

THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE

2004

**GROWING FRUITFUL FRIENDSHIP**

**A Garden Walk**

**Ute Caspers**

## **The James Backhouse Lectures**

The lectures were instituted by Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) on its establishment in 1964.

They are named after James Backhouse who, with his companion, George Washington Walker, visited Australia from 1832 to 1838. They travelled widely, but spent most of their time in Tasmania. It was through their visit that Quaker Meetings were first established in Australia.

Coming to Australia under a concern for the conditions of convicts, the two men had access to people with authority in the young colonies, and with influence in Britain, both in Parliament and in the social reform movement. In meticulous reports and personal letters, they made practical suggestions and urged legislative action on penal reform, on the rum trade, and on land rights and the treatment of Aborigines.

James Backhouse was a general naturalist and a botanist. He made careful observations and published full accounts of what he saw, in addition to encouraging Friends in the colonies and following the deep concern that had brought him to Australia.

Australian Friends hope that this series of Lectures will bring fresh insights into the Truth, and speak to the needs and aspirations of Australian Quakerism. This particular lecture was delivered at Avondale College, Cooranbong NSW on Wednesday 7th January 2004, during the annual meeting of the Society.

Ruth Watson  
Presiding Clerk  
Australia Yearly Meeting

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Ute Caspers grew up in post-war Germany, when nothing was reliable, and families were just as ruined as cities. Having lost both parents before she was four, she was fortunate to find a caring foster family who enabled her to receive a good education, and challenged her to develop a questioning mind. She met Friends as a student of pedagogy while visiting England and, together with her husband, joined right before they married. She gave up teaching when they had their own children and became involved in adult education activities in her neighbourhood as well as within the Religious Society of Friends.

Among German Friends, Ute has held a number of offices, including clerk of Regional and Yearly Meetings, and representative to the Friends World Committee of Consultation (FWCC). Within the FWCC Europe and Middle East Section, she has been involved in several European Gatherings and the European Quaker Peace Consultation, and recently held the post of Visiting Friend. She also represents Friends in local and international ecumenical contexts. Currently she attends Central Committee of the World Council of Churches on behalf of FWCC.

In the early 1990s, Ute felt called to go into active peace work. Following a year of Peace Studies in Dublin and a term with 'Responding to Conflict' at Woodbrooke, England, she then became involved in peace missions in South

Africa, the Great Lakes region of Africa, Sierra Leone and, most recently, in Israel/Palestine. She has facilitated numerous workshops on peace and conflict resolution, including through the Alternatives to Violence Programme.

With all the travelling that has been involved in her activities, what is most essential to her are personal encounters and an awareness of the deep connectedness of humankind.

## **Acknowledgements**

Designing this 'Garden Walk' led me through an extensive maze of options, full of bends and dead ends. I wonder how far I would have got without so many friends faithfully rendering provisions for the journey whenever my own reserves threatened to run dry. They kept me going with their prayers, their encouragement, their ideas and sometimes concrete suggestions. My companions on this journey have included: Eden Grace in the USA, Sr. Monica Lewis in her convent, Susannah Brindle and Helen Bayes in Australia, and Sibylle Janert in England. Lee Kim and Marianne Feller supported me locally, and my bilingual son, Jan, my husband, Lutz, and Tony Fitt were of immense support in smoothing out the language. Special thanks go to Ruth Gilbert who fixed some of my imagery on paper.

## **About this Lecture**

Ute Caspers says that friendship has special importance for her because she never experienced a normal development of family relations due to World War Two and its aftermath. She writes: "Let us start by looking at the notion of friendship in general. Friendship, like love, is such a basic notion that it defies exact definition. We can only describe it, or rather some of its facets, according to our individual experiences with it, which differ depending on circumstances and personalities. If I were to weave a definition . . . then friendship could be a place of acceptance, where you don't have to pretend. It would be an empowering experience, with a good balance of giving and taking, and a place where you are supported and held with your spiritual or emotional doubts and findings. However, it seems to be an ideal that we do not always manage to live by. Cicero, long ago writing *On Friendship* said: 'Therefore I suggest we look at what wisdom we find already in our cultural fabric. You may just as well take the sun out of the sky as friendship from life, for the immortal gods have given us nothing better and more delightful'".

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**Der große Gärtner (the great Gardener) 1940**  
**Emil Nolde (1867-1956) – Sprengel Museum, Hanover**  
© Stiftung Seebüll Ada und Emil Nolde

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## I: INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATION

Sometimes it is the very special nature of a situation that turns an invitation into a call. This I experienced two years ago. I had one of my low days, a deep cloud of self-doubt hanging over me so thick I could not even reach out to my friends, and meeting for worship remained empty. It was a long day. In the evening, almost mechanically, I opened the mail – and was stunned. Seeing a name that I remembered from far away and long ago broke a first hole in that fog, so that curiosity could start peeking in. I started reading, "... Our Backhouse Committee wants to invite you..." Total Disbelief. Me? Why me? Why this? Why right now, this very night? Was it possible that, while I had been torturing myself with scruples there were people on the other side of the globe who trusted I had something to share, after all?

Receiving an invitation under these circumstances – how could I dare back away from something that seemed as if it had come from divine intervention? My mind was resolutely set back on the creative path again. It was a rich time looking round, asking, whatever came my way, if it wanted to be my subject matter. In the end the subject that found me was *Friendship*.

Friendship has special importance for me because I never experienced a normal development of family relations. Due to World War Two and its aftermath, I fell out of the nest twice. My mother died at the end of 1945 when I was three. When I was five years old, I was separated from my grandparents and siblings – my father had gone missing as a soldier– and I was fostered out into a new family with a new set of parents, brothers and a sister. All of them were bigger and older than me, looked quite different and spoke a different dialect. Since this family was not properly settled yet either, by the time I was ten I had moved house eight times.

Lacking stability and a feeling of belonging, I had to learn to adapt to new locations, new situations, new carers, new neighbours. For the sake of surviving, I learned to grow friendships. I also learned to say farewell, and to trust that some link would remain just as I was linked with my siblings whom I could not see or

meet. Was that somehow trusting God? Of course I still quarrelled with God. Life was not easy. Why did God allow all this to happen? Someone once gave me an answer: “It is because God knew that you would be able to master this fate!” This gave me a completely new perspective on all those humps and depressions that would continue to haunt me. Perhaps God was trusting me, too. It is possible that this vague perception of mutual trust established what tentatively could be called ‘friendship’ with this God who had – once I had escaped starvation – given me such a rich life. However, in the churches of my various families God seemed so far away and inaccessible. Maybe that is one of the reasons why I felt deeply at home with Friends ever since I attended my first meeting for worship on a trip to England as a young student some forty years ago.

I suspect this may be why Friendship became my subject for this lecture. But why – given your quite different life stories – should it be relevant to you? Well, we are the Religious Society of *Friends*. If this is not to be an empty phrase, we need to look and see every once in a while what we mean by friendship, how we can cultivate it, what empowers us to maintain it.

The next step in developing this lecture was finding a vehicle to carry my message. As my mind feeds on images it seemed important to find an image that could illustrate what I feel and think about friendship.

“Friendship is like a wonderful garden.” This was one of the many definitions of friendship that I heard from all kinds of people over the following months. It was given to me one night by a friend and colleague in central Gaza City where, amidst all the fear and hatred in that troubled corner of the world, there is so desperately little of anything like a garden, and friendship is so hard to live. Perhaps it was this great contrast that made the idea stay with me. It looked like an almost perfect image to use, except that my mental picture of a garden is definitely European, and you may have to translate some of my garden images into your own context. We are blessed with a moderate climate; droughts and heat waves are rare and the soil tends to be rich. Perhaps gardening is quite different for you in the Australian context. So I do ask you to imagine an easy, European garden.

There are some interesting references to gardens in the Bible. For example God made a garden before God even created Adam and Eve.<sup>1</sup> The prophet Jeremiah encourages the exiles, who are bound in Babylonian captivity, to build houses and plant gardens<sup>2</sup> and Mary of Magdala<sup>3</sup> mistakes the resurrected Jesus for a Gardener.



I realised again just how powerful this image of a garden is when, on one and the same day, I received a warning from one friend I should be on the guard lest my image become more important than the content, while from another friend, I received what looked like the cover story of a garden magazine<sup>4</sup>. This second friend wrote that, while reading, she had been thinking of me and my 'friendship-project'. Indeed, I found all those sentences highlighted where she might have replaced 'garden' with 'friendship'. Sentences like "In a garden, context is everything", or "Gardens do not just happen", or "You cannot separate anything from the mix because everything affects everything", or "the point is the journey – or the gardening – rather than the arrival". These are, indeed, most of the important points that made me choose the garden image. Gardens and friendship just do have a lot in common.

Long after I had decided to use this image, I turned the radio on one Sunday morning at breakfast time. "... This is MY garden," said a voice, "everyone will believe this and I don't allow anyone to play in it apart from myself." I was startled, for at this time of day I had expected classical music. "This is my story!" I said to myself as I went on listening. You may be more familiar with Oscar Wilde's fairytale of *The Selfish Giant* than I was: in order to keep the children out of his garden the giant builds a big wall around it and the garden falls into harsh and permanent winter. Only when the giant eventually shows compassion for a little child does Spring – and life – return and the children are allowed back. At the end of his life the giant meets that child again and, this time, recognises him for who he really is by the wounds on his small hands and feet. The giant finds himself invited to the child's garden, which is Paradise. Indeed, this was my story: the garden, seen as a metaphor for life and for the way we relate to other people and to God.

Now, having introduced myself, the topic and the metaphor, it is time to tell you how I have planned this 'garden walk'.

While 'Getting There', we shall look at concepts of friendship before and within Christianity, and among Quakers, and I shall introduce you to my own thoughts. In our 'Tour of the Garden' we will look at some varieties of friendship and how they grow. We shall then go into the 'Garden Shed' to find out what resources we have to tend our garden. 'At the Lake' we can take time for reflection. Before we part we shall look 'Beyond the Garden' to see what role friendship can play in the broader context of our time.

## II. GETTING THERE SOME BACKGROUND

Let us start by looking at the notion of friendship in general. Friendship, like love, is such a basic notion that it defies exact definition. We can only describe it, or rather some of its facets, according to our individual experiences with it, which differ depending on circumstances and personalities. If I were to weave a definition out of the answers I received when I asked European Friends about Friendship, then friendship could be *a place of acceptance, where you don't have to pretend*. It would be an *empowering experience*, with a *good balance of giving and taking*, and a place where you are supported and held with your spiritual or emotional doubts and findings. However, it seems to be an ideal that we do not always manage to live by.

