

FRIENDS JOURNAL

QUAKER THOUGHT AND LIFE TODAY

11/2026



Quaker
Fiction

ANNUAL

*Books
Issue*

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Friends Journal November 2026

It's Reading Weather

Where I live, in the Wissahickon Creek Watershed, it's full-on autumn. By the time this letter reaches you, the brilliantly colored red and yellow leaves that are falling now at even the slightest breeze will be a brown carpet of leaf litter, providing insulation and nourishment to the forest floor, not to mention cover for animals who will be hunkering down for even colder weather soon. I've swapped the short-sleeve shirts that were in my closet with the flannels that were in storage, and a chunky second-hand wool cardigan with well-worn leather buttons is what I find myself reaching for in the cool mornings to keep me warm while the coffee brews.

This is reading weather. Welcome to November, where it is our custom to treat readers to an expanded book review section, and where, for the sixth year now, our editors have curated a collection of fiction by Friends. Fittingly for this season of harvest, it's a bumper crop.

Where will you start? Perhaps with some flash fiction like George Lukalo's near-death "Journey of Grace" or Eric Sableman's dreamlike "The Line of Walkers," each vivid and memorable in ways that belie their brevity. Then on to "Barn Cat" by Vicki Winslow, which for me resonates with Brad Sheeks's review of *Love in a Different Way: A Journey Through Dementia* found in this issue's Books section. As Winslow's character Frances would put it, "Show me a coincidence; I'll show you God directing my attention."

Glenn Morison's "Quitting and Starting" inhabits a Quaker meeting riven by speculation, shock, and shame, as the reader wrestles, like its characters, with questions many of us face in our real lives. What goes said, and what goes unsaid? Can we ever truly know what goes on behind our neighbors' closed doors? Even in his absence, the central figure dominates the community he had to leave behind.

In "Encounter with Razor Wire," Margaret Crompton dramatizes the quintessentially Quaker work of prison visitation, moving between spaces of freedom and unfreedom, humanizing both those who are caught up in the criminal-judicial machinery and those whose care surrounds them.

Beck Daniel Wren, recently featured by Roxane Gay in her "Emerging Writer Series," brings us "Starlings," which to me evokes Robert Heinlein, Franz Kafka, and John Steinbeck, and in which we see society's xenophobia refracted and glistening, like light scattered by the wings of the titular birds.

There's no wrong way to work your way through a bounty like this. I hope you enjoy these stories, and I hope you'll pass this issue along to a friend.

Yours in peace,



Gabriel Ehri
Executive Director
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Write for FJ: Friendsjournal.org/submissions

- **Open Issue** (due November 23 and January 18)
- **Ecology and Eco-Spirituality** (due December 21)
- **Friends in Africa** (due February 22)



Let Your Money Speak: Integrity in Practice

See page 28 for a reflective essay from Diana Yañez, who looks back on the season and shares examples of Friends aligning their money with their values.

Claim our record too

Before Quakers put Bayard Rustin on the banner (“The Gay Quaker Civil Rights Organizer That History Forgot,” *QuakerSpeak.com* Oct.), they should read their own files. In 1953 he was arrested in Pasadena, Calif., on a “morals charge” while on a speaking tour the American Friends Service Committee was paying for. AFSC’s response was to cancel the rest of his talks. Two years later he was one of the main authors of *Speak Truth to Power*, AFSC’s famous 1955 peace pamphlet. Some people objected to his name being on it, so it came off. The board didn’t put his name back until 2010, more than 20 years after he died. AFSC’s explanation is that Rustin “assented” to his name’s removal so the paper could be published. That’s a polite way of saying he was erased with his own reluctant signature on it. Speaking truth to power was apparently easier to print than to practice. Claim him, by all means. Just claim the record too.

Bruce Grant
Philadelphia, Pa., via Facebook

Chafing at obedience

The challenge of religious obedience is difficult for modern Liberal Friends (“The Law of the Lord Is Perfect” by Ron Hogan, *Look to the Light* on *Quaker.org*, Sept. 28). We celebrate our individualistic freedom to approach the Divine in ways we self-determined, and we are open to suggestions from Quaker tradition. But we rebel at any

suggestion of obedience. This pride is our golden calf.

John Smallwood
Staunton, Va.

My interpretation of Isaac Penington is that he describes his own inner experience—consistent with Quakerism being an experiential religion—and tries to reconcile it with the doctrine of God’s perfection. Penington asks, “Can Christ and his light be separated?” because it is a real question he was struggling with, as do we.

Eric Sabelman
Santa Rosa, Calif.

The wingspan of time

In this era of “alternative facts,” there is so much good counterfactual work to be done. In “Restoring the Timeline” (by S.E.W. Smith, *FJ* Oct.), the author can find as many forms as there are Friends to envision them. Smith’s sharing of Elise Boulding’s conception of a “200-year present” reminded me of a dear friend’s similar conceit: that of “the Warm.” Essentially, this wingspan of time extends from the oldest person you meet when you are very young to the youngest person you meet at the oldest age you grow into—with whom you have exchanged a handshake, a hug, a breath shared in silent worship. Expressed in words: bodily warmth. Like hands clasping at the rise of meeting, these connections reach in many directions.

Theo Black
Ithaca, N.Y.

Author S.E.W. Smith was interviewed for our *Quaker Talk* podcast. Watch the video, “Living the 200-Year Present” at *Friendsjournal.org/s-e-w-smith*.

The potential of Friends education

I’d be curious for author Jack Tripp (“Toward a Quaker Pedagogy,” *FJ* Oct. online) to compare the pedagogy of what he learned when becoming a teacher with what he remembers from Quaker school. How are they similar? How are they different? What types

of restrictions might a public school require of him that would limit his ability to use or follow a Quaker pedagogy?

Rebecca Lucas
Elgin, Ill., via Facebook

In my years teaching at a Friends school, I used the Harkness method to run class discussion. Students came up with the queries, ran the discussion, and tracked and evaluated their performance. My job was to take notes, listen, and occasionally ask a clarifying question or try to summarize things. These could be amazing, deep sessions. The best ones were like a gathered meeting, where each student offered something that became part of a collective truth.

Roger Reynolds
Bristol, Maine

I believe an overemphasis on Quaker SPICES can result in a sort of dilution, even an unmooring, of Quaker faith and practice, not because the values themselves are objectionable—they are not!—but because they are not just values but ways of bearing witness to the spiritual, moral, and political revolution that Christ is bringing forth upon the world. Attempting to summarize Quakerism in terms of five or six pithy, respectable values feels to me like yet another bourgeoisification of a faith that has been struggling for decades, maybe centuries, not to get swallowed up in middle-class habits of mind and living.

Cristina
Montreal, Quebec

I have come to an answer that we Friends live from the wisdom of the heart, and that we have an orthopraxis rather than orthodoxy. Our practice is to stop; be still; listen to Spirit through our hearts; and follow its wisdom.

Damian Marshall
Kalorama, Australia

Author Jack Tripp was interviewed for our *Quaker Talk* podcast. Watch the video, “Balancing Belief and Practice,” at *Friendsjournal.org/jack-tripp*.

Forum letters should be sent with the writer’s name and location to *forum@friendsjournal.org*. Each letter is limited to 300 words and may be edited for length and clarity. Letters should be direct responses to published content; we do not accept letters on general topics or addressed to previous letters. We invite readers to engage in discussions in our online comment sections, located at the bottom of every published webpage; we frequently use online comments for our print Forum.

Barn Cat

Vicki Winslow

When Clifton Sykes entered the Pine Knot Grill, the bell on the door jingled merrily. The hum and rattle of breakfast used to lift his spirits whenever he and Frances came in together and slid into a booth opposite Jason and Myra Turner. Now that Frances was living in Willow Glen Memory Care, Clifton had one whole lonesome side of the booth to himself.

As he sat, Jason called out, “Nancy, you shouldn’t serve a fellow grits that are still boiling. My mouth is ruined.”

Nancy, moving from table to table with the

Vicki Winslow earned a master of fine arts in creative writing from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro and has published short stories in literary and online journals. She serves as clerk of Liberty (N.C.) Meeting. Read more of her work at The Cabinet of Curiosities: vickiwinslow.substack.com.

coffee pot, shook her head and poured coffee for Clifton. “Seems like your mouth’s working all too well. Grits are hot, Jason; that’s life. What you having, Clifton?”

“Scrambled eggs, sausage, grits, and toast.”

Myra, short and round with bright dark eyes and bulldog jowls that disappeared when she smiled, couldn’t resist chiming in, “Ought to warn you, Clif, the grits are hot.”

“So I hear.”

He’d known the Turners so long that sitting with them in the Pine Knot felt like home. Better than home, now that his life had spiraled into a woeful country song—his dog dead, his wife gone, his son stationed in Germany and seldom able to visit.

He felt Myra’s eyes on his face. “Clifton, the Methodist Church sent a text. They want the Barn Cats to play at their fall festival.”

Clifton nearly fumbled his coffee cup. “We can’t

play without Frances,” he said flatly. The four of them had played bluegrass and gospel as the Barn Cats for nearly 15 years—Frances on keyboard, Clifton on his Gibson, Myra and Jason on fiddle and banjo.

Jason focused on his toast. Myra persisted. “I don’t propose we try. Let’s play at Willow Glen; see if Frances will sing with us. I bet singing would do her a world of good. They say music really helps people with dementia.”

Clifton looked into his steaming grits. At one time, music had played in his head nonstop, a running soundtrack that matched his mood, whether light or dark. The music had stopped sometime in the past year, he couldn’t name exactly when.

Myra patted his hand. “At least think about it.”

Clifton drove to Willow Glen determined not to think about it. He had no heart for playing or singing. Bringing up the Barn Cats might upset Frances. Heck, it upset him, with his guitar hanging on the wall of the den gathering dust. At one time, his fingers itched to play it, but no more.

He found Frances in the nearly deserted dining room, finishing breakfast. She’d always been a slow eater. A new lady Clifton didn’t know sat with her. He brushed crumbs off the chair next to Fran’s and sat, nodding to the new resident. “How are you?”

She looked older than Frances, with eddies of thin white hair above a pale, puckered face. Her neck seemed too thin for her head, and a slight palsy made Clifton itch to stake her, like a sunflower. Her voice came out low and grating. “Not a bit good. I want to go home.”

Clifton, aware of his cowardice, turned to Frances. She looked pretty in her favorite yellow sweater.

“Got your hair done this morning, Frances? Looks real nice.”

Frances nodded, and stuck out one foot. “See these socks? I don’t know whose they are.”

Sure enough, she wore a pair of unfamiliar green socks. Dang it. He’d written her name in every stitch she owned, but the laundry always seemed to mix and redistribute residents’ laundry at random.

“I swear, I’m going to start washing your clothes at home. Why pay them extra to mess stuff up?” He reached over to help Frances remove the lid from a fruit cup.

The new lady’s head nodded. “Everything’s messed up. It’s not a bit like home.” Then to Frances, “Is that your husband?”

Frances looked thoughtful, a dot of nectar shining on her lower lip. “He’s my husband. Clifton Poole Sykes.”

Clifton nearly wept with relief. “Yep, married 54 years. What’s your name, ma’am?”

“Pam Baker. I used to bake—cakes, pies, cookies.” She continued

on about baked goods in her grating monotone while Frances slowly consumed diced fruit. Clifton thought Frances would never finish, but at last she did, and he stood to help his wife to her feet.

Pam Baker looked up at them. “You going home already?” Her neck wavered, and she gripped Clifton’s arm. “Pray for me. Pray the Lord will take me home, away from this messed-up place.”

Later that night, back at home, Clifton carried the trash outside after supper. Pam Baker’s words stuck in his head like a line from a country song: *Pray the Lord will take me home, away from this messed-up place*. A flash of movement startled him as a slim gray cat ran from the barn’s open double doors. He watched it streak into the woods and vanish.

Clifton had always scoffed when Frances pointed out what she called signs and portents. “That’s only a coincidence,” he’d tell her. “Doesn’t mean a thing.”

“There are no coincidences,” Frances would insist. “Show me a coincidence; I’ll show you God

“There are no coincidences,” Frances would insist. “Show me a coincidence; I’ll show you God directing my attention.”

directing my attention.”

Here, on the very day Myra Turner brought up the Barn Cats, a cat had taken up residence, however briefly, in his barn. *Show me a coincidence; I'll show you God directing my attention.*

“A stranger came by the house yesterday.” Clifton sat with Frances on the back patio at Willow Glen. “I looked out back, and a gray cat walked out of the barn like it owned the place. This morning, I saw it lying in the sun by the old pump. Looks like we’ve got us a barn cat.”

Frances stared at him. “A cat! Won’t Bella run it off?”

“Maybe not.” Clifton no longer reminded Frances that their retriever, Bella, had died three years back.

On Sunday during open worship, Clifton fought to keep his mind on spiritual matters and off the eternal hamster wheel of his to-do list: *Buy Frances toothpaste. Cancel laundry service. Order a new bedspread.* The Bible said there was a time for everything. Silent worship had become his time for fretting.

He redirected his thoughts by glancing at the bulletin in his hands. The Scripture reference, James 5:13, read: “Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise.” Clifton folded the bulletin twice and crammed it in his shirt pocket.

After meeting, he pulled into his driveway to eat a sandwich before heading to Willow Glen. A flash of movement by the barn caught his eye. The cat again. A heavy mix of aggravation and something close to despair washed over him. *Shut up!* he thought, wondering who in the world he was shushing. God?

He and Frances had been sitting in her room chatting for about 20 minutes when the Turners dropped by. Clifton offered his

chair to Myra and sat on the bed, shoulders tense. Sure enough, after several minutes of chit-chat, Myra asked, “Do you ever have any sing-alongs here, Fran?”

Clifton waited. He’d shut this down if Frances became confused or anxious.

Unperturbed, Frances cocked her head. “You know, I used to sing all the time.”

Myra almost came out of her chair. “Yes, you did! The Barn Cats made fine music. What’s your favorite song?”

Frances launched into “He Keeps Me Singing.” Myra jumped in; then Jason followed. Hearing their voices again, even without accompaniment, made Clifton’s heart soar, before it quickly plummeted

and broke into pieces. His mouth felt dry as sawdust while the others sang. “There’s within my heart a melody. . . .”

The half-open door to the room widened. Pam Baker sidled in, head bobbing. She stopped, one hand raised as if to conduct the singers or demand silence.

“Come in; come in!” Frances acted like the hostess at a party. “I’m Fran. Who are you?”

“Pam Baker. I used to bake.” She looked around the room. “I heard singing, and thought this might be the door to home. I beg your pardon.” She left, closing the door gently behind her.

They sang another verse, and Frances clapped.

Myra looked at Clifton, who wouldn’t meet her eyes. She said to the room, “Oh, that felt good. We’ll have to sing together again soon, Fran.”

Clifton pondered the situation on his drive home. Myra was right: Frances still enjoyed singing. But hearing them sing had only intensified Clifton’s sense of loss. He had no desire to sing, not even his favorite dark ballad by Del McCoury, “Rain and Snow.” *I married me a wife, she give me trouble all my life, left me out in the cold rain and snow. . . .*

No. Myra could sing with Frances all she wanted; the Barn Cats would never perform again. If the

Outside the barn, the wind swept him back toward the house, sang across his ear again—an extended note like the song of the barn cat but rising up triumphant and brave.

barn cat had been a sign, it pointed only toward closing those barn doors to keep critters out.

Closing the heavy wooden doors proved an effortful business. They'd become so deeply engaged with the earth and grass that the barn seemed rooted. Clifton hacked at the earth beneath the doors with a shovel to break the bond, finally freeing both doors enough for them to slide, haltingly, inch by inch. Though he strained every aging cell of his body, he couldn't close the final two feet of gap.

Clifton stripped off his work gloves as he walked to the house, flinging them onto the porch. A cool breeze bent the leaves on the hickory tree, revealing their pale, veined backs. Storm coming. Clifton watched the clouds blow in while contemplating his failure with the barn door. Then he remembered the Havahart trap he'd used to relocate a groundhog.

He hurried back to the barn with a chunk of ham for bait, pulled the trap free of a tangle of cobwebs, brushed it off, and snugged it into a corner. When the cat sought shelter from the storm, as it almost certainly would, the ham would draw it into the trap. He'd drop it at the animal shelter in the morning, and that would be the end of it.

Clifton made it to the house ahead of the first lashings of rain, which grew harder and steadier by bedtime. He awoke later to hear rain coming down in sheets. Miserable to be out in that mess, he thought, like the aggrieved husband in McCoury's ballad. The lament ran through his head. *Rain and*

snow, ohhh, oh Lord, left me out in the cold rain and snow.

Standing now, Clifton slipped a flashlight into the pocket of a rain jacket and fumbled into boots. He pulled the hood over his head and stumped down the steps into the backyard. After three steps the wind stripped the hood from his head. Rainwater stung his face. He walked on, wind howling past his ear, creating a hollow, mournful tone inside his head. He nearly laughed as the wind played him like the jug in a country band.

The downpour sounded intent on shattering the barn's tin roof. Clifton swung the light toward the trap in the corner and caught the glow of eyes. The gray cat emitted a low, rolling yawr—another ballad of pure grievance.

Clifton sang, long and sad, "Left you out in the cold rain and snow," an imitation of the cat's aching yowl. Rain drummed heavy on the tin. He strained to catch the beat, paired it with the wind he'd heard in his ears and tapped out a few notes on the side of the flashlight. The rain-song untied the knots in his shoulders.

As if in response, the cat made a low rumbling growl, more plaintive than angry. "You singing with me, or is that your version of 'Folsom Prison Blues'?" Clifton asked. "Don't you fret. I'll get you more ham in the morning before setting you loose. That'll blow your blues away. Well, good night then."

Outside the barn, the wind swept him back toward the house, sang across his ear again—an extended note like the song of the barn cat but rising up triumphant and brave. ■



Photo by Allison Christine on Unsplash



Robert came to our preparative meeting for the first time on the first Sunday in January, and he gave vocal ministry about the importance of simple living. Some were leery at his immediate comfort in our midst, while others were excited by the energy he brought. And his energy was a little contradictory. He was clearly excited about the value of simplifying his life but very flat in his actual style of speaking. Only later did we find out why.

Robert was an economics prof at the university and lived a few doors down from the union hall where we meet. In our worship-sharing time, Robert had talked about the ways he was being intentional in his journey of simplicity. But it wasn't until he put on one of our monthly education sessions that we understood the extent and full nature of his efforts.

Glenn Morison is a member of Winnipeg (Manitoba) Meeting, which is part of Canadian Yearly Meeting. In addition to committee work in his home meeting, he serves the Friends World Committee for Consultation Section of the Americas as co-clerk of the Representative Engagement Program Group. He is working on his fourth book and writes a blog. Website: Clicheoftheweek.ca.

Robert was journaling about his commitment to “quit something new every day.” Some of his quits came across as silly and harmless. Others were a challenge to imagine and humbling to consider.

Our second-hour program is usually once a month, but when Robert finished, he was immediately asked to follow with more the next week, and he happily obliged. By one measure it seemed that he had not prepared at all and would just flip through his journal and either smirk or lean in to read more carefully and then flip the pages some more. But when he did read, he seemed to be reading verbatim and seemed to apply his academic talents to the process, as the queries that followed his reading were rich and varied. It was like a popped cork or a lanced boil. Everyone always had a response, and I remember Sheila saying, “I have never considered simplicity at such an elemental level before.” I’m still not exactly sure what she meant, but her words stuck with me as a challenge to dive more deeply into Robert’s ideas: to take him more seriously.

One of his quits was the word “but,” and just a week later, he had to add quitting using any word that could be reasonably substituted for “but.” I remember him telling a joke about the prime minister putting out an

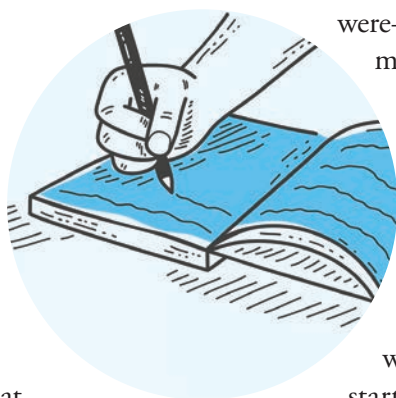
advertisement for a one-armed economist. When asked why, the PM said, “I am tired of my economic advisors always saying, ‘This is what you should do, but on the other hand, you could do something entirely different.’” Robert explained that the joke described economists perfectly in that they always want to account for all circumstances. So, an economist who did not use the word “but” was kind of a mythical creature. I remember he closed that session saying, “For all you non-economists, this will be easy.” I tried. It was not easy, but I could have tried harder.

One of the quits I remember the best is when he quit “walking by purple flowers without smelling them,” alluding to the line from the book *The Color Purple* that reads, “I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it.” He explained how early on he saw that starting was more important than quitting and that quitting without starting was a waste of time. He asked us if we could see quitting and starting as mirror images of the same thing.

When Robert announced he would be leaving for four months to be the Eureka Springs Scholar in Residence at the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York, my first thought was that I was going to miss him. And I had a hard time picturing what that position would entail. I am in the “baseball is slow and boring” camp unless the Blue Jays are in the World Series.

After some time, Robert’s wife, Ginny, started attending sometimes with him. She was the opposite of Robert. She had few words to share, but she was very expressive with her dress, body language, and mannerisms. Unlike most of our group who wore plain or even dull clothing—gray and taupe abounds with us—Ginny often wore fire-engine red and always accessorized. She drew attention but showed little vulnerability. She was unlike Robert, who appeared as if he was trying to blend into his surroundings like a piece of furniture. But once he started talking, he always had a lot to say, and it was consistently worth listening to.

