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

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Transforming Conflict

Short Circuit: Conflict Unresolved

James Baker

Transients sleeping in their parked car on meetinghouse grounds had been an ongoing subject of discussion during meetings for business. As a newly minted Friend I was now the resident in our comfortable but aging meetinghouse. I had read with enjoyment Jan deHartog's Quaker trilogy and was greatly impressed with his description of Friends' three-step conflict resolution process. In *The Peaceable Kingdom* physician Gulielma Woodhouse confronts Parson Paisley about the probable results of his fiery stirring up of his congregation. I thought, "How simple and straightforward—'*Identify with thy adversary…Speak truth to power…Prevail upon thy adversary to join thee in meeting for worshi*p.'"

When I returned from work the SUV was again parked. I decided that now was the time to try out this conflict resolution process. It began well enough (*Identify with thy adversary*), "Hello, I know what it is like to not have any place to live. I, too, have been homeless in a large city. It's not fun." So far, so good—his eyes seemed nervous, but he listened.

Then (*Speak truth to power*) "You need to realize that you are trespassing. The meetinghouse has recently been broken into, and since you are trespassing you need to realize that your presence places you under suspicion." Well, all his pent-up anger broke forth. This was not going the way it was supposed to go. He started shouting at me. In spite of myself my temper rose in response. I tried to say something appropriate, but he continued shouting, started his engine, and drove off, fuming. I returned to the meetinghouse, chastened, to have meeting. Alone.

The result? One man, angry at Quakers. One new Quaker, newly educated. Learning to be a Quaker was going to be a lot harder than I had thought.

James Baker is a Friend away from his beloved Downers Grove, Illinois, Friends Meeting. He is still learning to be a Friend.

From the Editor:

The idea came at the end of a grueling and gruesome class in conflict resolution. Rather than allowing us to explore our differences and find mutual understanding, the instructor preferred to provoke conflict to stimulate discussions and to browbeat us into a more acceptable viewpoint. There had to be a better way to address differences. The old ways weren't working.

We have witnessed the transforming power of the Divine Spirit amidst conflict. This transformation is a journey of faith along an ever-evolving human continuum. Often we begin our growth from where we are most stuck and unwilling to change. Yet, if we want to transform, we must be willing to be transformed. We chose these articles with great love, because each represents a point along this continuum. We hope we can learn this better way by sharing our stories—both from the perspective of assisting in the transformation and of being transformed in the process.

Pam Melick, Guest Editor with Mariellen Gilpin

The Peacemakers

Ken Stalcup

Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.

Matthew 5:9 (NIV)

Every couple years as a volunteer chaplain, I was expected to attend a week of in-service training. I felt pretty righteous the first time I gave up a week of my vacation to attend the in-service training at Putnamville Correctional Facility. That is, until I saw the schedule for the week. My feelings were soon replaced by an unrighteous dread as I saw the scores of hand-outs, the tests and films we were going to see during the next week. Among other things, we were taught how to clean up blood spills, how to survive as a hostage, how to apply mechanical restraints, and do lots of other things I don't ever want to try.

So I sit through the class with 30 other people. We spend the week together and learn everything the Department of Corrections says we need to know this year. Sergeant Metzger is the leader of our class. She looks to be about 50 years old. She says she's a grandmother and when she smiles I can sometimes picture her outside the prison in a happier place playing with her grandkids. But, today, she's all business. Today she is dressed in what appears to me to be SWAT gear. She's wearing army boots and a dark blue DOC uniform that is perfectly pressed. She's maybe five foot three in those boots, but her tough-as-nails presence adds about ten inches to her height.

We spend the morning inside a small classroom with Sergeant Metzger. After a lunch break, she leads us outside. It's June and it's warm. I've been sitting in class watching DOC training films, and I'm ready to stretch my legs. Sergeant Metzger has more than that on her mind. She's teaching us self-defense this afternoon. Given my Quaker background and pacifist tendencies, I'm hoping to just stand out in the sunshine for a while and breathe the fresh air. I look up at the beautiful clear blue sky as I'm standing in a patch of freshly-cut grass in the field behind the training building. I feel the warm spring breeze and am just beginning to really enjoy myself outside. I'm not paying any attention to Sergeant Metzger.

