But often, just to pause, take a deep breath, and feel love and gratitude expanding me and transforming the food, is what feels right.



Jean Mayes is a member of Urbana-Champaign (Illinois) Meeting.

All of Me

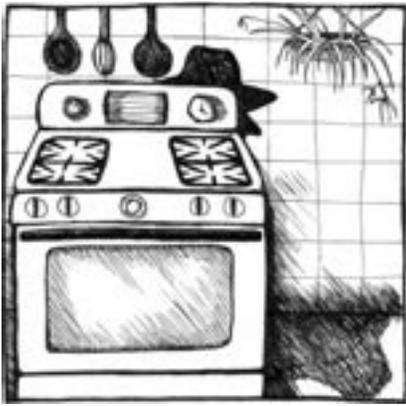
Michael Phillips

I remember when I was a child wondering what Jesus would be like, if I met him. I sat with the question for a while, and this is what came to mind: a man in a robe who would, wordlessly, smile at me, then embrace me. He would know everything about me, and love me anyway. Actually, my bad parts wouldn't be bad with him; he'd love all of me.

Later (sometime after taking geometry), I used the theorem: If $a=b$ and $b=c$, then $a=c$

to deal with John 3:16. I couldn't imagine the Jesus I knew sending anyone to hell (or not letting them into heaven). But how, then, could it be true that you had to believe in Jesus to get to heaven? Well... if God is love, and Jesus is God (roughly speaking), then Jesus, also, is love. Therefore, all you had to do to get into heaven was believe in love. That sat a lot better with me.

Michael Phillips is a brand new member of Urbana-Champaign (Illinois) Meeting.



Watch for That Hat

Mariellen Gilpin

When I was about four, my mother told me about God. Because she was grieving the death of my grandfather, in the same conversation she showed me a picture of Granddaddy—a smiling, approachable old man in a gray felt hat. I understood both God and Granddaddy were around all the time, knew everything we did, and loved us. I understood I couldn't see them. I thought the only place God couldn't be seen was behind the kitchen stove—and God was wearing a gray felt hat and smiling at me. I used to tiptoe when I was alone in the kitchen, so as not to disturb God, and imagine I saw the shadow of that old felt hat. Nowadays when I sense God smiling at me, I sometimes see the shadow of that hat.

Crawling to the Foot of the Throne

Mariellen Gilpin

My friend Bob died last week, and I couldn't go to his funeral. Bob was sometimes abusive. I had to keep clearly in mind that whether or not he actually liked me, I cared, and I always stuck to the friendship through his long illness. All last week I rushed from one obligation to another, thinking, "I need to process Bob's death somehow."

Last Sunday during worship I thought about Bob. Almost immediately I was given a memory of a conversation Bob and I had fifteen years ago. I had told him when I died, I was looking forward to praying for all my friends. I figured when I was in the presence of God, I'd have a better understanding how to really pray for them. Bob said with considerable vehemence,

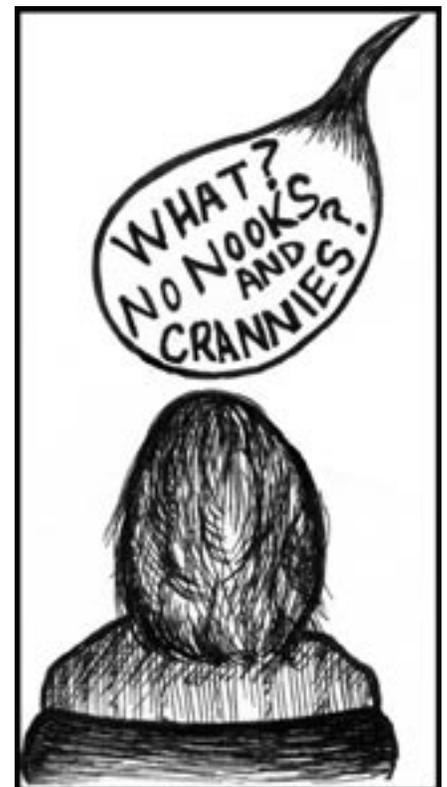
"Well, I hope I can do something better than just pray! I'll crawl to the foot of the Throne and say, 'Lord, my friend Mariellen is in a bit of a pickle down there. Would you please send her some help?'"

