

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

February 2021



Walking Together – see p.2-3

Dear Friends: A visitor who joined us for our New Year Social on Zoom thanked us for all the fun and asked if this was something we do every month. Would it were so! But it was a great success and all credit to everyone who had a hand in organising it and setting the quizzes. Thanks, too, to all of those readers who sent us their favourite extracts from last year's newsletters, thus enabling us to produce an unusual but hopefully repeatable January compendium.

Gilian Turner and David Parlett

*God's love is around us like the sea round an island
and we stand secure on the rocks of our faith.
He has given his word like a beacon to guide us.
His love is a harbour in which we are safe.
All glory to God our leader and captain.
All praise to the Son, our guide and our light.
All praise to the spirit – the wind and the power.
All honour and praise and glory and might.*

- From Celtic Daily Live read in Meeting by Joyce Trotman

Words to encourage us all in tough times

In our activities this day we ask for the power to be continuously thankful, not only in our words, but in our hearts; to give up concern for ourselves and thus to walk in perfect freedom.

We trust ourselves, we trust our friends, we trust our families, we trust life, we trust the universe and we release our past to the past, our future to the future, accepting our present.

We abandon our illusions of control; we acknowledge our complete dependence on providence. We relinquish our apprehension. We rely on that which we do not sometimes understand. We have faith. We have courage.

Keep us from all fear today. Open our hearts to the gifts of this moment, and bind us to great unknown through complete trust.

May the vast Mystery beyond comprehension fill us with joy and peace and hope this day and always.

We lift up our hearts.

Peter Millar, Iona Community, 30 January 2021

News of Friends

Wilfrid Hayler I've just had a lively conversation with Wilf about life in his care home during Lockdown. The residents have now all had their vaccines, but a number of them have caught the virus - fortunately no one died - and many carers also have been away ill. His light-hearted description reminded me of those accounts of officers in prisoner-of-war camps in Germany during the Second World War, published in *Boys Own* comics. Locked up in their cells, communicating with tapped messages on pipes or smuggled notes during exercise time, full of news, gossip and plans of escape, everyone keeping their spirits up while they waited for Red Cross Parcels. But the enemy in the care home is the virus, not German soldiers.

Wilf and the other residents have been confined to their bedrooms since the beginning of this second Lockdown, only this week allowed to go out a wing at time for lunch sitting alone in the dining room, and in the lounge in the afternoon. They are not allowed in the garden without a carer accompanying them. They all phone each other every day, asking questions and exchanging news, as they don't like to trouble the staff. Has anyone become ill, how are the ill ones progressing, has another carer taken ill and so on. Two of the carers double up as Activity Ladies. Both caught the virus, one from a resident and the other from her. That means that the shop doesn't operate so they can't buy their treats. I immediately offered to send Wilf a food parcel full of chocolate and sweets from M&S, but he said he would wait until the shop opened again. And of course they don't have activities either, nor any walks.

I asked him how he spends his time. His Quakerly task is to send round readings from *Quaker Faith & Practice* for worship sessions, but these have ended with lockdown. He keeps busy with the racing (when it's on), the TV and reading. He's read all the books in the Home library and is now reduced to grimly reading through a 700-word book about early church history that someone gave him. Apparently one of the local shops sent in a parcel of new books of all kinds, and that was the one he was handed through his window. He told me last time we talked that he had read the third Sebastian Faulks, so I have sent him the first of the three, *Birdsong*, via Amazon, with all our love.

It's clear that the staff are giving devoted care which is very much appreciated by the residents, but oh, how they long to be mingling again, walking round the grounds, chatting to each other and meeting again their friends in the cottages and the main house. As do we all.

Gillian Turner

Mavis Parker My mother, Mavis Parker, used to live in Shirley and was an active part of the Croydon Meeting, moving to Cambridgeshire 17 years ago and joining Huntingdon Meeting. She is still in touch with Joyce Trotman, and Joyce suggested people might be interested to hear how

we spent her 87th birthday last Sunday. I'm sending this on her behalf as she is not on the Internet.

Mum turned 87 on 24 January, and a few months previously we signed up to take part in the WWFs *Big Winter Wander*, intending to walk in a group with other family members. Lockdown 3 put paid to that idea but the idea of walking 'together', even while being physically apart, seemed to appeal to people and a large number of friends and family walked that day for Mum's birthday. So on 24 January we set out for a walk around the outskirts of our village in rural Cambridgeshire. It was muddy. And it snowed. Maybe it wasn't the wisest thing for an 87-year-old to be doing, but Mum was undeterred and was determined to stick to her commitment. It turned out to be a lovely walk. As well as friends from all parts of Cambridgeshire (including some Friends from Huntingdon) we were joined by one grandson in Birmingham and another in London, by my brother and his family in Sussex and a cousin in Stoke-on-Trent. We even had a



friend in Holland join in. Then the photos started coming in, so we were able to see everyone enjoying their walk. There must have been around 20 households altogether.