Before I really know what's happening, Sergeant Metzger places a rubber knife in my hand. I'm going to be her volunteer. I'm going to be the Sergeant's example of how to unarm an attacker.

"Come at me with the knife held high," she says as she backs away from me. She crouches into a position that looks like a karate master.

"OK," I say, collecting my thoughts. "Are you ready?"

"Sure," she waves her hand. "I'm ready."

I get a couple feet away from her and I start to lower the knife in a terrible and menacing manner. But, before the knife is anywhere close to a vital organ, she swats my wrist…hard. She grabs my arm, twists the rubber knife from my hand and plants me on the ground with a thud. I'm looking up at the blue sky again and Sergeant Metzger smiling at me.

"You OK, chaplain?" she asks.

"Fine…good…OK." I'm lying.

"OK, good…let's try it again. This time come at me with the knife held low."

I'm still shaking cobwebs out of my head as I stand up. She hands me the rubber knife that was only briefly in my hand, and I return to my starting spot about ten feet away. As I brush myself off and collect my thoughts, she explains to the class just exactly what she's going to do to me this time as I attack her. My knees feel weak.

"OK chaplain…come at me with the knife low."

My enthusiasm for this exercise has waned considerably. I move somewhat more cautiously forward this time and begin to swing the knife toward her stomach. Before I get anywhere close, she sidesteps my lethal attack and grabs my now aching wrist. This time I drop the knife before she has a chance to break my fingers. With an all-too-familiar thud, I'm on the ground again. Difference being…this time my face is in the grass, the same grass I was appreciating from a much more comfortable distance just moments earlier. This time she has me pinned to the ground and the fingers of my right hand are firmly planted between my shoulder blades. I try not to cry.

More cobwebs. I roll over and Sergeant Metzger smiles and helps me

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To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything, and your heart will certainly be wrung and possibly be broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact, you must give your heart to no one, not even to an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements; lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket—safe, dark, motionless, airless—it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. The alternative to tragedy, or at least to the risk of tragedy, is damnation. The only place outside Heaven where you can be perfectly safe from all the dangers and perturbations of love is Hell. —C.S Lewis

to my feet. She asks me if I'm OK. I honestly don't remember my answer. I hope my response didn't include any profanities. She asks if anyone has any questions or needs to see it again. I hope not. I don't want to re-demonstrate either move again. I'm ready to move on to something easier, like a full-body cavity search. Sergeant Metzger has a few more pointers for us—none, thankfully, involve putting the chaplain on the ground. I'm paying attention at this point and I decide never again to attack anyone with a knife.

After some final instructions, the class splits up. Some of my classmates hang around chatting with Sergeant Metzger. Some decide to sit on picnic benches and just relax. I decide to leave with all the grass-stained dignity I can muster and go back to the chapel office and hide for a while.

I find the office is open. I find a chair and carefully place my aching body in it. Dan and a couple of the other chapel porters are working on request forms and filling out paperwork.

Dan is a little quieter than usual today. Since my head and wrist ache, I'm not too anxious to ask why. I sit for a few minutes pondering my knife-wielding past and considering how I'll explain away various grass-stained garments.

Dan comes over to me. He tells me he got a letter from his wife. She's filed for divorce. We end up talking for a long time.

She's got a lawyer and an agenda. But, his heart is breaking, and he's not going to fight her. He's not going to let things get ugly either. He loves her, but he understands that while he's in prison, he can't be much of a husband to her and he can't be much of a father for their kids. He wants his family but he wants peace too. He wants to be there for his wife and kids one day, but it can't be today. So, for now, he's stuck. He's stuck and he tells me he's going to sign the papers and send them back to the attorney. He's going to quietly let go and pray that he will be together with them in the future. He tells me he's putting it all in God's hands now.

Dan is a peacemaker. He's making peace by letting go and stepping aside. Later, it occurs to me that Sergeant Metzger is a peacemaker too. She keeps the peace in a very different way. She holds to strict rules, regulations, policies and procedures. She's going to keep the peace even if it means stepping in front of a knife. Sometimes, peace comes by letting go and stepping aside. Sometimes peace requires you to step up and face self-sacrifice. Blessed are the peacemakers on both sides of the fence—they will be called children of God.