Therefore I suggest we look at what wisdom we find already in our cultural fabric.

You may just as well take the sun out of the sky as friendship from life, for the immortal gods have given us nothing better and more delightful.<sup>5</sup>

So basic is the notion of friendship that, throughout the ages, thinkers have pondered it. This quotation is just the most enthusiastic praise of friendship that Cicero sings in his dialogue-treatise *De Amicitia*. He defines friendship as “just this and nothing else: complete sympathy in all matters of importance plus goodwill and affection”.<sup>6</sup> Although he compares it with the sun in the sky - available to all – he (like his Greek predecessors) sees friendship as restricted to only extremely few, extremely virtuous men. Women are apparently too weak for it, anyway! “Friendship is so concentrated and restricted a thing that all the true affection in the world is shared by no more than a handful of individuals”.<sup>7</sup> Still, Cicero and the Greek thinkers do recognise there are some forms of friendship which can be experienced by ordinary people. These are based on pleasure or utility and are therefore seen as ‘lower’ friendship because they can easily come to an end when the shared interests change.

Some twelve hundred years later, Aelred de Rievaulx, a Cistercian abbot from Scotland wrote a Christian response to Cicero. It was another dialogue, though explicitly set in the presence of Christ, for now it is Christ who, in his complete solidarity with the whole of the human condition, is the model of friendship. For Aelred, then, true friendship implies unconditional love, the readiness to die for an other and to share one's possessions. Again, this looks like a high ideal, perhaps seemingly unattainable – I have seen Aelred's idea of friendship compared to the Sermon on the Mount<sup>8</sup> – and yet it is, indeed, accessible to everyone. The Bible stories are full of examples of friendships – not just those obvious ones between David and Jonathan, Ruth and Naomi, and Mary and Elizabeth, but also those in which friendship is implicit, as in so many of Jesus' parables and in his dealings with his disciples.

Not only is friendship, in the Christian concept, much more accessible for normal people than in the view of the classical philosophers, but Jesus' repeated reminder from Leviticus<sup>9</sup> "You shall love your neighbour like yourself" is an active encouragement to friendship. Ultimately, Jesus even declared his personal friendship with humankind in being open and trusting in sharing the truth about his father.<sup>10</sup>

Although using different words, Aelred speaks of varieties of friendship similar to those described by the classical philosophers:

...The carnal springs from mutual harmony in vice; the worldly is enkindered by the hope of gain; and the spiritual is cemented by similarity of life, morals and pursuits among the just.<sup>11</sup>

Clearly, Aelred sees spiritual friendship as the only 'true friendship'.

The very early church, still remembering Jesus in person, lived by his example and his commandment to love their neighbours. The first Christians seem to have been truly friends to one another, equal in rank and sharing their possessions communally, as we can read in the Acts of the Apostles.

It was one of the objectives of the 'Children/Professors of the Light/Truth' around George Fox to re-establish the original Christian community and to undo the distortions that history and the development of the established church had brought about, and that Reformation had not managed to abolish. They perceived secular authority and church hierarchy as corrupt and hypocritical, misleading

society into complacent ignorance. Feeling directly invited by Jesus' promise "You are my friends,"<sup>12</sup> the early Quakers broke with the church and its authority and were gathered into community as they knew both experientially and experimentally that Christ would talk directly to them if and as they listened in silence and prayer. They lived consciously in the presence of God and were friends simply by regarding everyone as equal and trustworthy.

They knew the truth of Jesus' promise "I have called you friends because I have disclosed to you everything that I heard from my father. You did not choose me. I chose you."<sup>13</sup> This led the early Friends to the testimonies of Truth, Equality, Simplicity, and Peace, each rooted in a changed understanding of human relations that point generally towards friendship. These testimonies demanded from them that they dissociate themselves from general society – something that had two-sided consequences, for the more they grew together as a group, the fiercer became the persecution, and vice versa. Yet they had the power to resist. They were friends with one another just as – or even because – they knew they were friends with Jesus. I take Jesus' invitation "You are my friends" as an invitation to a relationship with God, based on unconditional trust which makes it into friendship. All our human relationships and actions should then have their source in this experience of friendship with God through Jesus' example. Friendship, from a Christian perspective, is a three-dimensional thing – God is the third partner, and the author of that love and trust which makes friendship possible.

The first generation of Friends did not write much about 'friendship'. In George Fox's *Journal* we find this term used only in the preface written by William Penn. At the point when Penn writes about "care for others .... as well as for ourselves..." he says,

We were in travail for one another's preservation; not seeking, but shunning occasions of any coldness or misunderstanding, treating one another as those that believed and felt God present; which kept our conversations innocent, serious, and weighty, guarding ourselves against the cares and *friendships of the world* (my italics).<sup>14</sup>

This surprising reference of friendship in the negative echoes James' reproach

Unfaithful creature! Surely you know that love of the world means enmity to God? Whoever chooses to be the world's friend makes himself God's enemy.<sup>15</sup>

I understand these 'friendships of the world' not so much as the 'carnal' or 'worldly' friendships Aelred talks about but as an uncritical acceptance of all the temptations and pleasures that distract people from a life deeply grounded in faith and the urge to follow the path that Jesus has shown his disciples.

Early Friends were eager to live in friendship with God as well as in friendship among themselves and, maybe with some qualification, with their neighbours beyond. In general terms I believe we may, in this context, say, they did not write about friendship, they lived it.

Journals, epistles and testimonies of early Quakers are full of stories that imply there was, indeed, deep friendship. How else could Barbara Blougdone relate to us in her *Account of the Travels, Sufferings and Persecutions* of 1691 a most dramatic story of friendship in such plain words: in Exeter prison she had been whipped almost to death. A Friend was present and dressed her wounds. The next day Barbara was released

together with all the Gypsies and the Beadle followed us two miles out of the City, and as soon as he left us, I returned back again, and went up into the prison to see my Friends that were Prisoners there at the same time: I took my leave of them and went to Topsom....<sup>16</sup>

I can hardly imagine a stronger evidence of three-dimensional friendship than this action. Barbara went back into the lion's den – only a day after that barbaric whipping! – just as a matter of course, simply to say good bye to her friends because she loved them, and she could do so because she trusted God. Trust in her friends alone would not have helped much considering their persecution and misery. Their friendship had to rest on complete trust in God. In our Religious Society we are no longer clear as to why we call ourselves Friends – is it because we are Friends of one another or because we are friends of God (and Jesus). Barbara Blougdone's witness shows us that this is a false dichotomy. She would have been prepared to lay down her life for her friends<sup>17</sup> because she and her friends had together experienced the source of friendship.

In the first half of the last century, after World War One, there were two philosophers who, though coming from different angles, shed new light on the

two passages which seem to be at the core of Quakerism. Jesus' invitation "You are my friends"<sup>18</sup> and his one and only command, in this context, to love one another<sup>19</sup> which is a reminder of the familiar command of Leviticus "You must love your neighbour as yourself".<sup>20</sup> Martin Buber, the great German-Jewish thinker translated the *Torah*<sup>21</sup> with his very special way of inventing words when those available did not seem to reflect the full meaning of what he thought the Bible was intending to say. In his translation, the Leviticus passage reads: *Halte lieb deinen Genossen. Dir gleich. Ich bin's*, or in English: "Hold your companion in love. You're equal. It is ME."

Not only does this imply a naturally close relationship between us, the humans; it also implies an intimate relationship between us human beings and God. In his translation of "I am the Lord" into "It is ME," Buber puts humankind and God on one level. He even sees humans as co-creators. Therefore, 'holding in love' means actually to recognise that all humanity, by virtue of being co-creations and co-creators, are potential friends.<sup>22</sup>

Roughly at the same time, the Scottish moral philosopher John Macmurray looked into Jesus' declaration "You are my Friends". He was studying the social changes that had come about in the wake of the turmoil of the Great War and observed a shift away from duty and service and from roles people were expected to play, to a higher conception of self and personal relationships. "He lands tentatively on the term 'friendship' to describe the full content of personal living"<sup>23</sup>, despite the problems he was facing by dealing with a term as 'soft' as this in philosophical discourse. Indeed, he approaches it through Bible study. In an essay *Ye are my Friends*<sup>24</sup>. Macmurray works out that the key word of the Christian gospel actually is not service but friendship, since Jesus said to his disciples explicitly, according to John,<sup>25</sup> "no longer do I call you servants" and commanded them to "love one another". This command Macmurray sees as paradox since

perfect obedience to it was to live in perfect freedom. To live in friendship and to live in freedom are not opposites but the two sides of the same coin. In true friendship, the flourishing of genuine togetherness *effects* (original italics) the flourishing of genuine individuality – and vice versa.<sup>26</sup>

This fits nicely into Buber's concept of 'holding in love' which has to be seen in the context of his dialogical principle that all life is rooted in the relation of 'I and Thou'. As humans we are not made to live in monologue, only referring

to ourselves. We need and want to relate to someone else. If this is done in friendship both sides will grow from the dialogue.

At this point I expect you to ask me: the philosophers said this; early Quakers said that – what canst thou say?

I have learnt a lot about friendship from one of my favourite authors, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. His *Little Prince*, is actually a textbook on friendship, and it has been a faithful companion to me ever since I had to write an examination essay on it. Some of you may remember the passage where the Little Prince is lonely and, looking for a friend, meets a fox. This fox cannot play with him because he is not yet tamed. It takes a while before the fox explains to the Little Prince what taming means. At this point I prefer my German translation to the English – although that is closer to the original French. In the original it says ‘taming’ means ‘establishing ties’, whereas the term used in German, [*sich*] *vertraut machen* implies explicitly that there is trust involved. To make friends, the fox is saying, means establishing trust.

When I have established trust, the world looks different. The yellow colours of a field of wheat, actually meaningless to a carnivore like the fox, will become beautiful to him for it will remind him of his new friend’s yellow hair. And that is the fox’s secret, “It is only with the heart one can see rightly; what is essential is invisible to the eye.”<sup>27</sup> The end of their encounter has always puzzled me: “You become forever responsible for what you have tamed”, says the fox; “... for as long as you live”, says the German translation. What a demand! So, what does this mean for my friendships? Am I irresponsible if I ‘tame’ someone or allow myself to be tamed, knowing this cannot be for eternity? And yet the fox and the Little Prince do part, never to meet again. Does this mean their friendship was of a ‘lower’ sort? Or was it not really friendship?