Mum told me at the end of the day that it was the best birthday she can remember. Even better, we asked for donations to the WWF as an optional extra if people wanted to sponsor us, and we raised £110, which will be match funded by the government. Nature and wildlife is becoming especially important to us during lockdown, and felt this was a good way to try to preserve it.

I am attaching a few pictures [*page 1 and above*] from our walk, which show just how snowy it was that day.

Debbie Trafford

Mavis adds: Apologies for taking so long to reply to your note. It seems my brain has gone into lockdown too. Like the old song 'I'm busy doing nothing, working the whole day through, trying to find lots of things not to do (etc.)'

I have embraced Zoom Meeting for Worship and regularly meet my son and family who live in West Sussex. My grandson, 12, acts as questionmaster and we have a game of *Trivial Pursuit* together. Many thanks for producing such a lively Newsletter. I remember some of the faces, Marjorie and Win, elegant Joyce, and of course one of the children when I helped in the children's group – Emily. A lovely picture of the bridal pair.

I have such wonderful memories of a vibrant caring Meeting. Love to all, Mavis.

From Margie Ashley

This month it has two special meanings for me, thinking of two very precious people in my life.

Firstly, Philip, my youngest celebrated his 50th birthday, Covid19 lockdown style, certainly different from original plans. A highlight for him was the video of friends and family saying their greetings to him, even from Australia and beyond, work colleagues, school friends and family. The music background and ever-changing pictures of Philip while growing up were a delight to see. So much work had gone into that surprise, thanking my lovely daughter in law, plus the wonders of modern technology. I had tears of joy while watching the video.

A very good friend is Mrs B. of 35 years.

My friend is dying. She knows and I know.

We talk a lot, laugh often, reminding ourselves of such good times we shared. We have had many outings both local and in London. Wonderful chats on the phone, bit bizarre, imagine sending 'stuff' through the line, (at that very moment), the cake freshly made, that jar of

marmalade, the new shoes, you can try them on, arrange to meet at the park, wear the rollers skates etc..

She has a very strong faith. In the past when chronic pain set in she would say 'let me see my maker', I would smile saying that all will be well, we would carry on talking. I listen to her now and hear those words again. I am crying.

But I know how fortunate and happy I am to know so many people who have so many interests and who make my life so rich

The poem I would like to share makes me smile however many times I read it.

The Friend

*There are lots and lots of people who are always asking things,
Like Dates and Pounds-and-ounces and the names of funny Kings,
And the answer's either Sixpence or A Hundred Inches Long.
And I know they'll think me silly if I get the answer wrong.
So Pooh and I go whispering, and Pooh looks very bright.
And says, ' Well , I say sixpence, but I don't suppose I'm right'
And then it doesn't matter what the answer ought to be,
'Cos if he's right, I'm Right, and if he's wrong, it isn't Me.*

AA Milne

Thoughts on Advices and Queries 18

Today (31/1/21) in Meeting for Worship the reading from *Advices & Queries* brought up so many things for me. A&Q 18 reads:

How can we make the meeting a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and strangers are welcome? Seek to know one another in the things which are eternal, bear the burden of each other's failings and pray for one another. As we enter with tender sympathy into the joys and sorrows of each other's lives, ready to give help and to receive it, our meeting can be a channel for God's love and forgiveness ...in which each person is accepted and nurtured... Our Meeting is enriched by different personalities, each person bringing their own experience of faith and searching for connection to that which brings them back to Meeting for Worship week after week.'...bear the burden of each other's failings and pray for one another.'

Even if a Friend can make us want to scream (and I'm sure that happens from time to time), we can delve deep within ourselves to reach across the divide and embrace them with love. A poem by Edwin Markham that I found in an old newsletter speaks to this embracing with love: 'He drew a circle that shut me out / Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. / But Love and I had the wit to win: / We drew a circle that took him in.'

'As we enter with tender sympathy into the joys and sorrows of each other's lives, ready to give help and to receive it...' Entering into the joys and sorrows of each other's lives is easy for some and difficult for others. Some of us can ask for help while others may find it difficult.

