

FRIENDS IN SAN ANTONIO

7052 North Vandiver at Eisenhower

May 2014

Answers to Gretchen's Forum Questions:

When you have a deep religious experience in a Meeting for Worship, what is it like?

I find that when I make myself "open" to receiving a deep experience -- which to me means an answer to a personal dilemma, or a light shining on some aspect of my life that I've not been appreciating "enough", or becoming able to feel strength and acceptance of something very difficult in my life -- or even (and I try to stick with this) feeling an exceptional sense of joy at the blessings in my life, I try to start my "deep listening" by calling up reminders of my children and grandchildren and those I love, for these are the chief blessings in my life. Next, if I need to focus a bit on "direction" into which an opening or insight can come, I will focus -- as needed, depending on what's going on in my life -- on what can help me find acceptance for those concerns or matters that I cannot change. As needed, I will focus on seeking strength -- to understand what I need to do or change in my life, and then wait for that answer, that wisdom, to enter my awareness so I can call on that wisdom to give me solutions to problems I can solve rather than just accept. "Focus" is too directive a word here, for what I really mean is that I try to open my mind, to remove any obstacles to awareness, so that insights can flow in with no inhibiting thoughts. But I don't try to "work at this" but just let go, and not feel fussed if thoughts do pop up unbidden.

So, to be immersed in the waiting and listening during a Meeting for Worship are practices I work on perfecting. And the results -- the "openings" -- are the insights I gain if I've succeeded in these practices of waiting and deep listening. These are the blessings I gain as a result of my personal faith. I've been taught -- by Quaker writings and by my Quaker mentors over the years -- not to worry or be disappointed if these listening goals are not met during every single worship time. But (come to think of it!) I do find that as long as I have serene, calm confidence that my own faithful practice -- or mind set -- will open me to the answers I need, then I can say that my experience is that no worship session is ever dry or barren for me.

How to teach or show others how to do this? I think it must start with the "student" accepting that it is possible. And that is what I call "faith." As a Quaker scientist once wrote, "I believe, because I know."

And another:

The deepest experiences have been realizations -- a new truth which seems to have come from -- where? Within me? From elsewhere?

Calendar

- 4. Sunday
Potluck lunch at 11.30.
- 11. Sunday
Forum -- The Promise Neighborhood and Poverty, with Catherine Schneider
- 18. Sunday.....
Contemplative Singing, 9:00 -- 9:45am.
Meeting for Business, 11.30..
- 25. Sunday
Forum -- Worship-sharing Dialogue on Emptiness
- 28. Wednesday
Midweek Meeting,, 7.00 p.m. Gary's home.

Yet a truth that penetrates deeply, that seems beyond what I could have experienced alone, that guides me, helps me, speaks through me and to me. It is rare, but I must come to Meeting, to go into the silence, which is more than just silence. It is infinity, black space, within and without, the essence of being, existence.

Yet it is fleeting, torn by mundane concerns, memories..

And another

I enter the meetingroom, sit, adjust comfortably, and relax my body, shoulders, arms, elbows, wrists, hands, fingers, and close my eyes – still, still. Resisting the impulse to look up when someone else enters, I seem to look into a dark space, just above the surface of the earth, conscious of the humming surface below, but, then, immersed in the silent, black, space. I focus on the black silence and wait.

But other things intrude. The clutter on my desk, a mislaid pen, a letter not yet written. I abolish them and return to the silent black space. The meetingroom door opens, breaking the silence. I stay in the blackness. A thought, about the Earth, or poor local children’s need to learn to read, or violence in the city, surfaces. Slowly it forms, is amplified, formed in words, perhaps to be spoken in ministry. It is repeated, a Quaker concern, not necessarily an answer; is it spiritually complete? I lay it aside, waiting.

The silence continues, black, interrupted by everyday memories, pushed aside. The silence is healing. Someone speaks, softly, unheard words. I turn and strain to hear, then turn back to silence. Someone else speaks, of a moving experience in the week, and the leading that seemed to come of it. It speaks to my concerns, lighting my blackness. But I return to the black silence, where peace lies.

There is a movement, shuffling. The thought that had formed returns to me. I open my eyes and turn to shake hands. Meeting is over and I am thankful for the silence.