Ken Stalcup *is a member of Irvington Friends Meeting in Indianapolis, a semi-programmed meeting. He and a friend in Alabama read each morning and email each other their reflections. He served as a volunteer chaplain for five years.*

A Dream of Forgiveness

Lucy Davenport

We have had a two-year problem with the neighbors who live in the apartment building next door. There have been multiple arrests, police visits, reports of drug use, and drug sales at the building. We have been burglarized twice in the past year. We are certain that the person responsible was living next door.

I repeatedly asked the neighbors not to use the breezeway between our house and the apartment building, except for emergencies. We share a common fence. The landlord asked us to grant access through our fence from the apartment's patio, in case of fire, because the back door has no other access to the street. We agreed. Since the present occupants moved in, there has been constant traffic in the breezeway at all hours, much of it to and from the parking lot out front. I literally felt trespassed against, as my requests to keep the gate shut and observe the rule of no access except in emergencies went on deaf ears. The final straw came when we began seeing the gate to our own back yard left open, despite it being nowhere near the patio next door. Someone was obviously going into our back yard to get access to our driveway or the street without being seen from the street. I had a friend seal the gate to the street and the gate to the patio next door to stop the traffic flow. We put a lock on our back yard gate. I could sleep at night again without worry.

Last night I was given a dream about a wonderful, spiritually rich older couple who had taught us about the love of Christ in very real ways. It was not anyone we know in waking life. They showed us how their home was an oasis of hospitality for all, without fear. I heard in my heart: *What you do to the least of these, you do unto Me.* Their life was a vision of peacemaking in the power of God. Then I was shown the locked and barred gates between our home and the home next door. Despite the garbage on

the patio and the sense of unease and despair, I saw that this home too is a refuge, a place of safety, and that I had wounded those who live there with my mistrust. I saw that I needed to undo the gates and apologize.

I feel that I have to be faithful to this message by revealing it to another person before I deny Christ again. I will share this revelation with my husband Dan tonight. Tomorrow we will undo the barricade to the patio next door. I don't know what is next, but I know that I must be obedient to this next step. I was comforted when I heard myself say inwardly, "Lord, I didn't know what else to do." I was forgiven. Now I must do the forgiving.

"What you do to the least of these, you do unto Me."

I have to be faithful to this message by revealing it to another person before I deny Christ again.

I went to undo the gate to the neighbor's patio. It was already open. Ditto for the gate to the street from our walkway. I am glad that I had the vision, so I could be calm about this. In fact, I am extremely calm about the whole situation. It simply no longer bothers me. This is incredible! I had been lying awake at nights, wondering what to do next. I see now that it is in God's hands. I have asked for it to be resolved, and the Spirit is working on it. Like the mechanic who is putting my car to rights, sometimes it takes a little time, sometimes it takes a lot.... So, although there has been no 'resolution' in the expected sense, my heart is easy about our neighbors at last.

Lucy Davenport is a member of Reedwood Friends Church, Portland, Oregon. Her spiritual walk is to bridge the historical divides among Friends in hopes of eventually seeing Friends come into deeper spiritual unity. She works as a visiting nurse supporting the poor elderly of her county.

A Note from the Editors:

The following poem brought considerable discussion among the editors whether it belonged in an issue on "Transforming Conflict." We decided to include it because transformation may only begin by recognizing the places where we are most obviously stuck in our stances. And, sadly, that recognition may come rudely rather than softly.

Pam Melick and Mariellen Gilpin

Escape Plan

Linda Caldwell Lee

Some come to the church in a van, most drive.
Couples lean on each other,
  gray-haired women ease arthritic knees onto the nearest chairs.

The young instructor needs no microphone.
He tells sixty-six old people to practice in pairs.
Go for the throat. Palm open, fingers spread,
  shout as you hit, protect your face.
Practice this a thousand times.

Even a small hand is large
  when stretched from thumb to index finger.
A cane is a stick. A walker is a weapon.
Even old women can surprise a sociopath. Strike first.

You who are as sheep in the field
  must become fierce dogs against the wolves. Be ready.
Hit the side of his neck. If you miss whack the ear.
Practice running away.

