

The Australian Friend

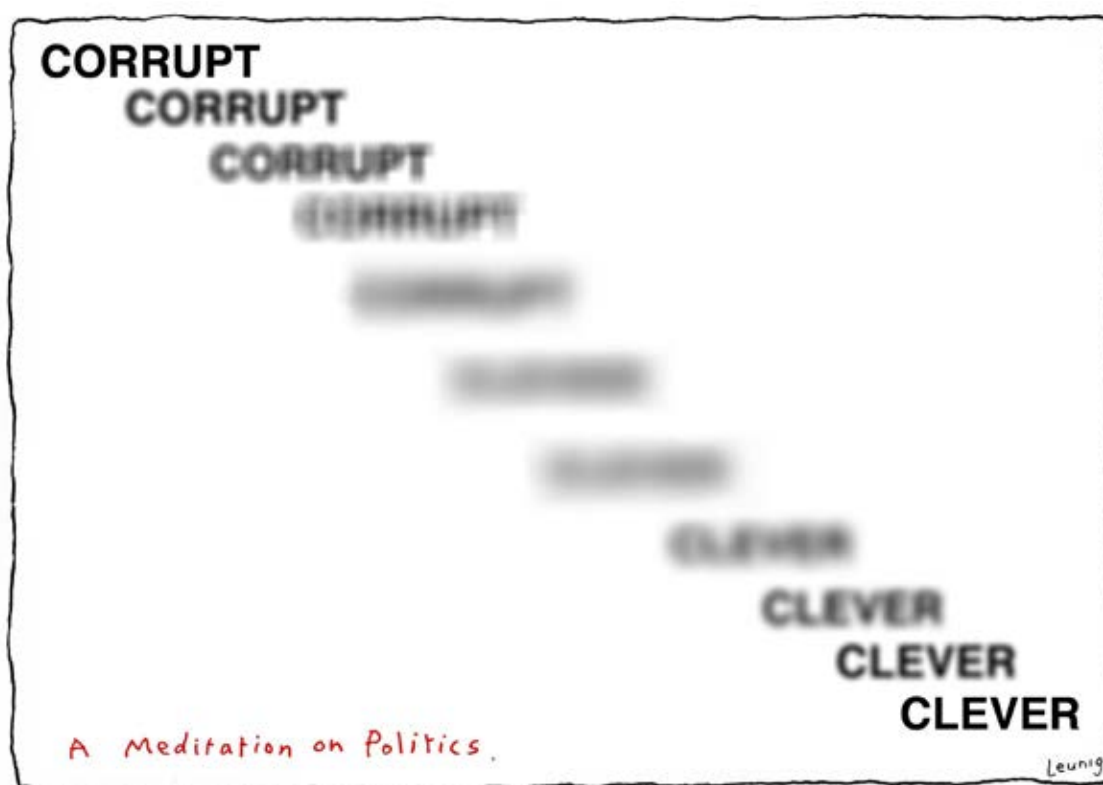
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Integrity



Leunig Corrupt/clever (Used with permission.)

Editorial

Australia faces a critical decision, perhaps a spiritual rather than a political decision. On 14 October we must decide whether we will amend our constitution to officially confess that our First Nations people once possessed the whole of our country, and to give them a Voice to Parliament, with probably no more influence than the lobbyists of a fossil fuel company. In this issue of *The Australian Friend* Possum Hodgkin suggests that the concept of *terra nullius* was the starting point for the loss of integrity in Australia. David Johnson writes ‘The early colonisers were outside the divine law, following laws of their own making which suited their own profiteering. These invaders did not obey the inward Law of Christ, did not affirm natural justice’. He urges us to follow our inward Light.

Also in this issue, Dorothy Scott tells of another group sorely treated by our country, the refugees. Kaye Wright’s poignant little story and Reg Naulty’s book review throw light and love on people suffering from dementia, and Michael Corbett points out how our unthinking actions can cause distress to f/Friends. Duncan Frewin returns with advice for running our Meetings, this time for Clerks. Judith Pembleton calls for a Meeting for Learning in Queensland, and introduces us to a rather isolated but vey active Friend. Fleur Bayley tells of the domestic rearrangements of QSA, and if all this is too much, Heather Saville invites us to take a break at Worona.

Correction and apology

The received text of the ‘Know thy Friend’ article in the June issue of *The Australian Friend*, included the statement ‘Kenneth had been a C.O. during the Second World War’. In the editorial process ‘C.O.’ was translated as ‘Commanding Officer’ rather than ‘Conscientious Objector’, as it should have been. This error not only makes the statement nonsensical but misrepresents the character of the man. We apologise to Joss Brooks, and his father, for this error.

THE AUSTRALIAN FRIEND EDITORIAL COMMITTEE

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Australia's integrity crisis

POSSUM HODGKIN | CANBERRA AND DISTRICT QUAKERS



Australia is at a critical risk of losing its integrity. Trust in institutions is low, and we struggle to agree on basic truths of reality. Democracy can not function in a landscape of mistrust, corruption and lies. Perhaps we can survive for a time without democracy, but if left to fester this trend will rot the underlying fabric of society. All the fundamental functions of society are built on a common truth: the rule of law which keeps our peace, the welfare and education which underpins technology, and the basic respect of other human life which keeps us from barbarism.

We drive on a common road together. We must be able to trust the cars coming towards us will keep their lane. We must believe that the road signs read true.

This reliance on common ground has always been true, but it is thrown into urgent sharp relief by the need for ethics for our post-human AI and cyborg offspring to govern the future of humanity. We cannot hope they will keep true to our values, if we can't even state what our values are. The AI alignment problem requires our own alignment to be solved.

To stand any chance of stemming the tide of mistrust, we must be clear on the cause.

The story of our nation's integrity problem begins with our arrival in this land. We did horrible, unethical things, and we lied about them. The

written accounts of the first explorers tell of a thriving first nations society with agriculture, multi-story houses, clothing and continent-spanning trade networks. Their highly evolved steady state society had survived longer than any other in the history of humanity; the magnitude and criticality of this achievement is only now being appreciated. These accounts didn't make it back to England; they were edited out of letters by the colonial governors, and the lie at the heart of Australia was born.

Terra nullius allowed a genocide, and we have still not come to terms with it. Hundreds of years later there are still many who deny it happened at all. Perhaps because accepting such a horrible truth would come at too great of a cost to their worldview, personal wealth and self-image. Whatever the reason, it birthed a culture where the most horrible acts could be justified, and history rewritten by the victor. Most of us were not here then, and perhaps we would not have gone along with the lie. Australia's migrant population weren't given a choice in it; we were not told on arrival. We were presented with a very different picture, of a lucky country, a strangely empty paradise waiting for us, if we would merely accept the validity of the existing power structure.

That power structure

did not fully change at federation. In many cases the existing colonial governors transitioned seamlessly into identical positions in the new country. In the most extreme examples, the very people who had hunted, killed and raped indigenous peoples were elevated to become aboriginal protectors and members of parliament. Our electorates are named after some of them, and their descendants still represent the descendants of those they oppressed. This is true across all aspects of society, not just government. Australia still has billionaires descended from slave owners.

Initially newcomers were carefully managed, to ensure they had a shared cultural heritage and would support the structures of power. However, after World War II it became clear this dominance may be usurped from abroad, so it was decided Australia needed to get big to survive the next war. One hundred million Australians would be needed by 2100, a true global military power to help enforce western hegemony. To reach this goal we would



Terra nullius?

need to double our population every 50 years. This is when the great migration began, and 70 years later Australia's high migration rates are still on target for our fateful date with an imagined war.

All this migration posed a number of problems, chief of all how to ensure they supported the rich pay for all the infrastructure to support that many humans. The answer was to import rich people and make them pay for themselves. The three main ways to get into Australia were to either have a lot of money, come from a rich country or have a job which will earn a lot of money. This is why such a small portion of our migrants are the refugees who most need the support of a rich country; they don't make it in because they can't pay for themselves.

How do you onboard all these people to the status quo? This was partially solved by the rich migrants not wanting to rock the boat, but the other approach has been control of our education system and media. The lie was doubled down on, the truth was suppressed and excised from public discourse. Media has now been consolidated to the point that Australians mostly get their news from just two corporations, or from the government itself.