Personal News

We now welcome Bill and Pat back into the Meeting after two decades absence in other cities. Christine D, who is director of Trinity University Urban Studies program has been named the Marilyn J, Gittell Activist Scholar for 2014 by the Urban Affairs Association and San Antonio Growth on the Eastside. Congratulations, Christine! We miss you!

Coming back from months, recently in southeastern Asia, Janet’s granddaughter updated her status: "Tyler and I are probably the only people in Minnesota excited that it's snowing." Their other granddaughter is now engaged to her girlfriend.

Lindsay says, "As part of a fundraising event, I just smashed a pie in a student's face. Man, it feels REALLY GOOD to smash a pie in a student's face on the last day of classes. I HIGHLY recommend it to my colleagues (you know, in the interest of advancing cancer research)."

Catherine sends us this query: A populist perception: People fall between the cracks

because there are cracks. The Hightower Lowdown, June 2013.

James says, "Both of my younger children are getting married this summer. My son Collin is marrying his girlfriend Gabriella, who he met while working as a screenwriter in Romania. After carrying on a difficult long- distance and interrupted relationship they finally have survived the U.S. immigration system and will be together in California.

My younger daughter Lesha will marry her partner of nine years, Fred, on June 14. Being avid campers, they will have the ceremony at a primitive location on South Padre National Seashore with a reception the following week in New Braunfels. I was pleasantly surprised when Fred asked to talk to me about a month ago, not to ask for my daughter's "hand in marriage" but to just ask me how I felt about it. It was something he wanted to do at the right time, and I was happy that he considered my feelings."

Business Meeting

Meeting for Business commenced with an advice of Thomas Merton:

"The rush and pressure of modern life are a form, perhaps the most common form, of its innate violence. To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is to succumb to violence. More than that, it is cooperation in violence. The frenzy of the activist destroys the fruitfulness of her/his own work because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful."

Committee reports to Meeting for Business were long, detailed, and complex. The Property Committee has carefully listed its goals as short-, medium-, or long-term. These include listing contractors for future use, and having painting and sheetrock repairs in the storeroom done. Long-term plans include the uses and appearance of the meetinghouse, especially for our youth. The plans will all be seasoned until midMay. The volunteer workday was successful, a great deal of work being done, with very dedicated help by community corrections clients from Crosspoint. James was thanked for his work constructing a bench.

A question was raised about editing of the report by the Meeting clerk, who explained that she had not changed anything substantive. She had attended the committee meeting as ex officio member.

The Outreach Committee considered the placement of signs, provision of Meeting bumper stickers, and conditions for announcements of meetings on radio, at colleges, and in newspapers. It proposes to have singing before meeting on the third Sunday each month. Gretchen will seek out interest in this.

Peace and Social Concerns Committee brought a list of ideas for increasing Friends visibility and sense of community. The clerk did not go over these as many were dealt with by Outreach. To see the list, ask Margarita.

The Treasurer reported that Meeting finances were healthy, income having exceeded outlays. Income reached 34% of budget, while outlays are at 30%. This is largely because some Friends donate larger sums at the start of the year, when several one-time expenditures are made.

The Ministry and Oversight Committee report has discussed how Friends who wish to can continue silence after the rise of meeting, while noting that many Friends, appreciate the fellowship on the porch at this time. An anchor group is being formed to provide support for Friends' spiritual needs and service work in the wider world. A revised Meeting Handbook is being prepared and ways by which people may bring concerns to the committee are being discussed.

Meeting closed in silence.

Miscellany

For the experiences described at the beginning of this newsletter, Thich Nhat Hanh says “No one can be truly successful in the art of meditating without going through the door of breathing. To practice conscious breathing is to open the door to stopping and looking deeply in order to enter the domain of concentration and insight.”

In its Spring Issue of *Sharing Principles*, AFSC has an appreciation of Ruth. In it, AFSC says that, born into a devout Mormon family she “helped pioneer electron microscopy and ecology. She began attending Quaker Meeting” in Ann Arbor, where she saw “people :being so simple and quiet and unassuming about their good works.”

She became a Quaker in New York in the late 60's, moving to San Antonio when she retired from a faculty position at CUNY. She says, “We are all incarnate spirits, with body, mind, and spirit. I have a deep conviction that the spirit goes on indefinitely, and I'd like to see us develop a conceptual framework that includes the spiritual component along with the physical and mental.”