Through all of these writers I came to some clarity as far as my own thoughts on friendship were concerned. Initially, when I read about ideal friendships in those classical texts, I perceived them as two-dimensional. ‘Complete sympathy’ and ‘second self’ seemed to me to suggest it concerned only the two persons involved, united in complete mutual trust. For a while, I had the wild idea that it was no wonder there were so few real friendships in those pre-Christian days! A stool cannot stand on two legs. Yet Aelred showed me that, with Jesus, a new dimension came into play. Mutual trust was augmented by trust in Jesus, or God, which introduces a third dimension. It eventually dawned on me that friendship is, indeed, always three-dimensional. There is, of course, a ‘third

leg' even in classical friendship. This is virtue. Of course, when 'true friendship' is defined as requiring extreme virtue, friendship may not happen quite so often. As I mentioned earlier, the classical philosophers did observe some 'lower' forms of friendship which they say can be more widely found. But since they are based on 'pleasure' and 'utility', on shared interests that can easily change, they are deemed to be less durable. If I return to my image of a stool: a third leg consisting of components that are apt to change will not be reliable and would easily render the stool unstable.

With Aelred's 'carnal' and 'worldly' bases of friendship, it is just the same. However, what is new with Aelred is that he replaces the abstract concept of virtue with the concrete example of Jesus who trusted humankind to be his friends and showed us time and again how he lived friendship. He made friends not only with his disciples, people he knew well enough to be his confidants, but also with those at the margin of society, the outcasts, relating to them as his equals.

Here we can ask ourselves what this means to us. If I were to define friendship I would use words like: an equal footing, openness, a certain intimacy, and caring, with trust as the basis of all this. I could be even briefer: God's Spirit in all of us; because recognising God in whoever comes my way is the foundation for trust and for equality, and encourages me to open up. Then caring comes naturally.

Outside our Religious Society, we vary in generosity in our use of the title friend. Some people call a friend only that person with whom they are really close, with whom they share "complete sympathy in all matters of importance plus good will and affection" as Cicero defined it.<sup>28</sup> Others may not insist on 'complete sympathy' but still need a substantial 'taming' period. I, for my part, can easily refer to someone as my 'friend' with whom I share a fair amount of trust and whom I would be looking forward to meeting. In addition, of course, I have 'good friends', 'special friends', a few 'spiritual friends' and one or two 'best friends'. All these friendships are the plants I find in my friendship garden.

Friendships can differ widely in history and depth. There may be the old school friend with whom I share exciting childhood memories but do not really have a wider base for a mature relationship. There may be the neighbour who befriended me through our children. There may be the shop assistant in my little corner shop who really seems to care for her customers. There may be the person sitting next to me on a long flight who shared his life story with me. And there are those friends with whom I am really and constantly close, sharing our deep



experiences over many a year. All these are my friends. In my experience, friendships can exist for a moment or longer, some are forever. Their duration has nothing to do with their depth or fruitfulness.

I have tried to figure out what it is that determines how fruitful, or perhaps barren – or even harmful – a friendship will be.

Friendship can be fruitful in an atmosphere of unconditional trust and mutual acceptance, when both parties are free to be their full selves. In fruitful friendship, the third dimension is a shared spiritual power. An environment determined by fruitful friendship encourages deep exchange of reflections on personal and spiritual matters, welcomes difference as a chance for new learning, allows us to do our real best without holding back or overstretching, and permits and forgives shortcomings and mistakes.

Friendship tends to be barren in an atmosphere of superficial friendliness, where trust and acceptance are not especially required, and when there is little interest in the full self of the other. In barren friendship, the third dimension is made of shared interests, concerns, and likes. An environment of barren friendship covers up difference, has little exchange of reflections on personal and/or spiritual matters and hesitates to touch our shortcomings and mistakes.

Friendship will be harmful when acceptance is conditional, when there is exploitation, and when flattering reinforces elements that are in the way of being our full selves. In harmful friendship, the ‘third leg’ is decaying with false values. An environment of negative friendship fears difference, fosters pretence and false images, and enhances needs and wants. It demands that we deny our mistakes.

Friendship can have so many different shapes and forms. Now that we have looked at some of these and brought the notion of friendship from classical philosophy, through Christian thought, to Friends’ reality and back to philosophy, we have reached the gate of my garden. Welcome in.

### **III. A TOUR OF THE GARDEN COLOURFUL VARIETIES**

In the landscape of your mind, did you find an empty piece of land on which to plant and grow your friendship garden? I wonder. I believe we never find empty land. In my mind I had such a garden for as long as I can remember. However, I started to tend it consciously not all that long ago. What I find growing in my garden these days is a mix of plants that were there all along, together with new ones that I planted and others that found their way into it by themselves, perhaps carried by the wind, perhaps on the coats of little animals, perhaps by some other mysterious and unknown means.

It is a colourful mixture of plants of all varieties, just like my friendships. There is just one limitation to this analogy: a rose will always be a rose but friendship can be quite different according to your perspective. The same friendship can be compared with either a rose (here symbolising concern) or a raspberry (which I chose to symbolise connectedness). It can also be seen as a dandelion (standing for energy and perseverance) or a snowdrop (for continuity), a lily (for spirituality) or laburnum (for risk) – or even a fruit tree (the plant that lent itself for distinguishing between fruitful friendship and the more barren form – which is often more flowery!). Even weeds (for harm) can have some of the qualities of the other plants (and vice versa). I could have chosen different plants to symbolise the characteristics I intended to emphasise, and you may have to translate my images into plants that are familiar to you in this land. Also, in their development friendships can go through different forms and phases, thus emphasising different characteristics at different points in time. Friendships are, indeed, extremely complex. It is for simplification that I opted for one particular comparison at this point.

#### **The Roses of Caring**

I guess I am not the only one who has quite a number of roses in her garden – different in size, colour and scent, and all with their own story. Saint-Exupéry's

Little Prince has a rose, too. He loves it dearly but it makes his heart ache with its coughing and fear of wild animals even though there are none on his little home asteroid. In the end the rose demands to be covered with a glass globe overnight. It is only when the Little Prince decides to explore beyond his little world that the rose decides it might be able to do without the glass shelter. This is why I have taken the rose to represent the aspect of concern and caring in friendship.

One of my most formative friendships was with Gertrud. I had known her since she was a schoolgirl. She and I belonged to the same small Friends' Meeting, although both of us travelled in from different directions and did not see much of one another. But we had that basically trusting relationship that encouraged her to ask me, when she was diagnosed with cancer, if I would take her to her chemotherapy treatments. At the time, she was a young teacher in a little town an hour's drive away and another hour to the hospital. So we had plenty of time together to develop a good friendship, and, sad as it was, experiencing life at the brink of death gave it extra depth.

Like good care for roses, these friendships can be quite demanding. But my experience is that they are worthwhile, even though – and perhaps because – they cost a lot. Friendship does need nurturing.

## The Raspberries of Connectedness

Do you have raspberries in your garden? I once planted a few seedlings and, some years later, was extremely surprised to find new shoots all over the place, even at quite some distance from the original plant. This is why I chose them to represent the deep connectedness which I see at the core of all friendship.

In a little essay on her experiences in the African part of Friends World Committee for Consultation's (FWCC) three-fold world gathering in 1991, Australian Friend Ronis Chapman relates a very special encounter she had had when she went to a Friends' Church in Northern Kenya. Smiling warmly, a small child took her hand, and went to great lengths to compare it with her own. "Moments of intimacy – a meeting of that of God in us both," Ronis wrote, "Gently but persistently she was my friend while we worshipped."<sup>29</sup>

Indeed, friendship does not necessarily need long to develop. It can occur suddenly, coming seemingly from out of nowhere. Have you ever chatted with your neighbour on a train or plane and found yourself sharing the deepest personal or even spiritual experiences? Such a thing can happen anywhere, a

surprising understanding that is beyond words. ‘A sudden intimacy’, as Ronis put it.

In his *Letters to a Hostage* Antoine de Saint-Exupéry describes a comparable situation in which he and his friend feel they are having an ‘invisible feast’ and invite two strangers to join them. He talks about the deep unity within and between them. They could not have said what it was that bonded them, “But this unity was so filled with, so deeply anchored in, profoundness based on a Bible of such clear though inexpressible content...”<sup>30</sup>

‘Deeply anchored in profoundness’. – Perhaps that is one explanation for these surprisingly instant friendships. Deep down we are all connected, rooted in the same soil, and breathing the same air. It does not matter how long these friendships last. They can take place in the two hours in an African Quaker church, in a few days at a conference, or throughout a lifetime. What makes them fruitful is that same deep sharing which connects us to who we really are and to those powers beyond, which give us the strength to be thus.

Yes, I call even those encounters friendship as they are based in some basic trust and intimacy.

## The Dandelions of Potential

Some friend-ships grow in surprising places. I believe the dandelions would be a good symbol for such relationships. They just come out everywhere. On the lawn, in the flowerbed, in a crack of the old wall – and if one with special determination does not find a crack it may even manage to crack the tarmac of the path with its own strength. Time and again I am filled with awe that a plant you can easily crush between two fingers should have such enormous power. What life energy!

Where growing conditions are very poor dandelions may grow weakly. But give dandelions enough soil, and they will thrive in clusters of rich green leaves, producing a wonderful dark yellow cushion of sturdy flowers and developing the most intricate fruit – a lacy gossamer puffball, made up of a host of tiny little parachutes which fly out with the first breeze. The dandelion spreads its seeds



Dandelion. *Taraxarum officinale* agg.

most generously and this is how it made it into my friendship garden. I believe it wants to speak about the ubiquity of possibilities for friendship. Each and every encounter, it seems to say, bear the capacity of becoming a friendship of some kind.