Three weeks after Robert left for Cooperstown, Ginny came to worship on her own. I know I was—and imagine others



were—surprised to see her attend. A few minutes after the start of worship, she provided the backstory to Robert’s quitting journal.

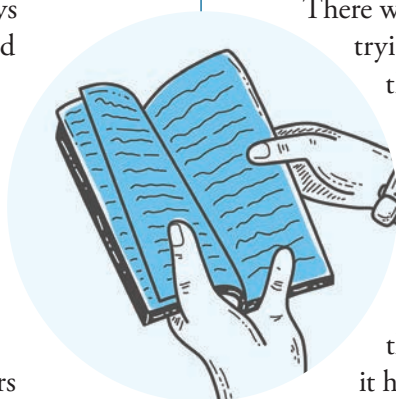
Crying before she spoke, Ginny began, “Robert is an addict,” and then paused and said, “He is addicted to Subtunol, a pain killer he was prescribed for his headaches.” She got into details with a tenor of total defeat. “Before he even started this journaling project, he quit writing his book about the economics of Olympic medals. He quit correcting the grammar in his students’ essays. He quit eating chocolate. But he never once even talked about quitting his pills.” After a long pause, she went on, “I’d ask him—I mean this wasn’t a secret—and whenever I said to him that there was one thing and one thing only that he needed to quit, Bobby would slow his speech to a crawl and say, ‘That’s where I am headed.’”

After yet another pause, Ginny continued, “Andre and Rebecca really miss him, and I don’t.” This is where she stopped speaking and hung her head. That was the only ministry of the day. Our worship clerk encouraged us to hold Ginny and Robert and their children in the Light. Ginny left as soon as our clerk arose to shake hands and did not return in the weeks that followed. I assumed that someone from Ministry and Counsel reached out, but these things were not shared, so I don’t know. I assume she was embarrassed by letting so much out, but it did not feel in gospel order for me to initiate contact on my own.

I didn’t find out until months later that there were factions that had formed in our meeting. I do my best to ignore such goings-on. All I know is from a single conversation where I felt cornered and had to listen. My informant told me that one Friend said there were two women who thought that Ginny had made it all up.

There were no addiction issues, and she was just trying to be the center of attention. Apparently, the two (it was obvious who they were even though names were not mentioned) speculated that she had an affair with someone and made up the story of the drug abuse to cover herself if that ever came out.

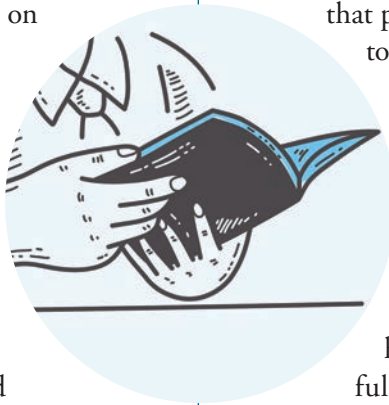
Another group, a larger one, about a third of the meeting, felt betrayed. They felt it had been dishonest of Robert to talk so



much about quitting without coming clean on the real issue. Apparently one in that group even phoned the meeting in Cooperstown to warn them about an untrustworthy addict who might try to infiltrate their meeting. I don't know who it was, but I was told that he or she was told that Robert had not shown up at worship, but if he did attend, they would be seeking to respond to that of God in him, rather than forming an opinion based on an unsolicited phone call. Again, by the time this was relayed to me, it could have been third- or fourth-hand. The rest of us were not so much a faction as we were the majority. Again, I am constructing this looking back, but we felt that this was simply a part of the life of our meeting and did not require such discussions. Yes, Robert had an impactful few months with us, and the ministry of Ginny was uncommon, to use an understatement, but it was out of our hands, and if there were issues, it was expected that Ministry and Counsel could handle them in a discreet and caring manner.

The fourth partition in the meeting was Cyril, the weightiest and most seasoned of us all. Cyril doesn't speak much in meeting, and when he has, he's remained seated. He had not stood to speak in years. So as he struggled to stand, we all had time to turn our full attention to him. Cyril began, "It is not the Quaker way to lobby," then added, "and I don't like to be lobbied." This was September, and Robert had not been at meeting since leaving for Cooperstown in April. Cyril spoke with great gravity. I remember he used the term "faultfinding" as if it were a refrain. If Ministry and Counsel is dealing with Ginny, then that is their business, not ours. I remember the impact more than any actual words. He praised faultfinding when one Friend goes humbly to another to offer correction in the manner of Friends. And I do recall his final words—I think we all do, all of us who were there: "But this is nothing other than idle gossip, and we will not have that here. It ceases as of today." We had never heard Cyril speak that way. And we all did as we had been admonished to do.

A couple months later—I believe it was early in November—Ginny walked into our meeting. A few minutes late, presumably to spare herself conversation, but noticeable enough



that probably everyone watched her until she took her seat. She provided no vocal ministry. But when it came to announcements, she began with an uncharacteristically somber tone saying, "I want to give you an update."

She told us that Robert, she had always called him "Bobby," had left Cooperstown and was living in a rooming house in Washington, D.C., working full-time on his journal. She explained he had asked for a leave of absence from the university due to his addiction, and it had been granted. She told us that their children were missing their dad but understood that "finishing his study of quitting" was very important. She said she did not know what was next other than what he told her, that he was "on a path to wellness." Ginny thanked us for listening, asked if her whole family could be held in the Light, told us that she would not be returning, and asked us to respect her need and her children's need for privacy.

With Cyril's words having settled within me, I knew I did not want to talk about Robert; I didn't want to even think about whether he was descending into madness or was on a journey that most would be too fearful to take. Hero or antihero? It was better to hold him in the Light than it was to evaluate him.

It was more than two years later before Robert gained our attention again. Rick, who we call our Religious Education Committee, stood at the close of meeting to make an announcement. He held up a book and read its cover, *Quitting* by Robert L. Seaton, annotated by Virginia Howard. He said that Robert was clean and sober, and that he had continued to live in Washington for another year and compiled his writings into the book we were all looking at. Rick said he had read the book in one sitting and wanted to lead a group study of it. I, and I imagine everyone else, looked over toward Cyril. His head was down, and his eyes were closed. And he nodded the slightest of nods.

This is how Robert's book ends:

It is about choice, really. Sensing your own power to choose. It is about knowing who you are and what your choices are. It is not about quitting. It is about inherent authority. □



In the Dark, *with* Gifted Voice

We thought them a nuisance, those clouds of moths
that circled our porch light and swarmed past us
into the house when we came in at night.

Something changed in their world, small, unnoticed
until the moths left or died—no longer
tapping at screens to reach the inside lamps

each summer night—bodies which smudged fingers
and walls with powdery scales fine as ash
no longer smeared on windshields and headlights,

no longer scooped up by the whippoorwills
who nested in our gravel drive. I sit
in my old porch rocker near our woodland

and miss the voices of the whippoorwills.
They are gone, those gentle birds of the dark,
their evening chant an air a small child could learn.

They sang long into the night, loud and clear,
strong tenors chiming through the oaks and pines
and my bedroom window and through the years.

It was no symphony but a folk song,
a three-note burden that a child of five
learned with ease and whistles now at twilight.

David Black
Louisa, Va.



Photo by Yevgenia Yegorova



Encounter with Razor Wire

Margaret Crompton

Somewhere in England, some time ago. . .

Meeting had been peaceful that morning. Friends greeted one another quietly and settled smoothly into silence. After 15 minutes, children were shepherded gently into their adjoining room.

No one had risen to speak after a stern elder's advice that "Blessed are the peacemakers" referred as much to everyday relationships as to world wars—even among Friends. The implied message was clear: especially among Friends.

Isaac's halftime snores blended, as ever, with the comfortable snuffles of Richenda's assistance dog, Lumina. The clerk announced so few notices that no embarrassed Friend crept out to the toilet. Zak had plenty of time to make virtuous coffee (weak). Gracie's biscuits were life-threateningly delicious. Martha nearly forgave her for being not only beautiful, clever, and kind but also a good cook. Even the disturbing presence of Breeze was absent. Martha strolled home, basking in peace.

Martha had been attending her local meeting for several years. Reading introductory literature had convinced her that she lacked the essential

Photo by Danny Burke on Unsplash

Margaret Crompton is a member of Britain Yearly Meeting. Her concern for young offenders began in a student/prisoner discussion group. Her later service included a committee in a young offenders' project, Quaker prison chaplaincy, initiating a prison visiting scheme, and collecting donations from drama performances for a prison literacy program.

Quaker qualification: serenity. However, when at last she bravely entered the meetinghouse, she felt that she had “come home.”

Although still far from serene, she was content to sit quietly through meeting for worship, and share kitchen duties afterward. She would have liked to “make a difference,” but recognized that her service was, essentially, menial. Sometimes she noticed friction between Quakers whose silence could express emotions that were far from serene. Martha kept clear. Home must be . . . homely. A place of peace. Unlike the “home” from which she had escaped.

Home was also, she reluctantly knew, a place to start from. A place of beginnings. A haven providing rest and renewal from which to set out, again. Martha was not keen to set out again.

That morning, Martha enjoyed the walk to her small terrace house on a quiet street. Although several tiny front gardens had been paved to accommodate cars, most were enlivened by tubs of bulbs and shrubs. Martha was proud of her blue-glazed ceramic pots of daffodils and two trim bay trees.

She had left her simple lunch ready, and silently gave thanks for pasta, salad, crisp rolls, fruit, and her weekly indulgence in non-virtuous coffee (strong). Then she dozed over a favorite novel, snug in her armchair and grateful for comfort and peace.

A light tapping disturbed her. The wind, she assured herself. But when the tapping escalated into frantic rapping on the window, she muttered, “Oh no,” and dragged herself to the door. Her unwanted visitor tottered into a firm embrace. “Come on in, Breeze,” she said. “I suppose you’d like lunch.” As Breeze began to protest, Martha added briskly: “Don’t try to talk yet. And don’t worry, I have your gluten-free bread and oat milk. As usual.”

Martha felt stricken with shame. How could she be so irritable at the loss of her precious afternoon? She turned to invite the other woman to sit in her own armchair. Too late. Breeze had already taken possession of both the chair and Martha’s homemade afghan blanket. Martha resignedly provided tissues to dry tears and running nose. “We need to start again,” she grinned. “A silence break, I think. Breathe deeply, calm down, and—when we both feel ready—tell me what’s happened.” She managed not to say, *This time!*

“They’ve got him.” No pause for silence. Martha sighed inwardly, unconsciously grimaced, and composed herself

to listen. “Don’t ask me what he’s done.”

Martha added silently to herself, *This time.*

“Prison, Martha. What am I supposed to do?”

No longer a regular conversation between a worried mother and a helpful friend, the situation had suddenly become serious. “Oh Breeze! Where is he?”

“Prison. I said.” She sounded almost proud.

“Prison? But he’s only a boy. And he hasn’t been to court, has he? Not found guilty of anything or given a prison sentence? Wait a minute. He must be at Hindwood. The remand center. He’ll be there waiting to go to court.”

“Like I said. Prison,” Breeze insisted. “My little boy—behind bars.” She pulled the afghan over her head. Then emerged to add, “He never done a wrong thing. Not a criminal, not my angel.”

“Not exactly an angel,” said Martha. “Now, we need to know exactly what’s happening. When are you going to see him?” But when Breeze, predictably, collapsed under the blanket, Martha understood that she would soon be setting out from home. Like it or not.

The bus stopped a few yards from the prison. Martha joined the procession of friends and relations clustering at the gate. She was grateful to be with people who seemed familiar with both journey and destination. She had not been prepared for the wall topped with high-security razor wire or for the long wait to be admitted.

Breeze’s angel—usually known as Gabriel—was escorted to the meeting room with a group of other alleged criminals. Martha had felt nervous about confrontation with so-called “young offenders.” But she knew Gabriel well: a tall, thickset boy with a mild stammer and enchanting smile. He had found speech and school work difficult but was a skillful artist. Martha remembered his efforts to teach her to draw a bicycle. He had failed, defeated by her incompetence. She admired his patience and treasured his demonstration sketch.

During the hour of their meeting, Martha bought soft drinks and packets of biscuits from the volunteer-staffed counter. Boys and young men sat at little square tables in the pretend cafe. Mothers and sisters, girlfriends, a few grandmothers, and several babies had to sit opposite their personal prisoners. Martha felt like an intruder, having no close relationship to Gabriel. But he clearly valued her presence. “You’re my first visitor,” he said. “Some of them don’t get anyone.”

“The boys, you mean? No visitors at all?”

"No. Their people are ashamed of them, being in here. Not like my Mum. She's just afraid."

"Afraid?"

"Afraid of everything. Everyone." And then: "Afraid of me."

There was nothing to say. She gently touched Gabriel's hand across the table. At once, a watching officer strode over and reminded Martha that she must not touch the prisoner. With searing pain, she realized: *The prisoner? He means Gabriel.*

In deep distress, Martha sought help from Friends. Zak and Gracie lived near the bus station. Martha had never visited them before, but Gracie showed no surprise, welcomed her, and served perfect coffee. "Martha, my dear," she said, "I see you need sweet nourishment—friendship and cake, no? Forget your virtuous waistline. Here is comfort." Gracie steered Martha to the opulent settee and held her as she overflowed in tears. Zak looked in, nodded, and sat quietly nearby.

"They're so young," Martha gasped. "I thought they'd be tough young thugs. Big. Hostile. Horrible. But they're just boys. Thin. Pale. Weary. Only 14 years old, some of them. Children. Others—handsome, young men. Already worn. Offenders. In prison. Behind razor wire. Can you believe that? Razor wire. And some of them, no one visits. No mother, no friend. One of them has to be protected because his mates ran away, left him to be caught, and now he's terrified they'll think he grassed them up. Not a single person visits him. In prison. He's 15."

Image by Cristina Conti

They sat in silence while Martha wept and Gracie held her hand. Into the silence, Zak said, "When I'm moved to pray, I write a letter."

The governor sent a car to the bus station. Martha's letter had asked if it would be possible to arrange visitors for boys and young men who had no contacts. She had prepared to penetrate the razor wire and do battle. The governor responded with a courteous invitation to discuss her idea. The radiant raiment of a warrior saint was exchanged for the modest garments of an unremarkable reformer.

Her concern matched his own. All the governor had needed was someone to take an initiative, develop a scheme, find—and organize—volunteers. It might after all, Martha thought, have been easier to storm the citadel. However, the gates had been opened by a few words written to the right person at the right time. Peace work.

The Hindwood Prison Visiting scheme was the first for young people in the country. Once Martha had been officially registered as a prison visitor, she explained the scheme to the meeting. Friends offered support in every way possible. Isaac regretted that he was too old to visit but offered to organize, purchase, and dispatch magazines. One lonely boy, Tyson, was interested in karate; Isaac sent him *Karate Kids Weekly*. Phil loved rabbits; every week, Isaac found and sent postcards with pictures of them. He would have paid out of his pension, but Friends agreed that meeting funds should meet all expenses, so that everyone could feel involved.

Richenda confessed that she would have loved to be a visitor, but, she said sadly, "Who would want to be visited by me? Even if Lumina and I were permitted to enter the prison."

Martha reassured her, "Anyone would love to spend time with you and Lumina. May I check with the governor—about Lumina?" There was, of course, no problem. Richenda and Lumina became regular visitors, beloved by young men and boys, relations, and staff.

Zak and Gracie invited Martha to coffee and cake one morning. Zak was even more shy than usual, until his sister persuaded him to speak. "Martha, I would like to be part of this. I am, as you know, always busy. But I am my own master, and I can find time. But—"

"Zak," ordered Gracie, "come to the point."

"But I may not be acceptable. I am . . ."

"He's gay."

Continues on page 55



Starlings

Beck Daniel Wren

In July that year, when the breeze off the ocean faltered and the sun's weight felt like a fat thumb pressing her down to earth, Carol took to spending her afternoons in the library. She wasn't a reader by nature, but she'd discovered a chair in the magazine section placed perfectly beneath the AC vent.

The magazine section was across from the children's section, where two other young women sat cross-legged on the floor, chatting while their toddlers explored. One talked in lurid details about tentacles and the unspeakable actions of a Bug down in Pensacola, Florida. The other, in the distinctive blue uniform of a prison employee, scoffed. "Bugs don't have tentacles. They've got antennae, and you couldn't go stuffing one of those anywhere. They're soft, like feathers. They snap."

Beck Daniel Wren is queer, trans, and a lover of the serial comma. He is passionate about the power of writing to unlock new ways of living. Beck is a member of University Friends Meeting in Seattle, Wash.

Carol turned the pages of her magazine, chosen at random from the rack. The glossy pages stuck to her sweat-damp fingertips. She'd never seen a Bug in real life except through the fogged glass of a prison transport bus. She thought of the Bugs on the posters she'd seen at the county admin building. Had the protuberances atop their heads looked more like tentacles or antennae? Carol wasn't sure.

She didn't want to think about Bugs, anyway. She focused on the magazine, flipping through the pages until a spread of photos in unreal color caught her attention. The shapes were familiar enough—common plants, animals, flowers—but the colors were alien: vibrant purple and orange and a green so bright it looked radioactive. She began to read the article so she had an excuse not to turn the page. This was the vision of birds, she learned. Birds and insects and, yes, even Bugs. Ultraviolet light outside the spectrum visible to humans. Or, to most humans. After the French painter Claude Monet underwent cataract surgery in the final years of his life, the article informed her, he reported the

presence of a new color—and the strange countenances this new color revealed among certain of his neighbors. He painted these “others,” as he called them, in the colors of life, as he painted everything he saw, but his viewers saw only parasoled women strolling the banks of placid rivers. A century passed before Monet’s others, these Bugs, were revealed in the lens of a modern camera.

Carol stayed until the library closed at sunset. The flowers, the birds, this vibrant invisible world—desire choked the breath in her throat.

When she pulled into the lot at home, a flock of starlings startled up from the little strip of lawn between her apartment building and the concrete wall of the Pay-n-Sav next door. She winced at the sound of tires over gravel, but her landlady’s door, two doors down from Carol’s own, stayed firmly closed. A relief, because Carol was behind on her rent again; and a disappointment, because her landlady also ran the cleaning service that brought Carol most of her income.

She’d had an almost-good job last year, working for the county. She’d been set loose to comb the archive and slice lines through every county record, land deed, and surveyor’s report, slashing zeros into eights. Along their stretch of North Pacific coast, a prison built at 104 feet elevation required a tsunami evacuation plan, prepared at the county’s considerable expense, in order to be eligible for federal grants. Without those grants, the prison would close—like the sawmill, the papermill, and the plywood factory before it. But a prison built at 184 feet elevation required no such plan.

“It took you and me and a hundred other guys to build that prison, but Carol here moved it with her one little hand,” her boss had said once, admiringly, and Carol had

hoped that his admiration would translate into permanent employment. But once the work was done, the county preferred to pretend it had never happened. So now Carol cleaned houses.

She parked in the lot (elevation 62 feet) and stood awhile watching the starlings’ progress across the sky, lumps of coal against the deep, post-sunset blue, until they settled again on the lawn’s opposite edge to pick seed from between the withered stems of dried grass with neat twists of their bright yellow beaks.

What did a plan matter, anyway? she thought. Not a single Bug would stay in that place more than a week, just long enough to get their paperwork in order before they were blasted off back to wherever it was they’d come from.

In the magazine, starlings had shone like rainbows, each feather tipped brilliant green. Carol trained her tired eyes on the darting shapes, and, yes, there was a faint iridescent sheen to their dark plumage, like the swirl of motor oil in seawater when the tide came up over the highway.

She kept trying. She scrubbed houses, and she watched the starlings. It was frustrating to stare and not see, maybe pointless—Monet had needed surgery to see, after all—but frustration and pointlessness were familiar companions. Cleaning houses was backbreaking work, exhausting and frustratingly pointless. The beach houses all smelled like dead crustaceans and mouldering swimwear, and no matter how many times she vacuumed, the carpets were still thick with sand.

She was driving to the McMillans’ place on a Monday morning when something clicked.

Their house was her favorite to clean. It was small, two bedrooms and one bath, and Carol appreciated any house that had only a single toilet to scrub, but she liked the place on its own merits, too. It was set back from the ocean, where the sand dunes gave way to real earth. Oak trees soared overhead. The house had the low, squat look of base housing, although the nearest military base was an hour’s drive up the coast (inland, above 180 feet elevation).

Some animal, probably a raccoon, had torn into a trash bag the vacationers had left in the front yard, and the



starlings had landed to pick through the mess.

As she pulled up to park at the curb, Carol saw the starlings from the corner of her eye: each feather outlined with vivid, nameless color, the whole flock together so bright it was almost painful to look at. She sat in the car and marvelled at the birds for a quarter of an hour or more. When she did finally open the car door, the birds scattered into the air, glinting in the sun like light reflected through a prism.

Carol smiled; her eyes slid into their new vision, and the whole world came alive with a kaleidoscope of unnamed colors. Even without the starlings, the yard revealed itself in a riot of color: flowers, trees, grasses, all showing new hues.