Once you have established these techniques for controlling the narrative, it's hard to keep them constrained to just one lie. We are now awash with deceptive but profitable words from industries like military, fossil fuel and finance. This is endemic through all

aspects of our lives, not just in the media. Lies, cronyism and glorification of violence have been normalised throughout all the cultural pillars of Australia. We do see institutions make claims of higher virtues, but they will all ring hollow so long as the rotten core remains.

Is it any wonder then that when the pandemic came, so many doubted even the underlying basics of science? We are so used to being lied to, that we struggle to see the truth. This too is deliberate, with humanities underfunded and critical thinking discouraged. This is how we find ourselves in the moral wasteland of the present. The longer we bury our heads in the sands, the less we can see a way out of the desert.

We see this issue manifesting as corruption in government and war crimes in our military. In both cases the highest values are publicly stated, while the lowest are enforced. However, it spreads much further, and also infests every major institution. Through cronyism, state capture, corporate deception and organised crime, we see a country unable to shake itself free from leeches while it clings to a snake.

This disease of the soul isn't just happening on a large scale; we see division among families and communities, inability to prioritise welfare and healthcare, people's basic human rights undermined in fights over race, gender and body parts. On all fronts, personal and collective, a lack of common ethics is undermining the success of society.

The Answer

The answer to all of these big problems is actually very small, it's within us. It begins by finding truths that we can all agree on. These common truths can be our rock, our new deal. On this rock we can recraft a society capable of achieving the higher ideals we strive for.

We think Quakers can help here. We do not hold the whole truth, but we do have processes which can build consensus. Our testimonies were not handed down by prophets to be unquestioned. The things we agree on, are simple statements of universal truths derived from quiet discernment by humans in peaceful discussion.

For centuries we have turned to the small voice of truth inside, seen the light of good within others, and patiently worked through complexities to find common ground. The things we have found seem like common sense, and there are similar testimonies among other religions and humanists. We believe Australia needs to go through this process, to find our truths and then stick to them. That, after all, is integrity.

All Australians agree we need integrity, but that can't happen without shared truth. To achieve this, we are inviting you to join us in discussion. We would like to work with you to build the Australian ethical consensus, and from there rebuild trust in society.

AF



The way ahead?



Quaker support for refugees subject to Operation Sovereign Borders

DOROTHY SCOTT | VICTORIA REGIONAL MEETING



A 14 year-old girl living in Afghanistan, created this artwork. 'Fatima' is self-taught, never having formally studied art. Since Afghanistan fell to the Taliban in August 2021 she has not been allowed to go to school and is only able to leave the house under the supervision of her brother.

Her father has been trapped in Australia's offshore detention regime for ten years. He has applied for resettlement in Canada and three years on, he is yet to know if he will be accepted. The last time he saw his daughter she was four years old. Jan Trehwella, a volunteer with the support group Our Afghan Families describes the Afghan men still in PNG as:

physically and mentally damaged and broken men ... they have lost all hope of a future for themselves and their families and with that, some have also lost their sanity and their will to live. Meanwhile their families, continue to be at serious risk of persecution, torture and death with

the return of the Taliban to power.

Wednesday 19th July 2023 marked ten years since Australia's offshore detention policy began. The depth and scale of the prolonged suffering which has occurred in the past decade is immense. In the words of Behrouz Boochani, the Kurdish-Iranian journalist, author and former Manus Island detainee:

It is unbelievable that this tragedy is still going on after ten years with people stuck in Port Moresby. Many lives have been damaged, many families separated, and now Australia has abandoned them. Nothing has been achieved. Nothing but the creation of a tragedy and the mental and physical damage to hundreds of people. Humanitarian and democratic values have been undermined.

While successive governments inflicted this cruelty to deter others from trying to reach Australian shores, small groups of Australians have been working tirelessly to bring this policy to

an end and to support those who have been subject to offshore detention. One of these groups is Manus Lives Matter, an inter-denominational network formed in 2015 by Sister Jane Keogh, a retired Brigidine nun. From its early days Canberra and Region Friends have supported Manus Lives Matter, as have other faith groups.

Operation Not Forgotten

In addition to providing direct practical assistance and emotional support to individual refugees, Manus Lives Matter also successfully advocated to the Refugee Council of Australia to establish the initiative Operation not Forgotten, in partnership with a Canadian organisation, MOSAIC, to enable refugees in offshore detention to be sponsored to resettle in Canada. A team of volunteers led by Robyn Fetter worked with the refugees and asylum seekers to undertake the complex application process for sponsorship, during which close bonds were forged between the refugees and volunteers.

Keeping Connected, Sustaining Hope

When I asked Sister Jane Keogh in 2020 how Quakers might help Manus Lives Matter, she said there was a need to support those applying to go to Canada over the two years their applications were being processed. Delays caused by Covid have meant that for many this period is now closer to three years.

That is how the Quaker-funded Keeping Connected, Sustaining Hope project came into being. In the first year, 2021, it received a \$10,000 grant from the Victorian Quaker Fund and \$7,500 in personal donations from Friends. In 2022 the AYM Thanksgiving Fund Committee approved a grant of \$20,000 for the second year of the project. In 2023 Quaker Service Australia made a grant of \$25,000, and an additional \$25,000 was given by the Jan de Voogd Peace Fund for supporting a group of Afghan families in Afghanistan whose husbands and fathers are still stranded in PNG. Manus Lives Matter is grateful for the generosity of these Quaker bodies and Friends, and Alan Clayton and I are grateful for the opportunity to work with the extraordinary people from Manus Lives Matter.

Both practical and emotional support is offered through close relationships with volunteers. The practical support includes: mobile phones and phone credits; living expenses, including food; medical treatment and medication; legal expenses; gym membership in Port Moresby (for depressed refugees fearful of physical assault in the streets); driving lessons to secure employment for a refugee transferred to the

mainland; and significantly, support for families in Afghanistan of those still in PNG.

Support for eight families still in Afghanistan, whose husbands/fathers have remained offshore, became a priority after the Taliban returned to power in 2021. The Afghan refugees were deeply distressed about their families whom they could not protect, with the refugees' opposition to the Taliban, and/or their Hazara ethnicity putting their families at risk. Their plight is compounded by the economic collapse affecting the entire country, causing the families to be without the means to purchase food, fuel for heating and cooking or medical supplies.

Where to from here?

It is hoped that the majority of those awaiting resettlement in Canada will arrive there by the end of 2023. In early August Robyn Fetter reported that 43 of the refugees had arrived in Canada, 11 having completed their first year of settlement (although still having access to support), and 32 in the process of being settled. All have jobs and most continue to work on their English. There are 92 refugees still waiting to go to Canada.

Many remain deeply traumatised by their past experiences in detention on Nauru and Manus Island. There is also a group of refugees and asylum seekers who are ineligible for Canadian sponsorship or have been rejected, and some who are too despairing to even attempt this pathway, and they all remain extremely vulnerable. Some are still in PNG in precarious circumstances, while others are in Australia on six monthly Bridging Visas, with no social

security entitlement and no prospect of being allowed to settle in our country. Manus Lives Matters is committed to continuing to support them and advocate for them.

Reflections

My involvement with Manus Lives Matter through Keeping Connected, Sustaining Hope has been a privilege and has led me to make several observations which may be of interest to Friends and Quaker funding bodies.

1. The organic process by which Manus Lives Matter arose from Sister Jane Keogh's 'leading' into an inter-faith network, giving rise to new, totally volunteer-based groups such as Our Afghan Families, is truly inspiring, but being outside the formal charitable sector (without 'deductible gift recipient status') leaves such vital work badly underfunded.

2. Small groups of committed volunteers can adapt and individualise responses to refugees and offer the precious gift of friendship, so different from a 'service provider-service user' relationship typical of large, formal organisations. This can complement the work of large NGOs which have the capacity to develop and 'scale up' initiatives such as Operation Not Forgotten.

3. Quakers can be most effective when we are part of a broader inter-faith humanitarian initiative, thus harnessing a diverse set of skills and resources.