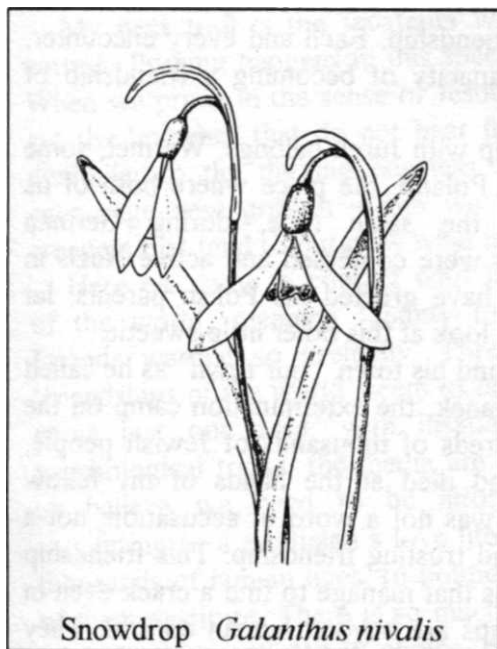
This is where my friendship with Jurek belongs. We met, some twenty years ago, in Lublin, Poland, the place where both of us were born around about the same time, during German occupation. My birth parents were confessed and active Nazis in their time and would never have greeted his Polish parents, let alone peeped into his pram to look at this other little sweetie.

Yet Jurek showed me around his town, “our town” as he called it. He even took me to Majdanek, the extermination camp on the outskirts where, beside hundreds of thousands of Jewish people, his fellow Poles suffered and died at the hands of my fellow Germans. From Jurek, there was not a word of accusation, not a word of blame, only open and trusting friendship. This friendship is like one of those dandelions that manage to find a crack even in concrete pavement. Friendships are beyond human control. They just happen.

## The Snowdrops of Continuity

Look, here are little snowdrops. They don’t bloom in January, in Australia, you say? It really doesn’t matter, in our friendship garden. They show us how little we need. That is why they are here. Snowdrops come out once a year, sometimes in really inclement weather. They show their fine white bloom for a while and then they are gone, leaving no visible trace until they are back again next year. Friendships can be like that, too.

Zile from South Africa is such a friend. Whenever we meet, we share really good friendship, deep and fruitful. Between us there is safe and honest sharing, trust and the Spirit. At the end of the conference we part with love, looking forward to our next encounter. Little correspondence passes between us because words are not necessary.



At the end of his *Citadelle*, Saint-Exupéry tells the story of two gardeners, old friends who, late in life, find themselves separated over many years and thousands of miles. When one of them has the chance to send a note to the other, after meditating at length, he simply writes, “I have cut my roses”. Years later when the recipient sees an opportunity to answer, he too spends several days pondering his response. He replies with, “I have cut my roses, too”<sup>31</sup>. Here, again, is friendship that needs neither words nor physical presence to express itself.

A good soil for growing snowdrops requires something like ‘independence’ (for want of a better word) on our part. If and when I feel whole as a person, I don’t ‘need’ my friends. I can give them the space they want to fill, and not be disappointed if this happens not to be much. On the other hand, I have met people who hesitated getting involved in intimacy. Here I see a misunderstanding: to trust a person, to meet him or her in open and devoted friendship does not automatically mean that I have to spread out my innermost secrets – it means to be prepared to share those aspects of my inner life that are needed for supporting and nurturing the other person and our friendship. And we do not need to be shy: does not he or she equal me, after all?

## The Lilies of Spirituality

For me the white lily is the flower of annunciation, probably because Italian painters of the Renaissance used it in this context. This is why I chose it to represent friendship which is explicitly based on spirituality. I have two of them in my garden with different stories. I met Monica, a Benedictine sister, while she was on leave from her convent attending a peace seminar. We kept in contact when she was back in closure, allowing years for the friendship to grow. Maybe we needed time to learn each other's spiritual language. This may be an extraordinary friendship since, on the surface there can hardly be any wider gap than between a Roman Catholic order – you think of doctrine, hierarchies, rites and sacraments – and the simplicity of the Quaker attitude of seeking and silence and non-hierarchical church life. However, the deeper our encounter with each other's spirituality, the more similarities we find and the more we find new perspectives on these issues.<sup>32</sup>

And then there is Eden, another lily of spirituality. I meet her almost every year at the Central Committee of the World Council of Churches where she represents Friends United Meeting and I attend on behalf of Friends World Committee for Consultation. We each feel blessed with having a Quaker 'elder' in the big community of some three hundred Christians of other denominations. This was not always so. Eden's lily started out in a shady corner of my garden. When I first met her I was quite hesitant about opening up to friendship with her. There was something about this enthusiastic young woman that came across to me as a bit precocious and ambitious. What irritated me most was her readiness to speak a clear Christian language. At the first Central Committee meeting we even shared a room and still remained strangers. It took the whole of the following year for me to realise the absurdity of the situation: two Quaker women at the same conference who do not manage to become friends – this is either ridiculous or tragic. Next time we met, a long walk cleared the air. I became aware of the fact that deep down I quite appreciated Eden's direct way of expressing her faith. It spoke to a condition of mine that had long been suppressed. We realised the complexity of the game the two of us were involved in. It had to do with the different theologies we can find under the wide Quaker umbrella, and with tolerance or, in this particular case, the lack of trust I had in the tolerance of Friends back home, should any of this Christian language rub off.

Meanwhile I have got this lily out into the sun. We are mutual 'elders' at the conferences, checking on one another's well-being and holding one another in the Light in between times. What I have learned from my 'lily-friends' is that

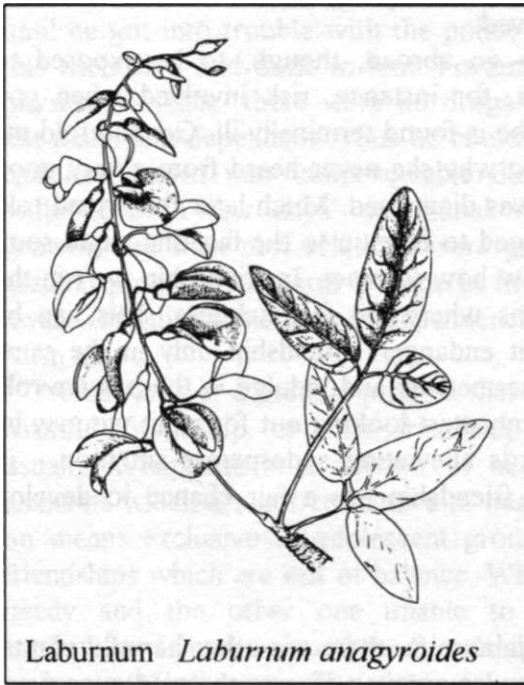
spiritual friendship requires extra time to grow and a readiness to allow something in, that is beyond our own making.

## The Laburnums of Risk

Now here we have a laburnum bush. I love its wonderful yellow clusters of bloom – back home we call it “golden rain”- and I like those delicate fruits they bear. However, so do children because those minute yet deadly poisonous beans are just asking to be served at the dolly’s tea table. What are we to do? Do we cut the bush, and campaign to have laburnum banned from public parks? Do we teach our children that some beans can be eaten but not others? To what extent do we need a life free of risk? And what would such a life be, anyway?

It is the same with friendship. In a little article in *The Friend* Alia Ganaposki of Lake Erie Yearly Meeting asks, “Do you want to be careful or do you want to be friends?”<sup>33</sup> The answer, she finds, is that friendship is indeed the opposite of being careful. “Friendship is dangerous”, she says, but not to be missed. She concludes that friendship “is keeping my heart and mind open to the unexpected miracle.” I ran the risk of getting taken advantage of, some forty years ago, as a young and somewhat naïve student, visiting England for the first time. I allowed another – male – student who just talked to me in the street to show me around Bristol. He turned out to be a good guide and we had a most positive encounter – a bit of that ‘unexpected miracle’. In a similar situation in London things developed differently and I found myself in serious trouble. I remember with some anger how I had to apply clever tricks to save my skin. From this young man I did not part as a friend. Yet I do not regret my initial openness. Fear and a need for absolute security are definitely hindrances to friendship. They would be the concrete pavement which only an extremely strong plant will manage to crack. It is only when I am prepared to take risks that I am open to allow friendship to grow.





The risk, though, may be on different levels. When I go abroad, these days, in the context of my peace work people sometimes ask me if I was not afraid my life could be at risk. This has never been an issue for me as I was fully aware of the fact that I was only exposing myself to a danger with which my future friends had to cope on a day-to-day basis. I saw – and felt – the risk rather on the psychological side: what did wound me – and still at times haunts me – are the pictures I saw, of the drowsy street children in Durban, South Africa, brutally swept away by the street cleaners early in the morning, the beggars in Freetown, Sierra

Leone, who did not have hands to hold out to you, and the Palestinian family observing their house being destroyed because their son had been involved (and killed) in a shoot-out with Israeli settlers. In all these situations I felt utterly helpless and incapacitated in view of the magnitude of the problems and experienced an archaic reflex to reject the people involved.

You do not need to go abroad, though, to be exposed to emotional risk. There is, for instance, risk involved when you stand by your friend as she is found terminally ill. Gertrud told me about her confusion as to why she never heard from a very good friend of hers after she was diagnosed. Much later this friend told me he just had not managed to face up to the fact she might soon be gone and did not know how to react. In friendship we run the risk of meeting situations where we feel helpless. This can be most disconcerting but it endangers friendship only in the same measure as we remain mesmerised and indulge in the passive role of the victim. If we actively start looking out for what we may be able to contribute towards alleviating a desperate situation – in whatever minute way – friendship has a fair chance to develop and even grow in depth.

## The Weeds of Harm

Apart from the risky laburnum, there are other harmful plants, weeds which, as ‘unwanted guests’, suffocate the plants we want to grow, by blocking the light off. They may look harmless but if you are negligent they spoil their environment. With friendship it can just be the same. If you ask some adolescents who hang around in groups you may be tempted to call ‘gangs’, they will clearly tell you these are their very best friends. This group is where they feel they belong, as they speak the same language, and hold the same values, however distorted those may be. It may look harmless in the beginning and it can take a long time for the young people to realise the possible harm this company has done for them.

I have been lucky not to have experienced anything like that myself or in my immediate family. But there is no guarantee you can keep your youngsters clear of it. Malte, the son of good friends who had virtually grown up with our children, suddenly found himself in such a group. No warnings helped. It was not until he got into trouble with the police that he realised the harm this friendship had done to him. Fortunately, there had not been physical violence, there were no drugs involved and alcohol did not make him dependent. Thus he could find his way out. The ivy had not grown into unmanageable dimensions. It took just a sentence of a few days’ communal works to remove all the growth, and then new relations were possible. Mostly, it is in a gradual process that harm is done in friendships. We may not be aware for quite some time of dependencies and exploitation which harm us.

Mostly it is in a gradual process that someone gets involved in harmful friendship or that friendship becomes harmful, and usually it happens in a context of need and dependency, two elements which are not conducive to healthy friendship. This is by no means exclusive to adolescent groups. We can find it in all friendships which are out of balance. When one party is extremely needy and the other one unable to set healthy boundaries, exploitation is in the air and the friendship can easily de-rail.