It gives me such joy to know for sure Bob cared, and that he's praying for me.

Nooks and Crannies

Mariellen Gilpin

While my evening prayers are certainly heartfelt and constantly evolving, they can also be rote. Part of my standard prayer is to thank God for helping us accept God's friendship and companionship "in every nook and cranny of life." One night I was very tired and rushed through my prayers, trying to get them all said before my medication



put me to sleep. I paraphrased, in order to get the gist without dwelling on the word choices so much as to slow me down. I left out the "nooks and crannies" phrase, and instantly there was a Voice speaking in tones of mock aggrievement,

"What, no nooks and crannies?"

That woke me up!

Mariellen Gilpin celebrates the many ways God has helped her deal with mental illness.

Can't...Can So

Dalton Roberts

When I was a preschool kid and doing something Mama told me not to do, I just closed my eyes and kept doing it. I thought if I couldn't see myself doing it, God couldn't see me. Mother had a tough time explaining to me that God could see me even if I couldn't. That's how much we internalize our image of God.

Dalton Roberts lives in Chattanooga, Tennessee, where he attends Christ Unity services and enjoys Quaker worship.

Misfit in Guatemala

Richard Renner and his wife Laura Yeomans went to Guatemala in 2004 to learn Spanish, become familiar with the culture of Guatemalan immigrants to their community, and visit the homes of their Guatemalan friends. The following is an excerpt of Richard's journal. His entire journal is available at <www.taterenner.com/guat04j7>.

We arrived at Aguacatan, where we attended a large regional church conference, visited several families, toured Aguacatan, and had a late dinner with the rectory household. By 10 pm I hadda go. The toilet did not have a toilet seat. Normally, I do not flush when I only pee. It saves water. Laura reported that the toilet she used did not have any water in the tank. I checked my toilet—it too was dry. I hadda go. I picked the toilet with the toilet seat. I used bottled water to wash my hands and brush my teeth, and went to bed.

We woke up about 6:00. What then should we do? I decided to tackle the toilet. I began with a plastic file drawer. This was no typical plastic file drawer. In addition to being open on the top, it was missing the back panel. It had a handle in the middle of the front panel. Here was my plan: I would fill the file drawer with water from the shower in Bathroom Two, then fill the toilet tank in Bathroom One. Then I could flush it. But after an initial flow of water, the shower dried up. I think I emptied the water that was standing in the pipes.

Next I tried the sink. I used one of our empty water bottles to help with this project. I opened the tap, water came out, then water stopped coming out. The plastic bottle was about half

full (I was such an optimist: I could have said half empty!) Still, every bit would help. Next I used the water bottle to move water from the tank in Bathroom Two to the tank in Bathroom One. It was a slower process than I had planned, but I still had over two hours until the 9:00 mass.

As I drew water from Toilet Two to Toilet One, I could see the water level fall in Toilet Two. Why, then, was the water level in Tank One not rising so noticeably? Oh. Toilet Two was a low-flush toilet. It only needed 1.4 gallons to flush. Maybe I should

I imagined the procession marching up the aisle majestically, slowly, swinging the incense from side to side to fill the air with the aroma of our connectedness. I was walking slowly, parallel to the sanctuary, ... on a mission to prevent the spread of aroma.

have considered that when I picked my toilet.

After a couple of trips, Laura suggested I use the water from the wash area outside. Laura was just full of good ideas. Never fear. I could learn. I reclaimed the file drawer, marched out to the outdoor bathtub alcove, and filled 'er up. As I hoisted it up, I realized that the handle in the front was a hole. I had to tilt the file drawer to maximize the triangular area that could hold water. This would have made a great calculus problem. I had to adjust the volume of water to minimize the amount that spilled as I walked. I tried walking slowly and smoothly.

The music started up for the 7:00 mass. I imagined the procession marching up the aisle majestically, slowly, swinging the incense from

side to side to fill the air with the aroma of our connectedness. I was walking slowly, parallel to the sanctuary, with water moving from side to side, on a mission to prevent the spread of aroma. It took about eight trips to fill the tank.

Finally, we were ready to flush. I gave the handle the ceremonial send-off. Laura said, "great!" and walked away. I made a decision with unforetold consequences: I took out my mini-flashlight, and I peered into the bowl. The stuff was still there. I refilled the tank. I flushed again. Still it was brown water.