Outside a red maple burns, oak leaves fly against the windows.
Soon we will all go home to pray for Jane whose throat was slit,
  for Monika who was strangled,
  for the policeman who would give his life for yours,
  for those who would as soon grind your grandmother as eat a burger.

© 2006. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission. Linda Lee is a former editor of WCTS, and a member of First Friends Meeting, Indianapolis, Indiana.

WCTS Editor Mariellen Gilpin was interviewed on "Keepin' the Faith" November 25, 2007. You can listen to it at: <will.uiuc.edu/am/ktf>

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A Pearl of Great Value

Verna (Marty) S. Neidigh

The whole thing began when a lady told me about having been very hurt by a letter from a close friend. Hoping to help her, I dug out a poem begun several years before, while working through shattering effects of a hostile encounter. I intended to send it to her. Instead, the poem became a catalyst for facing my own reactions to feeling hurt.

Even so, after I yielded (again) my will to God's during devotions early one day, my feelings got hurt by mid-morning. I reacted angrily. I felt so ashamed! It dawned on me that I could not continue such behavior and live in the Spirit. When the next temptation arose for retorting in like manner, I refused to be hurt. Rather, I found myself silently and intently saying several times, *Do not hold this against her. Forgive her, for she knows not what she does*. (Yes, like Jesus did on the Cross, for far more reason!) That very day came words which would help, not hinder; heal, not injure. When I spoke them to the person who had acted spitefully, they were accepted. What healing!

That night the pearl of great value came to mind (Matt. 13:46, RSV). I realized that my simple, but drastic attitude change was a pearl of great value, well worth letting go of ill-conceived ways in which I've dealt with being hurt. Better yet, the more I have practiced this attitude change, the more joyfully valuable it has become.

***Marty Neidigh** attends South Bend Meeting, Indiana. Hard of hearing, she works to improve services for deaf and hard of hearing people.*

There must be amidst all the confusions of the hour a tried and undisturbed remnant of persons who will not become purveyors of coercion and violence, who are ready to stand alone, if it is necessary, for the way of peace and love among men. –Rufus Jones, 1940
(Contributed by Dawn Rubbert)

Love Your Enemy

Judy Lumb

My enemies are personal—people in my life that generate an irrational response from me, or people who are hostile to me or actively work against me. They are harder to love because my anger, outrage, and hurt keep getting in the way. Another danger in trying to be like Jesus and love my enemy is that I might decide that my feelings are unacceptable and deny them before I even acknowledge their existence. This is cheating. It does no good and even causes harm to oneself. When I first got sick I was convinced that repressed anger was at the heart of my illness. So I spent a good bit of the first two years uncovering and expressing anger.

Most of it concerned a friend at work. We had always worked well together, like professional partners. Suddenly it all changed, and I found myself in a power struggle with him. I hated myself for participating and kept backing down when I should have stood up for myself. Our relationship finally deteriorated to the point that we were no longer speaking to each other. The year before I left, he went on a sabbatical. I thought I could get him out of my life, but it didn't work that way. I couldn't forget him.

A friend told me of a conflict she had with her brother. They had not spoken for three years. They had been very close when they were growing up, so she missed him terribly. Finally, without dealing with the intervening conflict, she contacted him and re-established their relationship. She just jumped over the problem and let go of the anger. I wrote my friend, telling him that story, and saying that I could not forget him, that he was stuck with me as a friend for life. We never dealt with the issues, just got past them, and are still close friends.

That was hard enough, but deep down I always loved him. What about people I don't like? Can I love them, too? I don't know.

***Judy Lumb** is a member of Atlanta Friends Meeting, Georgia, but she lives in Belize, Central America, where she writes, edits, and publishes.*

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In the Boundary Waters

Judith Weir

Five of us were heading into the Boundary Waters of Minnesota on a canoe trip, usually a challenging but exhilarating experience. Bella had flown in from California to be on this trip with her friend Natalie, our leader. Unfortunately Natalie backed out at the last minute due to a bad case of bursitis. No problem, we thought, Lou Ann and I had plenty of experience with this type of trip. The van was loaded, the canoes were on top, and off we went. The challenge, however, turned out to be not the weather, or the wilderness, but the people. Not what we had expected.