She carried the starling's joy with her as she went inside, weaving it into herself as she wiped the formica counters, scrubbed the toilet, and vacuumed the carpet into neat rows, emptying canisters of sand back out into the yard. She was putting the vacuum away when she saw the door at the back of the broom closet. It was cleverly hidden, hinges flush with the wallboard, the moulding drawn straight across the bottom. But the starlings' light seeped out around the edges. Carol dug her fingernails into the narrow gap and pulled. The door opened soundlessly.

Beyond it was a tunnel with smooth-scraped earthen walls and ceiling. Carol followed the tunnel as it tipped down, corkscrewing as it went, so she could see only the short expanse of hard-packed earth before her and behind. She walked until the tunnel widened into a chamber twice the width of her outstretched arms in every direction. The room was furnished ordinarily enough: a recliner, a little rag rug—but the walls pulsed with soft striations of light.

Carol knew she should leave, close the door behind her, and pretend she had seen nothing. This was a private place. But the burrow's strange walls wicked the heat away. It was quiet, peaceful; the air was deliciously cool. Carol sank into the recliner, and she felt embraced by the earth itself. Her eyes slipped closed.

Some time later, she woke to the gentle press of a hand on her shoulder. Carol blinked up at Mr. McMillan. There was something different about him in the burrow's light. It was the antennae, perhaps, or the curved mandible on which he rested his delicate, wire-rimmed glasses.



Carol had met him once before, when she'd first contracted to clean the house. She'd thought his hair was brown, but now it appeared he had no hair at all, only a sleek iridescent carapace she ached to touch. He was as broad-shouldered as she remembered, although he hunched a bit in his suit jacket, which was wrinkled around the waist, as though he had driven straight out from the city after work and worn it the whole way. She wasn't frightened. His touch was gentle, nonthreatening. A simple, animal presence; ruminative. She reached out to cup his mandible in her hand.

But as she did so she saw that her hand, too, glowed in the burrow's light. Her hands shone pearly white. That woke her the rest of the way, and woke her into fear. Carol knew her hands. They were plain and brown and lined. Her palms did not glow like the soft flesh of oysters. Her fingers were not so long and beautiful. She wasn't—couldn't be—like him.

Carol ran, and Mr. McMillan let her go.

She arrived at her apartment without any clear recollection of the drive.

There was a starling on the porch. The cats must have gotten it, although they hadn't finished the job. The bird fluttered, one wing dragging. Carol shifted her vision

Continues on page 55

Meeting

Before I start it's my duty to say
I'm not sure there's a poem in this
But it certainly made me think.

Coming out of Quakers, he said,
I can see God must have a human face
Just like he'd have the face of a woodlouse
For a woodlouse;
I told him he ought to write a book
And we both drove home.

On the way back, I'm thinking,
Is there a poem in this,
What would woodlouse parables be,
Would he come to his own,
Yet his own know him not,
Crucify, Crucify, would they cry
As the immortal woodlouse died?

During the meeting I noticed
A wren fly the length of the nave.

Robert Atkins
Usk, UK



Photo by Samich Time on Unsplash

The Line of Walkers

Eric E. Sabelman

I am one of a long line of people walking across the desert. The line stretches left and right to the horizon and beyond.

We walk slowly at the same speed, carefully looking at the ground we are walking over.

I notice that the person walking next to me is a child. I don't remember seeing her before; she must be new.

After a while, she asks me, "Why are we walking this way?" I answer, "We are looking for God."

Eric E. Sabelman began attending Orange Grove Meeting in Pasadena, Calif., in 1969, and he became a member of Palo Alto (Calif.) Meeting about 20 years later. He recently completed a second three-year term as presiding clerk of College Park Quarterly Meeting. Some of his stories having their origin in Quaker worship have been re-told in audio format by Tom and Sandy Farley (CDs available at Spont.com/storytelling.htm).

We walk in silence, and then she asks, "Why are we walking in a line?" "It is the most efficient way to find something we have lost."

We walk on through the desert, which is scattered with scrubby bushes growing in cracks in the ground.

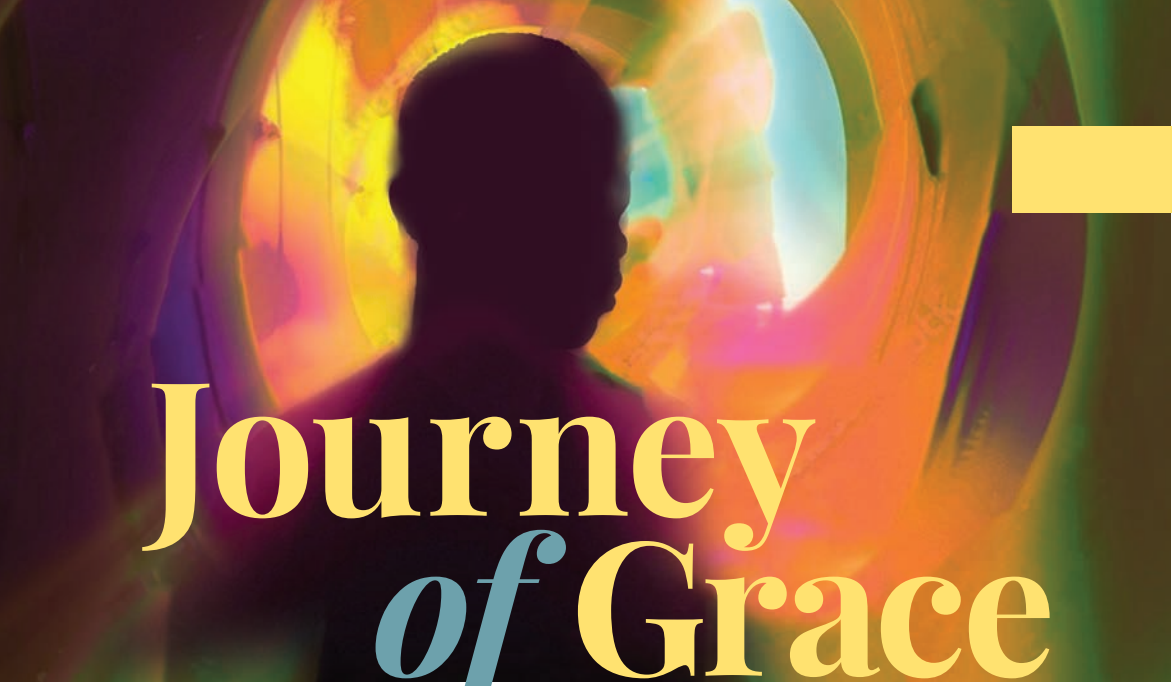
When the line of walkers comes up to a bush, those nearest stop and wait to see if it starts burning. When it doesn't, they hurry to catch up with the line.

A walker five or six places away from me bends down and picks up a scrap of parchment. He turns it one way and another, trying to read what is written on it. Finally, he lets it go, and it blows away on the wind.

Farther on, I see a flat stone on the ground. I pick it up and find that it is covered with cuneiform script. I hold it for a while, but since I can't read it, I shake my head to the child and drop it back on the ground.

The child sees the bush and the parchment and the stone without question. Finally, she asks me, "Why are we all walking in the same direction?" □

Photo by Arshla Jindal on Unsplash



Journey of Grace

Image by Mr. Note19

Hearbeat! Heartbeat! I felt a very sharp pain at my left chest side. My wife, Eila, was in the kitchen; she heard the loud commotion in the bedroom and came running. She found me lying down; I could hear her mourn from afar; then what followed was total silence, full darkness. I couldn't tell where I was, if life existed there or not.

Hope seemed to have evaporated. I found myself sitting in darkness: no light, no path, just an abyss. I then saw a thin light coming toward me; I was terrified for I could not trace any path to escape. I began reciting "Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4 [NIV]). The light became bright; I could figure out someone walking toward me; his radiance was so magnified that I could not see his face. He took hold of my hand and commanded me to follow him. His white robes shined in the light, and his aura was all over. We soon came to a hill; he showed me the other side of the land, which was so beautiful, covered with green trees. I saw people in white robes, walking and singing in that land. I saw my grandmother Rasoah, who looked at me with a big smile, then waved to me to go back where I had come from.

The man in the white robe with glowing face then directed me to take the path on the right side. I came past

a shining gate that opened as I passed through and finally came to places I had known before. As I followed the path, I heard the cry of my wife, Eila. I came close and saw my four children, Kaila, Laila, Mabish, and Glove, looking at me with sad eyes. Two nurses were cleaning the room, and immediately they left the room. I saw

my general superintendent, my deputy general superintendent, my senior pastor, and my clerk, and three women entered the room. They surrounded me and began to sing the *Swahili Injili* hymnal number 110, "Ni Tabibu wa Karibu" ("The Great Physician is Near"). The moment they finished singing, my general superintendent prayed for God's will to be done. He prayed that God knew me as a sojourner here on earth; and that he knew a day will come to go on the journey; and that, "if He so wills, then let me have the journey of grace. And if the journey is not yet, then let Him grant me the grace of healing." As my general superintendent finished praying, there was a loud bang of the machine.

I began to breathe with heaviness; I looked back and saw the man in the white robes and bright face waving his hand to me that I should now get up. As I opened my eyes, I saw people crying aloud, others running to call the doctors. The nurses came quickly and found me with open eyes. The doctor came and confirmed that my breathing was restored back to normal. They took me out of the supportive machine, and joy reigned in the air. Worshiping and praising the Lord overtook the hospital in waves; many people, including other patients who were there, came to witness the miracle that had happened. It was not just an ordinary doing.

I sat down on the bed and testified that I was on a long journey, realizing that I had been admitted for three days in the hospital. It was a journey of grace that God had granted me, to come back and proclaim his message of Christ to save those who are perishing. And so I said, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life" (Jn. 3:16). □

George Busolo Lukalo is a pastor with Friends Church Nairobi Yearly Meeting, stationed at Kariobangi (Kenya) Meeting, Kariobangi North Local Church. He is married to Sheilah Kasungu and blessed with one girl and two boys. He is the author of Quakers of Kenya and volunteers with Read for Africa, serving as chair of its Kenyan chapter.

Neal Burdick



Phil Wagner, Margrett Nillin, 2019. 24" x 36", mixed media. Original source photograph made by unknown photographer of the U.S. Works Progress Administration, 1937. 5" x 3.25", gelatin silver.

Margrett Nillin was a former slave interviewed by the Federal Writers' Project in 1937/38 in Fort Worth, Tex. The quote in the piece is from the interview.

Dreaming of Miriam

Neal Burdick is a direct descendant of Underground Railroad "employees"; Miriam in this story is an imaginary amalgam of freedom-seekers they assisted. He worships with Burlington (Vt.) Meeting.

Miriam. "Strong, resilient, rebellious" in Hebrew, sibling to Moses who led the Exodus. Born a slave child somewhere in cotton lands, sold deeper south at five, raped by her master at 16, straw raking the whipping scars across her back, mixed-race child sold before he was off her breast. Forced at 18 to marry the master's son who beat her every night, escaped at 22, *for the old man is a-waitin' for to carry you to freedom*, ran north, ran, ran breathless in the dark, her own exodus, stumbling, baying hounds and armed men on fast horses in crazed pursuit. Waded cold waters, *the river bank makes a mighty good road*, hid in tangles of thorns, stole apples from orchards' edges, staggered fatigued up stony streams throwing the dogs off her scent, slept cold in pig sties and chicken coops, given shelter and directions by Friends becoming friends, made her way by the light of the North Star, beckoning light piercing her ocean of darkness, *follow the drinkin' gourd onward*, on toward Canada, promised land of liberty, closer now with every barefoot step, every pain-laced knee, every labored breath. Harbored on a Quaker farm, *when the sun comes back, and the first quail calls*, Quakers who brought her food, clothing, bandages, prayer, silent encouragement, unspoken love, who sped her farther north, hidden under hay, north toward freedom, who dropped her off in woods ten steps from Canada, ten steps from freedom, *dead trees will show you the way*, grabbed, tackled by strong rifle-toting, black-coated men in bandana masks, wraiths emerging from the dawning woods, bound strong, rebellious, writhing in iron chains and rusted anklets, hoisted, rough hands probing, into a bare farm wagon, careening, jolting south, freedom fast receding out of sight, shackles cutting red into her flesh, lashed to a beam in an empty barn without food or water, lacerations festering, oozing, stinking, died of sepsis at 23, *for the old man is a-coming just to carry you*. . . . Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty she's free at last. Miriam, strong, resilient, rebellious. Free. . . . ◻



A Story from 1652 Country

An Interview with Historical Fiction Author Rosemary Sturge

Sharlee DiMenichi

British Quaker Rosemary Sturge, who worships with Northampton Meeting in the English Midlands, has written many historical mystery novels. Her latest work, *Clouds Over Bowland*, focuses in part on a character named Dorcas, the young adult daughter of a Quaker farming family in an English town where French prisoners of war are held at the end of the Napoleonic Wars.

Sharlee DiMenichi: Please tell me about the decision to tell part of the story in *Clouds Over Bowland* using Dorcas's journal entries.

Rosemary Sturge: I grew up in a Quaker family. I lived in an area which we call the 1652 country because it's where George Fox met up with Margaret Fell and lots of other people were attracted to the Quaker movement. We knew quite a lot about Quaker history, and this journal keeping was something people of all ages were encouraged to do and still do today. And it just seemed to me that this was a way of presenting this young woman by her doing something. She's really using it as a diary of her hopes and thoughts, and commenting on things that are happening. Dorcas is really writing a diary of her everyday life, not all that spiritual.

SD: What inspired you to write about French prisoners of war during the Napoleonic Wars?

Sharlee DiMenichi is a staff writer for Friends Journal. She is a member of Lehigh Valley Meeting in Bethlehem, Pa. Contact: sharlee@friendsjournal.org.

RS: In 1814—the year the book takes place—the Napoleonic Wars were ending, but there were still lots of prisoners on both sides. I thought it would be interesting for people to imagine what might happen. I have absolutely no evidence of local Quakers in that area being involved with the prisoners, but they were beginning to be very interested in prison conditions. Elizabeth Fry was active about that time. She was in London, but she was beginning to concern herself with the conditions in prisons generally. I brought this concern into the story, but it is quite imaginary. I haven't been able to find out a lot about any getting together between Quakers and French prisoners. I believe they did go to visit them on ships in Bristol Harbor to see that they had all the necessities of life.

In the beginning of Quakerism, there was quite a lot of noisy turmoil, enthusiasm, and preaching on the street corners. But then we went into what's called the Quietist period when people still wore the Quaker dress. They met to worship on Sunday and sometimes other days of the week as well. But they didn't engage with society anymore. They lived quietly in their own homes in communities. Local people believe that parties of prisoners were taken out to repair stone walls, as happens in the book.

SD: How did the character of Hugh Armstrong evolve during the process of creating him?

RS: I wanted somebody who came in as an outsider, didn't know the local people, and didn't know

anything about Quakers. I brought him down from Scotland and set him in this area, which I know quite well. I didn't live in Bowland, but I knew people who did, and so I could picture what it would be like.

SD: And what inspired you to make Dorcas, rather than her twin, Susannah, a protagonist?

RS: Hugh had his problems. He had physical problems. He had problems that began in his childhood. You need a slightly awkward girl for him to get to know and for them to realize how much they like each other. It's nice for Dorcas to tell her side of the story. Susannah's getting it quite easily because she's very pretty, and she already has an admirer who's a very suitable person for her to marry.

SD: What motivated you to center the story on Quakers, and could you talk more about the vantage point of someone from the outside who is meeting Quakers for the first time?

RS: That was partly the reason for creating Hugh. He is somebody who comes from outside and is completely baffled by these people, particularly things like silent worship. His experiences of religious life had been very different, and so he is meeting some people who are completely different from what he would have expected, and I just wanted to acknowledge the Quakers in the district. There still are a few Quaker families living in Bowland but not very many these days.

SD: What is a typical writing day like for you?

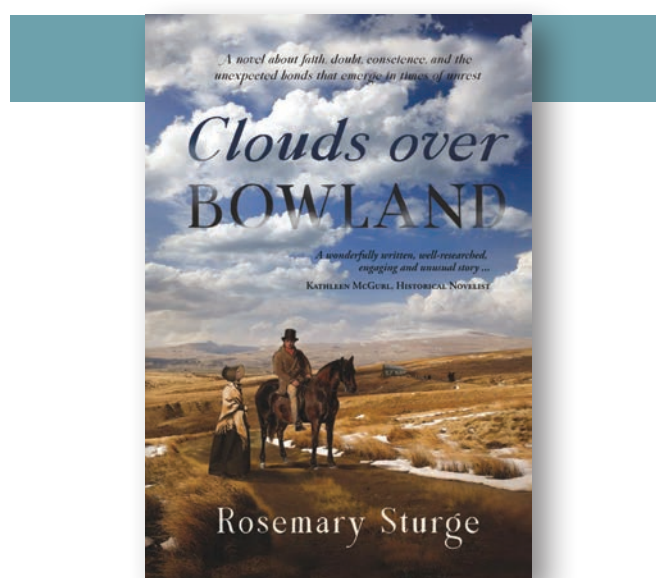
RS: I'm not very organized. I have spells of doing quite a lot of writing. That's probably because I'm now retired, and when I retired, I was determined I was going to write because I'd always wanted to. I took a university course in creative writing, and this wasn't my first book. I like to look at periods of history to see how they were similar to our own times or how they were different and find out about them. I enjoy doing the research.

SD: That brings me to my next question: How would you describe the process of researching *Clouds Over Bowland*?

RS: This particular book is talking about the area where I grew up, or really close to where I grew up, so I already knew a lot about the Quaker history. When I

was growing up, I knew someone who was very elderly that Quakers in America might remember, a Quaker lady called Elfrida Vipont. She was very knowledgeable, and she talked to us as youngsters about Quaker history. She organized a worldwide Quaker pilgrimage to 1652 country, and many

Friends from the United States attended. So a lot of that was already in my brain. I obviously had to research some other things. You can't rely on the Internet to tell you everything because they don't always get it right. But they can certainly help you a lot. And I wrote quite a lot of this during the COVID time.



SD: What are some of your most vivid memories of growing up in the region where the book takes place?

RS: They were vivid, or I wouldn't have written. The description of the farm and having a meal in the farm with the families is one that is just very beautiful. It's not as popular as the English Lake District. It's just south of the English Lake District, so it doesn't get overcrowded. Life has not changed as much there as in other parts. It's not industrialized, and the countryside is beautiful. It was very vivid in my memory, and I enjoyed writing about it. □

Read a review of Clouds Over Bowland in the Books section starting on page 37. "Sturge masterfully captures the period, and the Quaker farming community makes for a fascinating setting," writes Nancy Learned Haines. "I highly recommend [this book]."

Impressions



The eagle's six-foot wing span
pierces the sky,
but leaves no trace in the air.

The shark's twenty-foot body
smoothly splits the waters,
but leaves no trail in the sea.

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Let Your Money Speak: Integrity in Practice

DIANA YAÑEZ

For the past six months, my cohost Peterson Toscano and I have been talking with Quakers about their relationships with money for Season 6 of the *Quakers Today* podcast. In our final episode of the season (airing October 13), we reflect on what we have learned and focus on concrete, practical next steps to align our money with our values. We can think of these steps in three interconnected rings: personal, institutional, and collective.

The Personal: What Does Your Money Say About You?

In my personal life, the most difficult area to bring integrity to has been the way I earn money. Whatever the job, I will question whether it's truly aligned with my skills and values. I remember this most clearly as a college intern at a larger investment firm during the 2007–2008 financial crisis. I kept thinking: *do I really want to work for the organizations that have created this chaos?* After a resounding internal *no*, I kept switching jobs every year in an effort to find my place. Funny enough, in the end, that place was back in the industry where I started but with a group of people who were committed to ethical investing.

As a relatively new convinced Friend, I have been amazed to learn about the Friends who practice war tax resistance. At this summer's Friends General Conference Gathering, several people shared with me about their choice to intentionally keep their income below the taxable threshold so that zero tax dollars go toward military spending or foreign intervention. One Friend shared her story of tax resistance for 17 years and the stressful



resolution with the IRS. I am in awe at this kind of commitment to integrity and the willingness to bear the consequences.

The Institutional: When Meetings Put Their Money Where Their Values Are

On the institutional level, I love seeing individual meetings get creative with how they embrace integrity in their money decisions as a body. A beautiful example is Red Cedar Meeting in Lansing, Mich. (which was featured in the January 2025 issue of *Friends Journal*). The meeting's treasurer, Susan Waltz, shared with me the ways they decided to use money as a vehicle for action: their commitment to moving their funds to a Black-owned bank, self-financing their building renovation, creating a community food pantry, and making financial reparations to descendants of formerly enslaved people.

My own meeting, Central Philadelphia (Pa.) Meeting, is also on a path of impact investing, thanks to the help of Friends Fiduciary. Because of the overlap with my professional work, I was particularly excited to be part of this project, and it reminds me of something Friend Lisa Graustein says in the episode: "Money is a tool and it is a tool of power." She poses an important question to listeners: "How are we using it to co-create with other people, to share power with other people, and to begin to rectify the centuries of intentional inequity and harm that have been done that also fall along race lines in this country?"

The Collective: Friends Leading the Way

As a collective, Friends have a long history of bringing integrity into their money practices. One of the earliest examples is from hundreds of years ago when Friends, driven by their religious and moral convictions, implemented flat pricing: everyone paid the same amount for a pound

of apples regardless of the buyer's appearance, age, or connections.