In our Meetings we sometimes encounter enquirers who seem to be attracted more by our open form of worship and our generally welcoming attitude than by our basic beliefs. Often, disenchanted by other churches, they come with their own needs which Friends may not be able to meet. Their disappointment can take forms that can be harmful, indeed, for the Meeting as well as for individual Friends and the person themselves.

## The Trees of Barrenness and Fruitfulness

A little further on in my garden I have two fruit trees, a pear and an apple, about the same age and shape. However, while the apple tree bears luscious fruit, the other tree, after flowering for many years, produced just one small pear. We can find the same in our friendship garden, too. Barren friendships may look just like the fruitful ones. New green shoots and blossoms appear but it is only at a second glance that you notice something is missing.

I had met Karen and Peter in the peace movement of the late 1980s. We became close friends, sharing a lot of concerns and views. They ‘practised’ parenting with my children and I rejoiced with them when their own little boy was born. It was only when Karen rang me a few weeks later asking me to take her to hospital in an emergency that my husband and I learned that Peter, the brand new father, had gone on holidays with Karen’s best friend. Karen clearly needed a lot of support. The next time we visited them they looked like the happiest of young families, and though it is still hard to admit today, we did not challenge them by touching on the topic of their marital problems. They separated not long after this and Karen needed more support than ever. Both of them moved to the nearby capital and before long, when Karen found a new partner, I ceased hearing from her. Six months later I met Peter again. As we discussed our friendship, his reproach surprised me: it was not, as I would have expected, that we did not challenge or even reproach him about his going astray. Instead, he accused me of insincerity; I had always given the impression of being strong and cheerful which surely could not have been truthful. How right he was. I used to spend a lot of energy in concealing, even to my friends, my feelings of weakness and insecurity. Meanwhile, this pear tree has dried out.

The apple tree, in contrast, is full of fruit.

In a sense, Jane and I were friends from the beginning, sharing a lot of interests, views, concerns and the love of music. But there was always a hidden tension overshadowing the warmth between us. We had met through her husband, with whom I had corresponded after we had met and ‘established ties’ at an international event. Those ‘ties’ were not so tight as to endanger our respective marriages, but they were close enough to cause this barely perceptible distance between Jane and me – that is, until the night we talked about it. It was Jane who started by asking me about my relationship with Bevis. My answer was easy as I

had found in him the supportive big brother I never had. The telephone kept ringing and we appeared to concentrate mainly on our needlework. Very late, when phone calls were no longer likely to disturb us I picked up where we had left off, and we had the most remarkable conversation I can ever remember having. We shared honestly and openly about our fears, feelings and misgivings. I cannot remember the details now, but the atmosphere of that time we spent together is present in me as though it were yesterday. Not many words, and long periods of silence, it was nothing short of worship between the two of us. Douglas Steere has said of such an encounter

if this has happened to you, you know that when you come up out of such an experience, there is a memory of rapture and feeling in the heart of having touched holy ground.<sup>34</sup>

This night did, indeed, change our relationship. It became independent of my friendship with Bevis and became a real friendship in its own right. The tension was gone and Jane and I harvested rich fruit, particularly when one year we visited the places of my early childhood in Poland together. It seems that friendships become fruitful when we face challenges squarely and trust that we can work them through.

Our tour of the garden has come to an end although there are many more plants we could have looked at, just as there are countless other qualities that friendship can have. Almost certainly each of you will have a preference for certain plants over others. Which are your favourites? What is it that characterises your garden?

The paradoxical thing is that, at the same time as we have friendship we also are a friend. In our friendship gardens we, too, are plants of one sort or another in this, just as much as we are gardeners, and sometimes it may not be clear to us just which plant or plants we are. We may be a snowdrop to one and yet a fruit tree (pear or apple?) to someone else. What can we do not to become a weed in anyone's garden? If I were to be a dandelion, what size could I achieve? How delicate a rose would I be? What can we do to encourage all our fruit trees to bear rich fruit? What is it we can do to ensure that our garden thrives? We may find some helpful hints in the garden shed.

#### **IV. THE GARDEN SHED USEFUL RESOURCES**

We have established that friendship is a three-dimensional process. So, if we want to look after our friendship garden holistically, we need to attend to all three dimensions. This is why our garden shed looks slightly different from those you may have in mind. It is not the usual collection of pots and strings and stakes and scraps of wire and a host of different tools in all shapes and sizes crammed into little space. This shed strikes you by its spaciousness and surprising interior design. In fact, it is almost empty. There is just a rocking chair in one corner. In another corner you find a few of the most essential garden tools. And, on the wall opposite the wide window, you may be startled to find a big mirror, which almost doubles the space in the shed.

What all this is about may not be immediately obvious, but all of these items, each in its own way, are concerned with trust - because I see trust as the base of all friendship and friendly relations between people. What we primarily need to care about in our garden work, therefore, is the question of how to strengthen trust in *all* the three dimensions of friendship – trust in ourselves, trust in our relationship with the other person, and trust in the power beyond us. We have the mirror to help us understand, empower and trust ourselves. The tools will help us clear away the overgrowth that gets in the way of mutual trust. Finally, there is the rocking chair – inviting us to allow space for trusting the power beyond, which will provide for a solid ‘third leg’ of our tripod stool. For this power beyond is the only constant factor in our friendship garden. The other dimensions, by virtue of their being human, are apt to change – for better or for worse.

#### **The Mirror**

What do you see when you look into a mirror? Did it ever cross your mind that whatever you see, tall or short, big or skinny, or even a shape that you do not fully approve of – what you see is God’s image. God has made us just the way we are. “God saw all that he had made, and indeed it was very

good”.<sup>35</sup> How hard is it to accept that! Yet self-acceptance is necessary if we want to grow really fruitful friendship. We must love the I in ‘I and Thou’ in order to truly value the Thou. Our Friend Robert Antoch most emphatically challenged us in his recent Richard Cary Lecture:

How could anyone understand and value another person, honour their goals and judge their mistakes and imperfections with forbearance, and be ready to forgive them, if they cannot do the same for themselves?<sup>36</sup>

Society has a hand in rendering it more difficult to accept ourselves. There was a time, in some places not all that long ago, when, for fear of vanity and narcissism, mirrors were banned. Even back home the only mirror that would have shown me full length was tucked away in an awkward corner of the landing. I never learned to know my body, really, and thus was easy prey to the bullying of my big brothers who claimed I was fat. I was not but I could not judge that for myself and so it undermined my feeling of self worth for a very long time. I was far from making friends with myself.

Next to the mirror in the shed hang two little pictures, two cartoons, enlarged photocopies from a little picture book for adults. The first cartoon shows Adam and Eve in the sunny Garden of Eden. Adam points to his shadow and says, “I grew up with this one. He and I are inseparable friends.” In the second picture, a little pond lies between Adam and Eve. Eve points at Adam’s reflection and his shadow and says, “All three of you are most welcome”. Eve not only accepts Adam’s mirror image, she also embraces his shadow.

There is, indeed, much more to making friends with yourself than accepting your image as it appears in the mirror. There is that whole ‘shadow complex’ which Western psychology talks about, the problem that we have in accepting that there is a *dark* side lurking within us, representing bad habits, desires, or vices, just as well as we have the *bright* side with our good traits, our virtues. I believe we learn in early childhood to disconnect from our shadow. I remember I was scorned as a child when I failed high moral standards - when I did not share (although I was hungry), when I failed to thank auntie for her present (although I was disappointed about yet another set of pink underwear), when I did not help in the kitchen (although I was afraid I might break things). Does this ring bells for any of you? I believe this is how I was driven ever further from knowing my full self. In my yearning to be loved and accepted, what I did learn, however, was to hide my negative side and pretend it was not there.

This had a double side effect. First I never felt I was alright or okay just as I was with warts and all. And second, I learned to look suspiciously or enviously at other people to see if they complied with the norms and to see where they failed. What I could not tolerate in myself I criticised in others, and I seem to have felt relief in finding mistakes in other people.

This is what happens in our attempt to grapple with our *shadow* rather superficially. There is, however, an even deeper dimension to that grappling. I may shy away from looking into the mirror and may fear my shadow because what I see could be just too frightening. Constant repression of guilty feelings can hang like a fog over the garden, blocking out the sun so that the plants wither for lack of light.

Well into my adult years I was haunted by my birth family's background. It lay heavily on me that I had been born within a stone's throw of one of the big Nazi concentration camps, as mentioned above. Although my foster parents tried hard to soothe me by telling me my father was just a journalist, I grew up with irrational but powerful feelings of guilt that blew up my shadow to such a size that I felt I would never be able to embrace it. What helped me put things into perspective was, again, friendship – that is, once I had gathered up enough courage and basic trust to face visiting my birthplace in Poland. And it was Jurek, the 'dande-lion' from Lublin, with his open, trusting approach, seemingly untouched by the violent past, who taught me the important lesson, that, indeed, I am a person in my own right, and that I do not need to feel guilty for the sins of my parents.

This does not imply, however, that I close my eyes to what my parents did. On the contrary, I believe this experience freed me to go and find out more about what my parents really did. Even when I found out, in the archives of Yad Vashem, the big memorial and documentation centre for the Holocaust in Jerusalem, that my father was one of the SS-troops that crushed the Warsaw Ghetto revolt in 1943, it did not bring me down into depression again. I feel much freer now – though somewhat distant from most of my blood siblings who still cannot face the truth and spend a lot of energy denying the bitter facts of the past. But just as I am not responsible for what my father did, so I am not responsible for my siblings either. What I am, indeed, responsible for, together with my whole generation and those following us, is to work towards a society that does not allow a repetition of this horror. Since on the large scale there is desperately little progress in this field, could growing fruitful friendship not be seen as an important step in the right direction?

But, of course, I did not come to this point simply through that friendship in Lublin, or by my own efforts alone. Sometimes we are well advised to seek professional help. However, to this day I am unable to discern to what extent it was my new independence, gained through Jungian therapy, or a miraculous growth of faith and trust in God, that enables me now to say “God saw all that God had made, and indeed it was very good”.

All this does not mean that I can lean back and just live out my shadow, becoming self centred and enjoying myself at the expense of others. Surely, to see God’s image in the mirror means challenge, positive challenge. I have to ask myself if I live up to what it is God wants me to be. That is the reason why this mirror is placed opposite the window. When we can see ourselves in relation to our garden, we are encouraged to ask ourselves, “what role did I play in this, what can I learn from that situation?”