And, on her charitable donations, she explains that “I want to have the good work that AFSC and others do continue, especially for those who can't help themselves.”

~~~~~  
A note in grief:

In the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the birth rate is about six per woman. It has been estimated that 30,000 homeless children wander the streets of Kinshasa, the capital. And many children are regarded as the bearers of demons. The pastors of many evangelical churches claim to be able to recognize this and to exorcize the demons. Sadly, they “earn” money by this practice, attracting crowds who pay to enter and to see it done.

Their “treatment” varies from gentle to painful, including induced vomiting to bring up the hearts of others the children are alleged to have eaten. Some children live in the churches. Many have been thrown out of their families because of their parents' suspicions or, perhaps, because they are a nuisance and the parents have no way to feed all their children. And some are sick, throwing suspicion on the ones who are well. This is described in the April issue of *Foreign Policy*, where it is said to follow the example of an America of 300 years ago, when the weak were the targets of accusations.

~~~~~  
We have damage done to the meetinghouse. The wall between storeroom and children's room has had a large hole bashed through it, probably by someone who was able to jimmy the lock to the storeroom. This will be repaired. It reminds us that deadbolts must be locked for all rooms after use.

But we now have a new bench in the breezeway, constructed by James and friend.
Thankyou both!

~~~~~  
Leilah often has news about Brackenridge Park for us. To avoid making the newsletter denser, let us suggest that if you would like to receive these regularly, let Leilah know at [leilahpowell@gmail.com](mailto:leilahpowell@gmail.com). Or go to [www.brackenridgepark.org](http://www.brackenridgepark.org)

~~~~~  
Caroline Stephen in 1890 says of her first visit to a Friends Meeting, "I found myself one of a small company of silent worshippers who were content to sit down together without words, that each one might feel after and draw near to the Divine Presence . . . , before the meeting was over, a sentence or two were uttered in great simplicity by an old and apparently untaught man, rising in his place among us. . . . My whole soul was filled with the unutterable peace of the undis-

turbed opportunity for communion with God . . .”