4. Our Quaker notions of 'concern' ('a weighty matter that disturbs the conscience and impels the concerned person or Meeting towards action')

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

and ‘leading’ (acting on a concern) are profoundly important and are rightfully given salience by Quaker funding bodies.

Compared with the leadings of others, my leading in relation to refugees is relatively recent. It crystallised in 2019 when a small number of refugees and asylum seekers held in offshore detention were brought to the Australian mainland via the Medevac provisions (until the Morrison Government repealed the legislation after nine months). The men were held in detention, including at the

Park Hotel in Melbourne. Soon after they arrived the hotel windows were tinted so people in the street could not see the refugees inside. The refugees were punished for peeling off the film on the inside of the windows but did so anyway. Perhaps punishment was the price they were willing to pay for a small sense of agency.

A group of Quakers in Coldstream Monthly Meeting in Ontario privately sponsored our friend to go to Canada and early this year, almost three years after his application was lodged, he arrived. After suffering from extreme

sleep disturbance for almost a decade, this immediately ended on his very first night on Canadian soil. At long last he felt safe.

Let us hold in the Light all those who still wait for the day they will be safe.

If Friends wish to know how they can support the work of Manus Lives Matter and Our Afghan Families, please contact Dorothy Scott (dorothy@avonsfield.com.au) or Alan Clayton (alan@avonsfield.com.au).

AF



Refugees detained at the Park Hotel, Melbourne



A refugee arrives in Canada through Operation Not Forgotten

I used to visit a young man in the Park Hotel who was in a very poor mental state and suffered severe dental pain for which he received no treatment.

The Butterfly

He had never seen my granddaughter
but he called her ‘The Butterfly’.
I had sent him a photo
of her little face peering into a pumpkin flower.
He had never seen our garden
and asked me to describe it.
I sent him a photo
of trees laden with plums and peaches.
Was it wrong to share such beauty
with a young man desperate to be free?
So long since he had held a child,
so long since he had touched a tree.
Years in hell on Manus Island,
now imprisoned in a Melbourne hotel.
Its windows were newly tinted
to render refugees invisible.
Oh, the banality of evil.
Oh, the fragility of hope.
Perspex between us when I visit,
guards hearing every word.
He asks me, so gently,
‘How is The Butterfly?’
And when I leave, I weep.
I weep for what my country has done.
I weep for what my country has become.

Integrity

The purpose of this Friendly School was to encourage Quakers in Australia to write about Integrity, to write a poem, do a cartoon or other visual, make a video on their mobile for our YouTube channel, etc. Integrity is an important Testimony for Quakers but little has been written about it in Australia. Several Friends who participated in the Friendly School wrote on the topic and we offer these to *The Australian Friend*. We hope that other Friends will reflect on integrity and feel inspired to contribute on the topic for future issues.

WIES SCHUIRINGA | NEW SOUTH WALES REGIONAL MEETING

Integrity

Not just honesty,
integrity's essential
for a wholesome life.

Malcolm Whyte, Canberra and Region Quakers

In the great public service of Oz
You should always behave well because
When Integrity's seen
Your conscience is clean
And you can be proud you're in Oz.

It might be that one of these days
You are told some dishonesty pays
But this is corrupt
And you should disrupt
Such evil and self-serving ways.

Whenever temptations abound
Try to stand firm your ground
And do your best
To pass the test
With Friends' inner values profound

Juan Roberson, New South Wales Regional Meeting

Integrity demands that we put our stated beliefs into action. When our actions do not meet our values or our commitments, we need to take time to review our beliefs, to bring our actions into alignment, reminding ourselves of fairness and equity. There is no shame in monitoring our actions in this way. Being able to self-correct is the mark of an adult. Let's all be adults, lighting the way for each other and our community.

Ann Britton, New South Wales Regional Meeting



Werona

a place of peace (1982 – 2023)

HEATHER SAVILLE | NEW SOUTH WALES REGIONAL MEETING



This second part of Werona's history gives a quick update on the significant changes to the property and surrounds, looks at the changes in use since it was bought and concludes with personal memories of what it has meant to many individuals over the years.

As covered in the March edition of *The Australian Friend*, the 1982 bush fires destroyed the much-loved bark hut along with the farm cottage. Friends House was unscathed and continues to provide cooking, eating, and sleeping facilities. The cabin with sleeping bunks, a water tank and wonderful views over the valley was built in the early 1980s along with a shelter on the site of the old farm cottage. Some 18 years ago Council required the pit toilets to be replaced and there is now a solar/hybrid one.

The road into Werona is reached across the land of the electricity sub-station that provides power to the entire Kangaroo Valley area. The need to protect the sub-station during bush fires may well have contributed to ensuring that Werona too was saved. Over the years the road has been repaired and improved and is now accessible with

care down to the camping area in front of the cabin.

By 1976 the Tallowa Dam was completed resulting in the disappearance of the 'beach' and a rise in water level. Access to the river for swimming was more difficult and erosion was aggravated. The days of rushing down to retrieve the pump from inundation were over. New steps on the path to the river are planned soon.

A Back to Werona gathering was held from 26th December 1992 to 3rd January 1993 coming up to the 25th anniversary of the Werona's purchase. Over the course of the week, around one hundred people attended from places far and wide. The gathering spanned the generations and many stories of the histories and sheer pleasures of enjoying the bush were exchanged. The gathering was centred around the Shelter, the food preparation hub with rosters covering food preparation, cooking and cleaning. Everyone slept in tents and we were blessed with perfect weather for meetings, bush walks, discussions, swimming and music making.

Twenty years ago, the AF described the aims of Werona as establishing an alternative community, a rural retreat,

a haven for draft resisters during the Vietnam war and a safe and peaceful place for people to experience nature in a tranquil bush setting. It has indeed been used by a variety of peace groups for training camps etc. Young Friends have frequently held their annual gathering there, and now there are second and third generation users who spend time on the property, as can be seen in the **photo above**.

Matters Indigenous

Werona adopted a policy of Paying the Rent in 1988 and chose Tranby College in Glebe, which had long-term links with Quakers and held several student camps at Werona. Since then, there have been a range of interactions with local Indigenous organisations and the rent is now paid to the Nowra Land Council. In 2018 Merindah Funnell, a Wiradjuri woman, who has spent time at Werona designed and painted the Acknowledgement of Country that appears on the wall of Friends House.

Matters Environmental

In 1995 in conjunction with National Parks and Wildlife and local landowners The Friends of the Brushtailed Rock Wallabies was formed to save the last

colonies of these endangered native animals in Kangaroo Valley. Werona has participated in this scheme since its inception and each year sees the number of wallabies increase.

Werona contacted Shoalhaven Land Care in 2004 seeking advice about nurturing and caring for the native bush. Over the next 14 years we received advice, support and a series of grants. Working along with local bush regenerators, many of the introduced species of weeds have been minimised and eradicated. One hundred red cedar trees, native to the area, were gifted by a local resident and have been planted on the property.

Then in 2021 negotiations with the Bio-Diversity Conservation Trust began. The BCT ranger with whom negotiations were conducted expressed delight to see that parts of the property had no introduced species and overall little disturbance of the natural environment. Lyrebirds, echidnas, wombats are thriving and bandicoots have also been seen.

The BCT focuses on the conservation of private land and allows owners to register a minimum of 20 hectares with the Trust for conservation and environmental purposes. Parts of the property may be set aside for buildings and roads. In return the property receives a reduction in rates, financial assistance with infrastructure such as fences, and revegetation of native plants.

A special General Meeting of share-holders unanimously supported the decision to sign up with BCT. In March 2022 we gifted 32 hectares of our 38 hectares to the Trust to be kept and maintained as native bushland in perpetuity. Under the agreement, we have a responsibility to keep the property free of introduced species of plants. The agreement also means that we have our rates reduced by 58%. The two neighbouring properties, Sydney Bushwalkers and Chakola have also signed up to this agreement which means

there is now a substantial corridor along the southern side of the Kangaroo River that is protected.

Memories

I was first introduced to Werona by my friend and colleague James who suggested it as a peaceful and beautiful place to write and to compose. That was about 10 years ago, and since then my time there has helped me to compose a number of pieces of music, including an opera and two concertos. I am particularly uplifted by the birdlife on the property and this directly inspired my piece for flute and piano Paradise of Birds. A wonderful recording of this by Bridget Bolliger and Andrew West may be found on YouTube.