We also bring our testimony of peace alive in beautiful ways. Years ago, I was both shocked and proud to learn that American Friends Service Committee, a large international nonprofit with over 350 staff members and an approximately \$240 million investment portfolio, avoids or significantly limits investments in U.S. Treasury bonds, which are considered one of the safest and most stable investments. Yet AFSC avoids them due to its "principled opposition" with certain U.S. government policies, including "military policies and wars, treatment of indigenous peoples, environment policies, and immigration policies," according to the organization's investment policy statement adopted in 2021.

From the individual who practices war tax resistance, to the meeting that moves its funds to a Black-owned bank, to the organizations that follow socially responsible investing, Friends recognize that our money decisions are an invitation to practice faith through action. I'm curious: what has this podcast series helped you question? Where do you want to make changes, and where might you need more support for discernment?

Diana Yañez is a certified financial planner; convinced Quaker; and cohost, along with Peterson Toscano, of Season 6 of the Quakers Today podcast, in which they explored money as a spiritual practice and communal responsibility. This is the final essay in the limited-run Quakers and Money column. Contact: podcast@friendsjournal.org.

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Building Up the Kingdom of God

Talking with Quaker Candidates in Indiana Elections

SHARLEE DIMENICHI

Commitment to Quaker values inspires some Friends to campaign for elected office. *Friends Journal* talked with two Quaker candidates running for the Indiana State House of Representatives about how faith influences their platforms and shapes their campaigns. Tom Rockwell, running in District 56, is a co-pastor at West Elkton (Ohio) Meeting and lives in Richmond, Ind. Rockwell is also the associate superintendent of Western Yearly Meeting. Nan Polk, running in District 54, is a member of New Castle (Ind.) First Friends Meeting. The conversations have been edited for clarity and shortened for print. Read the full interview at Friendsjournal.org/quakers-indiana-elections.

Tom Rockwell interview

Sharlee DiMenichi: Please describe the process of deciding to run for the Indiana House of Representatives.

Tom Rockwell: Both my wife and I had been feeling concerned about the political situation more broadly, and felt like we were obligated to get involved, so we had a lot of discussions about it. We found out there were no Democrats running in our district, and that just seemed like something we could not stand. I decided to jump in, and subsequently my wife decided to run for township trustee too.

SD: How have you gathered information about the needs and concerns of voters in District 56?

TR: I am really big on canvassing, so we go out two nights a week. Both nationally and in our area, there's been a movement away from canvassing, which is strategically bad. It leads to candidates not learning very much about the people of their districts. There's a real spiritual component to canvassing. Kat Griffith wrote an article for *Friends*

Journal about canvassing and the spiritual side of it, which has been very influential for both my wife and me.

SD: Where would funds for building affordable housing come from if you were in office?

TR: There's lots of different places where you could get funds for affordable housing. There's already a well-funded redevelopment committee within Wayne County, but a lot of that money goes toward building newer housing that's aimed at upper-middle-class people. We need a more asset-based approach, including rebuilding housing that already exists. There are also lots of grants that we could apply for. I'm a big fan of matching fundraising from the private sector and putting public sector funds in there.

SD: What techniques would staff of publicly funded addiction treatment centers and programs use if you had your way?

TR: I would like to see a totally different approach. Right now we take as short-term an approach as we possibly can. Normally it's hard to get into treatment at all in Indiana, and they get people back on their way as quickly as they can. We need to take a much longer-term approach. Give people even a multi-year inpatient method where they meet together in fellowship with other people who are struggling. There's non-judgmental therapy to help people deal with the traumas they have in their lives. Right now we tend to isolate people's trauma from their addiction. I would like to see things get more holistic and to focus on evidence-based, medication-based treatment, but there are judgmental feelings about that.

SD: Please tell me more about those judgmental ideas. Are you referring to the concern that people then become addicted to the medicine?



Tom Rockwell and his wife, Jade Rockwell

Photo courtesy of Tom Rockwell

TR: Yes. Especially if you're within an AA model, a 12-step model, which I'm a big fan of. I actually wish our churches would take on more of a 12-step AA model to the ways that they worship and hold each other accountable. But it also has some limitations where people get very puritanical about no medication assistance, and I think that's profoundly unhelpful. It's putting way too much pressure on people. There's no real evidence-based reason for that, and there's no biblical moral reasoning for that either.

SD: How would you describe the human cost of addiction in District 56, particularly?

TR: Huge. Statistics are not as clear as I would like, but it seems like Wayne County has lost more people than any other county in Indiana. Every family here is touched by addiction in some way. It's a huge burden on our economy. There are a lot of people who can't hold stable jobs because of addiction, and then there are employers who leave because they can't find stable people to work.

SD: What specific types of support would you offer to police officers, firefighters, EMTs, and first responders?

TR: I'd love to see more spiritual care available to all of them. We have an excellent advantage in that we have Earlham School of Religion and Bethany Theological Seminary in town. People there could be interns who provide spiritual care. I would also like to see their pay improved. I would like to see more officers. I'd like to see better training opportunities to get more new officers because we have



Photo by Ken Myers

Nan Polk

really struggled with getting enough officers on the police force.

SD: *How does your Quaker faith shape your platform?*

TR: Everything in my platform is about trying to see that of God in everybody, and getting us back to a place where we respect each other. We're bombarded with technology in ways that cause us to be totally non-communal. I see this in our Quaker communities. A lot of people see people on Sundays and then don't see much else of each other, and that's really not what we're called to do. My platform is a political version of trying to build up the kingdom of God and make us more community-minded.

Nan Polk interview

Sharlee DiMenichi: *Please describe the process of deciding to run for the Indiana House of Representatives.*

Nan Polk: That's a very good question because it definitely was a process. I ran four years ago and was defeated—I think largely by straight ticket voting, as much as anything else. I talked to so many people who are hungry for a change. In Indiana, there's been a super majority now for almost 25 years, and things won't change if people don't have alternatives. So I decided I'd run again.

SD: *How have you gathered information about the needs and concerns of voters in District 54?*

NP: I am a retired teacher, and I'm on our school board. I am a state education advocate for the League of Women Voters. I'm on a childcare board. I'm on a board called Hope Initiative that discerns needs in our community. It finds ways to partner and solve things

like affordable housing and women transitioning after rehab. We focus particularly on women because we didn't have a place for them until we got Hagar's Hope. [Hagar's Hope is a transitional living center for women in Henry County that opened in 2024.]

SD: *What specific policies would you enact to protect religious liberty?*

NP: We now spend tax dollars on private schools, which are about 70 percent parochial. We're just not paying any attention to the separation of church and state, which is very threatening to freedom of religion.

SD: *What are the most important ways the government can partner with churches to address hunger, addiction, and homelessness?*

NP: A really good example of this kind of work happened in our area last month when we had torrential rain. We had 13, 14, I think some places even got 18 inches of rain. Since I'm on the school board, we had like 38 students that were displaced, were homeless, because their homes had been destroyed. So in trying to find out where they went and what was going to happen with them, I was very much amazed by the lack of government oversight and government organization. There was an emergency management system, but they could only answer people that had known to dial 211. There are still 30 students that are living in hotels, a month later. The churches came in with groups, and they were the ones that actually organized the relief effort, and were the boots on the ground. Our emergency management team later coordinated with them. That kind of scenario could work in other places also.

SD: *How would you describe best practices in addiction treatment?*

NP: Very often, especially government entities, say, "Oh, we're going to do this, and it's going to fix the problem." You can't just fix the problem. In our community we've talked about trying to build tiny homes, but that doesn't work unless there's counseling that goes along with them. One of the entities we've helped establish that

is working well is an organization providing transitional housing to women coming out of prison after attending rehab while incarcerated. They receive fiscal training, and they aim to leave transitional housing with a job and with some savings.

SD: *What specific types of support would you offer to public schools that are not currently being offered?*

NP: Public schools are not adequately funded, and the direct result is that teachers are not compensated well enough that we can entice people that have gone through the licensing process to come into teaching and stay in teaching. We have to put people through a process where they do appropriate licensure, which includes student teaching. We have an awful lot of teachers who are in the process. They're in the classroom and there are some qualifications that they have to have, but many of them are just on the pathway to licensure. We really need people that are in there that are qualified.

SD: *How would you increase broadband Internet access for rural residents?*

NP: We have to just pony up and provide subsidies and get broadband. I live in a rural district where there are still a number of people that don't have access to broadband. It's very difficult to function today without that.

SD: *How does your Quaker faith shape your platform?*

NP: We believe that there is the light of God in all people. It affects how we treat people of different backgrounds, ethnicities, and religions. We're all God's children.

SD: *What would you like to add?*

NP: Why I'm running goes back to my faith, trying to seek justice in terms of seeking a way of life that is respectful and just and equitable. That all goes back to those Quaker values.

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An *Odyssey* for Our Times

Christopher Nolan's Antiwar Epic

ANTHONY MANOUSOS

I was eager to see Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* because I have loved Homer since childhood, when my Greek father gave me Jane Werner Watson's marvelous, illustrated translation of *The Iliad and the Odyssey*—a copy I still own. I studied Homer in college and initially planned to major in classics, but after taking a poetry workshop by Anne Sexton, I chose literature instead. Over the years, I have perused nearly every translation of Homer: from Alexander Pope's to Emily Wilson's.

Some have called for boycotting the film because parts of it were filmed in the Western Sahara, a contested area where the Indigenous Sahrawi people are resisting Moroccan occupation of their land. I chose to make a donation to Nonviolence International's Western Sahara solidarity campaign to support their cause.

Nolan's film has also rightly been criticized for not being faithful to Homer, but the filmmaker, it seems, had a very different purpose. Nolan has said in interviews that he wanted to portray the imminent collapse of Hellenic civilization as a parable for our time. He also wanted to show the traumatizing effect of war on the survivors.

Most scholars agree that the epics attributed to Homer were written

down in the seventh or eighth century B.C.E., though the events they describe likely date back hundreds of years to around 1200 B.C.E. or earlier when the Greek city-states were flourishing. Many believe this civilization collapsed after marauders known as the "Sea Peoples" disrupted trade and ruthlessly destroyed cities in the eastern Mediterranean. For nearly four centuries, the Greeks had no written language, abandoned their cities, lived in villages, and produced little by way of art or architecture. During this dark age, the Homeric narratives were preserved orally by poets called "rhapsodes."

Nolan's film makes several references to the Sea People as a looming threat. The film also makes clear that the Trojan War set the stage for their invasion and destruction of Hellenic civilization.

Odysseus is not portrayed as a wily, articulate strategist with a gift for lying shamelessly and making up stories convincingly. This cleverness was admired by many Greeks (including Athena, the goddess of wisdom) but despised by "pious" Romans. ("Beware of Greeks bearing gifts" is a line by the Roman poet Virgil, referencing the Trojan horse.) Instead, Nolan portrays Odysseus as a broken man: suffering from PTSD and guilt-ridden for causing

the massacre that took place in Troy, as well as the deaths of his many men.

Much of *The Odyssey* focuses on what is called "Zeus's law," the law of hospitality. In the Homeric world, guests were supposed to be treated with kindness and respect—even beggars, who might be gods in disguise. Zeus's law is reminiscent of Hebrews 13:2, which states: "Do not forget to show hospitality to strangers, for by so doing some people have shown hospitality to angels without knowing it" (NIV). This is an allusion to Abraham, who showed hospitality to strangers that turned out to be God's messengers. The Greek term for such hospitality is *philoxenia* (love of the stranger or guest), the opposite of xenophobia. It is a core value of the Abrahamic faiths, including Quakerism.

This movie reeks of violence, but it is never glorified. David Swanson, the brilliant antiwar writer, sums up the film's brutally realistic depiction of war in a piece for *ProgressiveHub.com*:

Nolan de-glorified war. In this movie, we're told that the Greeks were led into the Trojan War for economic reasons. The warriors were forced into the war through threats to their families and towns. The war was boring and

wasteful. Then it was horrific, evil, and traumatizing. Then it tore down the rule of law and spread fear and insecurity across the world. Odysseus, in this film, took so long getting home because he was recovering from the moral guilt, horror, trauma, and grief of war. . . . There was not one decent thing about the whole filthy enterprise, apart from the misdirected bravery.

Swanson also points out that the movie's ending seems to justify the massacre of the suitors who invaded Odysseus's home to court his wife, but I disagree. Homer does justify the revenge perpetrated by Odysseus, but Nolan does not. There is nothing glorious about Odysseus's orgy of violence, which Nolan graphically depicts. So heinous is Odysseus's bloodthirsty revenge that he feels compelled to go into exile with Penelope, leaving their son behind to rule over a deeply traumatized community. Odysseus effectively becomes a refugee, pushed away from his home once again. Not exactly a happy ending.

Nolan's Odysseus is in some ways comparable to his J. Robert Oppenheimer, whom Nolan examined in his 2023 film as a tragic figure consumed by hubris. Oppenheimer created weapons of mass destruction that he later came to regret, fearing that they would lead to the end of civilization. Odysseus created a weapon of mass *deception*, the Trojan horse, that led to the horrific fall of Troy and paved the way for a breakdown of values that knit together Hellenic civilization.

Although *The Odyssey* does not address the threat of nuclear armageddon as *Oppenheimer* did, it is worth noting that Nolan has shown deep concern about nuclear war. As a Quaker, I was pleased to learn that he expressed appreciation for peace activists in his acceptance speech for best director at an awards ceremony in 2024: "I do just want to acknowledge [those] who

have fought long and hard to reduce the number of nuclear weapons in the world. . . . They show the necessity and potential of efforts for peace."

Nolan clearly made *The Odyssey* with our own time in mind. We are witnessing the erosion of the fragile system of international law and values built after World War II to prevent the horrors that scarred the first half of the twentieth century. As imperfect as that system was, it is now giving way to something worse: the collapse of international law and the amoral doctrine that "might makes right."

What Nolan calls Zeus's law—the obligation to welcome strangers and treat them with kindness—is being replaced by anti-immigrant xenophobia, in many nations worldwide. Under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention, asylum seekers are to be protected from returning to the persecution they fled. The Trump administration has all but repudiated that Convention, and many other nations (including Greece) no longer welcome refugees as they once did.

Are we moving toward a civilizational collapse like the one that befell Homeric Greece? It can feel that way. Yet my Quaker faith affirms "the necessity and potential of efforts for peace," as Nolan put it. As Quakers, we have a crucial role to play in fostering what Martin Luther King Jr. called a "revolution of values." We must also put our faith into practice by welcoming refugees and asylum seekers, as many Quakers have already done, and by standing in solidarity with groups like Veterans for Peace and others who, like Odysseus, know the trauma and tragedy of war firsthand and choose to seek a peaceful world.

Anthony Manousos is a Quaker author, blogger, and activist. A member of Orange Grove Meeting in Pasadena, Calif., he has authored/edited six books, including Transformative Friends and Howard and Anna Brinton. He is also cofounder of a housing justice nonprofit, Making Housing and Community Happen. He blogs at laquaker.blogspot.com.



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Why Do You Involve Me? My Hour Has Not Yet Come

ANDY STANTON-HENRY

John 2:1–11 (NIV)

On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus' mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus' mother said to him, "They have no more wine." "Woman, why do you involve me?" Jesus replied. "My hour has not yet come." His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you." Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water"; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet." They did so, and the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, "Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now." What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

The Bible Study column runs four times a year in the February, May, August, and November issues. We welcome your submissions and comments at Friendsjournal.org/biblestudy.

Maerten de Vos,
The Marriage at Cana, oil on
panel, 1596–97.



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I have had the privilege of officiating several weddings. Most of the time, these events are spiritually and emotionally supercharged: full of excitement, anxiety, and tension. When I meet with the couple before the ceremony, I prepare them: "Something unexpected *will* happen. Something unexpected always happens at weddings." Not wanting to leave them in a state of distress, I quickly reassure them: "But you've got good people around you who care about you. We will solve any problems that come up and make sure it's all about love and celebration. And, at the end of the day, you'll be married!"

Indeed, something unexpected always happens at weddings, for better or for worse (no pun intended). At the last wedding my wife and I officiated, we introduced the "ring warming ceremony" only to discover that the rings were missing! Thankfully, we were able to improvise—Quaker style—with open sharing. Thankfully, the rings were eventually located, and all was well. The sharing time ended up being a highlight for guests; they felt it added a personal and spiritual quality to the occasion.

Even in Jesus's time, it seems, something unexpected always happened at weddings. In the Cana wedding story, the issue wasn't the rings; it was the wine. For traditional Quakers, the wine running out might bring a sigh of relief. It was getting a little too wild for their taste. What's wrong with water, anyway! But for a Jewish wedding, running out of wine at a wedding was tragic, if not downright shameful.

I love Mary's simple but suggestive comment to Jesus: "They have no wine." You can almost hear the subtext: "They have no wine (wink, wink, nudge, nudge). If only there were an up-and-coming messiah who could do something about this perplexing problem. . . ."

Jesus seemed less than amused in his reply. Commentators tell me that "Woman" in this passage isn't as derogatory as it sounds. It could be translated as "dear woman" or "ma'am." I believe them, but Jesus still doesn't sound pleased: "Why do you involve me?"

I have asked that question more times than I can count. It is a frequent internal (if not external) reaction to

peoples' attempts to triangulate me into their drama or coax me into their project. We should resist unhealthy triangulation and overcommitment. But I've also learned that sometimes it is as much the Spirit's nudging as it is the "Mother Mary" figure in my life. A big part of the spiritual life is "getting involved with God," as biblical scholar Ellen Davis puts it.

Once we get involved, the duty often turns into delight because we realize that, somehow, we get to participate in miracle-making. We get to witness water becoming wine. It becomes a sign of a better world to come. And we become signs of a reality that Jesus called "the kingdom of God."

Of course, it's not just weddings where unexpected things happen. All around the world—not least the Quaker world—there are unexpected things happening all the time. We generally experience the unexpected as an unwelcome surprise. It's hard not to have rising anxiety as we feel pulled into a spiral of scarcity as people declare: "We have no wine." Many Friends feel like the wine of our movement has run dry, and we are left with only lack: a lack of passion, energy, and resources.

However, "We have no wine" is more than a statement of fact. It is also a nudge to faithfulness. It names a problem and possibilities at the same time—in the same way that a breakdown can lead to a breakthrough, a rock bottom can be the beginning of recovery; an apology can lead to reconciliation. "Limitation and possibility mean about the same thing," wrote Flannery O'Connor.

Miracles of any kind generally start naming reality and facing facts, and accepting limitations. Paradoxically, this recognition of what's absent and negative can help us turn to what is present and possible. If we resist the spiral of scarcity, the practice of counting the "five loaves and two fishes" can jump-start the miracle of feeding the multitude (to borrow from

another Jesus story). "You don't know what you need from outside until you know what you have inside," instructs community development consultant John McKnight. (And often, we have more than we thought.)

In Cana, Jesus took what was present—the old ceremonial jars—and filled them with water, trusting that some kind of Power or Presence would work in the process to bring transformation. This event was the first of many miracles for Jesus. And it all started with a nudge. Give credit where credit is due—a concerned guest, a faithful woman, and an assertive mother.

As Friends, we emphasize the gentle nudges of the Spirit. Only One can truly speak to our condition. Humans are prone to manipulation and domination. We easily drift from nudging into nagging.

And yet, sometimes we do need a Friendly nudge from someone we trust. And sometimes we are called to nudge others to "get involved" with God and neighbors in some kind of problem turned opportunity, limitation turned possibility, scarcity turned abundance. If we are anywhere in that mix, we get the privilege of partnering with God in miracle-making.

Discussion Questions

- How do you know when you are being nudged to get involved in something?
- When have you been the "nudger" and when have you been the "nudgee"?
- What situations of scarcity in our Society might be poised for transformation?

Andy Stanton-Henry is a writer and Quaker minister who makes his home in East Tennessee. He is co-pastor of Lakeway (Tenn.) Meeting (part of Wilmington Yearly Meeting) and co-director of the Quaker Leadership Center at Earlham School of Religion.



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All stories by Sharlee DiMenichi

Jury convicts Vermont man in 2023 shooting of Three Ramallah Friends School grads

On September 21, at a courthouse in Burlington, Vt., a jury found Jason Eaton guilty of attempted murder, *PBS NewsHour* reported. Eaton could be incarcerated for life; a sentencing date is not set.

The three shooting victims—Hisham Awartani, Tasheen Ahmed, and Kinnan Abdalhamid—were graduates of Ramallah Friends School, according to a post on the school's Facebook page. At the time of the attack in November 2023, Awartani was a student at Brown University in Rhode Island; Ahmed attended Trinity College in Connecticut; and Abdalhamid studied at Haverford College in Pennsylvania. The men were all 20 years old when Eaton shot them.

At the time of the shooting, the three men were speaking a combination of English and Arabic; two of them were wearing keffiyehs, Palestinian scarves, according to Vermont Public Radio.

Authorities investigated the attack as a hate crime, according to *The New York Times*. However, prosecutors concluded that they did not have enough evidence to support a hate crime charge under Vermont law, Vermont Public Radio reported. Vermont does not have a separate hate crime charge, but crimes determined to be motivated by bias can result in longer prison terms.

The three men testified in Eaton's trial, including Awartani, who uses a wheelchair after the shooting paralyzed him from the waist down, Vermont Public Radio reported.

The jurors rejected an insanity defense in which Eaton's attorneys said he believed he was following commands from Mossad, the national intelligence agency of Israel, and the CIA broadcast on FM radio, NewsChannel 10 reported.