Such simplicity seems very difficult for those of us who, now, are “taught.” Yet the truth we seek is, surely, simple yet profound.

~~~~~  
We have recently heard a great deal about the novel The Help, which, fictionally, tells of the tribulations of black servants in the South as late as the early sixties. The book-within-the-book written about these experiences described the need for secrecy to protect the “helps” from attacks by whites for telling their stories.

It now turns out that there is a nonfictional book from the seventies that tells of the true life of a sharecropper in Alabama. He recounted this to the author at length and his account was taped. His identity had to be concealed to protect him from having told of his oppression. The book is All God's Dangers: the Life of Nate Shaw, but the true name of the recounter was Ned Cobb. James Geirger, at the time of publication, said in the New York Times Book Review, that America had “found a Black Homer, bursting with his Black Odyssey.”

A “hefty” paperback edition is now available from the University of Chicago Press, described by Dwight Garner in the NYT as “serious history and a serious pleasure.”

## Inspiration

We asked Friends to tell us of people who have inspired them. James tells us:

“A person who had a great influence on me was Pete Seeger. He recently died at 94 years old. He was not a Quaker, but led a very ‘quakerly’ life.

He lived his life using the power of song as a force for social change. I saw Pete perform several times usually at folk festivals or political events. I actually spoke to him one time before going on stage for one of the concerts given by the crew of the Clearwater Sloop. I saw something printed on the head of his banjo and I asked him what it was, and then I talked about wanting to learn the banjo.

The message on his banjo read, “This machine surrounds hate and forces it to surrender”. You would never guess that Pete, who hopped freight trains in his youth, was a graduate of Harvard and came from a family of classical musicians.

Pete has inspired a lot of folk artists including Joan Baez, Bob Dylan, Bruce Springsteen, Arlo Guthrie. I highly recommend the video ‘The Power of Song’ (2008), telling Pete's life story with many interviews.”

## Quakers Speak “Quakerspeak”

There's a new Youtube phenomenon on the air. Here's what they (Friends Journal) say about it: “QuakerSpeak is a new web video series aimed at communicating Quaker experience in ways that are appealing and energizing, particularly to religious seekers and to Friends meetings interested in growing in number and level of engagement.”

In the first one, Max Carter, a professor at Guilford College, shares the story of George Fox, who went seeking for spiritual answers and found them not in a church, but within. You can check on <http://quakerspeak.com/> and if you check on one of the videos you may get a list of videos, including Quaker Beliefs, Quakers and Women in Ministry, Jan De Hartog's “The History of Quakerism,” Quaker Silence.

And here are three websites for you and your friends anxious to know more about what you do on Sundays to spend time on:

[friendsjournal.org](http://friendsjournal.org) | [facebook.com/friendsjournal](https://facebook.com/friendsjournal) | [twitter.com/friendsjournal](https://twitter.com/friendsjournal)

## War and its Benefits

There is a new book, War! What Is It Good For?: Conflict and the Progress of Civilization from Primates to Robots, by historian Ian Morris. He apparently argues that war has been good for everyone, creating secure and large environments for their absorbed citizens. If it is so bad, why has it been a constant in human history? Our lives are much safer than those of our stone-age ancestors for this reason.

But now, we are approaching an endpoint, at which wars will be fought by robots, no longer endangering lives.

A frightening prospect but also, surely, flawed. Modern wars are focused on destroying the economy that supports the enemy, and therefore its environs. Would robowars be different? And in fact he argues that the next war is likely to precede this and be nuclear, involving huge destruction.

But, if those large environs are so beneficial, why did the empires and the USSR break up, and Scotland be on the verge of seeking its independence from the UK?

Morris seems to suggest that robowars will be less violent, but that, further, robocops will be necessary to prevent war buildups. We have reached a point at which cyberwar is threatened. How is this to be policed? Quakers with FCNL and the Quaker UN Office, still have a lot of work ahead of us. We need AVP at the cabinet level!

## From Moscow Friends to the worldwide Quaker family

“We Friends have been trying to serve as a sort of spiritual observatory in the Ukraine crisis. Two meetings ago we received some suggestions from our friend Sasha about a new call to prayer and spent our time after meeting for worship considering these suggestions. Yesterday we gathered again to receive and approve an edited statement. Here's what was approved in monthly meeting.

We Friends are free to seek to persuade others of the efficacy of our position -- warranted by our Quaker witness that 'all people are equal', and that 'there is that of God in every person'. We also strongly oppose all possible seeds of war in ourselves and others, and we declare that armed conflict as a tool of diplomacy for solving modern disputes is ineffective, futile, and wrong.

Wars are not inevitable. War cannot be won merely by using inhumane violence. Peace has no chance of being enforced through military means. No conditions can justify armed warfare because it inevitably involves killing civilians.

There is a thoroughly held ethical conviction that we ought, in any case, to live in peace with one another: 'Our life is love and peace and tenderness and bearing one with another and forgiving one another and not laying accusations against one another but praying for one another and helping one another up with a tender hand.' Isaac Pennington, 1667.

Friends are calling for restraint by all parties in Ukraine, abstention from violence in any form in order to avoid bloodshed. We are for purely peaceful non-violent activities in defense of their claims and the protection of the rights of every person, regardless of which group of the population they represent in Ukrainian society. Bloodshed divides, prayer and forgiveness unite. We know that in the love of Jesus we gained independence, autonomy and salvation, for we have long since been paid for by the blood of Christ.”