'...a channel for God's love and forgiveness.' When I think of 'God' so many questions come to mind. Is God in the silence, in the prayer, in the chanting? In *The Kybalion* (recommended reading on a coaching course I've just finished), it reminds us that we don't know anything! I sometimes think that when I eventually pass on to the next level and perhaps am fortunate to meet the gatekeeper into the next life, I will be told: 'You all got it wrong. None of you were right.' I will then be asked: 'Why did you make it difficult for yourself? Do you have some attraction to suffering?' This links to another thought of being able to connect to the source/God/higher wisdom (I'll use the word 'God') without asking for anything. No pleas, just connection for the love of connecting. I know I do plead and bargain: 'If you let happen, I promise' I think God must be thinking, 'Here she goes again, doesn't that woman ever stop moaning?' Of course, I never keep my side of the bargain as in a little while I'll be doing the same: 'If you let.....'

In *The Opening of the Eyes* by Daisaku Ikeda there is a reference to Nichiren Daishonin (seen as the Buddha of the Latter Day of the Law by Nichiren Buddhists) and his commitment to his faith in the Lotus Sutra 'transcending the mundane desire for divine protection or freedom from difficulties'. (p 224) This struck me because I'm not sure there are many times when I'm connecting to God without asking for freedom from difficulties. It seems beautiful to connect without expectations and just be in the moment. This is something I am hopefully working towards.

Pam Sellman



**The flowers of late winter and early spring
occupy places in our hearts
well out of proportion to their size.**

Gertrude S Wiste

Snowdrops photo by Liz Collins

Just Be With It All

Looking at my 2021 week-per-view wall calendar, (not sure why I bought one, really, habit, I guess), I noted that only one written entry stood forlornly amid a sea of pristine, snowy-white paper. It was for Wednesday and written there was the legend – 'main bin collection'. It's true, I could have added 'daily walk - hoping to see that friendly dog again', 'phone friend' and 're-watch *Uncle Vanya*, but I knew that these add-ons would be a waste of ink as the plain truth of my days of shielding was up there on the wall. I flipped over a few pages looking for more interesting days in the forthcoming weeks and I fell upon Candlemas which falls on February 2nd, celebrated by many Christians in countries such as parts of France and Mexico. This day commemorates together with other holy events in the religious calendar, Jesus' presentation at the Temple. It is the fortieth day of the Christmas-Epiphany season marking its end and at the same time celebrating the pagan mid-way point through the winter. Many Christians around the world do not take down their festive decorations until this date.

A few Christmases ago, a friend sent me a copy of *Candlemas Creed*, a beautiful poem written by Howard Washington Thurman (1899- 1981) who was a prominent American civil rights leader, theologian, Baptist minister, author and educator and mentor to Martin Luther King. Thurman wrote:

*When the song of the angels is stilled,
When the star in the sky is gone,
When the king and the princes are home,
When the shepherds are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:*

*To find the lost,
To heal the broken,
To feed the hungry,*

*To release the prisoners,
To rebuild the nations,
To bring peace among people,
To make music in the heart.'*

Thurman's words affected me profoundly at the time and on re-reading them this year, I thought firstly about their resonance with the enormous political, social, economic medical and emotional effects of the global pandemic. During and after such a catastrophic event what is our work?

Secondly, the political era which started under Joe Biden in the U.S.A. on 20 January of this year came to mind. New beginnings and perspectives bring hope, fresh ideas, challenges and responsibilities. Changes of this kind are of immense national and international import and we know from 1960s feminist literature that the 'personal is the political' but what of the needs of the interior landscape of the individual? The all important search to find authenticity and balance between the twin needs for solitude and relatedness? Time spent in tending to boundaries and acknowledging and accepting difficult feelings?

Our much loved, late Friend Cecily Taylor wrote many wonderful poems, and in this piece, entitled *Thirst*, she dealt with the necessity of opening to the inner life to reconnect with our essence:

To all things there is a season:
*A time to give out, a time to take in;
A time of being drained, a time of
replenishing:
A time to say yes eagerly, a time to say no
wisely,
I have come to the time of drinking in:
The thirst is great and terrible.
Time I need to drink in sunsets,
To wait like a blackbird listening for worms:*

*Time I need to hear
What the leaves have to tell me:
And time to sleep and sleep:
Time to hug to me sanity:
Time to hold silence like a promise
In my two cupped hands:
Time to think with God
Alone in some wilderness of solitude,
And then – with love returning,
Then only, to share.'*

Taking time for introspection, meditation and prayer may provide us with much needed peace and strength. In *Polishing the Mirror: How to Live from Your Spiritual Heart*, Ram Dass offers these words:

'The art of life is to stay open and be vulnerable, yet at the same time to sit with the mystery and the awe and the unbearable pain- to just be with it all'.
Barbara Earl

The nuclear weapons ban is here

*Can we forget that flash?
Suddenly 30,000 in the streets disappeared
In the crushed depths of darkness
The shrieks of 50,000 died out¹*

On 22 January 2021 the UN Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons came into force. The treaty prohibits developing, testing, producing, acquiring, possessing, stockpiling or threatening to use nuclear weapons².