The birds that I find most fascinating at Werona are the lyrebirds, and I always try to spend time there in May and June when the males are displaying.

I remember one evening sitting very still outside Friends' House when two juvenile male lyrebirds, whom I took to be brothers, came tearing out of the bush chasing one another in play. They did three laps of Friends' House at full speed and then stopped right in front of me, panting. I've never witnessed birds panting before.

I've explored the property, seen the ruins of the timber-getters' humpies, swum the river, watched the wombats play and listened to the dawn chorus. Much of my time there is spent at the table outside Friends' House in the shade of the turpentine tree writing my music.

My children, now adults, continue to enjoy time at Werona. Sitting with them around the campfire is about as happy as it is possible to be.

Dr Jim Coyle, Composer, Music Educator, Conductor

For four 23-year-old men to revert to young boys chatting at a sleepover, it needed a home like this. A day spent entirely fishing, with pure enjoyment seeping from the catching of a single bass. "We need some lemon!" was the instant call as the fish was dumped into the esky. Silence by the fire as we watched foil wrapped fish sit among the embers. Out came the spine as we all dug in. Simple, pure joy.

The final night we slept like rocks, the pure black night enveloping us into its kind heart. The great reset. One of many. Roy, Vince, Giaco, Angus.

We used to spend long weekends there, and I always felt that we were like an orchestra tuning up, and when we were all in tune we went home! Tomas Kalmar

We stayed at Werona on Friday night and we had a really wonderful time. It was such a beautiful location, could not have been better! Beautiful bush, river and properties. The kitchen was so well stocked and we were impressed at how great the fire in the cabin was!

It was really a spiritual investment for peace. I saw my first platypus family in the area.

Would you like to sniff a wild flower,
climb a cliff, sing around a campfire,
watch the moon rise,
boil a billy, build a raft,
look under a rock, listen to the silence?

If so please come and discover for yourself. Bookings: khasleton321@bigpond.com

AF



Know thy Friend

Pam Tooth

JUDITH PEMBLETON | QUEENSLAND REGIONAL MEETING

Most Friends know Pam Tooth as the faithful editor of *Qletter* who provides information of relevance to Queensland Friends each month.

This month, Pam was guest speaker for the Queensland Quaker Women's Group which meets by Zoom on the second Tuesdays of the month, and she shared her life story including her journey to the Queensland Quaker Meeting.

Pam was the second eldest of four girls who lived initially at a property near Biloela. When it was time for schooling the family moved to Brisbane. Towards last years of Pam's youngest sister's schooling, her parents moved permanently to a family property 'Curragilla', on the Prairie Muttaborra road near the geographic centre of Queensland.

School and university holidays were spent on the property doing sheep and then cattle work. Her parents welcomed their daughters' friends for holidays as extra farm hands!

Pam loved their country lifestyle, and in her married life moved to a property outside of Toowoomba where they had the land and the space of that country childhood.

Pam's dad shared many of his own values with his family. Though he was someone who attended church only for weddings and funerals, Pam describes him as having a strong sense of fairness.

This sense of fairness, inherited from her father, challenged Pam in her later work as a social worker and sometimes

led to her breaking rules that did not seem humane or kindly.

He encouraged the family to rise at sunrise to make the most of what he considered 'the best part of the day'. Her dad came from a large family without much money and he saw his four sisters struggle financially, so he encouraged his daughters to study so that they would never be financially dependent on anyone but themselves. His four daughters could not drive a car until they could replace a tyre – a wise move for those driving on the rough and often isolated country roads.

Pam also imbibed his strong work ethic and though Pam describes herself as having been fortunate in the people she worked with in her working life, there is a sense that her approach to work and her inner sense of what was fair would have ensured a positive response from her colleagues.

Pam's faith journey began in the Anglican church which her mother attended. Pam taught Sunday school but struggled to see Christianity in action. When there was discussion about replacing the existing altar with a marble one, in her local wealthy Anglican church, Pam thought surely there was a better way to spend that money. At that time, what kept Pam in the church was the choir as she loved to sing.

One strand of Pam's faith journey was her own poor health during her childhood. She had some heart irregularities and was in and out of hospital. Though she sensed her

mother's anxiety, Pam felt safe – she felt she was being looked after by her parents, the medics and God. She describes this as 'the simple faith of a 12-year-old'.

In the past few years, Pam has had quite a few medical challenges, but throughout she maintained her sense of gratitude for having had a very good life and has had no fear of dying.

While studying social work at the University of Queensland, Pam's faith was nurtured by the warden of St John's College, James Warner, who demonstrated a living faith that was open to adolescent queries.

Once graduated, Pam began work as the first social worker at the then Southport Coast Hospital – a small 4-ward hospital, servicing the Gold Coast. Pam had not studied hospital social work and found many elements of medical practice in the 1970s to be testing.

She was distressed working with young women who were pregnant but could not see how they could keep their babies because they were 'unmarried mothers'. Some came from interstate so that their families were unaware that their 'holiday' covered up having a baby and giving that baby up for adoption.

The prevailing rule was that these women could not see their babies, but Pam could see no reason for them not to see them and let them into the nursery.

Pam worked with a couple of surgeons who would refer patients to Brisbane for serious surgical treatment

and she would suggest that these patients needed to talk with and to question their doctors about their diagnosis and prognosis, but either from fear, lack of compassion and/or the communication skills, the couple of hospital surgeons were often reluctant or indeed did not see this need.

She also remembers that patients were not informed that they were terminally ill. That was up to the doctors and the many of the doctors – surgeons in particular – seemed to lack the ability to talk with patients about terminal illness.

As a social worker, she was not allowed to tell the patients the truth in relation to the patient's diagnosis and prognosis. Pam believed most people would prefer to know the reality.

In the early 1970s there were no public beds available for psychiatric inpatients at the Gold Coast. If patients had a psychotic episode or a serious mental illness requiring hospitalisation, they had to be taken to a Brisbane hospital by ambulance and the ambulance drivers refused to take patients on Fridays because of the fear of accidents on the Gold Coast-Brisbane highway.

People who might be injured in a motor vehicle accident were prioritised over patients with a psychiatric illness requiring hospitalisation for their safety and treatment. It was a challenging situation for patients and their families.

Pam remembers having a visit from a senior social worker which had her terrified, as she did not wear uniforms

and most people in the hospital called her 'Pam' not 'Miss Tooth', neither of which were 'done' in medical social work at that time. Despite her unconventional approach, Pam was commended for the work she was doing.

Later, Pam worked in Cairns with Child Protection and in the Yarrabah Aboriginal Settlement where she observed that they had their own ways of dealing with difficulties. She drove down a steep hill to reach the community in a four-wheel drive that had a bright yellow roof and could be seen from some distance away. When she arrived to speak to the welfare officer, all the kids had gone bush so she rarely saw a child, but she knew the children had plenty of family to look after them.

Pam was asked to formalise adoptions within the Yarrabah. The paperwork for the adoption of Aboriginal children was structured to white families and did not 'fit' with Aboriginal family relationships.

Whilst working In April 1975, in the closing days of the Vietnam War, more than 3000 babies were airlifted from Saigon orphanages and delivered into the arms of waiting couples in the US, Canada, Britain, Europe and Australia..

One request that still leaves her flabbergasted was in 1975 at the end of the Vietnam War, when babies were airlifted from orphanages to Australia, there was a woman who came to the Dept of Children's Services to request adoption and said she would like to adopt a Vietnamese child, but 'not a

black one'.

When Pam returned to the Gold Coast, she worked in Lifeline and trained telephone counsellors and also did disaster recovery work in floods. She later worked in Lifeline in Toowoomba and in both places gained great respect for those she trained who offered phone counselling as volunteers.

After university, Pam drifted away from the traditional church. She moved to London to work as a social worker in a hospital there and found herself observing three people whose way of relating to people attracted her admiration. She asked about them and found they were all Quakers.