Laura saw Francisco in the schoolyard and suggested I ask him for help. My Y chromosome kicked in. If I wouldn't stop to ask for directions, I surely was not going to ask for help flushing a toilet. I refilled the tank a third time. This time I watched with the flashlight. I saw that the water drained completely, and then backed up into the bowl again. I refilled a fourth time. Laura checked the bowl and confirmed that it was a lighter shade of brown than when she found it. We decided to stop. I refilled the tank in Toilet Two. That went a lot faster. We decided to leave that tank unflushed until just before we left.

During the mass, Padre included prayers for Laura and me by name. He preached that we needed to care for those less fortunate. These people did not have much, but they knew others were worse off.

Richard Renner is a member of Wooster (Ohio) Friends Meeting. His law practice is devoted to environmental whistleblowers who speak truth to power and suffer retaliation. He says his spiritual practice is not good enough, and he still gets grouchy when he should be enjoying life.

Less Than Romantic Bethlehem

Judy Lumb

It was Christmas morning and a Friends Minister visiting from Kenya had given a beautiful sermon evoking a very romantic, idealized image of beautiful Bethlehem, the birthplace of our Lord, Jesus Christ. It was very unusual to have such a long, well-prepared message in our unprogrammed Friends Meeting.

I should have been basking in the peaceful aura his words created among us. Instead, I sat there quivering as I remembered my experience in Bethlehem, which had been quite different. I kept saying to myself,

“I can’t say that!”

But I could not sit still. Finally the words came out:

“When we got to the church in Bethlehem, we were told it had originally been built more than three hundred years after Jesus’ birth by the Emperor Constantine, supposedly over the ‘exact’ place where Jesus was born. We saw beautiful tall,

arched doorways that had been filled in with concrete so we had to stoop to get through the four-foot high opening. I asked why and was told the doors were filled in to prevent vandals from riding horses through the church.

“We were then taken down in the basement to the ‘exact’ place where Jesus was born. The guide showed us the silver star on the ‘exact’ spot where Jesus was born. He told us there used to be a gold one, but someone stole it. ... It was as if I could hear God laughing!”

After Meeting for Worship I told one of the elders of my experience of not being able to sit still until I spoke and the last sentence that didn’t seem to come from me at all. She said, “Didn’t you know, Judy, that is the quaking!”

Judy Lumb is a member of Atlanta (Georgia) Friends Meeting, but lives in

Ice in Someone Else’s Soup

Judy Lumb

I dream that I am sitting at a lunch counter eating soup with a friend. I decide my soup is too hot, so I put ice in it. Then I reach over to put ice in my friend’s soup, when the booming voice of God comes from behind me, “*You can’t put ice in someone else’s soup!*” Every time I start to meddle in someone else’s life, I hear the booming voice of God saying, “*You can’t put ice in someone else’s soup!*”



Bat Line to God

Lauren Leach



I had a Catholic upbringing. I thought the confessionals were elevators and the office phone in the rectory was the Bat Line to God. You know that little box in the front of the church with the red candle hanging in front of it? That’s where the host was kept. The little red candle was a nightlight to keep Jesus company. The priest always said the host wasn’t really Jesus until he said those prayers during Mass, but if not, why did they have to keep a nightlight on in front of the host box?

So, it was Jesus in there, but we weren’t really cannibals during Communion because it was more like a piece of Jesus’s soul was in each of those little pieces of bread. Besides, we weren’t eating it, we were swallowing it—like medicine, which of course isn’t really food either because you can take medicine one hour before Communion, but you can’t eat. You didn’t want to chew the host—you had to swallow it before it got stuck to the roof of your mouth—because then you’d be a cannibal. And if you ate one hour before Communion, then Jesus’ soul wouldn’t get into your bloodstream.

Lauren Leach is a member of Urbana-Champaign (Illinois) Meeting, currently living in Maryville, Missouri.

Getting Closer to God

Maurine Pyle

I was always mystical. From birth I recognized God in all of nature, especially when tree climbing. Sometimes I imagined that God was my magnolia tree that held me in her rocking arms. I loved to climb to the highest branches to get closer to God. I sure miss my tree climbing days. Now I dive deep into the silence and the womb of God instead of climbing higher.

Maurine Pyle is former presiding clerk of Illinois Yearly Meeting and a member of Lake Forest (Illinois) Meeting.