Sylvia, Bella, and Eve were new to me and Lou Ann though they all knew each other. As we drove north Bella began to complain. "If I'd known Natalie wasn't coming I wouldn't have come either." Half an hour later it was, "I would have at least suggested that just the two of us go off and spend these days together in a cabin." So you knew she was still sputtering in her head about her unfair situation.

The next morning, canoes loaded, I ended up paddling with Bella. She was an expert and it was a delight sailing across the water even though heavily loaded. We raced a group of canoes to one of the last open campsites on the lake and lost by one canoe length. Then we found another empty site just beyond it that turned out to be even better. Getting the food pack up into a tree is always a challenge. After twenty minutes of not quite getting the rock with rope attached over the high branch that Bella had designated, I suggested we try a less ambitious branch. She lashed out at me as though I was her worst enemy. I will do this, she said. Half an hour later she conceded and we used a lower branch.

There were two tents—a new one for four people and a smaller old one. Lou Ann and I agreed to take the smaller. It turned out to be moldy and awful inside. We had help scrubbing it out and then adding an extra small tarp to the bottom inside. It was passable, barely. We discovered blueberries ripening out on our point and a pair of loons nesting with their baby in the cove in the back, where the wild iris was blooming. The baby looked like a giant puffball with beak. The warm air and water made conditions perfect for skinny-dipping. We indulged. Eve explored everywhere with delighted explanations of "lovely" and "bea-u-ti-ful," but Bella was becoming more and more difficult. Lou Ann and I stayed up to watch the stars.

In the morning Bella was awake before 6 a.m. and talking in a loud voice right next to our tent. We were the late risers and those in her tent the early risers it seemed. Before lunch Sylvia suggested we have a circle meeting to try and resolve differences. There was quite a bit of talk and we heard again how much Bella wanted to be with her friend Natalie. She wasn't able to let go of that. By the following day she was screaming at me in the canoe and then at the others when we turned around to join them while a thunder storm passed over. "What are you doing sitting under a tree. Don't you know that's more dangerous than being on the water?" None of us agreed with her.

That night, our last, I was unable to sleep. There had been another confrontation about going back. Bella wanted to get back as early as possible, so she could have time with Natalie. The rest of us wanted to take our time and enjoy our last day on the lake. The compromise was that we would leave the campsite at 10 am and be back in Minneapolis as we calculated it by 6 pm. I was worried about how the return would go as Bella had become especially nasty with me and Lou Ann. There would be no option of going off alone the next day. We would all be together almost all the day.

The challenge turned out to be not the weather, or the wilderness, but the people.

I prayed in the night for some way to ease the tense situation. I tossed and turned and asked for help. What I got was love her. That was it. *Love her and live in that love.* Would this work? It was the answer I got, so I resolved to try it. Though I got little sleep that night, I was up early in the morning—unusual for me—and greeted Bella with a cheerful good morning. I could see that it surprised her. We all ate breakfast early and packed up with amazing speed. All the while I was keeping *love her* in my head and holding Bella in my heart as best I could. We were all packed by 9 am. We took time before leaving for another skinny-dip and a last look at our loons and wild iris. Sylvia volunteered to paddle with Bella. Bless her.

The two of them surged ahead, as of course they would, since Bella was such a strong paddler. Near the end of our long lake we could see that Bella was heading straight for the put-in though we had agreed that we would eat lunch on an island in the lake. Eve said, "I can't believe it. I've never seen her this bad. I thought at least she had a sense of fair play." We hailed a canoe that was passing us and asked them to tell Bella to come back. We were stopping on the last island before the put-in and we had the lunch.

I continued to hold Bella in love. I was concentrating on that and I sensed that the tension between us had eased. Everything seemed to have changed. Things were simpler, easier. It felt good, in fact, this loving. We were on schedule with our plan to get back by 6 pm until we discovered that we'd forgotten the hour drive from our put-in to the highway in our calculations the night before. Uh-oh. We just kept going. Bella did yell at Lou Ann a few times, but not at me. Things went smoothly. We were back by 7 pm. Time enough for Bella and Natalie to have dinner together. Lou Ann, Sylvia, and I went out to dinner together. Lou Ann told me that she could feel me loving Bella all day. Yes, I know. It was a simple and powerful learning for me.