The Treaty has been made possible by the work of the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN), which won the Nobel Peace Prize of 2017. ICAN campaigners (including Quakers) from organisations in over 90 countries have worked together to draw attention to the catastrophic humanitarian and environmental harm caused by nuclear weapons. Drawing on the work to ban landmines (1997) and cluster munitions (2008) the campaign has sought to adopt a similar approach for nuclear weapons. The treaty that is now in force was adopted by the UN on 7 July 2017.

The Treaty has so far been signed by 87 countries and ratified by 52³. However, to date the world's nuclear powers, including Britain, have not signed up.

While there is much work to do on promoting disarmament in the UK and elsewhere, the role of the Treaty in developing an international moral consensus against the acceptability of nuclear weapons is significant.

22 January saw groups across the world celebrate its entry into force. Quaker meetings and others across the country displayed banners. Others took a louder approach with Iona Abbey celebrating with bell ringing and Peggy Seeger singing *Carry Greenham Home*.

Having seen this huge step forward, we must not lose momentum now.

A survey of over 1000 respondents by Survation commissioned by the CND suggests that the majority (59%) of the general public would support the UK signing up to the Treaty.

The CND has also estimated that the cost of the UK replacing Trident (which commenced in 2016) would come to £205 billion over its lifetime⁴. By comparison, the House of Commons Library estimates that local authority spending on care and support for disabled and older adults in England 2018-19 was £18 billion per year⁵, and is chronically underfunded. Alternatively, on a budget of £2.30 per meal, it would cost £1.2 billion per year to provide a free meal to the 1.4 million⁶ eligible children every day for a year.

If New Zealand, South Africa and the Republic of Ireland can sign the treaty and do without nuclear weapons, why can't the UK?

Michelle Dumont

1 Excerpt August 6, Toge Sankichi, translated by Karen Thornber:

<https://www.pbs.org/newshour/features/hiroshima-poems/>

2 <https://www.un.org/disarmament/wmd/nuclear/tpnw/>

3 <http://disarmament.un.org/treaties/t/tpnw>

4 <https://cnduk.org/resources/205-billion-cost-trident/>

5 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-7903/>

6 <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cdp-2020-0114/>

The Mara Crossing by Ruth Padel

In January our book group read *The Mara Crossing* by Ruth Padel, a mix of prose and poetry on the theme of migration. The author explores the imperative of migration in all its forms, from the most basic spread of life through the breaking of bonds and forming new ones within the DNA of cells to the mass movements of life over land, in the sea and through the air. The range of the author's knowledge impressed us all. Both prose and poems encompass biology, physiology, evolution, environment and sociology.

In her introduction Ruth explains that she has written in the style of a mediaeval prosimetrum, a literary genre that combined prose and poetry. She wrote the poems and then added the prose to set them in context. An introduction tells the audience about the piece in the same way performers will introduce songs or poems in a live performance. This is a style of writing the author has made to work very well. The prose is written in an easy lyrical style that at times feels like a continuation of her poems and, like the push and pull of the migrations described, the poetry flows easily, an emotional response drawn from the factual descriptions.

The different kinds of migration and their necessity are explored, summarily described as 'go and return' and 'go and stay'. The impact of migration is also looked at, and the changes it brings about both for those migrating and the environments. We learned that geese for instance have adapted their physiology so they can fly at higher altitudes over the Himalayas, which grow taller every year, showing how biological evolution has proceeded over geological time

The history and culture of human migration is also explored, from the earliest journeys to the current day. In the final section of the book the deadly migrations of people by land and sea made today are shown in parallel with the annual migration of animal herds compelled to cross

the crocodile infested Mara River, risking death while fleeing predators and famine in search for greener pastures.

