

Excerpts from the upcoming publication –

Whispers of Faith: **Young Friends share their experiences of Quakerism**

– a project of Quakers Uniting in Publications (QUIP)

A Query

Do I set aside time for myself during the day?
Or do I wear myself out all around all day?
Do I know who I am? Do I care for my light?
Or are my stress levels rising beyond my control?

Can I simply listen to that radiant light,
My inner light that yearns for rediscovery?
Am I sacrificing myself for the other things,
the material pressures upon me all day?
Or will I take time to feed that flickering candle?

Will I care for the Light around me,
and cause them all to glow more brightly?
Will I search for the hidden, and take out the darkness?
Can I, through sharing light, help us all glow stronger.

*Brianna Richardson, 17,
North Pacific Yearly Meeting, USA*

I Hear God Singing Within Me

I always sit in the same spot during meeting for worship. Nestled in the corner of the cherry bench my father refinished, I sit quietly, my head turned slightly to the left, where two hundred year old moldings frame a twelve-paned window. Since I was a tiny baby, my family has occupied that bench. As I've grown older and my little sister also started attending meeting, I have fought for and won the corner seat by the window. The view I have seen outside of that window has changed only slightly over the past sixteen years. I have changed though, and as I grow, how I see the view outside the window has changed as well.

I'm five years old and it's springtime. A bluebird hops from branch to branch of the leafy oak outside the window. I squirm on the bench, wishing I, too, could be out in the gentle sunshine, hopping and skipping and yelling. The heavy silence in the meeting room pounds in my ears. Impatiently, I look at our first day school teacher. She looks at me sternly, admonishing me to be still. It is not time to leave yet. I again turn my attention on the window. As I look at the bird more closely, I see a little nest filled with baby birds. I can no longer contain my excitement. I stand up, ready to proclaim to the silent meeting room the miracle of life outside the window, when the first day school teacher, ascertaining my intention, hurriedly ushers me from the room.

It's the Sunday before Christmas, and I am eight years old. Greens hang on the window, giving off the fresh winter scent of pine and snow. My friend Gina and my sister Madeline sit on the bench next to me. The three of us have recently learned the sign language alphabet in first day school, and we use our new knowledge to painstakingly spell out messages to one another. I eventually turn away in frustration, and study the bow tied around the evergreen on the window. Its intricate curls and gold trimming remind me of my own life, which has become more and more complex over the years. In school my math workbook is now filled with multiplication and my class is reading longer books with bigger words; I'm a big girl now, and I no longer have time to color and paste. I look past the ribbon to the

outside where it is beginning to snow. I hope that there won't be school tomorrow. And since it is near Christmas, I say a little prayer for the well-being of my family and friends and the speedy arrival of the gifts I want. I don't know if God can hear me, but in the silence of the meeting room, I feel more listened to than anywhere else.

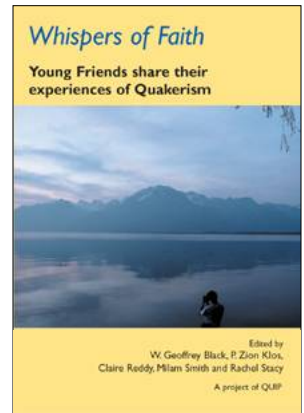
The summer sun pours in through the window and beats heavily on my thirteen-year-old head. I sit, my eyes closed, trying almost too hard to find God in the swirl of thoughts that throng my brain. Finally, I give up and open my eyes in exasperation. Resorting to my favorite meeting house pastime, I look out the window and begin to dream about my future life. Rather than the quiet simplicity of Quakerism my daydreams involve elaborate mansions and movie stars. While I watch the adults silently worshipping, I keep my mind busy, making plans for when I'm "grown up" and philosophizing about the nature of God. My Lutheran teachers have told me that God is in the Bible. My Quaker family tells me to look for God inside myself. I defy them both and look for God outside the window. The summer wind in the oak tree and the sound of cars on the nearby highway combine to create a siren song of reality. I don't need to find any God-force right now. First I have to find me.

I'm sixteen years old this autumn, and this is my first full-length meeting for worship. I do not try to think this time, and I do not try to plan anything. Instead, I sit quietly my eyes slightly closed, and allow my mind to slowly empty. Any thought that pops into my head meets a whisper of "thinking" and then dies away. Before I close my eyes completely, I glance out the window at the thin fall sunlight. I allow this light to fill me, washing away everything else, and then, with a silent thanks to the window, I sit waiting for God. I do not find a miracle, no bright lights or angels. Instead, I find a deep cleansing peace, and I realize that life is just that simple. Theology and religion aside, I find in the sunlight from the window a simple feeling of pleasure at being alive and being me, and for now, that is all I need.