Laughing at Fear

Linda Theresa

A numinous dream prompted me to see if I could learn to laugh at fear. It's been a long journey. At first I tried to bust through whatever I felt afraid of. I took up public speaking and shared personal, often controversial, information. While these helped my fear of speaking, it also helped burn out my adrenals. However, getting very sick helped me with several fears.

Although I wasn't afraid of dying, I was afraid of dying without feeling I'd done the best I could with my life. I hadn't yet realized everyone (including myself) is always doing the best they know how at any given time. Yet, lying in bed considering my death motivated me to say "I love you" and "I'm sorry." This brought me some peace.

Then there was the fear of severe, unrelenting pain and/or torture. I still work on this. Thanks to Shinzen Young's meditation techniques, pain from sciatica is no longer fearsome.

Lastly, during this first period I worked with the great fear no one talks about. Our unconscious holds whatever we subconsciously wish not to see. My first jump into this area felt like child's play, but to go back

took more courage than any of the gutsy endeavors of my past.

Thank God that the unconscious holds both dark shadows and golden shadows. I saw how I puffed myself up big and tough in order to protect myself, and how I had shut down the wise part of myself—my intuition, my gut sense of things, the still small voice.

Yet all this work didn't come near the heart of fear. Most people don't realize how ubiquitous fear is. Most thoughts contain a kernel of fear. It was my first privilege to delve into this area when I took myself cold-turkey off muscle spasm medication (not advised). Along with all my muscles cramping, I also had the withdrawal effect of 24 hours' unrelenting fear.

I was in the habit of watching my thoughts all day, but knowing that the fear was unreal gave me the gift of seeing what my mind did with fear. I laughed as time and time again I saw the same pattern:

- Upon recognizing fear, my mind panics.
- My mind pulls out the first potential cause for the fear in its circuitry.
- Thoughts jump to how to fix this problem.

- This alleviates the fear because it wasn't real in the first place.

Now I understand why some of the religious greats say there is no cause and effect. **Cause** is usually something our mind invents. All the forces in the cosmos play a part to cause each feeling or thought, no matter how small. There is no such thing as a single cause. The purpose of naming a single cause is to distract us from uncomfortable feelings.

It's difficult to hang out in the unknown—feeling afraid and vulnerable without putting any reasoning to the process. For a second or two or three, it feels like I will be split open by the fear, or I will be crushed to oblivion by it. **And the not knowing why feels worse!**

I have found Shinzen Young's teachings to be true in my experience: when we hold to whatever we are experiencing with awareness, detachment, and compassionate calmness, the small (vulnerable, particulate, separate) self gives way to safe, spontaneous knowing all that we truly are. Only then is it possible to truly laugh at fear.

Linda Theresa lives in Alamosa, Colorado. She feels very grateful for the sharing in WCTS.

Listening to Fear

Patti Nesbitt

Was it a time of intense darkness or intense light? Both were apparent as I sorted through options for my treatment for breast cancer in 1992. I had consulted with four different medical institutions after I was told my life was on the line. Looking at my two young children, I knew this was not a time to waffle. But the options the doctors offered were so varied. I really did not know what to do! In the next First Day's Meeting for Worship, I asked Archangel Michael to help. What followed still shakes me.

Michael: *I will tell God that you want to talk about this.*

Patti: Please, please do. I need to know what to do fast.

M: (trots off, and comes back pretty fast) *God says he will be glad to talk about it over dinner with you.*

P: Dinner! Why can't it be lunch? I need quicker answers.

M: (goes back to God, and returns with this)... *No, you have to pay attention here and think about this one. It is not a short conversation. You are too thick to let my word get through.*

P: OK, OK. Dinner! But can't he give me a clue now?

M: *He says dinner is good. If you pay attention to your fear, you will get some answers.*

Tripping up God

Chris Fulmer

When I was five or six, I remember playing tricks on God because he was supposed to be everywhere. My friends and I would try to put out our feet suddenly to trip Him or stick out our elbows quickly to punch Him. Gosh, that sounds kind of mean now that I write it down. This was our lunchtime entertainment at St. John's Episcopal Day School where I attended.

Chris Fulmer is former clerk of Dallas (Texas) Meeting.