When she returned to Australia, she was at the Gold Coast where there was no Meeting for Worship. She travelled to Kelvin Grove Meeting occasionally. Pam then moved to a small sheep farm in Kinglake to join her now husband, Peter Brennan. Then, when she and her husband moved to their property near Clifton, south of Toowoomba she met Taisoo Kim Watson and began to meet regularly with Quakers in Taisoo's home.

Since Peter and Pam sold their property and have moved into Toowoomba, Pam's alternates fortnightly with Taisoo to offer hospitality for the local Quaker Meetings and her husband, Peter, who is not a Quaker nonetheless welcomes 12 Quakers into the home and cooks for them.

AF



Clerking our meetings

DUNCAN FREWIN | QUEENSLAND REGIONAL MEETING

Both regional and local meetings report that finding Friends to take on significant roles, especially for clerking the meeting, is getting harder. I have been reflecting on some aspects of clerking, with the hope of encouraging Friends to take up such roles.

Quakers speak of the practice of equality as one of our witnesses to the world. From the beginning, Quakers made no distinction between women and men in speaking in worship, or as elders or clerks. We try to transcend race, gender, sexuality, age etc. in appointing people to roles of authority among us – elders, clerks etc. Sometimes we also say that all members are equal, which is a claim that no individual has greater power than another. And, indeed, in our business meetings, all voices can be heard. But the decision that follows the discussion is more than a compromise of competing voices. At its best, it is what we recognise as something that the Spirit leads us to. This does empower the whole group, including those who may have started from a different position, whether the group is a small committee or a regional meeting. We can feel the spiritual rightness of the decision, and know that we are not alone in following it through. More than that, we see how such a decision can awaken individuals to their own power in the Spirit.

However, despite this practice of equality, we actually DO vest some power or authority in our officers, especially elders and clerks. I'd like to look more closely at those powers and what they mean to our worshipping community.

I recall a late Friend, Clayton Bredt, explaining two different types of power,

using the two Latin words for power: *auctoritas* (which gives us the English word *authority*) and *potestas*. *Auctoritas* refers to a person's moral stature. When we say someone is a 'powerful' speaker, we are acknowledging their *auctoritas*. It is that inner force that makes us listen to them and that persuades us. It is close to charisma, but without the 'magic' element. In contrast *potestas* refers to the ability to compel others. It is the power of the police, or managers, ... and of a good parent. It is not automatically bad. *Auctoritas* is a characteristic of good leaders. We listen to them and sincerely consider their proposals. But we also need leaders to have *potestas* if we wish them to keep order in society and in our Society.

Now Quakers keep their treasures in clay vessels – the humans we choose for our offices. Since we are only human, we all fall short of the mark and make mistakes. But, with the Psalmist, our trust is in the Lord. We trust that Divine Assistance will guide us to choose good elders and clerks, and we trust that Divine Assistance will uphold them. I'd like to consider how we choose clerks especially.

We try to choose our clerks (co-clerks, clerking teams) for *auctoritas*, or rather for their potential for *auctoritas*. No one is a ready-made clerk; clerks grow into the role as they develop the sense of *auctoritas*. Nevertheless, we DO also confer some *potestas* on our clerks, trusting that they will use it wisely, sparingly, lovingly – as parents try to do. We ask them to discern the agenda for business meetings, to run the meeting and discern the decisions without a vote. (The group still retains the power to adjust or reject a proposed

discernment.) For the agenda, not everything that comes up should be put before the meeting. We trust the clerk to push back items that are not a true concern or that have not been properly prepared, and to exclude items that can be dealt with outside a meeting – promoting upcoming events is a perennial.

During the meeting, we trust the clerk to control speaking. Everyone has a right to be heard, but we trust the clerk to control (or even stop!) speakers who are *debating* a point, or have wandered from the topic, and we trust the clerk to prevent dominant speakers from overshadowing less confident speakers. We give the clerk authority to prevent the confusion when many voices are talking at once. Finally, when we have considered an item for a length of time, we trust the clerk to discern if we need to let the matter rest in order to 'season', or to discern what the Spirit has told us, even when no one person has expressed the idea clearly. And of course we trust our clerk to represent us in outside forums without vetting what they might say.

That is quite a lot of responsibility. And, as I said, no one is a ready-made clerk, ready to handle all of that. (Nor do we really expect one person to handle it all – we tend to have a team nowadays.) We look for someone who is willing to grow into the role, to discover their inner *authority* and to use their *power* wisely. We try to support them with mentors (former clerks for instance, or a support committee). We allow them to learn from the inevitable mistakes. In fact we all learn from such mistakes, and we forgive ourselves and each other.

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A Circle of Love

KAYE WRIGHT | QUEENSLAND REGIONAL MEETING

We were on the bus, heading home. There were two more clients to drop off, Geoffrey and Jacqui who both live with dementia.

Jacqui and Geoffrey's conversation in the bus goes something like this:

Geoffrey: Where do you live? (for the fourth time).

Jacqui: Well, my mother likes to do that.

Geoffrey: But where do you live?

Jacqui: I like the blue one.

Staff (me): Jacqui, I think you live in Hampton, don't you? (for the fourth time).

Jacqui: My mother says so.

On the surface level, this seems gobbledegook but on a deeper level the conversation could be translated as:

Geoffrey: I like you, Jacqui and I like to ask people questions to find out more about them and to know them better. Where do you live?

Jacqui: Well, I have no idea where I live and have let go of most of the facts of my life. But I still love my mother and think of her often. By the way, I like you too, Geoffrey.

The bus stops and I get off with Geoffrey to take him inside but Jacqui insists on coming with us. I try to encourage Jacqui to stay on the bus but she is determined. So instead, I invite Jacqui to accompany us, as we see Geoffrey inside.

As we approach Geoffrey's front door, we stop momentarily and I hold out my hand to Geoffrey. He takes it and then holds out his hand to Jacqui. I then follow Geoffrey's lead and reach my free hand out to Jacqui so that we create a circle.

We all look at each other and smile. Something akin to love passes between us. At that moment, we are not two clients and one staff but three people sharing and creating something eternal.

We drop our hands, say goodbye to Geoffrey and then Jacqui and I return to the bus.

The three of us are moved, I think and enriched.

I could feel Presence. I reckon we all could.

Blessed be.

AF

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But there is a practical way we can all support our clerk. In our business meetings we are not twenty Friends plus a clerk; we are twenty clerks helping the Clerk we have appointed. Foremost, we support the clerk in our prayer. Knowing that those in the meeting pray in order that the Spirit can prevail gives great strength to a clerk.

In a more material way, we question ourselves about how we go about business matters. For instance, we can be thoughtful in proposing items for business. 'Have I given this to the clerk in good time so that the clerk can be prepared?' (The key is 'unhurried consideration'.) We ask ourselves, 'Is this item just a good idea that I hope someone else will carry out?' (Hmm, perhaps I should try doing it myself first!) 'Is this something I want others to know about?' (Could I put it in an

announcement or newsletter?) 'Is it a concern just forming in my mind?' (I should test it with others first!) In the meeting itself, we can ask 'Am I wanting my own idea to prevail or am I waiting to hear the Spirit?' (Maybe step back a bit.) We can also ask 'When others speak, am I listening deeply as a clerk?' (Good!) 'When I speak, am I helping the meeting to a clearer vision of the way forward, or am I just repeating my own take on the matter?' (Time to sit down!)

And at all times, we can be helpful by 'clerking' from the other side of the desk – pointing out when we have lost our way (clerks get lost too!), offering help when a minute does not seem to hit the target, giving practical suggestions when the clerk is struggling. We all bear responsibility for 'right ordering' of the meeting.

In this way, each of us can exert power over ourself so that the meeting can focus on waiting on the Spirit rather than debating or talking in circles. And in this way we support the appointed clerk(s) to carry out the responsibility we have put on them.

So my prayer is that our meetings will continue to find people who are ready to grow into the roles of clerk, that we will support them as they grow into the role, and that we will encourage them not to be afraid to use the power we have given them. And I hope that when the call comes to any of us to step up to a clerking role, we will not automatically say 'No, I can't do that', but will prayerfully consider what Divine Assistance will help us to do, and so to take up such a role with humble confidence.