Johan Maurer added this comment in his post: This is not just a statement to the world, it's a statement to ourselves as well. (I'm now speaking personally.) We have been constantly tempted to fog our spiritual telescope with hot-off-the-press political observations. I'm glad we have taken the time to remind ourselves of first principles.”

## **Friends' Meetingrooms**

When small Quaker groups formed three and a half centuries ago, they met in people's homes, necessary, to avoid the eyes of the King's men, as their meeting was illegal. As they became more accepted, they continued to meet in Friends' houses, sometimes receiving them as bequests, when they continued to be known by the name of the deceased. Then they began to build meeting-places, continuing to call them "houses." Those new meetingrooms were plain and unadorned, often with high windows to emphasize the search "within" rather than the "without."

We no longer feel the need to exclude views of nature's glories and we sit in a meeting-room with the full benefit of these. Yet it is a "room," not a "sanctuary" and is in a "meetinghouse," not a "church." The only important feature of this room is within the hearts, minds, and spirits of each of us as we gather in silence and these can take place anywhere large enough for us, however unattractive and with whatever other uses.

## **COAC of Texas**

in 1965 Janet and Ken were in Ann Arbor and were one of four families which met, led by Peter and Joyce Forsythe, in the Quaker meetinghouse to discuss the problems they had perceived in adopting children of a different race. The small group decided to start an organization to encourage adoption agencies to think more broadly about their principles for placing children. This meant, effectively, more easily placing nonwhite children with white adoptive parents, that being needed for minority children sorely needing placement..

The agencies' current practice was to assume that the only reason for adoption was sterility and to place children with appearances as close as possible to that of the adoptive parents, to make it possible for them to pretend the child had been born to them. This could mean that neither the child nor others would know he or she had been adopted. The group in the meetinghouse resolved to work to change this.

Through Pete and Joyce, Janet and Ken had been approached by a caseworker in Chicago who had persuaded her supervisor to let her find white parents for a black baby. (Though his birth mother was actually white.)

Those children were being classified as "hard to place" or even "unadoptable." "So we chose to name our organization the Council on Adoptable Children, COAC.

We remember attending an Open Door Society meeting in St. Louis where the National Association of Black Social Workers met and formulated a policy accusing us of now stealing black babies as a yet further aspect of racial domination. We listened respectfully as, after all, their goals were the same as ours. And it seemed effectively to be the first time they had ever been able to meet and take action. (But black children still face greater difficulty in adoption.)

Very soon after, we left Ann Arbor for Urbana in Illinois, where we started a branch of COAC. In Michigan, we heard, COAC had achieved great success in persuading agencies to change their practices..

We have now discovered that there is a Texas branch of the national organization, 'COAC of Texas,' in Austin." So much, from small beginnings!

## **Execution?**

There are some people who do unthinkable things to other people, raping, beating, torturing, and, recently in Oklahoma, shooting a woman and burying her alive. What do they deserve? Nothing, surely, better than what they have inflicted on others. They deserve to die in very nasty ways. But then there is no chance of growing remorse for their crimes, of seeking redemption.

And are we prepared to be the ones who inflict that punishment? Or to pay someone else to do it for us? Would we not then become as bad as the ones who committed those crimes? How, then, should we proceed?

## **A Quaker Artist**

A recent review of the illustrative art of Norman Rockwell mentioned that his idol was the Quaker illustrator Howard Pyle. Pyle (or should we say Howard?) is regarded as the father of American illustration. Dying in 1911, he was born in 1853 into a Quaker family in Delaware and expressed an interest in studying art, not then a normal choice for a Quaker boy. To support himself, he took to painting posters and covers, realized that this skill was transferable to the inside of books, and took, eventually, to producing illustrated books for children. The most prominent of these were on such unQuakerly subjects as King Arthur and his knights, pirates, and Robin Hood. *Otto of the Silver Hand* is a historical novel set in 13<sup>th</sup> century Germany, full of conflict and well-created characters. And his book *Man of Iron*, published in 1891, was the basis of a film in 1954 starring Tony Curtis! So how did his Quaker upbringing show? Well, he founded the Brandywine School, and among his class half were women, a proportion unheard of around the turn of that century. He published *Rejected of Men: a Story of Today*, which tells the story of Jesus as if he was an early 20<sup>th</sup> century man.

## **The Query for May**

Am I walking gently on the Earth living simply, and mindful of how my life affects the Earth?

Meeting for Worship is held on Sunday at 10 a.m., followed by refreshments and a Forum discussion at 11.30, usually lasting until about 12.45. Children are invited to join worship for the first fifteen minutes, after which they may go to join with the Young Friends program. Child care is available during Forum.

Clerk: Carol Balliet; e-mail: [clerk@saquakers.org](mailto:clerk@saquakers.org).

Newsletter Editor: Ken Southwood, (210)828-1513; e-mail: [jksouthwood@grandecom.net](mailto:jksouthwood@grandecom.net)

Website: <http://www.sanantonioquakers.org>

Donations may be made to Friends Meeting of San Antonio, P.O. Box 6127, San Antonio TX78209.

Meeting telephone for meeting times or to ask for other information: (210) 945-8456