Judith Weir *is a member of Twin Cities Friends Meeting, Minnesota, and a writer of poetry and memoir. She has followed a daily meditation practice for more than thirty years.*

Out beyond ideas of
wrong-doing and right-doing
there is a field

I will meet you there

When the soul lies down in that grass
the world is too full to talk about.

Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
doesn't make any sense.

–Rumi

Peace Brings Progress and Pleasure

Dalton Roberts

At the peak of my career, a five-man political body fired me. The deciding vote to fire me was cast by a man I had befriended and supported for many years. I went on TV and had some choice remarks to make about him.

The head of the body had promised to give my job to this man's closest personal and political friend, and he did. Feeling my name had been dragged in the mud, I decided to run for the head position on that political body. I was elected; the man who voted to fire me was re-elected. He immediately threw a big party at his beautiful farm for everyone who got elected—everyone except me.

He had hurt me, and I had retaliated so strongly that I could see our relationship was going to be stormy. It concerned me because our county was going through hard times and we needed every elected person to be pulling on the same rope together.

I talked to him shortly after our election and apologized for the things I had said about him and expressed my desire to have peace with him. I told him the county needed both of us to get moving again. I told him we would make a great team and could do great things for the people. He remained cold toward me. I talked to him again to no avail.

I knew he was going to have open-heart surgery. I called his hospital room and told him I would be praying for him. I said, "That may not mean much to you but my mother will also be praying for you and I assure you, that will do you a lot of good."

When he healed from the surgery he came to my office and said, "You have tried over and over to make peace with me, but I just couldn't do it until now. When you called the hospital, it meant so much to me. I'm ready to work with you and I want us to be friends like we were long ago." We shook hands and hugged and even cried a little.

He was the most experienced politician on our governing body and was instrumental in getting many important projects approved. I do not recall that we ever had another serious disagreement. We worked together until his health broke and he had to retire.

While I rejoiced over the public good we were able to accomplish by mending our friendship, the personal pleasure in being friends again was an even greater fulfillment. When you lose a longtime friend, it leaves a big hole in your heart. When you recapture the friend from the jaws of revenge and retaliation, the rush of peace heals the hole so love can fill it to overflowing.

I think I know how the father felt in the parable of the prodigal son when he saw his son afar off and knew he was coming home. When I saw this dear brother had come to restore our friendship, I felt like the father when he ran to meet his son.

A renewed friendship is so satisfying. I thought about all the years we could have been working together and enjoying our friendship. If you find yourself in this situation, claim the promise of the prophet Joel who said, *I will restore to you the years the locust has eaten.*

The first time I read Joel's words I thought, "That's ridiculous. The past is dead and gone. You cannot restore it." But in God's time, there's no past, present or future. God does not wear a wristwatch. You can actually heal the present so well that it spills over and heals the past.

There's some kind of magic in Joel's words. They have helped me reclaim many little seemingly lost pieces of my past. Making peace with my old political buddy was just one of them, and I thank God.

***Dalton Roberts** told WCTS readers this story in February 2001, but sometimes it's good to revisit an old experience and find new meanings from it. Dalton is a singer, songwriter, and columnist who attends Friends meeting in Chattanooga, Tennesee.*

In Loving Memory: Christine O'Brien

Christine O'Brien wrote for several issues of WCTS, and when she died recently, Circus McGurkis the People's Fair, her annual undertaking, created a T-shirt in her honor. WCTS inquired of Christine's partner, John Walker, whether our readers might order T-shirts, too.

The T-shirts are medium weight, and available in M, L, and XL. The price is $20, including shipping. If I receive 20 or more orders for size XXL we can make some in a larger size.

I have continued, in her name, Christine's support of several charities, including Save Tibet, Wildflower Center, Southern Poverty Law Center, National Resource Defense Fund, Brady Campaign (gun control), Nature Conservancy, Wilderness Society, and the Xerces Society. All profits from T-shirt sales will be divided equally among these organizations.

Also, copies of Christine's artwork are available. To see Christine's work, go to the website <lizardhall.org,> click on Christine's blog, and then on Giclee prints (center right). Any size of any piece can be ordered. The smallest sizes are 11 x 11 or 9 x 13.5, and cost $20, shipping included. All orders should be by e-mail to <thelizards@lizardhall.org>.