Quakers win preliminary injunction against Homeland Security

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit affirmed District Judge Theodore Chuang's ruling in an appeal filed by the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS). The Religious Freedom Restoration Act prohibits the government from directly impeding free exercise of religion or limiting it through "indirect coercion, substantial pressure, or penalties being placed on such free exercise," according to the decision, filed on August 18, 2026.

Quaker plaintiffs in the suit, filed in January 2025, have suffered a decline in attendance at meetings due to the threat of immigration enforcement, according to the ruling. Being unable to welcome immigrant worshipers forces Quakers to violate the equality testimony. Other injuries include declines in ministries to immigrants and a reduction in donations.

The lawsuit only applies to the plaintiffs, and does not apply to other faith communities. Plaintiffs include Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, New England Yearly Meeting, Baltimore Yearly Meeting, Adelphi (Md.) Meeting, and Richmond (Va.) Meeting.

On February 24, 2025, Judge Chuang granted a preliminary injunction for plaintiffs in the case but stopped short of enjoining immigration enforcement at all houses of worship nationwide. The judge noted then that the Quakers in the lawsuit expressed concern that having armed DHS agents near meetinghouses would violate Friends' pacifist convictions.

DHS filed its interlocutory appeal shortly after Judge Chuang issued the order on February 24, 2025.

For the latest updates on this developing story, go to *Friendsjournal.org/quakers-sue-dhs*.

Sharlee DiMenichi is a staff writer for Friends Journal. Follow all our news coverage at Friendsjournal.org/news; send us tips at news@friendsjournal.org.



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Quick Facts About Indigenous Americans, 2026.

Developed by a Native-led team sponsored by Baltimore Yearly Meeting's Indigenous Affairs Committee, this book provides current data on many aspects of indigenous life today (Native Americans, Alaska Natives, and Native Hawaiians).

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Philadelphia Quakers and the American Revolution

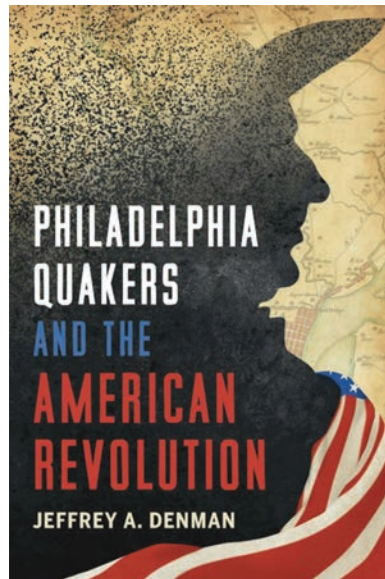
By Jeffrey A. Denman. *The History Press*, 2026. 160 pages. \$24.99/paperback; \$9.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Thomas D. Hamm

As the United States observes the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, many residents of this country have felt almost as badly divided as were Americans in 1776. Many Friends have felt led to offer a counter-witness to uncritical celebrations of American exceptionalism and accomplishment. Jeffrey A. Denman's book shows that such Friends are following in the footsteps of Friends in 1776.

Philadelphia, Pa., was both the spiritual center of North American Quakerism and, for most of the Revolutionary War, the seat of the new American government. Beginning with the meeting of the First Continental Congress in 1774, Friends found themselves in conflict with revolutionary firebrands. In the 1760s and early 1770s, many Friends had joined in opposition to British policies, but when after 1774 opposition seemed likely to lead to violence, they drew back. The fact that the revolutionary effort in Pennsylvania was led by Scots-Irish Presbyterians who had been in conflict with Friends for decades exacerbated tensions. When war broke out in the spring of 1775, Philadelphia Friends had already called on Friends "to discountenance and avoid every measure tending to excite disaffection to the King," as recorded in meeting minutes from that year. Quaker refusal to bear arms or provide supplies for the military was regarded as treasonable by the new national and state governments.

Things grew worse late in the summer of 1777, when the British invaded the Delaware Valley. The American and British armies confronted each other along the Brandywine in Chester County and



fought another battle at Germantown. After the British occupied Philadelphia in October 1777, George Washington and his Continental Army went into winter quarters among Quaker farms at Valley Forge. Meanwhile, American authorities, convinced that Friends were British collaborators, sent a number of leading Friends off to exile in Virginia. Things improved slightly after the British evacuated Philadelphia in the spring of 1778, but two Friends were hanged as British collaborators, and Friends found themselves disenfranchised by oaths that required them to forswear allegiance to the British government.

Not all Friends opposed the movement for independence. In Philadelphia, a breakaway group of "Free Quakers" decided that their faith could be reconciled with supporting independence and military service. Hundreds of Quaker men would be disowned for bearing arms during the war, although it is often unclear which side they were supporting.

Denman's work raises a perplexing question. He sees Friends committed to pacifism as neutrals, refusing to bear arms for either side. Yet an argument could be made that Quaker exhortations to abjure rebellion and to refuse support for revolutionary governments was in effect loyalism.

Certainly that was the judgment of contemporaries.

This is a readable and engaging book. Specialists can argue a few fine points, such as how integral pacifism was to seventeenth-century Quakerism, but these do not detract from the work. Its worst fault is the lack of an index.

Thomas D. Hamm is a member of West Richmond (Ind.) Meeting in the New Association of Friends, and emeritus professor of history at Earlham College.

Quakers and the Enslaved in North Carolina

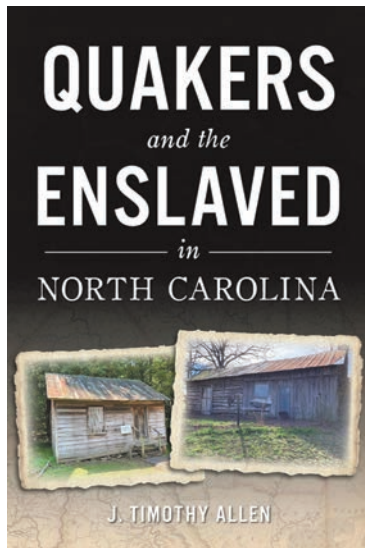
By J. Timothy Allen. *The History Press*, 2026. 176 pages. \$24.99/paperback.

Reviewed by Max L. Carter

In popular thought, Quakers are often perceived as being among the very few who have been free from the taint of involvement with slavery. Instead, they are portrayed as heroic opponents, organizing the Underground Railroad and risking life and possessions in illegal activity to free the oppressed. Neither are Quakers immune to this mythology. As a youth growing up in a community of Friends in Indiana that previously had been at the center of Underground Railroad activity in the mid-1800s, I took the stories of that work, along with the presence of Friends of Color who were descended from freed Blacks, as evidence of Quaker non-complicity—and even immunity to racial prejudice.

I was wrong, and J. Timothy Allen's book *Quakers and the Enslaved in North Carolina* details with extensive archival research just how involved Friends were in slavery, how complex the history is of their path to antislavery, and their response of how to address the issue of supporting those newly freed.

Allen examines early Quaker attitudes about slavery and notes the response of important figures such as George Fox. Fox, who preached in Barbados before his 1672 arrival



in the Carolinas, was aware of the use of enslaved labor on the sugar plantations but encouraged only kind treatment, education in Christian principles, and possible application of Jubilee principles following years of enslavement. Meanwhile, Quaker-owned ships carried more enslaved persons to the island.

As the coastal areas of North Carolina were settled by Quakers in the late 1600s and early 1700s, they utilized enslaved labor on the wealthy plantations made lucrative by the soil of the Great Dismal Swamp drained by canals dug by the enslaved. Allen's research details the number of persons enslaved by Quakers with familiar surnames: Francis Toms, 8; Patrick Henley, 11; Amos Trueblood, "around 20"; and together Thomas Newby, Caleb White, Zach Nixon, George Walton, and five others held 134.

Gradually, however, the growing sentiments against slavery expressed by William Edmundson, John Woolman, and others were being felt by Friends in the South. John Woolman's 1746 and 1757 journeys to North Carolina and his visits with Quaker enslavers had an effect. When Newby and over a dozen Friends in Perquimans County chose in early 1776 to manumit their enslaved persons, only to see them captured and re-enslaved, processes began in North Carolina Yearly

Meeting to address the situation.

That presented a dilemma for Quaker enslavers. Some chose to accept disownment and hold on to their enslaved persons. Some chose to leave Friends. Those choosing to remain Friends then had to face the reality that manumitting their enslaved persons was against North Carolina law. In response, the migration of Quakers out of the South began, with a trickle in the late 1700s becoming a torrent by the 1820s.

Those who remained in North Carolina worked around the law in various ways. "Colonization" societies raised funds to ship freed Blacks to Haiti, Liberia, and other locations. But that proved to be problematic for many reasons. Manumission societies were formed to advocate for a change in the laws. They ceased to exist by the early 1830s.

An idea was finally adopted by the Yearly Meeting in consort with an antislavery jurist who advised that, since religious bodies could hold property, Friends could hand over title to their enslaved persons to the Yearly Meeting for their protection as "owned," while being allowed to live as "Quaker Free Negroes." By the 1820s, North Carolina Yearly Meeting held title to more than 700 formerly enslaved persons, making it perhaps the largest "enslaver" in the state!

Care and oversight for the Quaker Free Negroes became the responsibility of the Meeting for Sufferings, and they had to raise enormous sums of money for that work, including clothing, food, training, and transportation. Donations from beyond North Carolina were received, but a dramatically declining population of Friends in the state was hard-pressed to address the need.

Meanwhile, North Carolina, as were other Southern states, was growing increasingly concerned about large populations of free Blacks: fearing slave revolts. As the work to maintain legal responses to the choice of freeing their enslaved continued, some Friends,

as Levi Coffin explained, found the laws to be in contradiction to human decency, and so "we ignored the law." Beginning with a "Maritime Railroad" along the waterways of eastern North Carolina and the "Aboveground Railroad" of Friends taking free Blacks with them as they migrated to free states in the North, a system eventually evolved of an "Underground Railroad" that aided in the escape of both the enslaved and free Blacks, who continued to face the threat of kidnapping.

Throughout it all, there were ongoing debates among Friends about the propriety of legal vs. illegal activity, gradual emancipation vs. abolitionism, and a continuing undercurrent of racism.

Allen's work is important to consider as Friends today continue to wrestle with the legacy of slavery and our complicity, as well as with contemporary issues of justice that have Friends divided about the proper ways to address those issues. Our own history can be a helpful guide in considering the ramifications of our decisions.

Max L. Carter is the emeritus William R. Rogers Director of Friends Center and Quaker Studies at Guilford College. He is a member of New Garden Meeting in Greensboro, N.C., and serves on the board of Friends Publishing Corporation, publisher of Friends Journal.

The Ballad of the Fugitive William Parker: A True Tale of Love, Murder, Treason, and Ordinary Folks Who Saved America

By Cristin O'Keefe Aptowicz. Simon & Schuster, 2026. 448 pages. \$31/hardcover; \$16.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Cameron McWhirter

On September 11, 1851, a clash erupted at a farmhouse in rural Pennsylvania that would make national

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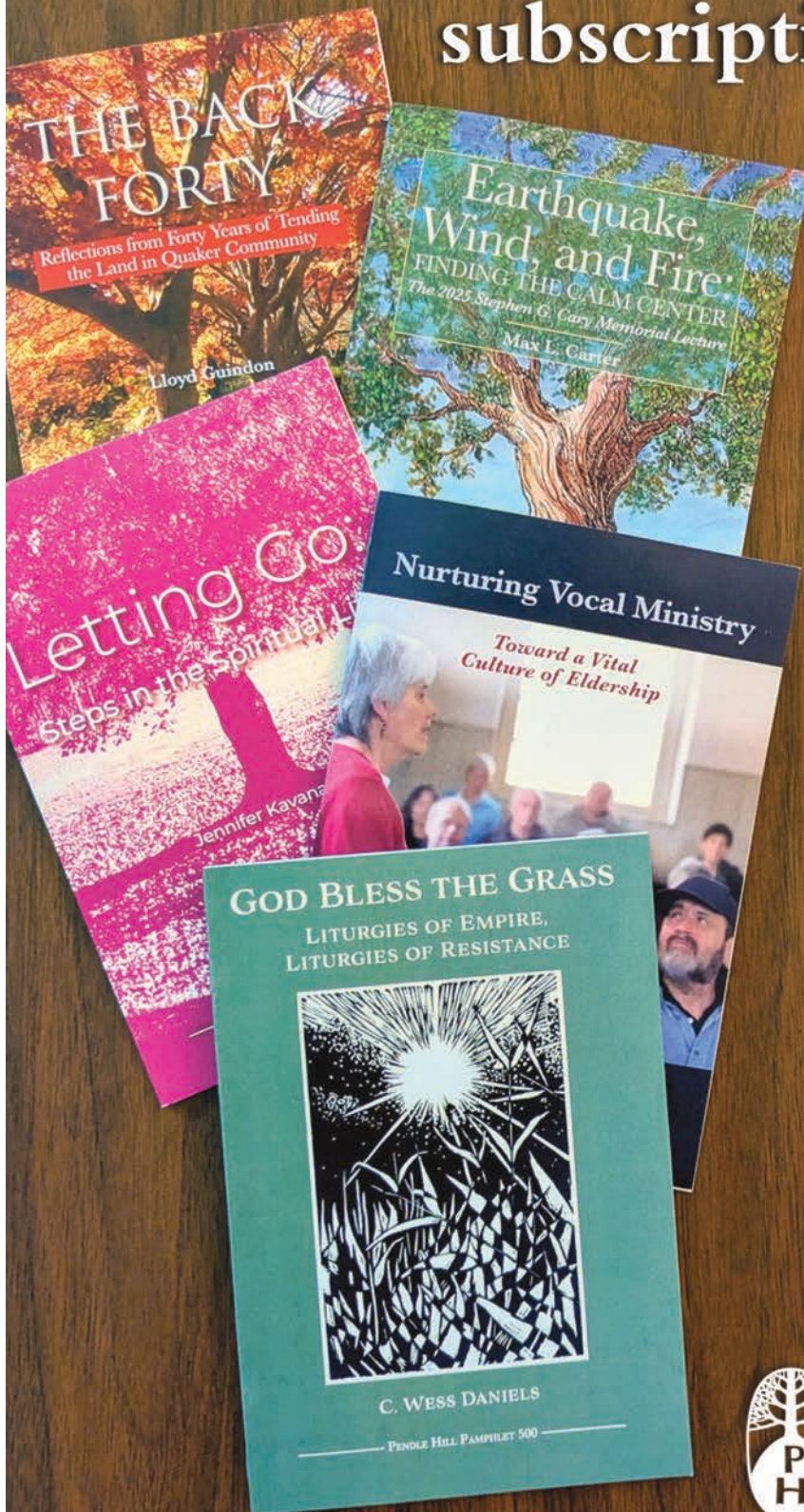
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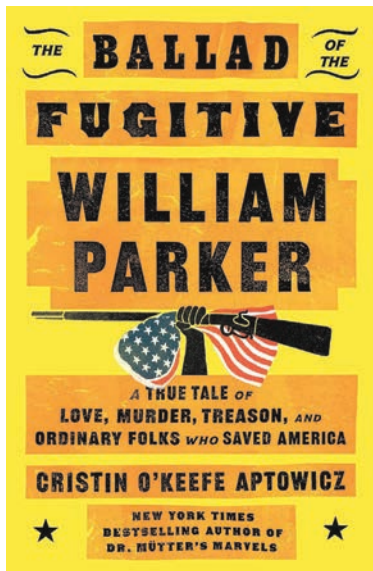
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headlines, lay bare the weakness of the federal government, and push the nation closer to a bloody civil war over slavery.

White slaveholder Marylander Edward Gorsuch arrived at the house in Christiana, Pa., with law officers, a posse, and federal arrest warrants to recover what he claimed was his “property”: Black men who had fled enslavement. The farmhouse was the home of William Parker, a Black man who had escaped slavery years ago. His home became known as a safe place for Black people escaping from the South. Gorsuch demanded the men come out of the house. They refused, and Parker came out and told the posse to leave. After an alarm was sounded, armed Black neighbors and white Quakers arrived to surround the house.

“I’ll have my property or go to hell!” Gorsuch yelled. Fighting and shooting erupted. Within minutes, Gorsuch was dead and his son critically wounded. The rest of the posse fled. National uproar ensued.

The so-called Compromise of 1850, which included the Fugitive Slave Act, divided the nation into free and slave states and allowed slaveholders to go into “free” states and round up alleged slaves. The events at the farmhouse revealed the compromise to be an

unworkable and immoral sham. It was a key moment in the nation’s descent into bloody Civil War.

What became known for generations as the “Christiana Riot” has been written about before, and by some excellent historians. Now Cristin O’Keefe Aptowicz has brought her poetic and narrative skills to the story, which she first encountered while researching her Pennsylvania ancestors’ involvement in the Underground Railroad. She has made a concerted effort to give the Parkers, the men who escaped Gorsuch, and others a larger part of a narrative that for too long emphasized white participants. In the past, Quakers, who played a significant role in the Underground Railroad and in Christiana specifically, were often made the saga’s heroes, even though it was actually the Black free men and escaped enslaved people who fought off the posse.

“The public had become invested in a narrative of resolute Quakers conducting a righteous crusade for liberty—with the weapon-wielding, Bible-quoting, hymn-singing, and fiercely defiant Black resisters relegated largely to the role of nameless minor characters,” Aptowicz writes.

With this book, she sets out to change that. Learned in the history of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, Aptowicz does a masterful job setting the stage for that violent day and detailing its aftermath. Her pace is brisk and her style taut, though the effort is flawed by some factual errors and the taking of liberties with evidence to present colorful scenes to the reader.

Quakers are a large part of the story, but Aptowicz works hard to make sure Parker, who was forced to flee to Canada after the violence, assumes his central and rightful role in the saga. The book is full of well-sketched historical figures, including Frederick Douglass, Thaddeus Stevens, and Lucretia Mott.

The book presents vivid and tense scenes, including when Parker and

other Black men escape north on a train as news of the violence makes headlines across the country. In a railroad car, Parker speaks with a seemingly sympathetic white man who may or may not know who he is.

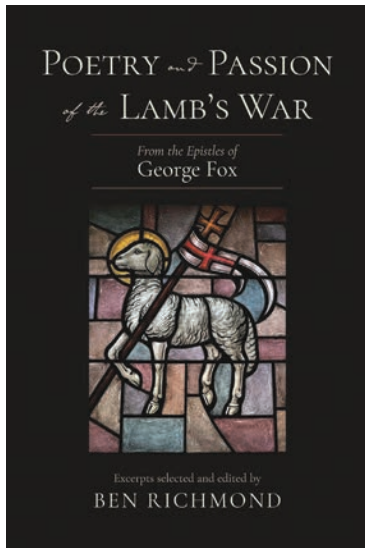
Aptowicz’s telling hews close to the historical record, with a few instances of speculation. The book’s subtitle is a bit of a stretch, as the violence that day was not any effort to save America but—perhaps more importantly—an effort by those who attacked Gorsuch to save themselves and assert their right to live free from the fear of enslavement.

The Ballad of the Fugitive William Parker is important for Quakers because it reveals a moral tension in the Religious Society of Friends’ commitment to nonviolence. Throughout American history, Quakers have espoused nonviolence, often at great risk to themselves and their families, but at times they have done so from a relatively comfortable economic and political position. A white farmer in Pennsylvania could argue for nonviolence, but could a Black neighbor who escaped slavery be expected to embrace the same view? If that neighbor wanted freedom, nonviolence wasn’t an option.

As Aptowicz writes: “Parker knew the Quaker way: They didn’t believe violence solved anything. He’d have liked nothing better than to live in a world where he could afford to believe that, too.”

At one point, Parker tells a Quaker woman who is his neighbor: “If the laws protected us colored men as they do white men, I would be a nonresistant.”

Cameron McWhirter is a journalist. He is coauthor of American Gun: The True Story of the AR-15 and author of Red Summer: The Summer of 1919 and the Awakening of Black America. He is a member of Atlanta (Ga.) Meeting. He has served on the Board of Trustees of Friends Publishing Corporation, publisher of Friends Journal.



Poetry and Passion of the Lamb's War: From the Epistles of George Fox

Excerpts selected and edited by Ben Richmond. Barclay Press, 2026. 262 pages. \$28/paperback.

Reviewed by Ron Hogan

When he began reading George Fox's epistles, Ben Richmond was profoundly affected by their spiritual power—but, as we learn in his introduction to *Poetry and Passion of the Lamb's War*, he “also found Fox's seventeenth-century English was sometimes obscure, his style dense and repetitive.” Then he started to experiment with the text's formatting, breaking the long sentences up into poetic lines, and found that it gave him “joy to listen for the melodious movements of the Word in Fox's letters.”

Poetry and Passion takes on a wide swath of Fox's public correspondence in this playful manner. Richmond organizes his selections into broad categories, such as “The Light that Enlightens Everyone” or “The Victory of the Lamb Who Was Slain.” He writes a short introduction to each extract, introducing the epistle's themes and explaining any archaic vocabulary, then helpfully identifies Bible verses that informed the composition of the epistle. Finally, we have the

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extracts themselves; though Richmond occasionally maintains the original prose structure, most are transformed into a type of free verse. We read, for example, that “every man and woman / must come to truth in the inward parts, / and to the spirit of God / within themselves.”