I can also see what the garden needs – so I then look around for the tools I have at my disposal.

## The tools

I believe I can manage with only four utensils for my gardening. Perhaps you may need more. That is okay. I need a spade, a pair of secateurs, a rake and a sieve. Although it seems obvious what these tools are good for, it is worthwhile giving them a closer look.

We need the spade most obviously for putting new plants into the soil or for digging out the odd raspberry shoot and replanting it where the other raspberries are growing. Or perhaps we have to dig out what is finished, or replant what does not seem to thrive in its current position.

This can go in two directions. One of my lilies of spiritual friendship I replanted from the shady edge to the sunny centre as I came to appreciate its special value to me. A rose, on the other hand, I had to plant in the shade when recently a longstanding friend from Israel let me know she preferred no longer to hear from me. As I had got involved with Palestinians by participating in a peace programme in the West Bank she found it hard to handle my new response to the dilemmas of her region. I shall, however, go on watering it with good thoughts, in the hope that it will put forth new shoots again one day.



Of course, during my life I have had to dig out a good many plants. Friends may have followed paths that were just too different from mine, or have gone that final path which I still must take. None of these plants is lost for ever.

My next tool is the secateurs which I need for pruning and cutting. Pruning happens in this special garden on different levels. When we prune in the sense of Jesus' parable with the vine <sup>37</sup>, and cut the branches that do not bear fruit, it is actually not all that dissimilar to the digging business. However, we also prune to encourage new growth – and we need to cut growth – those creepers that tend to outgrow what is essential in our garden.

Here we come in contact with James' concept of 'friendships of the world' meaning 'enmity to God' <sup>38</sup> of which the Early Friends warned so tirelessly. Three hundred years later those 'friendships of the world' seem to be even more dangerous. I shall name just one area: with insatiable greed and sophisticated psychological tricks, the media are out to win us over and make us believe we need to be informed about everything from shoplifting to a politician's love life, from natural disasters taking thousands of human lives, to political disasters making even more of them destitute. There is so much, what room remains to really take anything in? What choice do we have but to cut back drastically? In the first Gulf War, some twelve years ago, I went on a strict television diet and subsequently cut TV – and most newspapers - completely out of my life. When this *littering of my mind* ceased I felt an almost physical relief. It was only then that I realised just how much of my energy had been tied up in the constant avalanche of information, even when it was not as dramatic as during crisis times. It was a learning process to trust that the things which I really *should* be concerned about would come in spite of that drastically reduced flow of information.

Now that these creepers are gone – these were mine, yours may look different – and mental busy-ness is reduced, the plants have so much more air and I have so much more space to hold them in the light. Light is what my 'snowdrops' thrive on! Keeping 'heart and mind prepared' is not limited only to Sunday worship but is a good exercise all the time. When my mind is not so crammed with 'the world', how much easier is it to let intuition flow. Thus you may ring your friend even before you know for certain that she needs it especially right now. This space is good not only for our 'snowdrops'; all the other plants need time and space as well, perhaps space even more urgently. If I do take time to see my friend but actually have my mind engaged upon other things – however important – I wonder what this visit will actually mean to him. How long and

with what feelings will he remember my visit? What good did the visit do for either of us? In order to be fully present with my friend, I have to clear not only my diary but also my mind. That means I may well have to use my secateurs to cut away all those distractions that besiege it.

The rake comes next, together with the sieve. We need the rake, of course, to get all those trimmings out of the way. We also need it to gather up the dry leaves and broken twigs, all those little disappointments, the hurts of everyday life that occur even in friendship. If we leave them untouched they could choke the growing plants or make the soil acid.

It is also important to “rake the leaves and clear the paths so you can easily find the way to your heart”<sup>39</sup>. If we don’t know the way to our own hearts how can we expect to find the way to the hearts of our friends? Here we get back to the task before the mirror, to know and accept ourselves.

We may encounter people whom we are tempted to reject. We may be irritated by certain elements in their behaviour, their views, their ways of talking. If we take an extra effort in getting to know them on a deeper level we may become clearer about this irritation and may well find out it has to do with our own *shadow*. What I rejected in my lily-friend Eden were, in honest reflection, exactly those traits that I did not like in myself. This layer of irritation and prejudice has to be raked away to clear the path to true understanding and friendship.

What we rake up goes onto the compost heap. Every good garden should have its compost heap. That is where, given enough time, the whole mix of plants that we have dug out, creepers that we have cut, leaves that we have raked from the paths, will hopefully get transformed with the help of air and rain, and a big family of earthworms. It will eventually change into good healthy humus to nourish the plants that need it. However, our hands will still be wanted. We shall have to sieve the humus, removing little rocks, the old chips packet, and the unrotted twigs, before we can bring this humus into usefulness. This is tedious work – just so in our friendships. We have to go through our memories every once in a while and weigh up what needs to remain and what would be better gotten rid of. If I look at that barren ‘apple tree’ in my garden, I can recall the hurt I felt when Karen turned away so abruptly as soon as she met someone else to give her moral support. This hurt can confidently be disposed of for good, while Peter’s reproach that I had not been entirely honest when I concealed my periods of depression will undoubtedly enrich the humus and may well mulch new encounters.

When the fox in Saint-Exupéry's *Little Prince* says we would be forever responsible for what we have tamed, I believe what he has in mind is what I call my compost heap of memories. Our responsibility lies not so much in keeping a friendship *going at all cost* but in processing the experience of our encounters in an enriching way. We are not to burn our friendship plants in temper – if we have parted from a friend in disagreement – nor to trample them down or dismiss them and allow them to merely wither away. We owe it to our friends that we keep the memories of our friendship *forever*. This can best be done by raking them onto the compost heap where they can become transformed into new wisdom.

The compost heap teaches us: We can be ever so active in our gardens and in our friendships, attempting to improve growth, but the actual growing and maturing process is out of our hands. We can sow, plant, fertilise, water and prune, and heap up the cuttings, but then we have to wait and see what will come out of it all, whether it be in the flower bed or on the compost heap. That is why we have the rocking chair.

## The Rocking Chair

Actually, 'wait and see' is only incidental to what we need to do while sitting in this rocking chair. As long as it is merely 'wait and see' it is just that passivity that many of us feel uneasy about – and very rightly so. The passive 'wait and see' mode does serious harm to our friendships.

It was 'wait and see' when I pretended all was well with Peter and Karen – and our friendship withered away. Had I used the chair for taking stock, for linking up with that *power beyond*, I might have had basic trust restored which is such an essential requirement for the third dimension of friendship. I might have trusted that the right words would be given to me once I approached the crisis of Karen and Peter. I might, the other way round, also have trusted that my friends would not drop me when I was feeling low and inadequate. Instead, I glossed over one reality with complacency and over the other one with extra activity and false brightness.

I am still learning to sit and take stock. Just like probably most of you, I grew up in a society that values activity, the doing of good works to serve and to honour God, and does not easily allow for slowing down and rest. Here, a poem by Milton (a contemporary of the early Friends) comes to mind which we learned at school. In this sonnet, *On His Blindness* written when he had lost his eyesight

at a fairly young age, Milton mourns his blindness and wonders whether he can still serve his 'Maker' – "doth God exact day-labour, light denied?" It is 'Patience' that gives him the answer which ends in the words:

Thousands at His bidding speed  
and post o'er land and ocean without rest:  
They also serve who only stand and wait.<sup>40</sup>

On the surface it is not quite our situation in this garden shed. Most of us have good eyesight (or glasses to improve it) so we can be active and "at His bidding speed and post o'er land and ocean without rest". This even sounds quite familiar, especially in our Quaker circles. It is only when we admit to our spiritual blindness that this poem proves to be just right for our rocking chair.

Years back when I got very close to Gertrud, one of my 'rose-friends', as I was taking her to her chemotherapy, I reached a stage of feeling spiritually blind. When the point had come when not even chemo was an option for her any more I was desperate: What could I do for her now? In those days I found myself ministering at Meeting about the point when you have to admit that there is no longer anything you can *do*. What actually is asked from you is simply to *be*. This *being* we have to learn. And it is the 'rocking chair' where we can practise this *being*.

This is where faith comes in, the trust in God. I cannot *be* without God. Having found that "they also serve who only stand and wait", Milton reminds us that we do not need to be frantically active, that we can only do so much by means of outward activities. Then we can, freed from unhealthy worry, hand things over to God and simply *be* God's hands, praying.

Handing our worries over to God, is that not what we do in meeting for worship? Maybe the rocking chair should not be too comfortable after all, but be rather plain and upright like a bench in an old meeting house?

## V. AT THE LAKE GATHERED REFLECTIONS

Now we have left the garden and the shed. We have walked half way round the lake and sit on a wide, inviting bench. The setting sun sheds soft light on the scenery making the reflections in the water brilliantly clear.

I can spend hours wherever still water reflects its environment. Even a puddle will do, for it is the new perspective that intrigues me. When I look straight at something like a tree, for instance, there may be background obscuring the clear silhouette of it. But in the water's reflection, my object will stand out brilliantly clear against the sky, and probably even engage in new relations with clouds or the sun. And what is best is that everything will be upside down — something that, in itself, carries the possibility of new insights. This is why I am so happy about this lake. It is just right to reflect the shed and the garden and even the hillside beyond.

While we were walking through the garden a little while ago, the shed seemed to be tucked into a corner so as not to produce too much shade. From where we see it now, in the reflection in the lake, it almost dominates the scene and is quite close to the centre of our vision. Since the shed opens towards the garden, all we see reflected is the rear wall. The interior is invisible. This invites us to look at the shed as such and ponder why we need it at all.

Just like everything else in the world, our friendships are exposed to changing weather and the seasons. It may be a clear day today but there is always the possibility of the storms of life and the damp fogs of doubt, when the weather changes. The shed is the place to which we can retire for restoration. In the evening breeze, the reflections are slightly distorted by soft rippling on the water. It occurs to me that not only do we have to tend our garden – something that was obvious all along – but we also have to maintain our shed, for it will be of little use if the roof were to spring a leak.

I would imagine that for Friends the fabric of our shed is our faith, the basic faith in God (or whatever word we use to name the unnameable), the faith which provides us with the trust we see as the basis of fruitful friendship. It is also the faith upon which our traditional Quaker testimonies are founded. This faith, too, is exposed to the inclemency of the weather.