The book was informative, insightful and topical, written in a style that was a pleasure to read. **Liz Collins**

*Our next meeting will be on the Quaker Zoom page on Friday 26 February at 3pm. We have chosen *The English Patient* by Michael Ondaatje. You have probably seen the film and not read the book. It is easily obtained in paperback. Do join us and please let Liz or Gillian know you are coming.*

Lodestone

*I am Magnes the shepherd who found a pebble
stuck to a nail in his boot and discovered the mineral
Attract. I am Heinz Lowenstam, geologist from Silesia
who identified magnetic tooth caps
of a homing mollusc. I am magnetotactic bacteria
knitted with crystals which orient to the earth's
magnetic field. I am also your garden robin
who reads geomagnetic lines the way you scan
a newspaper, navigating folded thunderclouds at night
by neural pathways of Cluster N wired to my left eye
from light processing regions of the brain.
I am the photoreceptors protein which draws young
Monarch butterflies hatched on a month-long
journey to the same old Mexican forest their ancestors knew.
I am salamander, spiny lobster, bee, crocodile and whale
and also that flock of cranes passing silently over the moon.
I am fish, mammal, fungi and bird. I am two billion years
of life forms steering by the minerals of which I am made
and molecular feel for the pull of the earth.
What about us, poor wanderers with no inner compass?
You inscribe the globe. You map, you have words, you foresee your death.
Isn't that enough?*

Ruth Padel, *the Mara Crossing*

Pandemic Positives

Thursday 28 January 2021 saw Epsom Friends' first attempt at a Sharing meeting on Zoom. Barbara, Frances and Susan met for a worship-sharing session with 'pandemic positives' as our stimulus. Among a smattering of negatives which inevitably emerge by contrast we discovered that we had appreciated the extra time revealed by a reduced pressure to achieve. Time spent in the garden (spring and summer lockdowns) noticing plants, insects, sunshine and other forgotten delights. Time to take more care of oneself mentally, spiritually and physically (how many others took up extra walking or even running?). Time to listen more sensitively to the needs of others - 'Listening with your fingertips', expressed beautifully in a quote from a book that Susan had been reading.

We also found new connections with others. Zoom, a daunting experience to begin with, gradually became more familiar and less frightening. It also opened the door to online lectures and webinars (without the travel up to London). Morning exercise routines became an opportunity to greet strangers, smile (before face coverings) and wave 'Good morning'.

Monica's written contribution *Random thoughts in lockdown* I quote below in full:

'I have often been saddened by seeing that old stereotype, of the north being friendly and the south not, being played out. Wandering through a northern town or village I love the smiles and words of greeting from complete strangers. On returning to Surrey my stubborn attempts to do the same have sometimes been greeted by delight, but more often by astonishment or blank stares.

'However, since we have been in lockdown everything has changed. It is a delight to see that virtually everyone one passes has a smile and a cheery 'good morning' on their lips. Indeed I have made two new friends of people passed regularly on my walks.

'Let's hope that this open friendliness will continue once the restrictions are over. That would indeed be a wonderful positive legacy of the pandemic.'

Frances Touch

News of Nightwatch

Nightwatch has operated each night out of the Adult School Hall during the Covid crisis. We have experienced increased numbers in Queen's Gardens as a results of other agencies withdrawing their services. The number has increased in the week - an example is Thursdays, where we have seen an increase from an average of about 40 to 60. Sundays continue to be the most popular and we still see an average of about 75. In addition to giving food we also provide clothing, furniture and food bags on a Sunday. We have introduced the hardship fund and spent £18,000 in 2020 mainly on people in hostels facing evictions for arrears in service charges, but we are able to help with all sorts of short term financial burdens of some of our clients.

2020 was an amazing year, though we spent almost twice the normal amount we also received almost twice as many donations. The main increase in spending was food when it was difficult to provide during the crisis so we bought ready made sandwiches from Simply Lunch who are also volunteers to Nightwatch. We now have sandwiches delivered from Churches that would normally be providing Winter Shelters for the homeless.

Roger Davies

Events

Sunday 14 February: Croydon local business meeting, Zoom, 1pm

Sunday 21 February: South London AQM area business meeting, details to be announced

Sunday 28 February: Fourth Sunday session, Zoom, 1pm: Meet the elders and overseers

Collecting in February

7 Quaker Work at Home and Abroad; 14 South London Area Meeting, 21 Nightwatch, 28 Open

The deadline for the March edition is 21 February 2021

Please give, send or email contributions (no longer than 500 words, please) to Gillian Turner [Te/07805087981](tel:07805087981) [email/gillianturner033@gmail.com](mailto:gillianturner033@gmail.com)

SEED by Kathleen Raine



*From star to star, from sun and spring and leaf,
And almost audible flowers whose sound is silence,
And in the common meadows springs*

the seed of life...

External and innate dimensions hold

The living forms, but not the force of life;

For that interior and holy tree

That in the heart of hearts outlives the world

Spreads earthly shade into eternity.