John Walker

A Possible Instance of Transforming Power

Scott Searles

My involvement with AVP (Alternative to Violence Project), which is centered on the use of a transformative power we all have within us, has made a big difference in the way I react to situations. A possible example of this Transforming Power, as it is called in AVP, occurred last summer while I was staying alone in my cabin in northwest Minnesota. The cabin is in a very peaceful, isolated spot in the country, surrounded by a small grove of trees which mostly shield it from a lightly traveled country road about 100 yards away, and it had been occasionally broken into and vandalized recently when I was not present.

I was sound asleep about 4 a.m. one dark night when I was suddenly awakened by bright lights of a car in the driveway, followed by footsteps on the back-door steps and a knock on the door. I quickly rose and went to the door, finding there a husky man waving a beer can, who said he was just driving by. He was clearly inebriated. I invited him in, and we sat down together to talk. I learned that he was farming a few miles away, but his wife and family weren't with him, but at their home about 100 miles south. So, we immediately commiserated about the problem of loneliness, finding some common ground. Then I learned he was the grandson of an early settler in that area, whom I had known when I was a boy. He became so interested in hearing first-hand stories about his grandfather, whom he had never known, and about various other old-timers in that neighborhood whom I knew also, that he forgot to finish his can of beer. After we visited for about an hour, he realized that he was now quite sleepy and said good-bye.

When I mentioned this incident to some of my other neighbors later, they all thought I had been extremely foolish to let him in the house. They would have gone for their guns and shouted to him to go away and sober up! But it has become second-nature to me now to act otherwise, and I think that if I had acted as they might have, the situation could have become ugly.

So actually a good situation developed, instead of a possibly bad one. It may be an example of Transforming Power, which involves caring for others, looking for the best, and maintaining one's own self-respect and self-confidence.

***Scott Searles** is a member of Columbia Meeting, Missouri, where he volunteers for Alternatives to Violence Project.*

Tell Us Your Stories!

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Free Hugs

Kevin Chestnut

Why I Offer Public Free Hugs:

- *They promote direct involvement in peace!*
- *They are a striking and fun affirmation that humanity has more in common than what divides us.*
- *They question and unknot the fearfulness that creates and sustains conflict.*
- *They are great for mental health in these stressful times.*
- *They are completely voluntary for passersby, and always done in plain public view with obvious signs.*

Yesterday I got in my public Free Hugs for November, since it was to be the warmest and sunniest day of the week. For several weeks, I'd been thinking to offer this to the AmerenUE electric employees going in to work, since lots of them have to cross the public sidewalk from their parking lot and since I figured they are largely un-appreciated for their work.

The day before, I biked to the site and scouted out the logistics. I talked with some departing employees to learn the time range when most people arrive in the morning. I also gave the security personnel some notice to help ensure they wouldn't freak out, as I've found security personnel are prone to do. All went fine, with Randy the guard saying it shouldn't be any problem. He assured me he'd email his superiors about this, with my name and number. My friend Sandra also commited to doing this with me. At 6:30 a.m. she transported me and my big Free Hugs sign.

We got there before sunrise and displayed our signs on the public sidewalk. We knew, of course, that people were headed into work on schedule, and so would tend to be rushed. Indeed, the appreciative response was maybe 1 in 10, compared to an average 2 in 10 that I've found elsewhere. Many veered away from us as they crossed the street on their light. There was actually higher receptiveness from the non-employees passing by the building. But even at

that low acceptance rate, it felt fine and fun to provide this warm opportunity of kindness for folks on this below-freezing morning. With encouragement, three passing drivers even rolled down their windows to share a hug.

Unfortunately there was, indeed, a tangle with security. After about a half hour, Officer Travis came out and said they'd gotten a complaint from employees that we were forcing hugs upon people! He said we had to go and that the safe place for us would be to move down the sidewalk over the bridge (out of sight and and away from any employees). He said if we didn't leave, he would call the city police. I asked what basis he had to move us off a public space, but he was just adamant that he had orders. Sandy and I crossed the street away from the building to talk this over, having no desire for confrontation or to involve city police.