At that, I listened to my fear of being lost at Georgetown Hospital (it was too big and impersonal, and the thoughts of throwing up after chemo while driving on the Beltway just made it worse!). I noticed my fears of not getting state of the art treatment at our local community hospital, where it was comforting and near my Meeting. I recognized the oncologist I really liked had left his Georgetown fellowship for a private clinic, was associated with the Breast Clinic at Johns Hopkins and NIH, though he too was inside the Washington DC Beltway.

M: *So connect the dots, Patti. You want to be treated at home where there is more Love for you, and you want the doctor who is on top of the field. See if you can have him oversee your care at home.*

The decision was easy now. It turned out that my preferred DC doctor and the local doctor had previously worked together. They were

delighted to have this cooperative relationship again, which allowed me to have a state of the art protocol implemented at the local hospital with coordinated oversight from Washington. I started treatment within days, graced by Friendly visitors who dropped in at the hospital's chemo room during my IV and frequently at home to help our family, too.

Archangel Michael continued to be with me during 11 months of treatment and brought his joy and light into my darkness. It was a period of tremendous physical challenge and rich spiritual openings. He is at my side now whenever I check, and continues to be a messenger if needed. I have learned that fear can be an ally as well as an impediment, and my task is to accept the guidance to see the difference.

Since then I have heard that these two doctors have continued their cooperative arrangement which has enabled several other women in the rural fringe to get the best of both worlds too. Now, 12 years later, I am thriving and ever so grateful.

Patti Nesbitt is a member of Hopewell Centre Meeting in Winchester, Virginia. Living in Sandy Spring, Maryland, now, she works as a healer/teacher and is active in the Baltimore Yearly Meeting camping program.

A Laughing Out Loud Dream

Christine O'Brien

A few months ago I was dreaming that I was in my ordinary life when quite suddenly I became enlightened. Then I realized everything was exactly the same--unchanged. I began to laugh and woke myself up, laughing out loud in the night.

Christine O'Brien is a member of St. Petersburg (Florida) Meeting.

Broken Open to an Expanding Newness

Allison Randall

I had just returned from an intense weekend workshop at Powell House, where I had been in a very small minority with my religious beliefs about a difficult subject. I was thrown into three even more intense days. Each of the three mornings I ran a fever of over 104 degrees and experienced excruciating total body pain in every muscle and bone and cell of my body. Then the pain subsided and an angel either appeared to me or talked to me, presenting me with a profound spiritual insight or instructing me what to write or create during each feverless afternoon.

The man I was married to at that time had told me he didn't believe in God, so of course he was not open to the possibility of angels. He explained to me that they were hallucinations resulting from the fever.

I remember that one of the angels, the color of copper, had stood on the footboard of my bed, and when my then-husband later asked me how tall the angel was, and I guessed about nine to ten feet, he answered.

"That **proves** it isn't really there, because its head would have to go through the ceiling, and where is the hole in the ceiling?"

I couldn't argue with logic; I couldn't argue that when the angel was there, there **was** no ceiling! He would have thought I was crazy. There was no way he was open to understanding.

The angels looked and felt **very** real to me, and the overwhelming feeling of never-ending love that they brought certainly seemed like evidence of the Divine. But my

husband had great sway over me, and he sounded so sure there had been no angels. I was experiencing profound changes and insights, and my heart felt Divinely broken open to an Expanding Newness.

Some time later, at a Clearness Committee for divorce of a couple in our meeting, I saw an angel standing in back of the chair of the woman of the couple, its wings hunched forward to just barely come around to the front of the woman's shoulders, in a gently protective posture. A few days after the meeting I told her about it, thinking it would be helpful to her (which it was). Several days after that she called me, strongly recommending I see some spiritual elder about the vision, concerned that if I was

open to angels I might be open to some dangerous things, too.

This view did not coincide with my beliefs, but knowing that many other people know truths that I don't know, I felt I should listen to this woman and follow through on her suggestion. I called a Quaker spiritual friend for advice. She recommended that I talk with a Quaker elder who was teaching at Pendle Hill. I was in New Hampshire and had no money, and the elder was in Pennsylvania, but my spiritual friend kindly paid for my trip to see him.

I worshipped with and consulted with the man for two sessions. When I first sat down with him in worship I remember tears flowing freely from my eyes for a long time—which he

Tell Us Your Stories!