AF



QSA Notes

So many changes at QSA

FLEUR BAYLEY | QSA PROJECT MANAGER



Ai Leen at the QSA popup stationery store outside the Stanmore office

Move from the Stanmore office

Following post-COVID changes in working habits, it has been decided to close the QSA office in Stanmore. With most staff now working part-time from home and the move to more online work, the need for a bricks-and-mortar office has declined.

So in mid-August, we completed the move out from QSA's home of more than five years. It was a big job! With hard work and dedication, we managed to recycle or re-home most of the surplus office equipment and supplies without contributing very much to landfill. Fleur and Ai Leen set up a temporary store, and the neighbouring businesses took advantage of free furniture, stationery and office equipment. Most of the paperwork has gone to the Wahroonga

meeting house for storage, pending further sorting and digitisation (there's a wealth of QSA history in those boxes!).

QSA has secured a shared workspace in North Sydney that provides a work area for individual staff should they need it and a location for meetings, training and other gatherings.

Change of address and phone numbers

We will shortly send messages to all regular donors, regional meetings, etc, to advise our new official address and contact details.

In the meantime, we can be contacted at:

Phone: 0413 193 380 (Pia Reiersen)

Email: administration@qsa.org.au

Post: 59 Boundary Road, Wahroonga NSW 2076



Jessie, the office pooch, helped with the move, including taking gear to storage in Wahroonga. She'll miss going to the office!

During the transition period over recent months, we've had problems with our office phone number. Our sincere apologies to those who have had problems contacting us by phone, and thanks to Jackie Perkins for continuing to field calls on her private phone.

Pia is leaving us

Due to urgent family commitments, Pia is returning shortly to Norway, and QSA has advertised for a replacement

Executive Administrator. Pia will continue to support QSA projects in India and Australia until a new project staff manager is appointed.

We are sad to see her go, and we wish her well.



QSA is a member of the Australian Council for International Development and is a signatory to the ACFID Code of Conduct. The purpose of QSA is to express in a practical way the concern of Australian Quakers for the building of a more peaceful, equitable, just and compassionate world. To this end QSA works with communities in need to improve their quality of life with projects which are culturally sensitive, as well as being economically and environmentally appropriate and sustainable.

Find us on Facebook for more photos and stories: facebook.com/quakerserviceaustralia.

59 Boundary Road, Wahroonga NSW 2076 Australia • administration@qsa.org.au

• ABN 35 989 797 918





They are a law unto themselves

DAVID JOHNSON | QUEENSLAND REGIONAL MEETING

A person who behaves independently, ignoring the normal rules in a society, and sometimes even the legal laws, is sometimes described as "a law unto himself". It is a complete reversal of the Biblical text quoted. This modern use points to people who imagine they are the ones who know best, that their own agendas are justified.

The original meaning was non-Jews (Gentiles) who instinctively or thoughtfully followed ways of behaving which are contained in the Laws of the Torah were righteous, even though these Gentiles had never been taught the Law. Here is the biblical text as expressed in The Inclusive Bible (TIB) and the Revised Standard Version (RSV):

All who sin independently of the Law will also perish independently of the Law; and all who sin under the Law will be judged by the Law. It is not those who hear the Law who are just before God, but those who keep the Law who will be justified. For instance, when Gentiles [non-Jews] do naturally the things required by the Law, they are a law unto themselves, even though they don't have the Law. They demonstrate the demands of the Law are written on their hearts – they have a witness – their own conscience. (Rom. 2:12-15 TIB)

All who have sinned without [i.e. outside] the law will also perish without the law, and all who have sinned under the law will be judged by the law. For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified. When Gentiles who have not the law do by nature what

the law requires, they are a law to themselves, even though they do not have the law. They show that what the law requires is written on their hearts, while their conscience also bears witness. (Rom. 2:12-15 RSV)

The biblical comment by St Paul is poignant in that he, as Saul earlier in his life, had applied the law of the Torah so strictly and harshly that he was a leading persecutor of the early Christians, known then as the People of the Way, hunting them down from house to house and dragging them off to prison (Acts 22:3-5, 26:4-11; Gal. 1: 11-24). He was the person at whose feet those who stoned to death the first Christian martyr Stephen, laid their clothes as a sign he was witnessing and approving their behaviour (Acts 7:54-8:1).

Yet now as a Christian evangelist, Paul is teaching that the Christians who follow the divine Light of Christ in the conscience, in obedience to God, are following God's will perfectly. This Light leads to reconciliation with God, to personal freedom from sin, that is salvation, in a way which could never be achieved by the animal sacrifices demanded in the Hebrew scriptures. The law of the Torah was insufficient (Heb. 10: 1-18).

The real law is inward, written on the tablets of our hearts (Jer. 31:31-34; Heb. 8:8-12), and there we experience the judging our deepest thoughts and attitudes (Heb. 4:12-13). The ancient Hebrews knew this experience, as recorded in their Scriptures:

And you, Solomon my son, know the God of your father, and serve him with a whole heart and with a willing mind, for the LORD searches

all hearts, and understands every plan and thought (1 Chron. 28:9 RSV).

The spirit of man is the lamp of the Lord, searching all his innermost parts (Prov. 20:27 RSV)

Every way of man is right in his own eyes, but the LORD weighs the heart (Prov. 21: 2 RSV)

I hold fast my righteousness, and will not let it go; my heart does not reproach me for any of my days (Job 27:6 RSV).

The underlying supreme instruction in the Torah – to love God above all else – was in Paul's experience (Phil. 3:4-9), and in the experience of the first Christians, fulfilled and replaced by the requirement to follow God's light in their consciences, as expressed in the extracts selected below:

- *Christ will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and manifest the intentions of hearts (1 Cor. 4:5 TIB)*
- *For our boast is this, the testimony of our conscience that we have behaved in the world, and still more toward you, with holiness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God. (2 Cor. 1:12 RSV)*
- *For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. (Heb. 10:1-2 KJV)*
- *Pray for us, for we are confident that we have a clear conscience, wishing*

to act rightly in every respect. (Heb. 13:18)

- *This charge I commit to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophetic utterances which pointed to you, that inspired by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have made shipwreck of their faith. (1 Tim. 1:18-19 RSV)*
- *In your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence; and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. (1 Peter 3:15-16 RSV)*
- *Beloved, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God (1 John 3:21 RSV)*

This is the fundamental principle of Quaker spirituality, as preached by the first- and second-generation Quakers in the mid-1600s. These first Friends found the Light to be an infallible guide. Their experience was that following this Light not only reconciled individual souls to God, but also brought people together with a profound sense of unity, being members one of another in the body of Christ.

*To that in your conscience I appeal, which Christ hath enlightened you withal, which calls you to repentance, which shews you your evil deeds, which will be your teacher, owning and loving it; and your condemnation, hating it. Now you have time prize it; this is the day of your visitation. (George Fox, ca. 1651)*¹

On her return in the evening, Margaret Fell met him who "opened a book that we had never read in, nor indeed had never heard that it was

*our duty to read in it (to wit) the Light of Christ in our consciences, our minds never being turned towards it before." (Margaret Fell, 1652)*²

*But an Eternal Witness we have in all your Consciences, which by the Word of Power is awakened in you, by which we are known, by which we are owned, by which we are witnessed and received into your Hearts, wherein our Unity stands with you who are faithful unto it, by which we are remembered unto you though far Absent in Body (James Parnell, 1655?)*³

*So in all things mind that of God in you, the Light which shews sin in the Conscience, and reproves the evil-doer in all his ways, that in the Light you may receive the wisdom that is pure, and in that wisdom to order all things you have in charge, to the glory and praise of Almighty God. (William Smith, 1668)*⁴

This does not mean that all Christians or Quakers are more perfect, because Christians do not necessarily follow the Light in their conscience anymore consistently and faithfully than did the ancient Hebrews and Jews follow the supreme law of the Torah, the great commandment laid down by Moses (Deut. 6:5), emphasised by Samuel (1 Sam. 15:22) and confirmed by Jesus (Matt. 22:36-40; Mark 12:28-31; Luke 10:27) – love God with all your heart and mind and soul.

Paul is saying that those who follow this inward law, whether Jews or Gentiles or Christians, are on the Way to salvation, and are brought into unity (Gal 3:28; Col. 3:12-14). The historical enmity is broken.