Occasionally, Richmond uses his introductory remarks to point out that Fox’s messages might speak to our condition. When Fox writes, in a 1655 epistle of “the authority of God, / which is not usurped, / which gives the dominion over all the usurped authority,” Richmond proposes that privilege rooted in race, class, or gender represents modern forms of “usurped authority,” a human corruption of the divine order in which “ye live in the unity, / ye live in the peace, // ye live all in the subjection / one to another / in the fear of the Lord.” (Fear in this case is not a matter of terror but a respectful recognition that God and God’s power exist on a scale far, far greater than we can comprehend, a realization that properly makes us humble.)

Do Richmond’s tweaks and commentaries bring greater clarity to Fox’s epistles? Absolutely. I’ve read essays by Fox and other early Friends that have been preserved online, and teasing the messages out of all those long, winding clauses as they pile atop one another can require intense focus on the reader’s part. The poetic format doesn’t nullify the complexities of Fox’s spiritual arguments, but it does provide the reader with a highly navigable road map—one that enables us to see just how deeply Scripture was embedded in Fox’s thought processes and how it provided him with a language to make sense of the revelations he had received from Spirit.

The majority of *Poetry and Passion* deals with Fox’s spiritual messages, but Richmond also focuses on a batch of epistles in which Fox lays out some ideas about the shape of the Religious Society dedicated to that spirituality:

So Friends are not to meet
like a company of people
about town or parish business,

neither in their men’s
nor women’s meetings,
but to wait upon the Lord;
.....
that so whatsoever they may do,
they may do it to the praise and
glory of God.

Although, as this extract suggests, men and women were often segregated into separate meetings for worship, Fox makes it clear that he considered women’s ministry just as vital and as Spirit-filled:

for women are heirs of life
as well as the men,
and heirs of grace,
and of the light of Christ Jesus,
as well as the men,
and so stewards of the manifold
grace of God.

Richmond embraces this plain assertion of equality as a principle that remains true for today’s Friends, as he celebrates the existence of a faith community where “[b]usiness conducted with the intent of listening for the living Voice of God within each of us and drawing us into unity still has power to answer that of God in men and women and draw them into the eternal fellowship.”

Richmond makes several such observations, which are scattered throughout his preliminary remarks, along with some suggestions for spiritual reflection. I sometimes found myself wishing, however, that these observations would coalesce into one clear thesis. Certainly, as a former member of the American Friends Service Committee peace education team and a longtime staffer at Friends United Meeting, he’s in a position to offer a compelling take on modern Quakerism and how effectively it has (or, perhaps, hasn’t) held onto Fox’s vision. If anything, though, Richmond seems to deliberately step back, to keep the spotlight firmly on Fox and his writings.

You can’t really fault him for that decision, of course. Contemporary Quakers often have limited familiarity with Fox’s words. We know about the

“one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,” and most of us hear, at some point, about the exhortation to “be patterns, be examples.” And then . . . not so much. So we should welcome anything that helps us better understand how Fox shaped Quaker faith and practice. I still might wish for more of a helping hand—not to tell readers exactly what to think about George Fox—I wouldn’t want that—but to bind all his many thoughts even more tightly together for our contemplation.

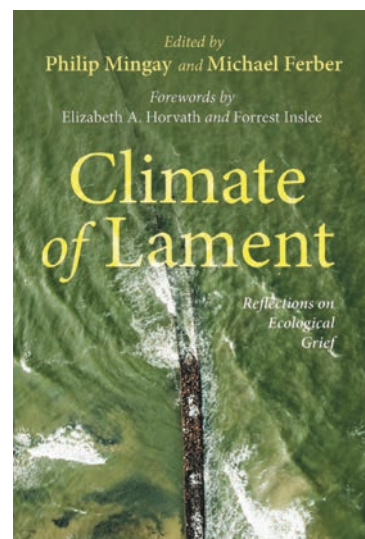
Ron Hogan is the audience development specialist for Friends Publishing Corporation and webmaster for Quaker.org, where he writes a weekly message connecting Friends’ faith and practice to Scripture called Look to the Light. He is also the author of Our Endless and Proper Work.

Climate of Lament: Reflections on Ecological Grief

Edited by Philip Mingay and Michael Ferber. Wipf & Stock, 2026. 212 pages. \$44/hardcover; \$29/paperback; \$14.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Harvey Gillman

Poetry is booming because it’s the only language for these times of violence and chaos. —Charlotte Higgins in *The Guardian* (August 10, 2026)





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I am writing this review in the south of England on one of the hottest days of the century. Plants are dying in the garden. Insects are in decline. There is news of food shortages, fires to the north, and both floods and fires throughout the world. The country is almost entirely in drought. How do humans perceive our own responsibility for what is happening? If we do, how do we share our feelings? How do we mourn together? How do we—can we—continue living as we do? Indeed, how do we continue living at all?

Poetry has always been for me an alternative voice to the bland rationalism and cynicism that views creation as a source of profit and exploitation. It is an expression of the human as part of the natural and also sacred world—humans not as isolated individuals seeking domination and power but as vulnerable creatures in a fragmented universe. In the foreword to this book, we are told that “poetry is a form of art that can touch both soul and heart.” Poetry then is a form of envisioning.

Climate of Lament is an anthology of 22 poems, each accompanied by a short reflection describing the genesis of the poem and the concern of the poet. The poets, all based in North America, are witnessing the degradation of the world around them. Some have never written poems before; some are very experienced poets. You cannot always tell the difference. It can be hard to find words, however imaginatively, to express deep raw feelings in a way that is illuminating and moving, rather than despairing and overwhelming. And yet there is great wisdom here, a desire to find connection and to express the grief felt at the brokenness of the world.

Lamentation is not part of the Quaker tradition. I have often found Friends reluctant to see grief and negativity as part of the spiritual adventure. There is sometimes a ruthless pursuit of optimism, a modern version of Fox’s not playing up sin

and striving for the Light. I have to remember, however, that Quakers are also human beings, and grief, hence lamentation, is also part of the human experience, an acceptance of which is part of the recognition of truth.

This book is influenced by Walter Brueggemann’s “prophetic triad of ‘Reality,’ ‘Grief,’ and ‘Hope.’” The poems observe, feel, and react, leaving the reader with questions as to how we might dare to hope. One of the most moving of the poems for me was “I Saw You Coming” by Michael Ferber. It is based on a visit to a canyon with some students. The canyon had been devastated by fire. In the poem, Ferber speaks of the canyon’s antiquity and its destruction but also of its resilience:

The ash is all you see,
but beneath it,
roots are already listening.
Fireweed presses upward through
the cinders.
The mycelium did not die,
it waits,
networked in patience beneath
your feet.

In his accompanying reflection, Ferber describes the canyon as a “sacred pedagogical place.” Humankind has destroyed much, but the natural world has much to teach, slowly and patiently.

Lamentation is a recognition of our own grief, our need to repent, and make amends. Traditionally, it is a ritual that the community does together. It takes us beyond our isolation to a sense that the grief is universal. In this, we may find solidarity. In her psalm “My God!,” Cassidhe Hart goes through grief to a vision of hope, based on the progression in Psalm 22, “an psalm of Earth”:

My oceans are like wax,
congealed with pockets of
petroleum.
My springs are dried up,
soil cracked like pottery.
My skies redden not with dawn

but with smoky haze;
I am set down in the sludge
of death.

And yet toward the end of the poem, the tone changes:

All your dirt-bound creatures
will kiss the ground in reverence.
Our being lives for you. . . .

In her reflection, Hart writes: “through our laments . . . we can connect the dots between the suffering we see in our local ecosystems and the larger global climate picture—and, perhaps, walk ever closer to justice.”

This is not a book written by Quakers, but I believe it appeals directly to Quaker sensibilities. It takes for granted a sacred depth in the whole of the natural world, without defining that religious understanding. It concentrates on broken relationships and the need for their restoration, be they political, racial, economic, environmental, or social.

We need a language that somehow meets the needs of a desperate, hope-seeking world. In her reflection, Connie Braun, one of whose poems is titled “Vigil for the Seven Children Who Died in Migrant Detainment Camps,” wrote: “The poetry of lament is a refusal to look away, a refusal to remain silent. It is the poetry of witness.” For Quakers, witness is at the heart of testimony. Perhaps poetry is one way we can witness to a larger, more inclusive vision of creation, imaginatively restoring connections in our disconnected world. This book is certainly a resource for this process.

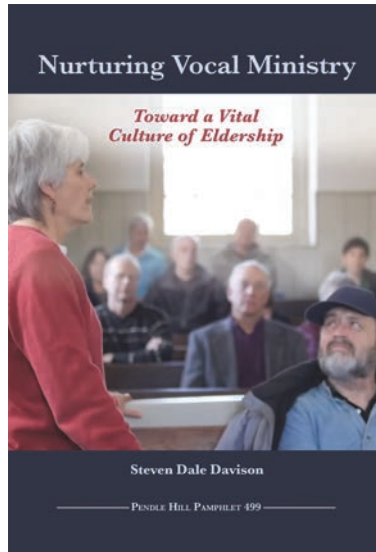
Harvey Gillman served as outreach secretary for Britain Yearly Meeting for 18 years. He has traveled widely among Friends both at home and abroad, exploring the Quaker way and reflecting on issues of spirituality, outreach, inclusivity, language, and hospitality, both in his writings and in workshops and retreats. His most recent publication is an anthology of poems titled Epiphanies.

Nurturing Vocal Ministry: Toward a Vital Culture of Eldership

By Steven Dale Davison. *Pendle Hill Pamphlets* (number 499), 2026. 43 pages. \$8.50/pamphlet or eBook.

Reviewed by Brian Drayton

In this useful pamphlet, Steven Davison argues effectively that a living vocal ministry is an essential element of a living Friends meeting, and that such ministry arises within a culture that both welcomes and helps cultivate it. He succinctly enumerates core functions of vocal ministry: as an invitation to the communion and culture of worship; as a contributor to spiritual nurture; as a manifestation of revelation continuing among us; as an invitation to newcomers; and as a key part of meetings' teaching about our tradition, our faith and practice. A consideration of these functions can



help us reflect on some of the gifts that may be present in our meetings, which we can nurture for the benefit of the whole, or if they are not present, we can take prayerful action to help them emerge. This is where the culture of eldership comes in.

Davison points out that our care

and nurture of vocal ministry requires us to reflect, study, and talk about the ministry that our meetings experience, as well as the places where there are kinds of ministry not currently active. Moreover, these conversations cannot have their best effect on the meeting's life without attention to the gifts and nurture of specific people in the meeting, whether emerging contributors to the vocal ministry or more experienced Friends, who also need encouragement and guidance. Necessarily, this also will include constructive ways to deal with unhelpful ministry. All these kinds of attention can be learned and practiced when a meeting works intentionally to build a culture of eldership.

Davison reminds us that some Friends and some meetings are resistant to such intentional care of vocal ministry and of eldership, and he briefly and effectively addresses some of the typical issues that are raised. He also explores the challenging issue of



naming and recognizing gifts in some form or fashion but closes with a strong statement of the benefits to be derived from the kind of meeting culture he describes.

His further reading list at the end is a useful collection of resources, including *An Invitation to Quaker Eldering* by Elaine Emily and Mary Kay Glazer. I would also add Peter Blood-Patterson's recent article in *Friends Journal*, "Speaking with Spiritual Authority" (June-July 2026).

Davison's pamphlet should join two other Pendle Hill publications, Marty Grundy's *Tall Poppies* and Adria DiCapua's *Embracing Spiritual Gifts*, as an excellent resource for meeting communities and for Worship and Ministry committees.

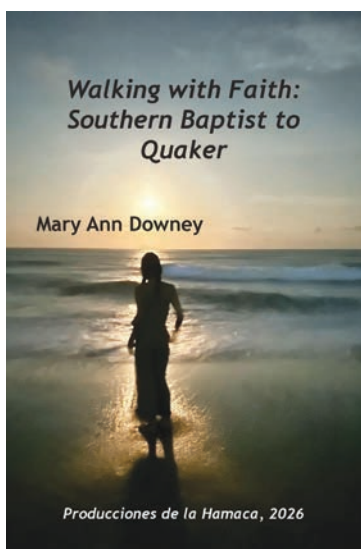
Brian Drayton worships with Wellesley (Mass.) Meeting. His latest book, The Gospel in the Anthropocene: Letters from a Quaker Naturalist, appeared earlier this year from Inner Light Books. He blogs at Amorvincat.wordpress.com.

Walking with Faith: Southern Baptist to Quaker

By Mary Ann Downey. Producciones de la Hamaca, 2025. 158 pages. \$20/paperback; \$5/eBook.

Reviewed by Barbara Birch

Mary Ann Downey is an active member of Atlanta (Ga.) Meeting, social worker, workshop leader, and accomplished writer. She began keeping a diary 70 years ago in grade school after a teacher told her that her thoughts were important and worth recording. Downey sometimes wrote intermittently and sometimes wrote every day about her observations, relationships, travels, griefs, and excitements. In this book, she calls her diary her "lab work and notes" (borrowing language from Friend Bill Kreidler) for exploring and understanding her life. Her journal practice evolved into a "search for the presence of the Spirit" as she



responded to the query "How is the Spirit moving in your life?" She notes, "I write to nurture my spiritual self, to stay in touch with God, to do my lab work."

The book *Walking with Faith* is the direct result of Downey's lifelong journal practice. Many of these essays will seem familiar as over a dozen were previously published in *Friends Journal*. The book is a kind of a memoir, but it is not strictly chronological. It is divided into four prose sections on general themes: "Family and Childhood"; "Career, Faith Community, Ministry"; "Loss, Recovery, Lessons"; and "Vespers Messages," along with a final poetry section titled "Aging with Faith." The 26 poems are in the form of a cinquain, a short five-line poem with a specific syllable structure, similar to a haiku. Each poem is inspired by a word for each letter of the alphabet. Christian and former Christian seekers and doubters will enjoy reading about Downey's life experiences in these essays and poems.

I was drawn to Downey's book because of my interest in the genre of "exvangelical" memoirs. Exvangelicals are adults who have re-evaluated their membership in strict conservative churches and now question the beliefs and traditions they grew up with. Their memoirs range from the

strident and bitter to the thoughtful and low-key. However, in Downey's writing, I was pleasantly surprised to read that her journey from her Southern Baptist upbringing to her life and ministry in Quakerism was relatively seamless because in the church of her childhood, although strict and conservative, Downey felt "loved, instructed and guided."

In her Baptist church, Bible literacy was fundamental, and Downey learned her Bible through competitions:

I especially liked competing in "sword drills," where we would stand at attention with a Bible (our Christian sword). The leader would call, "Attention, draw swords," and we would hold the Bible in front of us with left hand on top, right on the bottom. The leader would then call out a scripture reference. The first person to find the right verse would step forward and read it aloud. And win!

Downey made it clear that her father and mother did not discourage doubts, questions, and humor about their faith. She recounted that her "Mama" would sometimes stay home from church to cook Sunday dinner even though her attendance at worship was expected. Later in the day, when Mama asked her husband (a lay minister and Sunday school teacher) about the topic of the sermon, he would answer, "Sin, woman, sin." Mama would reply, "Was he fer or agin it?"

Downey concluded that this combination of intense and strict religious instruction combined with loving and irreverent parents created a foundation for her later Quaker faith. I am around the same age as Downey, and I too remember a distant time when churches were not on the defensive, when they were not associated with a single political agenda, and when the word "Christian" had not yet been problematized. It was bittersweet to

be reminded of that time.

Barbara Birch is a member of Strawberry Creek Meeting in Emeryville, Calif., and a board member at Ben Lomond Quaker Center outside Santa Cruz, Calif. Author of Lectio Divina: Revelation and Prophecy (Quaker Quicks), Barbara facilitates online lectio divina programs and publishes her musings at yourwifey51.medium.com.

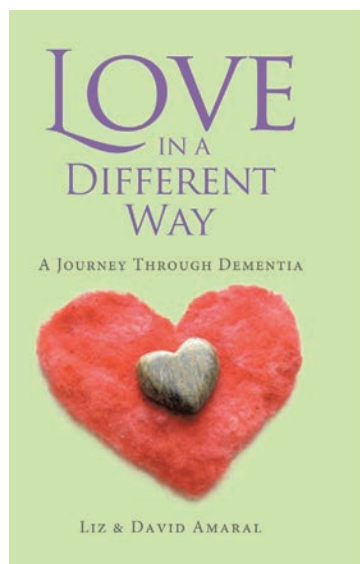
Love in a Different Way: A Journey Through Dementia

By Liz Amaral and David Amaral. Tellwell Talent, 2025. 110 pages. \$28/hardcover; \$19.10/paperback; \$2.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Brad Sheeks

Where does my pill box go? I'd just returned from a family visit in Minnesota, and while unpacking my bag, I pulled out my pill box and was flustered when I couldn't remember where I keep my pill box. In the bathroom? Nope. I glance at my bedside table. Oh yes! Of course. It goes on my bedside table. Hello, Dementia. I see you're back. What do you have to teach me today?

Liz Amaral has gifted us with *Love in a Different Way: A Journey Through Dementia* using her husband's



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drawings and notes along with her own stories of her 50-year marriage to David Amaral. During their last few years together, he descended into the darkness of what initially was called Alzheimer's, then the diagnosis was refined to be frontotemporal dementia, a brain disease that causes such symptoms as dramatic changes in personality, behavior, and language.

I couldn't put the book down. The parallels between Liz and David's marriage and my marriage to Pat McBee are too close for comfort. They met in 1970, fell immediately in love, and married soon thereafter. "We saw life through a shared spiritual lens," writes Liz, a member of Argenta Meeting in British Columbia. Pat and I met in 1971, fell in love, and married within a few months. Now, 55 years later, I'm in an early stage of progressive dementia.

David wanted his drawings to show what it was like to live with his disease. The book contains 32 pictures, followed by his notes and Liz's interpretations and stories as his life partner and caregiver. David used a canoe as a metaphor for their life together. An early drawing shows them in a canoe, floating backward, trapped in the rushing current. The river banks are lined with rocks. There is a waterfall just downstream. He notes, "I am destined to launch off the waterfall and fall forward in the 'Lights' mist." David's drawings pull you into his story. His notes are painful to read. Hers are even more so.

Sixteen drawings later, we see David sitting in the middle of the canoe, empty-handed. Liz is standing on the riverbank holding both life jackets. The canoe is yellow: David's color for God's presence. The gunwale is black: his color for dementia. Seeing David in the middle of that canoe without a paddle sends me back to a painful time in 2024 when I wrote to family and friends that I had to give up driving. David had to learn to ask for help; something I also had to learn. Dementia teaches hard lessons.

One of David's early drawings, "Disorientation," is of a blue hallway extending down to a dead end. Locked doors with no signage are on either side. He writes that once while in a dementia support group, he needed to go to the bathroom and got lost in the hallway. Liz recalled that it was around then that she realized the need to be more open and disclosing about their situation. Recently, I had a similar moment of confusion as I got off an elevator: "Where am I? Why am I here?"

David's drawing of a dining table with a dozen slices of pizza stacked on top of each other is titled, "Overwhelm." He couldn't filter out peripheral sights and sounds: everything came at him at once. He needed to reduce sights and sounds, including the usual things in their home. Pictures had to come off the walls. Shelves had to be emptied. Curtains had to be drawn to shut out the light. Their lives were turned upside down.

David thought his sundowner's syndrome was caused by his worry that he might not be able to sleep. It was a vicious cycle. The more he worried, the worse his sleeplessness got. His drawing has dark lines splitting the picture into pieces.

When Liz could no longer care for David at their farm home outside Nelson, British Columbia, she applied for assisted living housing for him, but unfortunately the application was rejected because David "wasn't disabled enough." So she found him a small cottage in town and made arrangements with an adult daycare program. As his symptoms worsened, Liz tried again for the assisted living facility and this time it was approved. It was a big relief for Liz: "I could finally stop being absorbed in errands, medications, risks, and worries. When I visited with him at his new home, we could just be together."

David died in May 2021, with Liz at his side. She writes, "I knew he'd gone over the waterfall."

Love in a Different Way is a treasure. David's drawings and notes drew me

into his story. Liz and David Amaral have given me a deeper sense of what it is to live with dementia.

Brad Sheeks, a retired hospice nurse, is a member of Newtown (Pa.) Meeting.