I then went into the building to talk with the guard at the desk and explained my courteous talk with the guard yesterday. I asked for his supervisor and he started making calls. Travis came in riled, insistent that I leave, but the desk guard waved him away, overruling him but urging me to go outside to wait. Soon, Officer Cabot arrived. He said they needed to remove us out of consideration for their employees and customers (at what he called an employees-only entrance!). He said that, no, we weren't on their private property, but that the employees were their property. He said his contract security service would enforce our move, but that we could seek permission from corporate security if we wanted.

Then corporate security guy Steve Burnett appeared with two silver-haired executive-types who hung behind him, who we had no interaction with as they conversed on their cellphones. Burnett said this should be no problem at all, that it was kind of a nice idea—just not to interfere with anyone's access to the building. He said of course we didn't need to move from a public sidewalk and that he had just gotten the email notice of our intentions. He was very friendly, we shook hands, and they all left us alone. No hugs with them, though.

When the number of employees dwindled, we decided to go to St. Louis City Hall, where there was steady traffic in and out. Some people were arriving for work, but mostly folks were just coming and going for business without precise deadlines and their passage was more relaxed. It was delightful to situate at the sunny south side entrance that was fed by the parking lot. The broad plaza offered lots of room to romp and to skip over to catch new prospective hugs. One suited guy passed us, saying matter-of-factly that he was a lawyer, and "We don't hug." But the response here was lovely, with an astonishing 8 in 10 responsiveness rate during these two hours. Several people came out from their offices just to get hugs with us! They said there was a big buzz inside about us. One took cell phone pictures with us. It was actually hard to pry ourselves away from offering hugs here!

Kevin Chestnut *has been an attender of St. Louis Friends Meeting, Missouri, and clerk of the Peace Committee for 25 years. He works to end racism and sexism, nurtures grassroots leadership, and fosters peace through personal international connections. He invites readers' email contact at <leadersupport@ureach.com>.*

Good News from Kenya

David Zarembka

Following the election of 27 December 2007, Kenya erupted into violence. In the midst of the violence comes some good news. Henry Mukwanja, a Quaker, works for the National Council of Churches of Kenya (NCCK) in the North Rift Valley. On December 30, 2007 when the violence in Kenya began, he and two co-workers were in a remote place. They stayed inside for two whole days. On the third day they ventured out, but ran into a menacing group of youth who were doing violence in the area. Henry called out, "God loves you." One of the youth responded, "No, he doesn't." What happened next? Everyone started laughing and the tension was broken. All was well with Henry and his companions.

David Zarembka *is the Coordinator of the African Great Lakes Initiative (AGLI) , a project of Friends Peace Teams. He lives with his wife, Gladys Kamonya, in Lumakanda, which is in the Lugari District of Western Province. They attend Lumakanda Friends Church.*

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August 2008
Telepathy
Guest Editor: **Maurine Pyle with Mariellen Gilpin**

Sometimes we hear our friends' thoughts before they speak, or see something happening thousands of miles away. Maybe we feel it in the pit of our stomachs, or dream it, or simply know. What has been your experience of telepathy? Was the experience helpful? Did knowing help you respond in a better way than you might have otherwise? Do you do anything to foster telepathic experiences? How has your experience of telepathy affected your spiritual life? How has your spiritual life affected your experience of telepathy?

Deadline: May 15, 2008

November 2008
Angels
Guest Editor: **Michael Resman with Judy Lumb**

And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them. (Luke 2:9) When have you encountered an angel? Was it a comforting experience, a disturbing one, a summons to labor in the Lord's vineyard? Angels might be described as agents of God's mercy. Have you been helped by an angel? Have you been an angel helping someone else? How have angels changed your life? Share your stories of angels.

Deadline: August 15, 2008

February 2009
Gratefulness
Editor: **Patricia McBee**

If your only prayer is "thank you" it is enough. (Meister Eckhart). Do you have a story of the spiritual breakthrough of a spontaneous upwelling of gratitude? Or perhaps you have a story of the grace that comes from a daily discipline of gratefulness, come what may. What have you discovered about gratitude in the face of suffering? How have you found God's grace to be the source or the result of gratefulness?

Deadline: November 15, 2008

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Transforming Conflict