Within the past dozen or so years there have been several thunderstorms that have threatened our sheds. To give just one example, political crises like those in the Gulf region and in the Balkans challenged our faith as we express it in our Quaker peace testimony. With all the information we were given in the media about the Iraqi occupation in Kuwait and atrocities committed in the wake of it (remember the babies thrown out of their incubators – shocking news that turned out to be lies) it looked as though we Friends had seriously begun to wonder if we could afford to “utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings under any pretence”<sup>41</sup> any longer. In fact, we seriously doubted whether we could continue to justify opposing military action. In Germany Yearly Meeting we had dramatic discussions, and I remember some very controversial correspondence in *The Friend* at the time. In terms of our image: our shed was in serious danger, indeed, of losing half of its roof. Friends reacted in different ways, often arguing, at least in my hearing, on the political level, which I found hard to follow. Our Yearly Meeting peace committee initiated extensive dialogue among Friends and published a book expressing the range of views and feelings. To contemplate *Radical Hope* as the title translates into English<sup>42</sup> did some repair to our communal ‘shed’.

But my own personal shed still shook dramatically. In fact I felt I was being torn to pieces. Not that I felt I had to deny my faith in view of that political dilemma, but I simply lost sight of it and remained utterly lonely, and at the mercy of ancient fears and traumas. While I could manage to function and to pretend, I was, in fact, hardly alive, and I was on the brink of putting an end to all this emptiness of life. It took a strong inward voice to call me out of *that* depression. And there *was* a strong voice, and it *did* get me going again – pointing me to a path that I could take even in this war torn world. This way forward was for me to equip myself with the knowledge of non-violent means of resolving conflict. But that is another story. My point here is that some ‘power beyond’ called itself back to mind. And with this experience my faith was restored. I regained the energy to repair the leak in the roof of my shed, and to stabilise it so that it could go on serving me as a base for my garden work of growing friendships.

Although the shed seems to be so prominent in the image on the lake, it remains embedded in its environment, the garden with all its colour and variety. As I survey the garden's reflection and contemplate its relevance for us as Friends a provocative poster that I once saw in front of a church in the USA comes to mind. "If you were accused of being a Christian," it said, "would there be proof of it?" What about making this even sharper for our purposes and asking: "If you were accused of being a Quaker – would there be proof of it?"

With early Friends like Barbara Blougdone, who went back to prison to say farewell to her friends, there was certainly proof. What would be our means of proof today? Let us try the traditional testimonies as a yardstick. Together with the basic conviction of "that of God in everyone", I understand that Truth, Equality, Simplicity, and Peace are – given all theological, formal or simply regional differences – overarching values that could characterise a Quaker, regardless of cultural background. They may indeed give us the means to regularly evaluate our own self in relation to our friends, and to know where more gardening work is needed. Now let us ask ourselves, what bearings do those testimonies have on the way we live our friendships?

So far in our garden motif, the choice of certain plants to symbolise various aspects of friendship has been somewhat arbitrary. We face just the same dilemma in attempting to attribute particular testimonies to these plants, with the additional problem that, of course, we cannot actually single out one plant or the other. Our testimonies inspire our overarching attitude to life and set the tone for all our relationships. With all this in mind I suggest I still 'categorise' - it helps to make my message clearer.

## Truth

The breeze has strengthened, transforming the reflection of the garden into a colourful carpet, which is now abstractly patterned rather than floral. Only the two fruit trees close to the shed stand out clearly. Looking at the pear tree that gave up bearing fruit, I wonder if a good portion of truth from me might not have saved it. Indeed Peter pointed his finger very clearly to my failure to live up to the testimony of truthfulness.

In this context I would love to be able to use the German word *zumuten* or *Zumutung*. My dictionary translates it as *unreasonable demand*. I am not doubting that this translation is right – but it is only superficially so. If you look deeper into the two components of the word, you will see that it contains much more than

that. The two components *zu*, meaning *to* or *toward*, and *Mut*, meaning *courage*, could equally well suggest a translation that is close to the English word, *encourage*. So, when I look back at Peter's reproach, I can see that, in glossing over my depressions, I had indeed not been truthful. My explanation at the time would have been that I saw it as an *unreasonable demand* on my friends to present myself openly as weak as I really was at times. However, with this new translation, what in fact I did was to fail to *encourage* my friends by exposing them to my temporary weakness. In other words, I did not trust that they had the courage to face my depression. While I was covering up my depressions so as to save my friend's embarrassment, Peter's reproach shows that he would not have minded seeing me weak. On the contrary, he felt betrayed. He felt *dis-encouraged* by my attempt to have my friends think I was some sort of superwoman who was strong and cheerful in every circumstance. Seeing me weak at times, he added, could have helped him cope with his own low moments – which he, in turn, had concealed from me just as I had concealed mine from him.

Had there been one open question, combined with a readiness to engage in an unpredictable encounter of sharing, the scene might have set a new level of friendship with Karen and Peter.

Next to the barren pear tree the ripples seem to magnify the solid green foliage of the apple tree. Here truth has found its way forward. The friendship between Jane and me had been overshadowed by a lingering uncertainty – until we had that amazing night-time conversation that turned almost into worship sharing. Truth transformed our friendship into a fruitful tree.

### Queries:

Am I truthful in my friendships, facing up to my own doubts and weaknesses as well as to those of my friends?

Do I trust that my friends can cope even with my unguarded self?

### Equality

The testimony of 'Equality' is next in line. The more a friendship is based on an element of one taking care of another the more we have to give consideration to the aspect of equality. Therefore I relate it to the rose. In the friendship between the Little Prince and the rose, the latter seems to be the dominant one. It is quite demanding and uses psychological pressure while the



Little Prince tries hard to please it. Such imbalance frequently occurs. We can only hope that, having returned from his exploratory trip through the planets (including planet Earth with its wise fox), the little Prince will be able to establish a more balanced relationship with his rose.

In my friendship with Gertrud, my ‘rose-friend’ who was so ill, I had thought that, despite our age difference, we were on terms of full equality. There was so much I could learn from her. For me, the circumstances that bound us together did not have any particular significance. Despite the general sad background and the ugly face of chemotherapy, I was genuinely happy about this chance of meeting her regularly. However, I was yet to learn my lesson. About a year before she died, I stayed with her for a few days. How embarrassed was I to observe just how happy she was to be able to play host to me. Had there been an element of disabling mothering in me after all, without my being aware of it? I took this experience as encouragement to me to look more closely at where there might be elements of dominance creeping into my friendly relations. They do tend to camouflage. This may mean noticing in myself when I frequently feel the urge to take initiative in order for friendship to happen, and perhaps being prepared to let go in order to give my friend space to act.

### **Queries:**

Do I pay attention to an equal sharing of responsibilities in my friendships?

Am I prepared to notice and let go of the subtle and undeserved power that I happen to have simply by virtue of age, experience, means, education, race, and gender?

### **Simplicity**

“Live simply that others can simply live” said a Quaker poster in the 1980s, putting into a nutshell the uncanny insight that our wealth in the affluent parts of the world is based on the exploitation of others – thus impeding any friendship mode of relation. Few of us can, like St. Francis of Assisi and John Woolman, opt out consistently, forsake worldly riches and follow Jesus.<sup>43</sup> Most of us will compromise. We have yet to learn to see the enormous consequences of the rampant materialism of our ruling society with its injustice and disregard for our planet, and accept responsibility for our actions and complacency.<sup>44</sup>

But to return to the lake and the reflections of my friendship garden, it surely would be the snowdrop-friendships that match ‘Simplicity’. The snowdrop is, indeed, a simple little flower, so small it does not demand much space and attention, I cannot even trace it at all in my reflection-carpet. Just like a snowdrop in summer, a ‘snowdrop-friendship’ makes do with a minimum of outward signs. It is based on the trust that just as I hold my friend in the Light while we do not meet, he or she will not forget about me. Therefore it does not require frequent letters or visits. Johanna, a young friend of mine, put it most concisely into a note she added to an otherwise plainly informative e-mail: “P.S. Even though I don’t write to you every five minutes – I think of you – and I bet you feel it – as I do, too.”<sup>44</sup>

### Queries:

Am I careful that friendships do not tempt me into an excess of wealth or consumption?

Can I bear times of separation, even of seeming emptiness and drought in a friendship, holding my friend in the Light and trusting that the seed will stay alive, ready to come up as circumstances permit?

Is my heart so free of the desire to possess that I can let go when my friends wish to go and still be there when they wish to return?

### Peace

As I am looking around over our reflection carpet on the lake to find a plant on which to pin our Peace testimony I am divided as to what to choose. What catches my eye is the colour yellow sprinkled over the lake. Is laburnum the plant I am looking for? Well, perhaps as far as its golden beauty is concerned and in so far as, to achieve peace (as with friendship) you must be prepared to run risks. But no! Peace can never be poisonous, and surely we would not want to warn our children away from touching, let alone savouring its fruit. No, laburnum is *not* a peace plant.

The other yellow dots in the lake’s reflection are the dandelions. What a dream: if peace were only as sturdy as dandelions. Imagine peace as blooming in the dusty gravel of an inner city playground, growing in a minute crack of the

globalised exploitative economy, forcing its way through the runway of a military airbase, and spreading its seed as light as the wind. No, I fear this might be just too utopian. Peace cannot be compared with a dandelion either, I am afraid. Perhaps peace is not at all like a plant that grows mainly by itself. Peace wants to be built by every one.

Maybe peace is an edifice, so what about our garden shed? It may not be such a bad idea to build peace by using the instruments we found in there. Remember the mirror: Peace also requires a sound image of oneself – for peoples, nations, just as well as for individuals. Remember the tools: In peace we may need a spade for relocating irritating energies, we may need secateurs to cut off what distracts us from our sources of hope and creativity, and we may need the rake to clear our paths from prejudice and resentment and allow them to be transformed. Remember the rocking chair: Peace cannot be achieved without the power that provides where and when our individual human efforts are no longer sufficient. In short we build peace in just the same ways that we found helpful in fostering fruitful friendship.

### **Queries:**

Do I trust that friendship is strong enough to embrace conflict?

Do I make use of all the resources of friendship in the service of peace?

Do I allow for conflicts to come to the fore and trust that they can be tackled in three-dimensional friendship?

Meanwhile it is getting on towards sunset. It has become almost windy and the reflections in the lake no longer allow us to distinguish any specific shapes. Our shed and garden, all are one. Soon it will be dark and we won't see anything at all. In the darkness we trust that the garden remains.