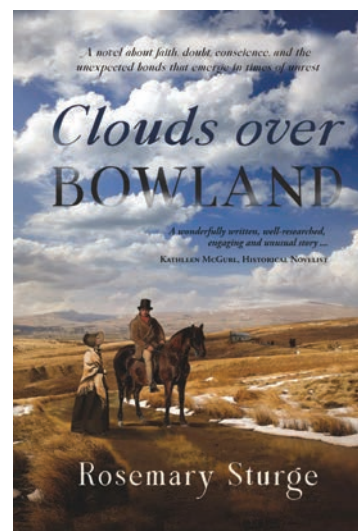
Clouds Over Bowland

By Rosemary Sturge. Cadence Timepiece, 2026. 312 pages. \$29.99/hardcover; \$17.99/paperback; \$2.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Nancy Learned Haines

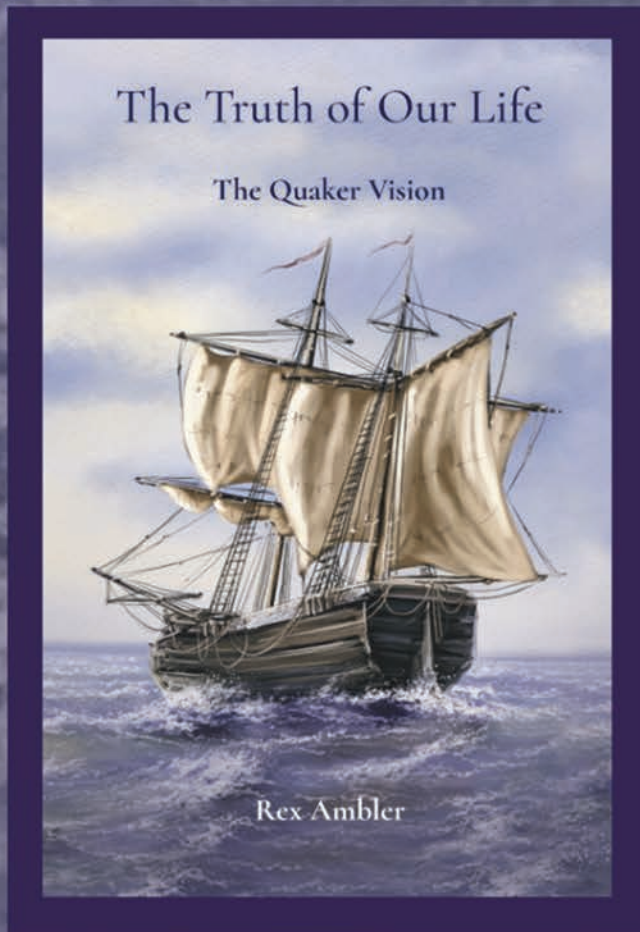
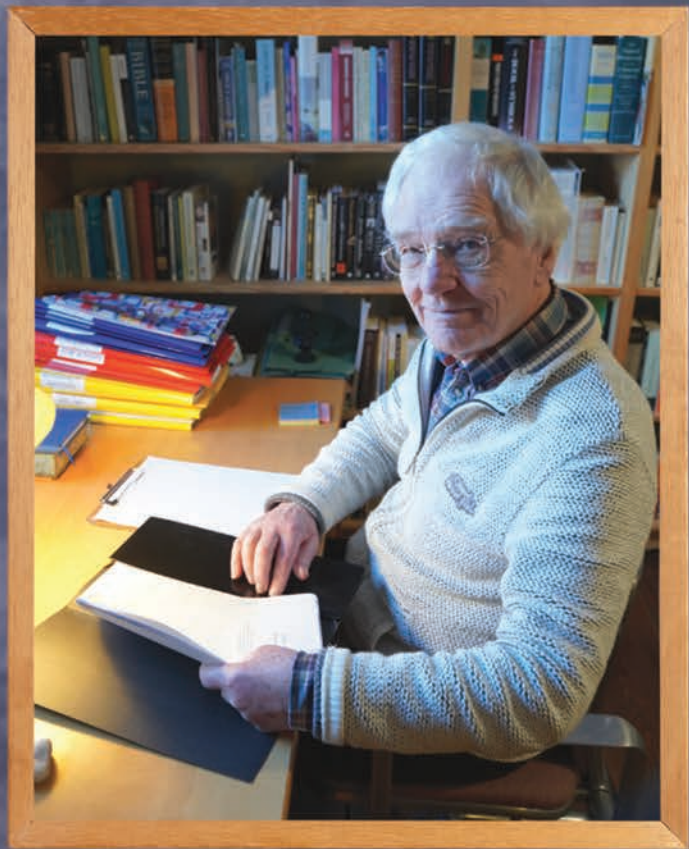
Clouds Over Bowland starts with two shepherds finding the frozen body of a stranger under the snow: a surprising start to a historical novel centered among peaceful Quakers!

The book focuses on Hugh Armstrong, a young Scotsman who has taken a position in England as a land agent for Sir John Hathersage, a mill owner and "would-be country squire." Hugh is hoping to remove himself from the guilt and prejudice generated by his criminal father. Bowland is a quiet farming village, not far from Morecambe Bay. The region is somewhat isolated and the farming difficult; the villagers have formed, of necessity, a close-knit community. Most of the tenants, but not all, are Quakers, and they live together in a harmony of sorts. This is a gentle book, notwithstanding the dead body, random people getting shot, escaped



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French prisoners of war, Hugh being attacked at gunpoint, and a circus bear breaking loose to terrify the town folk.

Hugh spends his time collecting rents, organizing repairs, and doing the bidding of his boss. He is drawn into the lives of the tenants, especially the Quaker Hutton family. He is initially entranced by Susannah, a lovely young woman who is betrothed and therefore out-of-reach (and, he believed, out of his league). He has a “meet-cute” with her twin sister, Dorcas, sitting in the mud feeding a weak calf. Although she becomes a constant presence in his life, he is not particularly attracted to her until her quiet strength and independence challenges him to examine his own life.

The descriptions of the daily life of the Quaker farmers, their commitment to simplicity, refusal to swear oaths, and inherent pacifism feel authentic. Hugh is talked into attending a Quaker wedding and then a meeting for worship, something he is not sure he could ever appreciate but tries gamely. The Friends attend quarterly meeting, seek advice from the meeting elders, and hold important decisions over for prayerful discernment.

Sturge’s writing style enhances her story. The quiet humor in the character’s dialogue sometimes brings a smile and occasionally a nod of recognition at a wry observation. She treats their quirks and foibles with a sweet fondness and respect, never looking down on them for their simplicity and country ways.

The point of view changes back and forth from Hugh Armstrong to Dorcas Hutton; each chapter is labeled with the name of the speaker. I found seeing the inner thoughts of the two main characters intriguing as their relationship grows. Hugh’s chapters are in first person as he experiences village life, and Dorcas records her innermost thoughts in her journal entries.

The setting and historical events are meticulously researched. While I know quite a bit about nineteenth-century Quakers in America, I had not read anything about the Napoleonic Wars in 1814 and the Quakers who lived

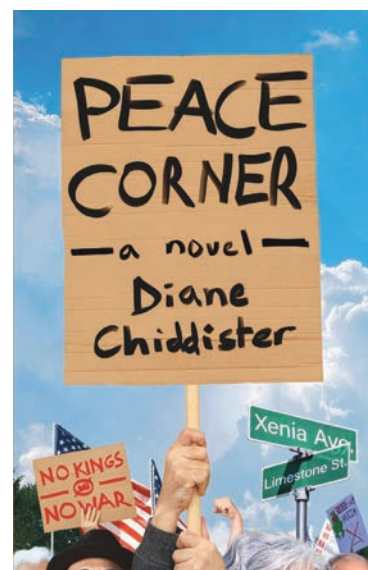
through them. The book, however, is easy to read, and the necessary background information about the time and events are clearly presented. Sturge masterfully captures the period, and the Quaker farming community makes for a fascinating setting. I learned a lot about the hard work of the rural British Friends in this period, their stand against the war and the politics of the area as well as the strong bonds that sustained them. A wonderful testament to resilience and community!

Sturge is a British writer of historical fiction set from eighteenth-century Venice to medieval England. *Clouds Over Bowland* is her sixth novel and the first located in a rural Quaker community in northwest England. Her books stand alone, but it seems *Clouds Over Bowland* has the potential to be the first of a series. The characters are engaging, and Hugh and Dorcas are just beginning to come into their own. Plus Sturge seems to be having fun writing about this devoted yet entirely human Quaker community.

In the author’s biography, we learn that while Sturge has been a Quaker from childhood, her husband’s family has practiced Quakerism since the seventeenth century. She grew up close to the area in which her story is set. She knows personally the life and discipline of a Quaker family, and it shows in the respect and dignity she gives these people.

I highly recommend *Clouds Over Bowland* to readers who appreciate well-researched history and an engaging story. I hope Rosemary Sturge writes more books reflecting her interest in her husband’s family’s long Quaker heritage.

Nancy Learned Haines has special interest in the stories of early Quakers. She is a member of Eno Meeting in Hillsborough, N.C. Nancy is the author of several books, including her recent historical novel, To Every Season, about eighteenth-century Friends in North Carolina. She serves as treasurer of Quakers Uniting in Publications (QUIP).



Peace Corner: A Novel

By Diane Chiddister. Atmosphere Press, 2026. 206 pages. \$15.99/paperback; \$8.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Michele Sands

Irascible Olympia is pushing 80 and carries extra peace and protest signs in the back of her car, “in case someone needs one.” That’s my kind of gal! If you agree, you will likely enjoy *Peace Corner*, a warm and often humorous novel set in present-day Yellow Springs, Ohio, a small progressive community with a strong Quaker history and presence. Since this is the beginning of the second Trump administration, Olympia finds many occasions to carry signs, to help neighbors, and to get into, as John Lewis would say, “good trouble.”

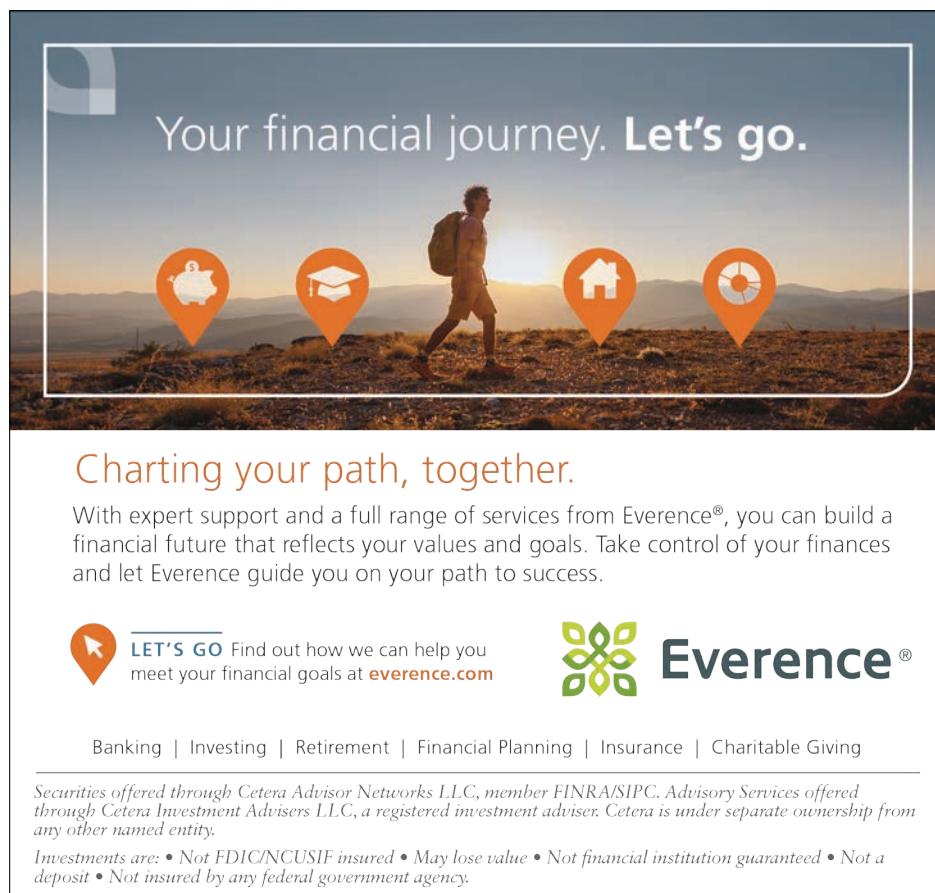
Delightful, decent characters inhabit *Peace Corner*, as told through Olympia’s adventures. Howie is a Trump supporter and an Amazon driver who delivers dog and cat food to old people, even carrying the heavy boxes up their stairs. Claude was a lawyer in Haiti, now working in the Amazon warehouse; he encounters Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agents during a minor traffic incident. Teenager Avery is concerned about bathroom rules for

trans students in her high school. Cary, retired lawyer and widower, bakes pies for any sad or glad occasion that arises. And, of course, there is an aging, loyal dog; a struggling grocery store; a hint of romance; and a Quaker potluck.

Clichés? Not in this author's hands. Diane Chiddister, the former editor of the *Yellow Springs News* for many years, knows her subjects well. As a graduate of the Iowa Writers' Workshop, she is a fine writer who also knows her craft. Her first novel, *One More Day*, about aging in a continuing care center, was an award winner. She now lives in Olympia, Wash., near her grandchildren. Chiddister's prose is breezy; the chapters are short; and the hopeful story lines offer respite from the news. My favorite line is, "The geese are throwing a party."

Yet *Peace Corner* involves the reader in the struggles those news headlines induce. One instance that stands out for me is Olympia's foray into the nearby big city of Springfield. Her sign reads, "ICE IN SPRINGFIELD! ARE YOU OK WITH THIS?" She can't believe she is getting "butterflies, in her chest," an old pro like her! Wouldn't she rather be doing something else? "We could play pickle ball! Knit a scarf! Bake a cake! Don't make us hold up this sign," she begs no one in particular. But she does hold up the sign. "She doesn't want to tell people what to think. She wants to ask them a question, make them think for a second." Cars and trucks pass by; old people, young people, moms and dads. Olympia stands on the curb in the cold as rain begins to fall and recalls her years as a doctor and thinks of her patients' hearts. "Hearts astonished her every time. Each day, every exam, she fell in love. . . . humans are valiant. It's easy to fall in love," she muses.

Olympia struggles with aging, independence, loneliness, the death of loved ones—and with nonviolence: she bashes a Trump supporter's truck with a tree limb. Through it all, Olympia keeps the "Peace Corner" going every Saturday for 25 years in the center of



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town. “We never stopped reminding you that peace is an option. That a just world is possible. It’s what Quakers do. It’s what old people do,” she says.

In an afterword by the author (received after this review was written), Chiddister notes: “Temporary Protective Status (TPS) for the 15,000 Haitians in Springfield, OH, ended on July 1, 2026.” Had she known this before publishing the book a few months prior, she would have ended the story differently. Olympia would, Chiddister writes, “do exactly what my real-life friends and neighbors in Yellow Springs, OH, are doing each day, a level of caring and activism that inspired this book.”

Still, *Peace Corner* is a good read. It is also good for gifting: for a friend who wants to know more about Quakers; for a Friend who needs a little validation now and then; for offspring of old folks to let them know what we are up to; and for yourself because everyone needs life-affirming, relaxing reading.

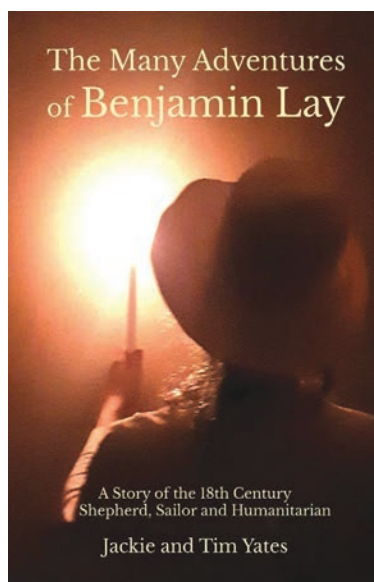
Michele Sands still worships with Upper Susquehanna Quarterly—land of the Lenape—via Zoom. She also worships and carries peace signs with her neighbors in Collington, a Kendal-affiliated retirement community outside of Washington, D.C., land of the Potomac, where an enslaved man named Nace worked and did not live to see his son set free.

The Many Adventures of Benjamin Lay: A Story of the 18th-Century Shepherd, Sailor and Humanitarian

By Jackie Yates and Tim Yates. Cobadida Books, 2026. 298 pages. \$32.99/hardcover; \$17.99/paperback.

Reviewed by Kathryn Lum

Whether you have never heard of Benjamin Lay before or are already familiar with his remarkable life story, a new book of fiction about this incredibly brave British Quaker



antislavery activist makes for captivating reading. The book brings to life not only Lay’s extraordinary life trajectory but also the emotions, personal struggles, and spiritual awakenings that accompanied him along the way. Lay was an early and outspoken abolitionist who campaigned against the sin of slavery at a time in which Friends on both sides of the Atlantic were slaveholders or involved in the slave trade.

The Many Adventures of Benjamin Lay begins with his mostly happy childhood in rural England. Benjamin is born into a Quaker family in 1682, and we see how Quaker values and teachings shape his upbringing and contribute to his inquisitive, critical mind and questioning of seemingly commonsensical social norms. We also learn of two distinct realities that are to mark his entire life: having been born with dwarfism, which exposes him to bullying and discrimination, and having been raised in a religious tradition whose nonhierarchical customs also set him apart.

In his early life, Benjamin works as a shepherd, during which he develops a deep kinship with animals, and then as an apprentice in a glove workshop. Long before he becomes aware of the evils of slavery, we see a young

Benjamin making a principled decision to leave his secure apprentice position and promising future as a glovemaker, because he cannot abide by the use of sheep skins in glovemaking. Biographical accounts simply state that Lay was vegetarian; in this book, coauthors Jackie and Tim Yates develop the emotional and spiritual motivations behind Benjamin’s decisions.

The description of Benjamin’s time as a sailor is fascinating, introducing one to a whole new world of life aboard a ship with its strict hierarchies, harsh work routines, and meager diet but also moments of joy, solidarity, and lasting friendships. As a complete sailor novice with a smaller body than others on the ship, Benjamin works hard to earn the respect of his fellow sailors.

Back in London, romance blossoms for the first time in Benjamin’s life. He meets and marries Sarah Smith, a fellow Quaker who also has dwarfism. When Benjamin and Sarah apply to their meeting for approval for their marriage, their request is initially denied, ironically because the committee believed that Benjamin was not sufficiently grounded as a Friend. A recurring theme throughout the story is the ostracism Lay faced throughout his life in different meetings. Despite this disapproval, Lay always remained steadfast in his Quaker faith and undeterred. Benjamin and Sarah appeal to London Quarterly Meeting, which eventually approves their union, one that brings them great mutual support, companionship, and happiness.

Reading *The Many Adventures of Benjamin Lay* was gripping and inspiring. I marvelled at the stubborn persistence of Benjamin, despite repeatedly encountering almost unanimous hostility or indifference, both from fellow Quakers as well as the broader society at the time. His Quaker faith no doubt sustained him and gave him courage, as did the unwavering support and

encouragement of his wife.

It made me think about contemporary Friends and the challenges we face in our day and within our own Society. I think of our equality testimony and its violation by those who refuse to recognize same-sex marriage, and hence deny the full humanity of LGBTQ+ people, just as enslaved people were denied humanity for centuries. As Quakers, we often pride ourselves on being progressive and nonconformist, but Lay's story shows how progress has often been painfully slow and at great personal cost to early campaigners such as Lay (who was disowned from four Quaker meetings). Who are the Benjamin Lays of today, whose voices are disregarded or seen as too radical?

I am glad that my first introduction to Lay was through fiction, which enabled me to get to know him not just as an abstract trailblazing abolitionist but a multifaceted individual who struggled his entire life with being a visible, derided minority, as well as with rejection from his own religious community. By the end of the book, I felt a sense of communion with Lay and deep admiration that he always remained true to himself and never gave up the fight.

Kathryn Lum is an anthropologist based in Brazil. She is a member of the Latin American correspondence group of Friends World Committee for Consultation. She has previously been active in Quaker communities in the UK, Spain, Italy, and Sweden.

Spanktown Papers

By Jane Hulse. Open Books, 2026. 278 pages. \$19.95/paperback; \$9.99/eBook.

Reviewed by Abigail E. Adams

This novel, the third and last in a series set during the American Revolution, places Philadelphia Quakers in the spotlight during the event of the Spanktown Papers. In



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Gabriel Ehri, Executive Director, 9/15/2026



1777, a Continental Army general claimed to have intercepted documents from Spanktown (today's Rahway, N.J.) Quakers that proved they were spying for the British. The papers were clearly faked; nevertheless, 20 Quaker men, most of them well-to-do merchants and elderly, were seized, transported, and held in Winchester, Va., without habeas corpus or charges. Quaker women formed a delegation to travel to the Continental Army and congressional leaders and petition for the release of the men in their families; historians have described this as possibly the first women's collective political action of the new republic.

Author Jane Hulse uses the essentials of the event to center the narrative on the women, both Quaker and non-Quakers, of the households who were left to fend for themselves. The protagonist, the young journalist Sarah Barrett, is one of an ensemble featured throughout the series; all of whom are closely tied to loved ones on opposing sides of that conflict. This volume focuses on those who refused to "take sides," the Quakers, who further aroused suspicion and anger when they would not engage in direct or indirect acts that supported the war, such as

using the worthless currency created by the rebels. Friends today will resonate with that testimony.

A subplot involves Sarah's boss, a wealthy white newspaper publisher, and the formerly enslaved woman he emancipated and then hired as a servant in his home and business. He also takes her as his concubine, and the author's framing of this coerced control growing into a love story begs credibility or compassion.

Spanktown Papers is a plot-driven novel, and I read to the end, despite the thin writing. I found the young women of the series' recurring characters anachronistically modern in their perspective and language.

I appreciated how Hulse addressed the wealth—and privileged oblivion—of many of the Philadelphia Quakers. Sarah, the non-Quaker journalist rooming with a Friends family, is not blind; she is critical of Quaker contradictions and their seeming to be unaware of the differences in their suffering and that of the soldiers quartered at Valley Forge or of others suffering under British rule. It was thought-provoking to consider how non-Quakers experienced the actions and positions of economically powerful yet ideologically marginal Philadelphia Friends. I also enjoyed the explorations of how people negotiate their love and connections with those who take opposing sides on the issues of the times.

Abigail E. Adams worships with New Haven (Conn.) Meeting and serves on Friends Committee on National Legislation's General Committee and Woolman Hill Retreat Center's board. A recently retired anthropology professor, she continues work in urban forestry, in Central America, and on immigrant concerns. Although she was unexpectedly elected to town office, she dreams of serving as a Connecticut tree warden.