When I open my eyes after thirty minutes of silent worship, I find that I cannot quite recapture the peace I had found. Perhaps next week I'll be able to last a little longer. For now I simply turn my head a little to the left and allow my thoughts to drift up and out. And for a moment I think I hear God singing within me as together we float up into the vaulting blue sky outside my window.

*Lily Press, 16,
New York Yearly Meeting, USA*

Order copies of *Whispers of Faith* from QuakerBooks of FGC, (www.quakerbooks.org) or Quaker Bookshop, London. The book is available now.



Praise Be to God!

When I sat down to write about my Christ-centered Quaker experience, I decided the best way to express myself was through the entry I made in my journal on the first day I stepped onto the Quaker path.

Journal Entry 116 Sunday, April 25, 2004

Praise be to God! What an absolutely AMAZING day! Elly and I set off this morning on a quest for a spiritual home. We went to mass at 8am, which left us feeling all right but by no means enlightened or full of You. Seemingly out of the blue, we decided to swing by the Quaker church near home and see if there was a service for us to attend.

When we got there we didn't know what time it was. We approached the door to investigate. As we were reading the schedule posted on the door and trying to figure out what was happening, the door opened and we were ushered in by a small, old lady with wiry silver hair. She asked, "Is there anything I can help you girls with?" I stupidly asked the time, and she responded, "About 9:30. You're just in time. There's a class over in the conference room that's just about to start, and I think you'd really enjoy it."

So over to the conference room we went, and we really did enjoy the class. They were reading and discussing the

The young people who contributed to *Whispers of Faith* have stepped forth confidently to speak of their encounters with God as well as their doubts. They invite all Friends — young, old, African, European, American, evangelical and liberal — to join them in worshipful and sometimes playful conversation about being a Friend. Their integrity should be a prod to all of us to examine our own conceptions and misconceptions about the "barriers" of age, Christianity, and so on which too often push Friends apart.

Marge Abbott

book of Luke; concepts of the old and new covenant; and how it all applies to us now. It was great. Everyone was so genuinely happy to have us there, every one was so friendly, so helpful, so warm, so eager for us to participate. It's as though we were drawn seamlessly into their community. Everyone was so alive, so vital, so inspired. Each one of them loves You, Lord, and we (yes! Elly too!) could see it, feel it. There was so much laughter mixed with so much insight. Oh, it was glorious.

After the meeting we went to the worship service, which was great. They have this quilting ministry where they make quilts for cancer/bone marrow-transplant patients. The idea is to provide a bit of warmth and a tangible example of God's arms wrapping around a patient via the quilt. Today was special, as a whole batch of quilts was ready to be sent off and part of the service was blessing the quilts. It was very touching. Also, a missionary family who's preparing to head for Russia in August spoke. It was nice to hear from them.

The Quakers do this silence thing that's really cool, where there's a period of time in the service where everyone just sits and listens to God. It was so refreshing. The best part of all is this: Elly wants to be in Your light! She checked the little box on the visitor card that said she's interested in becoming a Christian. It's not surprising. It



Editors Claire Reddy, Rachel Stacy, Zion Kloss, Geoffrey Black, and Milam Smith address the 2005 Annual QUIP Meeting.

seems like an environment where one can practically reach out and touch the fruits of the spirit, and nobody can leave without wanting to plant the seeds of those fruits. Both Elly and I want to join the church. Thank you, Lord! Thank you! The kind of joy today has filled me with cannot be quantified. It's a feeling of sheer joy, of coming closer to You, departing from the shadows of a cold, loveless world. I see your hand present in all of today's events, and the kind of excitement this instills in me is overwhelming.

"Incidentally, my name is Lois," said the old lady who opened the door to a new chapter in my life, a chapter I foresee as full of growth, friendship, fellowship and brotherly love.

Thank you for today! Thank you for the existence of North Seattle Friends Church, for the stark contrast you offered us between the old covenant practices and mentality of the Roman Catholic church and the overwhelmingly joyful new covenant practices and mentality of the Quaker church. And you could not have given us a more beautiful day for this to have happened. Beauty is everywhere in your creation.

Love, Trillian

A year later:

This past year has been a year of growth, friendship, fellowship and brotherly love. Elly and I were welcomed into the church as members last month. Every day God teaches me new things and every Sunday I get a big hug from Lois.

*Trillian Turner, 19,
Northwest Yearly Meeting, USA*

We need your contributions to help fund the promotion of this excellent book. Please send checks earmarked for *Whispers of Faith* to:

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