***What Canst Thou Say** is a worship-sharing group in print. Its richness comes from the generous sharing of readers with one another. WCTS has a vision—we want to tell the world God is much more various and wonderful than our skeptical culture allows. We hope to help Friends be tender and open to the Spirit. We need your experience—it may be just what someone else needs to know!*

Articles that best communicate to our readers generally focus on specific events and are written in the first person. There is a special richness when the writer goes beyond describing the experience and tells how it has changed her or his attitude or behavior.

*We welcome submissions of articles of 350-1500 words and artwork—line drawings or artwork suitable for black and white reproduction—that illustrate the theme of an issue, or that we might retain for use in future issues. 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 <m-gilpin@uiuc.edu> or diskette, or hard copy to **WCTS, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820.***

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With joyous expectation we look forward to receiving your contribution to our worship-sharing group in print.

—The Editorial Team of WCTS: Mariellen Gilpin, Chris Johns, Judy Lumb, Pat McBee, Kathy Tapp, Eleanor Warnock

accepted as matter of course. Unlike regular crying, there was no sobbing or sniffing involved. I have discovered over time that this is a true sign for me of reaching profound spiritual depths myself, or of being in the presence of someone in deep communion with God.

This elder put my angel experiences in a Quaker context for me, and spoke to me of many other people throughout history up to the present day who had seen angels, thereby giving me a lot of company, as it were, making my experience seem more commonplace rather than weird. It was comforting, and put my mind at peace.

I still remember the expansion and glow of Light I felt in my chest when he eventually said quietly that he did not see that there was danger for me in being open to anything evil because I was “pure in heart.” Since that day I have heard several healers agree with this man that it is still good to “play it safe” and focus on the Divine, the Eternal, the Good, God, the Spirit, whenever one is opened to visions.

After our sessions together he recommended that I visit occasion-

ally with another Quaker man, in a state neighboring New Hampshire. I met with the second man several times. Being well versed in Quaker history and in mysticism, and being a well grounded person, he was helpful to me even though he had never had visions himself.

I have kept quiet most of the time about seeing angels—I myself don’t know what I believe they are—messengers of God? More concentratedly Spiritual Beings than we are? I do know they are God somehow manifesting Itself to me.

Since most people don’t see angels (or maybe they do and are not talking about them, either!), people are frequently highly suspicious of the mental health or good judgment of someone who does see them. I am grateful that the woman in Clearness gave me that advice, and the people I went to for help were open to hearing and believing. Having advice and that kind of support kept me from eventually taking the word of the skeptics and disowning the messages of the angels.

Allison Randall is a member of Keene (New Hampshire) Meeting. She acknowledges the presence of God as much as possible.

Hearty Sense of Humor

Allison Randall

One of the many things that attracted me to Quakerism is that it seems to have such a high percentage of people with hearty senses of humor. At every potluck, during business meetings and yes, even occasionally in meeting for worship, the sense of humor is strongly manifest. This, for me, is good evidence of the Light Within, for the God I know has an excellent sense of humor. Which stories should I tell?

I remember one winter, when I was walking alone down a side street in Concord, New Hampshire, in the snow, using the time alone as prayer time. I had a lot on my plate. I was on Ministry and Counsel of my meeting and of yearly meeting, the clerk of Ministry and Counsel for my Quarterly meeting, active in teaching First Day School, had three children still at home, and was trying to be of help to a suicidal young woman. Over the years my usual prayers had been more of gratitude or just being in the Presence, without words, but lately I had been offering up a lot of “help them!” “help her!” “help him!” “help me!” type prayers.

So I was walking along, holding the suicidal woman in the Light, praying with great fervor for God to make Its presence known to her. Then I said, “I’m sorry, God, I seem to be asking a lot of You lately.”

A big full round and around voice answered loudly, not missing a beat, “It’s okay, Allison. I ask a lot of you, too!” Light filled me, and I laughed out loud.