Historical persecution of Jews is just as evil as persecution of any other peoples, even the ancient Hebrews of the tribes of Canaan, even the persecution of First

Peoples by European colonisers. The early colonisers were outside the divine law, following laws of their own making which suited their own profiteering. These invaders did not obey the inward Law of Christ, did not affirm natural justice, did not listen to and follow the laws of the land into which they came. They followed the common usage of being a law unto themselves, putting their own greed and ambitions in front of the inward law of Christ. To be truly a law unto yourself is to follow God's law within yourself, not to do what suits you.

END NOTES

1 George Fox, ca 1651. A doctrinal paper *To All That Would Know The Way To The Kingdom*: Works, Volume 4, p.31.

2 Isobel Ross, *Margaret Fell Mother of Quakerism, Second Edition*. York, England: William Sessions Book Trust, 1984, p..10-11. The quote is from a letter in the Spence Manuscripts Volume III, now in the Library of the Society of Friends, London.

3 James Parnell, ?1655. *An Epistle To Friends in: A collection of the several writings given forth from the Spirit of the Lord through that meek, patient, and suffering servant of God, James Parnel, who, though a young man, bore a faithful testimony for God and dyed a prisoner under the hands of a persecuting generation in Colchester Castle in the year 1656*, published 1675, p. 454.

4 William Smith, 1668. *Universal love In which a visitation floweth through the creation, that all people may be informed into the truth, and in their several places come to walk in the truth, and live in the truth, to be a good favour unto God, and honour God*. The Second Edition. See page 21. <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/eebo/a60664.0001.001>

AF



Meeting for learning in Queensland

JUDITH PEMBLETON | QUEENSLAND REGIONAL MEETING

Some Queensland Friends who have experienced the Meeting for Learning (MfL) program in past years would like to invite the Meeting for Learning program to return to Queensland in 2024 and are wondering if Friends from other states would be interested in attending.

If you are unsure what committing to the two-year Meeting for Learning program would involve, the description on the AYM website is a comprehensive description:

The Retreat is part of a year-long program, with a Retreat week marking each end of the journey. For most of the program, individuals remain part of their regular community; the residential Retreats provide the opportunity for individuals to commence and complete their MfL spiritual journey in the company of other members and attenders from around Australia. It is a time of inner seeking of the Spirit and learning about Quaker ways in company. During the year projects are chosen and undertaken by each member, with encouragement from their support group.

The size of the group is restricted to approximately 16 retreatants, guided by up to four facilitators. The facilitators provide reading materials, exercises and spiritual guidance to assist each participant. The resources provided allow retreatants to develop their knowledge of Quaker writings and beliefs, and to reflect on their own spiritual journey.

The format of each day is similar (with the exception of the silent day mid-week), allowing time for discussion, exploration and reflection. During the Retreat, some activities are carried out

as a whole group, some in small groups, and some are undertaken individually. Both structured and unstructured time is included. A highlight of the retreat week is a silent day mid-week.

Individual Friends' experiences will be different, but two personal reflections are offered to provide a flavour of what it can offer:

Margid Bryn-Burns' experience

Participating decades ago in a New Zealand adult education workshop, which I'd stumbled into quite by mistake, I commented after some time to a fellow student about how excellent this particular course was.

'I agree' she replied, adding: 'They're Quakers you know.'

And, for me, taking part in the Meeting for Learning programme was a similar realisation, allowing me to appreciate just what over three hundred years of accumulated knowledge and learning, tempered by the Spirit, can offer.

Others who attended with me in 2014 may have had previous similar experiences. For me, it was the first time of experiencing convalescence for both my being and my soul.

It was a week of discovery and recovery, a time to explore and heal in a totally accepting and supportive environment, an opportunity for openness and honesty and, so to gently grow; a quiet, informally disciplined programme with superb facilitators. This programme – compared to most learning undertakings – was minimalist, yet, as I have experienced in other Quaker undertakings: Less is More

The programme involved large groups as well as small intimate group work. Lots of time for private contemplation with beautiful gardens

and open spaces available. One-on-one sessions with a facilitator offered intimacy and support.

I contacted other 2014 participants requesting their responses and they wrote of it being spiritually enriching, of how the programme supported a deepening of relationships and their gratitude for having participated.

For some it can be a struggle to make time and for others it could be both time and a financial stretch. This is always recognised by those who have the task of organising this event and some financial support is offered by the participants' home Meeting.

Judith Pembleton's experience

I joined Queensland Friends for my second Meeting for Learning week and at first felt a little out of step as most of the others were in their first week, but the program is flexible and I was nurtured by the fellowship of seekers who were open and supportive of one another. Of those who participated, most of us have formed groups that continue to meet and offer spiritual support. Our 2004 MfL group has been meeting monthly for close to 20 years.

My first week was in Melbourne where one participant's reflections on her experience captured much of the hesitation on joining something new followed by the joy of the week-long unfolding. This Friend is no longer in contact with Australian Friends, so I could not check her permission to include her words in this article, but this article was shared generally at that time.

I arrived in Melbourne expecting to be full of energy. I wasn't. I clammed up and closed down. The atmosphere

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Reflections

MICHAEL CORBETT | QUEENSLAND REGIONAL MEETING

Every once in a while, I like to reflect on past events and remember either the pleasure or pain, achievements or failures. I try to evaluate what I can do to correct the pain and failures during what little time I have left on the earth whilst enjoying my achievements.

Sometimes out of the depth of memories a whole chain reaction begins. These past few days, I have been remembering my journey to Nairobi in April 2012. I had received an invitation to the World Conference of Friends in Kenya. These World Conferences are rare occurrences due the enormous costs, so it could be my one chance to join a World Gathering. So, I accepted, packed my bags and went to join at least 1000 Quakers from across the world.

But here I must pause, and go back before April 2012, so that you will understand my state of mind during the Gathering. I need to set the scene as it were.

I was re-appointed by QRM to be the FWCC Qld Representative for a 3-year term, starting in September 2011. At the December 2011 QRM, some in the Meeting objected to me taking the role which I had been given.

The year 2012 started out to be my annus horribilis. The damage suffered by me continued through the AYM in January and into the QRM in February. A comment heard by me at this meeting was that *it seems as if we have lost our confidence in our nominations process.*

I was so deeply hurt and offended by this continuing extraordinary bad behaviour of a few Friends, both from Qld and interstate, that I left the RM asking, 'how can I ever return?'

In August 2012 a Minute was written saying *We acknowledge the*

confusion, pain wrought and the mistake in Quaker process we all made. We ask forgiveness.

Not one single person from QRM ever contacted me to talk to me.

I knew my mental state was deteriorating, my office was starting to talk about restructuring the area that I was working in, which was stressful, and I was not coping at home, so the pressures came from three angles. The 'black dog' was my constant companion.

To arrive in Nairobi and participate in the Gathering offered me some hope, I spent the time talking to people who didn't know me, but the thought of resigning from Friends was beginning to grow.

I recall that someone had once said that *Quakerism - a fantastic religion - too bad about some of its practitioners.*

This was my state of mind as I went through the Gathering. So, eventually I thought that the only thing that I can do to ease my mental state of mind was to resign from QRM and I sent an email to the QRM Clerk from Nairobi.

That was the pain aspect of where I was at the time, the pleasure was being with all the other Friends from around the world. They were using a university and the campus was very large with a variety of accommodation.

The sights, sounds and colours of clothing, the movement [and noise] of 1000 Friends at times were amazing. Music was everywhere and our Meetings were a combination of Evangelical and Unprogrammed Friends - silence and singing. They also had to cater for languages and on the main floor, there were set up small booths that gave instant translations using English, Swahili, Spanish and French and these were transmitted to

sections of the seating where one could use headphones, which meant that the ones giving the address had given a copy of their text to the translators and spoke in a measured speed.

Then came an address from Jocelyn Bell Burnell titled 'Friends living the Kingdom of God in a broken world'. As background, Jocelyn describes herself as scientist - an astronomer - studying stars and galaxies and black holes and one who studies birth, life and death of our universe.