Encounter with Razor Wire

continued from page 16

“Yes,” agreed Zak, “I am gay. In our country, before we came here . . .” He faltered, upset.

Gracie came to his rescue: “He was illegal. They would have locked him up. Go on.”

Zak clasped his hands together: “So perhaps they will not let me into this prison.” He laughed, ruefully.

Gracie put her arm round him. “He has a good friend, and they are going to set up home together when they can find an apartment. At last! I love my brother, but it is time he grew up. Me too. I have my own good friend to live with. You understand?”

Martha laughed. “I suggest you ask the governor for advice, Zak. I have no doubt that he’ll appreciate your honesty. You’d be a wonderful visitor.”

On the first Sunday after the Hindwood Prison Visitor scheme was inaugurated, Martha sat in meeting. Once, she had reluctantly set out from home to visit Gabriel. Now she was at home in a new way: changed. People she had known at a distance for years had become close Friends: Isaac, Richenda and Lumina, and Gracie and Zak. A few minutes late, Breeze bustled in with Gabriel, sat beside her, and whispered triumphantly, “Probation!”

They had all been changed. So had the young Hindwood prisoners. And so would many young people held there and in other prisons.

That morning, the elder had no advice to share. But for the first time, Martha felt herself quaking. She rose and said: “I was in prison and you visited me.” □

Starlings

continued from page 19

with each pitiful wingbeat. Bright and dim. Tense and release. She practiced until she wasn’t sure which vision was natural and which was the affectation. A headache began at her temples, then crawled around toward the back of her neck like a lover’s caress. She went inside and fanned the freezer door to make a breeze.

When she stepped out again, toward evening, the starling on the porch was dead. The roofline of the Pay-n-Sav buzzed with starlings, but Carol could not see, with either vision, a hole where the dead bird had been snipped from the flock.

Carol practiced not seeing until she could watch the starlings without fear. Until all their brilliance retreated into memory, and she could track their flight across the sky and see no more than little lumps of coal with wings. Until her own hands looked plain again, without a trace of webbing between the fingers or a speck of pearlescence in the nailbed.

Some time later, she heard that Mr. McMillan had been rounded up for deportation. She’d stopped cleaning houses—so much time working alone wasn’t healthy, she’d decided—and found a job at a salon in town instead. She still saw more of her landlady than she would have liked. Having little life of her own, the old woman helped herself to the lives of others: Now she came to the salon where Carol worked, to get her hair cut and gossip.

“I harbored an illegal alien,” the old woman said this time—slowly, as though savoring the taste of the words. She’d brought a photo clipped

from the newspaper to show around. “Do you remember this one, Carol? You cleaned his house. Though of course he wouldn’t have looked like that when you saw him.”

The trickiest part of being a stylist, Monica, the salon owner, had explained during the first week of Carol’s apprenticeship, was looking at the hair without really looking at the person. But when Carol gave it a try, Monica smiled. “You’ve got a real knack.”

“I don’t think it counts as harboring,” Monica said now. “Not if he was paying you. And anyway, you didn’t know.”

“What about the house?” Carol asked.

“Sold.” She said nothing about the burrow, and Carol wondered if she was the only person left who knew it existed.

Her landlady thrust the clipped photograph forward again, so Carol could see more clearly. Monica moved her scissors gracefully aside to avoid the old woman’s ear.

It was a bad photo. The newsprint dulled Mr. McMillan’s brilliant green-and-purple carapace, and the surprise of the flash slicked his feathered antennae back in stiff, straight lines like twin stalks of celery. They’d taken his glasses: forever or just for the photo, Carol didn’t know. The old woman’s hand wavered. Carol steadied it with her own, so she could look a moment longer. She had suspected Mr. McMillan would look better without the glasses, and he did. □

Seeing That of God in the POTUS

REBECCA AMBROSE

Do you have difficulty seeing that of God in the POTUS—the president of the United States? If so, you are not alone. It is not for the faint of heart, but I encourage you to attempt it, because if you can find the divine spark in the POTUS, you can find it in anyone.

Intrigued? If so, you might want to join me by writing Donald Trump a letter each day. If more of us did this, we might bring out his Light and he just might start making decisions more to our liking. Even if this doesn't happen, you might find the daily effort assuages the anxiety he is so adept at fomenting.

I started my letter writing practice because my trepidation about a Trump presidency gave me vertigo in November 2016. I was particularly shaken by his repeated references to Kim Jong Un as “Rocket Man.” I feared the United States would end up in a military conflict with North Korea and felt led to begin a conversation with President Trump to help him to see that war is not the answer, as the bumper sticker goes.

The first letter started as follows:

My dear President Donald,

I love you. I am not sure you love me, but I know that you have the capacity to do so. You demonstrated during your inaugural day that you have love in your heart. It was apparent when you were signing your first orders in the Oval Office that your family is close-knit and your grandchildren feel at home in your presence.

Since I believe that we all have a divine spark which gives rise to that love, I look for it and was grateful to see it on that day. I will continue to be on the lookout for

it so I can tell others about those moments, and they can come to love you, too.

I continued to write to Trump throughout his first presidency, and after the events of January 6, 2020, I decided that I needed to continue my vigil of contacting the White House just in case he was elected again. While I learned a great deal from writing during Joe Biden's presidency from 2021 to 2025, here I focus on my correspondence with Trump.

Should you choose to exercise your Friendly muscles by crafting a letter, you will have 4,000 characters to express yourself. At least that's the case if you choose to send your note electronically via the White House website. You might get an email back acknowledging receipt, but don't count on it. Sending your letter by postal mail works, too. You can write as much as you want, but it will cost you 82 cents.

I have found it helpful to clarify for myself what I mean by “love” and have found bell hooks's writing instructive. She shared M. Scott Peck's definition as “the will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth.” To do this requires embracing the possibility that President Trump can change. I've found the New Testament's account of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus a convincing example that personal transformation can happen. Octavia E. Butler's conception of God as change has energized my writing as well.

You can use writing the POTUS as a way to keep track of current events in a way that will not evoke fear and dread. I tend to commence my writing sessions by consulting the presidential schedule to find out

what the president is doing, who he is meeting, and where he is going. By focusing on mundane comings and goings rather than the sound bites and photo ops that appear in the news, you will learn that in addition to making outrageous statements and sharing disturbing social media posts, President Trump frequently visits with foreign dignitaries, confers honors, and celebrates with winning teams. Signing executive orders and traveling to strategic congressional districts also occupies his time, as does golfing.

Through my letter writing vigil, I have come to the conclusion that we all have what psychologist Carl Jung called a “shadow.” President Trump's looms large. My witness to his daily activities has tamed the monster that the media had planted in my imagination through its sensational coverage of his words and actions. While I continue to be troubled by his decisions, wary of the people he surrounds himself with, and repulsed by his rhetoric, I no longer cringe when I hear his voice. Having been appalled by the behavior of Obama haters from 2009 through 2017, my letter writing vigil has enabled me to humanize Trump. I see him as a misguided brother rather than an odious villain.

If you begin writing letters to him, you might share them with your friends to spark conversation. Perhaps they will join the effort and we will overwhelm President Trump with so much love that he sees the Light.

Rebecca (Becki) Ambrose has participated in Davis (Calif.) Meeting for the past 23 years, serving as its clerk since July 2025. She has recently retired from her position as a mathematics educator so she can devote more time to her correspondence. Website: letterstodjr.com.

Deaths

Chatfield-Taylor—*Marian (Auritt) Chatfield-Taylor*, 78, on January 14, 2024, peacefully, at home in San Francisco, Calif. Marian was born on January 23, 1945, in Philadelphia, Pa., to Ruth and Jack Auritt. When she was three years old, her family moved to Norfolk, Va. Marian grew up in the Jim Crow South, an experience that shaped her lifelong commitment to social justice causes. She ascribed her early religious education to her father, whom she accompanied for many years to the synagogue, as well as her mother's profound spirituality. Marian left the synagogue when she heard the rabbi speak from a nationalist Zionist position, which she found deeply disturbing.

Marian attended Sarah Lawrence College in Bronxville, N.Y. In 1964, she met Charlie Chatfield-Taylor and they married in 1965. After Marian graduated from Sarah Lawrence in 1966, she and Charlie moved to Cambridge, Mass. They bought a house in Stonington, Conn., shortly after their first daughter, Mercedes, was born in 1968. Their second daughter, Jessica, was born in 1970.

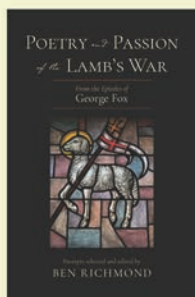
In fall 1977, the Chatfield-Taylors moved to Tomales, a very small town in West Marin, Calif. The family's time in Tomales was a good one. But in 1978, Proposition 13 was passed, and the local high school announced it would have to cut costs. Concerned about their children's education, Marian and Charlie decided to return to Stonington, which had a good high school and where they still owned a home.

After returning to Connecticut, Marian worked at the Women's Center of New London in various capacities assisting battered women, ending up as its director of outreach. Since her youth Marian had been engaged in antiwar efforts, and now she began working on behalf of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom. In 1995, she participated with a group of 100 women who traveled by train from Helsinki to Beijing, China, to attend the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women. The women came from different countries, spoke different languages, and represented every generation from late teens to early 80s.

While doing peace work, Marian encountered and worked with Quakers. She eventually accepted an invitation from a member to New London Meeting and began attending in the mid-1980s. Marian believed in actively living her way into the life of the meeting before seeking membership, which she did around 1988. She served as co-clerk of the meeting in 1997–1998, and was also active in New England Yearly Meeting. Her belief in nonviolence led her to obtain a master's degree in conflict resolution from Eastern Mennonite University in Harrisonburg, Va., in 1998.

After returning to the San Francisco Bay Area in 1999, Marian began attending San Francisco Meeting and transferred her

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And never heed prisons,
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and seasons in his hand.

And never heed the raging waves of the sea, . . .
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for the cords of love,
the power of God
are stronger. . . .

And so be valiant for the truth upon the earth,
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membership there in 2002. She has served on the Hospitality and Community, Peace and Social Concerns, and Ministry and Oversight Committees. Her vocal ministry came from a deep understanding of her personal experiences and observations. Marian also served on the board of directors for Ben Lomond Quaker Center, was a regular attendee at the meeting's Bible study, and worked for American Friends Service Committee from 1999–2001.

Marian and Charlie were married for almost 59 years, something neither one of them could have imagined when they started out. "It is a constant appeal; we are the Sun and the Moon to each other," she wrote in her diary in 1978. Charlie misses her more than he can express, calling her "an exceptional human being."

Marian is survived by her husband, Charlie Chatfield-Taylor; two children, Mercedes (John Flett) and Jessica (Angel); and four grandchildren.

McNeil—*Stephen McNeil*, 72, on June 18, 2022, at Kaiser Permanente Hospital in San Francisco, Calif. Stephen was born on January 11, 1950, to Mary Stuart (Elwell) and William Merton McNeil, in Plymouth, Mass. At age nine he moved with his mother and sister to live with family in the Anacostia neighborhood of Washington, D.C.

While Stephen was raised Irish Catholic, he lost interest in the church because of the racial segregation he saw in D.C. parishes. In the tenth grade, he visited a Quaker meeting in the Maryland suburbs, which had more diversity. Stephen enjoyed that meeting and began attending regularly.

In 1976, he interned with Friends Committee on National Legislation. He remained involved with FCNL for the rest of his life.

Stephen moved to San Francisco in 1983, to join his partner, Daniel Joseph McTague. Daniel died in 1985 in the first decade of the AIDS epidemic, along with over 10,000 other San Franciscans. This experience spurred Stephen's passion for AIDS-related services. He volunteered as a Kaiser hospital AIDS chaplain. He also volunteered for five years with the St. Martin's soup kitchen. From 1989–1995, he served with the AIDS Emergency Fund and, over the years, on the boards of The Family Link and Home Care Companions.

In 1996, he married Brian Mailman. To their marriage they each brought deep-rooted faith traditions, Brian's Judaism and Stephen's Quakerism. They shared many pleasures, including annual traditions of hosting their year-end "Stravaganza" bash; attending the Kung Pao Kosher Comedy Christmas Eve dinner show; hosting gourmet fundraising dinners; and going to the Frameline LGBT Film Festival. They made a loving home with an array of cats until Brian's death in 2019.

Stephen went to work for American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in 1984 as an administrative assistant and served AFSC in

many capacities for the next 33 years. He retired in 2017 when he was director of the Peace Building Program in the San Francisco Office. He also served on the board of Pendle Hill study center in Wallingford, Pa., for many years and served his monthly and yearly meetings in many capacities.

Stephen's life was about service and lifelong learning. He studied Japanese to be a more effective volunteer with his friends in Japan and with his anti-nuclear work. After he married Brian, who was Jewish, he studied Yiddish. He also studied Irish, Latin, and Russian. Even in retirement, Stephen kept busy with work to advance justice and peace. Intent upon preserving the history of those movements, he was a collector of books, articles, and ideas.

On May 22, 2022, Stephen was on his way home from a special Frameline presentation when he fell on the stairs at the Muni Metro, hitting his head. He was expertly cared for, but he did not recover.

At the time of his accident, Stephen was enrolled at the University of Maryland Global Campus, where he had plans to pursue a graduate degree in history, and to finalize a book he was writing about Quaker efforts to assist Japanese Americans who were subject to removal and internment during World War II. He was also taking Yiddish conversation and Japanese conversation classes.

For the West Region of AFSC, Stephen was their walking archivist. He had a deep understanding of virtually all AFSC's issues, from peace, police, healing justice, and immigration. His bottomless curiosity and constant willingness to be helpful to friends in need, and to a world in need, will be remembered and greatly missed.

Stephen was predeceased by his husband, Brian Mailman.

He is survived by his sister, Stasia Linynsky.

O'Keefe—*Jane Gingrich Harris O'Keefe*, 66, on April 30, 2025, in Milwaukee, Wis. Jane was born on March 20, 1959, to Ann and Tom Gingrich in Omaha, Neb. As she grew up she lived in multiple cities, including a suburb of Kansas City, Kans.; Burlington, Iowa; four towns in Illinois; and Watertown, N.Y. She was a high school exchange student in Chile under the repressive regime of Augusto Pinochet, which stirred in her a strong interest in social justice and diverse cultures.

Jane earned a bachelor's degree from Eastern Michigan University, a master's at Southern Methodist University, and a doctorate from Arizona State University. She worked for many years as a psychotherapist. Jane's interests were varied. She was fluent in Spanish, enjoyed many forms of music, and was an artist.

Jane married Jesus Trevino, a union that brought her to the Texas border where his Spanish-speaking family lived. She appreciated immersing herself in that culture. Her later marriage to Byron Bloomer brought her to the Milwaukee area.

Jane grew up attending a variety of Protestant denominations. In 2005, she began attending Milwaukee Meeting. She especially treasured her 17-year involvement in a five-member spiritual nurture group that met monthly to share their spiritual journeys. Following a divorce, she married Dan O'Keefe, who was a member of the spiritual group.

Shortly before she became a Quaker, Jane's ability to participate in activities gradually diminished due to a complicated autoimmune disorder. Nevertheless, she always pursued opportunities for spiritual growth.

Jane was predeceased by her spouse, Dan O'Keefe; and her sister, Mimi Gingrich.

She is survived by three siblings, John Gingrich, Bob Gingrich, and Becky Gingrich.

Way—*Emily Way*, 104, on April 23, 2026, peacefully, at Foxdale Village, a Quaker retirement community in State College, Pa. Emily was born on October 19, 1921, to Brooks and Jesse Quigley Hobbs in rural Hanover, Bucks County, Pa. One of six children, she attended a one-room school as a child and graduated from Wells High School in Newell, W.V. She earned her bachelor of science degree in early childhood education from Slippery Rock State Teachers College. She taught second grade at the Centre Township School in Beaver County, Pa.

Emily married Elwood Way on August 2, 1947, and they settled on his family's farm, the Way Fruit Farm, in rural Halfmoon Township, Centre County, Pa. She soon joined Elwood as a member of State College (Pa.) Meeting, Centre Quarterly Meeting, and Baltimore Yearly Meeting. Emily was active in all three. Emily taught First-day school in State College Meeting for many years, and was clerk of the Laurelton Committee. She was also a member of the Literature Committee.

Emily and Elwood bought the family farm in 1950. Emily became active in her community as a member of the Halfmoon Grange, the Halfmoon Garden Cub, and the Centre County Farmers Association's Women's Committee. She served as treasurer of the Halfmoon Women's Christian Temperance Union for many years.

In addition to raising their four sons, Emily kept house and assisted her husband growing apples and peaches, as well as in the sales room, until they retired in 1983. Emily and Elwood moved to Foxdale Village in 2005.

Emily's life was strongly rooted in faith and family.

She was predeceased by her husband, Elwood Way, in 2016; and by her three brothers and two sisters.

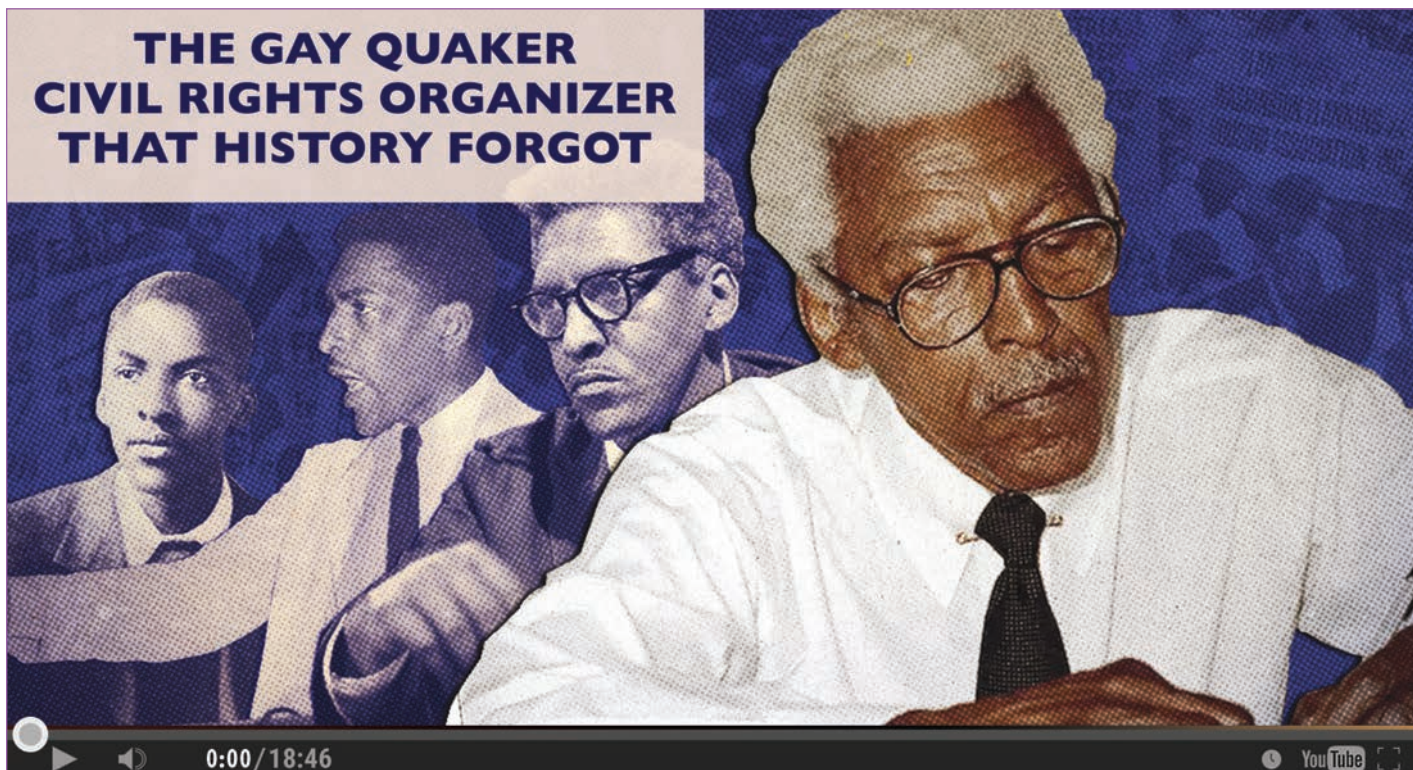
Emily is survived by four children, David Way (Terry), Donald Way, Brooks Way (Sharon), and Stanley Way (Anne); seven grandchildren; and ten great-grandchildren.

Bayard Rustin was almost certainly the most famous American Quaker of the twentieth century—even before he became the subject of an Oscar-nominated biographical film in 2023. Our latest video is a mini-documentary on Rustin and his advocacy work for civil rights and economic justice.

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“Bayard wanted to see a world of racial equality, justice, human equality . . . a lot of the values that grow out of the Quaker faith,” his longtime partner, Walter Naegle, told us as part of a wide-ranging conversation on Rustin’s life and legacy. We also spoke with Carlos Figueroa, a professor at Ithaca College who is working on a biography of Rustin, to fill in some of the historical and political context to his activism.

Watch this video at QuakerSpeak.com

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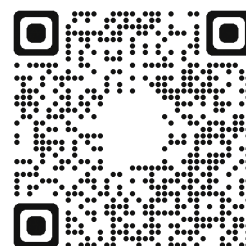


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