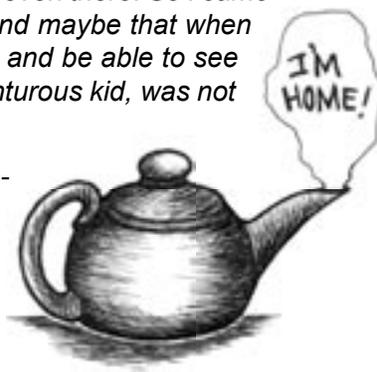
Another example of God’s humor, or maybe, in this case, persistence in

God in a Teapot

Chris Johns

*Before I was even in kindergarten, I was told that God was everywhere, and that I couldn’t see him. **Everywhere?** Yes, everywhere. I was reassured. **Even in my teapot?** Yes, even there. So I came to think of God living in my teapot, and maybe that when I took the lid off, he would come out, and be able to see what I was up to...which, as an adventurous kid, was not always what I wanted!*

Chris Johns grew up in the Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting, a wonderful neighborhood where her “other” parents were all Quakers. She is a natural resources scientist as well as a graphic artist.



WCTS Team Members Needed

Guest Editors: Do you have ideas for themes WCTS hasn't done yet, or should do again? Do you know a few people who would be perfect to write for that theme? Would you like to write for it yourself? Would you enjoy looking over the articles and poems as they arrive—being one of the first to get to read them—and helping choose which wonderful article should appear on the front page? One issue takes about six weeks of emailing with our wonderful team members.

Subscription Manager: Do you enjoy organizing, have familiarity with database software? We have a great way for you to use your talents! WCTS needs a new subscription manager.

We would love to add your creativity, your spirituality, your gifts to the WCTS mix. Maybe you know somebody who would be good, and can help us recruit him or her. To volunteer, write Mariellen Gilpin at 818 West Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820 <m-gilpin@uiuc.edu>.

teaching me a lesson. Once at yearly meeting years back, a woman got up in a Ministry and Counsel meeting and asked fervently for some help for a certain pastoral meeting whose pastor was about to be on maternity leave. They needed a pastor for six different First Days, and were putting out a request to see whether anyone on Ministry and Counsel felt led to come for one or more First Days, to plan the whole service and preach the sermon.

I, in my narrow-mindedness, had always wondered how the pastoral meetings ever came about in a religion whose founder preached against hireling ministers, and I always wondered how these meetings could call themselves Quaker.

But when I heard this woman's plea, a strong, powerful wash of Light crashed down upon my head, stirring me to my heart and to my toes. I was being called to go be an interim minister—to a meeting two and a half hours away from me! I fought back. "Are you kidding, God? This is **not funny!** You **know** how I

feel about this business!" and said "No!" emphatically.

I should have known better. For the next two days, out of 700 people attending yearly meeting, I kept running into two: the woman who had made the plea, and the clerk of that meeting. Wherever I turned, there

was one or the other of them, smiling at me and greeting me—next to me in a business meeting, hailing me in the hallway, behind me in the rest room line, ahead of me in the lunch line. And every time, that feeling of Light revisited me, urging me, and I again argued with God, and said "No!" Not only did I not want to fill this capacity, but I had had no experience being a pastor and knew I couldn't do it.

But finally, when a meeting for worship closed and the woman who had made the request was coming straight towards me across the hall, making a bee line for me, I knew I was done for. Sure enough, she said to me as she got near, "Did you want to see me about something?" I burst out laughing, told her the whole story, and ended up preaching two First Days at that pastoral meeting.



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February 2006

Miscellany

Editor: Patricia McBee

We're not soliciting new material for the February issue, because we have accumulated a store of material waiting for a theme. This time the theme will evolve from the content. We will bring you an interesting miscellany of stories, poetry, and resources that attest to the presence of Spirit in our lives.

May 2006

Jesus

Editor: Kathy Tapp

"I am the light that is above everything....Split the wood and I am there. Lift the stone and you will find me there." (Gospel of Thomas)
For the past generation, Friends have had an ambivalent relationship with our Christian heritage. Yet, sometimes unbidden, we have experienced Jesus' presence in our prayer life, in meeting for worship, or at times of crisis. Tell us about times when Jesus has come to you, and how that has touched your life.

Deadline: February 15, 2006

August 2006

Changed by Grace

Editor: Mariellen Gilpin

Grace is a flow of energy and blessing, utterly unearned and freely given. Sometimes Grace may be given to deal with a challenge in ways beyond our usual repertoire of emotional reactions. How has Grace touched you, either in the moment or for a lifetime? Have you been enabled to make a Grace-filled response? How were you lifted out of yourself into a new way? What has been the outcome? How has your experience of Grace changed you?

Deadline: May 15, 2006

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**God's
Humor**