### **Query:**

Do I know God's presence so deeply that I can see in every encounter the potential for friendship?

## **VI. BEYOND OUR GARDEN WIDER VIEW AND FAREWELL**

Before we part we should have a look beyond the bounds of our friendship garden, and ask ourselves what bearing all this has on the wider society. Of course, each garden contributes to a healthy climate, and so, too, do our friendships. It has often been said that one of the ways to bring about social change is by changing the way we relate to other people.

So, was John Macmurray too optimistic when he suggested that friendship could be the new mode of relating between people? We are all painfully aware of the fact that big history did take a different path.

As we sit there on our bench, looking up towards the horizon with those clouds that reflect the last rays of the setting sun we make out some hills. They seem to be covered with military barracks, sky scrapers and slums almost as far as the eye can see, symbolising the military-industrial complex, the globalised world of commerce and the human disaster that is the cost of all that greed and craving for power. In short: the ‘friendships of the world’ which are ever so distant from the friendships we have explored that nurture us and help us grow.

And yet – “God, the big AND YET” has been one of the most surprising definitions of God I have ever heard. It has proved helpful in many situations of seemingly insurmountable difficulties in my life. – And yet there *is* friendship outside our little garden even though we may not see it at first glance. If we look closely, we can find fruitful friendship growing even in this bleak environment. If we use our secateurs and cut away some of the horrific news of the past eighty years we can, indeed, see Macmurray’s traces of friendship as a new mode of personal – and institutional – living. There are a host of associations, federations, and movements that are based on mutual understanding, openness, trust, and a concept of equality — all factors that we have identified as leading towards friendship.

I shall name but a few larger scale examples, those which have been part of my experience.

The idea of an International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFoR) was born when, at the eve of World War One, in August 1914, Friedrich Siegmund-Schulze, a German Lutheran Pastor, and Henry Hodgkin, a British Quaker, had to part abruptly at Cologne railway station because their countries had gone to war. They promised each other their friendship would survive the hatred of their peoples and pledged to work for reconciliation. IFoR was founded when the war was over, in 1919 and soon grew into a world wide inter-religious peace movement which has ceaselessly promoted issues of peace and human rights. Two notable illustrations of the effectiveness of IFoR's work have been its backing of Martin Luther King Jr's civil right's movement in the USA in the 1960s, and being instrumental – through Jean and Hildegard Goss-Mayr's trainings – in the non-violent overthrow of the Marcos regime in the Philippines in 1986. IFoR was also heavily involved in the founding of more single-issue organisations like War Resisters International, Service Civil International, EIRENE Peace Services and Peace Brigades International. On a regional and local level IFoR can be found active wherever conflicts are on the agenda, promoting non-violent ways of solving them. Although it is such a broad international organisation, unique in its inter-religious spiritual approach, it has preserved its grassroots character.

The Christian ecumenical movement founded the World Council of Churches (WCC) in the wake of World War Two as a response to the churches' concern about the atrocities of the war. The WCC creates the space for mutual understanding and friendship to grow among a wide diversity of Christian churches. It offers a platform for theological exchange and promotes Christian values like charity and forgiveness in the wider society. For example, WCC's campaign to 'Combat Racism' contributed significantly to the end of apartheid in South Africa, and their 'Conciliar Process of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation' has raised awareness of these issues far beyond the churches. Currently, the 'Decade to Overcome Violence — Churches seeking Reconciliation and Peace 2001-2010' has a special focus on a campaign to 'End the Illegal Occupation of Palestine'. It was in this context that I went to work in the Occupied Territories (and lost my Israeli friendship).

Comparable to both these organisations is the Friends' World Committee for Consultation (FWCC). It was founded in 1937 for just the same reasons as WCC, to be a channel of communication within our similarly diverse Quaker

family. The triennial meetings of FWCC provide a platform for mutual learning about our varied traditions, healing of our divisions and sharing of our concerns. – When FWCC convened the World Gathering of Friends in 1991, the deeply divided groups of Kenyan Friends were brought together at Chavakali. For many of these Friends, it was the first time since the schisms that they had been able to meet old friends and extended family. The renewal of personal connections at that conference has had a direct influence on the healing and renewal of Kenyan Quakerism. Through their Quaker United Nations Offices (QUNO) FWCC promotes, on that level, issues such as economic justice, prevention of violent conflict, disarmament and human rights throughout the world.

Both in the WCC and in FWCC, I have been challenged by the depth of some of the divisions, but also, time and again, blessed by surprising experiences of real friendship across these divides.

While these are big umbrella organisations operating on a broad scale, we can also point to movements that, on a different level, have recognised the power of interpersonal friendship to transform social realities. Here, what comes to mind for me would be the work camp movement and town twinning programmes. Both of them provide opportunities for people, often of countries only recently at war with each other, to meet face to face, to learn about the life and history of the other, and to develop trust. Work camps bring together mainly young people who are concerned to alleviate damage done by natural or political catastrophes. While working together and sharing free time they learn a lot about their backgrounds. The town twinning programme usually includes, beside the official town council level, all kinds of cultural, leisure and sports associations, and therefore brings together people from virtually all walks of life. As they host one another in their homes –despite the fact that they often do not have a language in common and have to rely on their hands and feet and hearts to communicate – they meet on a personal level which can become quite deep. These encounters have broken down prejudices and in many cases have led to the formation of faithful friendships.

A project that deserves special mention here is the ‘Alternatives to Violence Programme’ (AVP) which most of you may know or know of. It was initially designed to help prisoners learn new ways of interacting and coping with conflict situations peacefully but has spread far beyond the prison gates into the wider community and schools. In thirty years it has reached thirty countries around the world. The layout of the courses is based exactly on the three elements we found in our garden shed (the mirror for self esteem, the tools for communication and the rocking chair for the ‘power beyond’ which is, in AVP-

speak ‘Transforming Power’, the central concept of the whole programme). Therefore it is, in my eyes, the friendship programme par excellence. This should not come as a surprise since the programme was developed by Friends, in friendly collaboration with prisoners who were concerned to find ways out of their anti-social patterns of behaviour. While it is not a panacea for all problems around violence, it has changed many lives. Time and again you can meet AVP trainers who are themselves former prisoners who have managed to change their lives completely.

These are but a few examples. There would be many more, some of which may well be closer to your hearts and interests.

We look at the distant hills and see the ugly and destructive forces of our world. And yet, in the foreground of our vision we see our garden – almost like a nature refuge. Perhaps it is also a humanity refuge, even a God refuge. In fact, we see many such sanctuaries when we start to look. Our Religious Society has always been such a sanctuary, and Friends have sometimes played a disproportionate role in creating many of the above-mentioned institutions and movements.

Ecologists proclaim that it is not enough to have big national parks far away from each other. Sustainable animal populations and ecosystems require constant and vibrant exchange. What we therefore actually need is a dense fabric of many small protected habitats. This is how our gardens are essential. Of course we can join and support institutions and movements and help them spread, but there is more that we can do. When we all grow and tend our friendship gardens we help create that dense network of sanctuaries which is needed to save humanity. Then we can really become God’s faithful co-creators. This should not be tedious work all day long bogging us down with feelings of inadequacy in view of the enormity of the task. No-one expects us to work big miracles, small ones, however, we can observe frequently in our friendship gardens. The most striking miracle I have found is that, the more friendships we grow, the more friendships we *can* grow. In my experience, it is extremely rewarding and empowering to grow fruitful friendship, for ourselves and for the wider community. For with fruitful friendship we hold in our hands a tip of Shalom, that life-enhancing, all-embracing peace which God promised humankind. This Shalom will, in turn, widen our scope for fruitful friendships, thus widening the field of peace on earth. Gandhi once said,

“With every true friendship we build more firmly the foundations on which the peace of the whole world rests.”<sup>46</sup>

We are at the end of our time together. The sun has set. The shed, the garden and the hill beyond are no longer lit, and it is getting chilly at our lake. Thank you for coming along on this garden walk and giving an enthusiastic gardener the chance to share her passion. I hope you have discovered in yourself a desire to explore your own garden.

As I am saying farewell I should like to give you a little present – just as the fox gave a present when he had to part with the Little Prince. Mine, however, is not a secret. It is a picture from our local Art Gallery that has often spoken to my condition.

Dark greens with a tint of red form the background to a slim bright orange-yellow flower, utterly fragile on its long thin stalk. So long is this stem that the solemn face which seems to tend the tulip-like blossom looks as if it is squeezed into the upper margin of the canvas.

This picture has a double message. The first is based in the history of its origin. It was illegally painted by Emil Nolde, whose work was banned because it did not conform with the Nazi doctrines of the arts. Not only was it painted during the Nazi dictatorship, but Nolde created it in 1940, while the world was upside down, cities being bombed, and countless people killed. Nolde’s first message seems to be that even in a world of turmoil and violence there is room for a fragile flower. His second message is couched in that gentle head protecting the flower, and in the title of this picture: *The Great Gardener*.

May the Great Gardener bless and protect you, and all the plants in your gardens of friendship.

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- 36 Robert Antoch, p.11f
- 37 *John* 15
- 38 *James* 4: 4
- 39 HJM Nowen, *The Only Necessary Thing: Living a prayerful Life*. London, 2000, p. 51
- 40 Milton *On his Blindness*

When I consider how my light is spent  
 Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide.  
 And that one talent which is death to hide  
 Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent

To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
 My true account, lest He returning chide, -  
 Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?  
 I fondly ask: - But Patience, to prevent

That murmur, soon replies: God doth not need  
 Either man's work, or His own gifts: who best  
 Bear His mild yoke, they serve Him best: His state

Is kingly: thousands at His bidding speed  
 And post o'er land and ocean without rest: -  
 They also serve who only stand and wait.

- 41 From a declaration to Charles II, 1660
- 42 *Radikale Hoffnung. Stimmen der Friedenshaltung deutscher Quaker*, Germany YM. Pymont 1993
- 43 *Matthew* 19: 21
- 44 see also Jonathan Dale, *Beyond the Spirit of Age*, Swarthmore Lecture, QHS, 1996: and John Punshon, *Testimony and Tradition*. Swarthmore Lecture, QHS, 1990
- 45 private letter, 14.4.03
- 46 found on a post card

"With even true friendship we build more firmly the foundations on which the peace of the whole world rests. Thought by thought and act by act, with even breath we build more firmly the kingdom of non-violence that is the true home of the spirit of humanity."

- Mohandas K. Gandhi (1869-1948)