I don't recall much of the first part of her address; I still have the text but it sort of washed over me. However, when Jocelyn started the second part, she had 110 per cent of my attention. And this is the part of this article that I want to share with you, and I will quote some of the main points.

Jocelyn said:

The second part of my message, about brokenness, is much harder - harder for me and harder for you, and I ask that together we hold a moment of quiet, and in that quiet, each pray to God for the strength to be really honest. ... We live on a broken planet; in our communities there are broken people. We want to heal brokenness, wherever we see it. It is uncomfortable for us, as well as we as being uncomfortable for the person or thing that hurts. If someone is grieving, for example, we ask kindly how they are, hoping that they will say they are fine, so we can go on our way unperturbed. ... We encourage people to get over their problem and get back to normal ... Here's the part where I need your help and honesty. Please think about your response to the following questions:

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One Caregiver's Journey With Dementia

BY ANNE FELTON

Pendle Hill Pamphlet 477 Wallingford PA
October 2022. ISBN 978-0-87574-477-3

Anne Felton's career as a field research geologist lasted for 35 years. She married one of her geology professors, Keith, and lived happily at the time of Keith's illness in Eden, a picturesque town on the New South Wales south coast. Late in life, Keith was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. Anne, was terrified, and, given the popular conception of Alzheimer's disease as something that could make the sufferer a vegetable, and become "a non-person, a living death or shell", it is not surprising.

Anne read the literature about the illness, which was not re-assuring. It emphasized the biomedical aspects of dementia, the loss of personhood, the social stigma and fear. It also

concentrated on managerial aspects of caregiving, and how to do the endless tasks more efficiently.

What surprised Anne was the lack of any spiritual dimension, and the view of the mind as the repository of intellectual knowledge and memory. She asked herself why should the rational mind be the centrality of what it means to be a person?

Throughout the onset of Keith's condition, Anne maintained her daily spiritual practices of meditation, prayer and devotional reading. One night, she attended a talk by Christine Boden Bryden about finding Spirit in her own journey as a person with dementia.

She found that an author, Elizabeth MacKinley, had accompanied Christine as her spiritual companion and advisor. Anne read her books which opened up a new world. Henceforward, she looked to God becoming more fully present in her own life.

And he did. In late 2013, some five years after Keith's diagnosis, she was attending a gathering at Silver Wattle Quaker centre in rural New South Wales. As she walked in, a bright light struck at her, and a voice boomed "You will study Spiritual Direction." She

did. She found that Silver Wattle's daily routine of a Quaker meeting for worship in the morning, shared prayer and work, study and rest time, suited Keith, and he became calmer and found it easier to communicate.

After eight years at home, Keith entered residential care. Anne was exhausted after two years of 24-7 caregiving. To her relief, Keith took to his new circumstances well. She became convinced that holding a deep silence together connected them to God and each other. She wrote that as Keith's dementia took hold, she noticed his personhood more and more, his innate gentleness, his faithfulness, his kindness. There was something else. Keith seemed to have acquired another faculty: he found that he could feel the presence of aboriginal spirits around Lake George near Silver Wattle, and at a sheltered location between the hills and the sea near Eden.

In Keith's last days, Keith showed Spirit working in him. Anne could see from his wondering, open face, that he was in peace.

REG NAULTY

Canberra and Region Quakers.

MEETING FOR LEARNING – CONTINUED FROM PAGE 20

was soothing, like balm to my aching body. I sat down in the circle. I felt tired and heavy. I wanted to cry. I realised how much energy it took to maintain my façade of coping, how much energy it took to maintain my life – the daily duties, the physical, emotional and mental demands. I took the load off.

A week didn't seem like it would be long enough. Would I have to go inside and sort out the mess before I even started to emerge?

I didn't even have the energy to think about it. Yet something guided me through the fog, something that knew my pain and knew what it would take to heal and strengthen me.

There was a plan – the physical structure of our days, the topics for discussion, the resource file of inspirational writings and leadings. Then there was the spiritual journey we were all on as individuals, seemingly external to our conscious selves yet

intrinsic. Then there was the group dynamic. I looked around at this group of people on Day One and knew we would create something great together.

For one week I lived in the moment. I lived in the presence of being connected. I surrendered to a Being – both a state and a divine entity, far greater than myself – which loved me and showed me the way ... The group

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Do you carry feelings of grief, or sense of loss? Perhaps someone close to you died or gone away? Have you failed in some way? Do you have a long-term illness or disability? Are you in a body that shows serious signs of age? Do you carry some hurt, some wound? If you have answered 'yes' to any of these, if you can, please stand up. And I will stand with you.

As I rose to my feet, I heard the almost silent 'whoosh' as a large number of people also stood. I could not see clearly, there were tears running down my face, I was not the only one with tears. My tears came as a feeling of relief, that someone had put into words a message and through it I realised that I was living in a broken world. The worshipful silence was audible, palpable and long lasting.

Jocelyn continued:

I believe that those of us who are wounded have a special ministry, because we are wounded, because we are hurt. I cannot tell you what your ministry is, only you can find that, but I am sure that there amongst us people who can speak to needs in this world because they know about hurt. Your ministry might be to help people who have been hurt like you but are behind you on the road. The US author, Thornton Wilder said – 'in love's service only the wounded can serve'. So do not rush into healing too fast; remember there may be ministry for you in your woundedness. That I am

sure about. Your wound may heal some day and that piece of your ministry will be over for you and will be taken up by others ... Just as there is ministry for the wounded in our community, is there a role for a wounded community? Is the Religious Society of Friends a broken community? Are we a broken community, a broken people, a broken society? Do we, through our brokenness have a role in God's plan?

I have carried this message with me – that more than my own self is broken, it goes beyond being able to cope in my family circle, I was ready to walk away from my job after 30 years of service as I could not cope with the stress, and I walked away from my faith community and wandered in the 'desert' for far too long.

Nairobi was not all doom and gloom. I have still a rich kaleidoscope of memories. On one trip we stopped for a break. There was a sign that said, 'from this place the first man walked out of the Rift Valley and spread throughout the world'. We were high on one wall of the valley; the opposite side could not be seen.

The Great Rift Valley runs for 6000 kms and is, in some places, 22 kms wide. It starts in the south of Africa, in Mozambique, and runs through Tanzania, Kenya, up past Ethiopia through to Jordan and Lebanon.

I went on a trip to a wildlife park and saw giraffes, zebras, antelope and buffalo – all totally ignoring us. I saw a saltwater lake where there are supposed

to be in excess of one million flamingos, all peachy/orange in colour, all walking the same way feeding on the brine shrimps. The baboons were a challenge – one of them stole a lady's handbag and descended over the parapet. She never got the bag back.

The last sight was just as dusk was falling on the way to the exit a large lioness was asleep on a branch of a tree. She would have been resting before starting the night's hunting. I visited a flint factory first discovered by one of the Leakey family that was maybe 20,000+ years old.

There is also a photo somewhere of me standing, legs astride, one each side of the line of the equator. Knowing the stress I had been living with, after the Gathering, I took a side trip to Mombasa and sat on a beach for five days with my companion 'the black dog'. I returned home with Jocelyn's words running through my mind.

And I was able to add the line from Desiderata:

in the noisy confusion of life keep peace within your soul. With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams it still is a beautiful world. Be careful. Strive to be happy.

I am grateful that I was able to see the wildlife, to explore some of Kenya and experience of being with 1000 Quakers from all over this sometimes-broken world. My 'broken' story continued for a long time but that's for another day.

AF

sessions seemed gentle and unobtrusive. And yet there was power and intensity behind the questions. I asked myself far-reaching questions about spiritual nurture and fulfilment within my faith community.

I verbalised my doubts, concerns and insecurities. The process is as important as the content and I therefore allowed myself to grow.

I used my contemplation time to record my insights, to listen to God and get replies. From Tuesday evening to Thursday morning, we had a period of silence like an extended Meeting for Worship. It was truly wonderful.'

In the year-long gap between the retreat weeks, each participant chooses a project – it may be working on meditating more regularly, or writing

a record of your experience; for one participant, it was to attend Pendle Hill Quaker College in the US for a year.

If you are interested in participating in Meeting for Learning Retreats in Queensland, please contact Margid Bryn-Burns or Judith Pembleton.

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