

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

May 2021

Dear Friends: May 17 and June 21 are the final dates on the roadmap we have all been following since the beginning of 2021. This month, then, sees the re-opening of our Meeting House for meetings for worship in person and on zoom/blended meetings **from 23 May** (subject to confirmation). While some meetings have already re-opened, we have been cautiously following the advice of Britain Yearly Meeting about not opening precipitously. Meanwhile we have learned that we can worship together, separately on Zoom, have our business meetings, meet online and now in our gardens and parks. The children have gone back to school, we have had our first or second jab and had our hair cut. Soon we will be able to meet indoors, go on holiday, perhaps take off our masks and hug each other. In Meeting for worship at the end of April we heard again advice on taking our lives forward.

Gillian Turner and David Parlett

News of Friends

Brian Skeet fell at home and broke his hip on 15 April and was taken to Croydon University Hospital where he had a partial hip replacement. He spent ten very difficult days in Fairfield-1 ward until he was ready for a move to Parkview Nursing Home in Upper Norwood, for rehabilitation. He is now making good progress with his exercises, and can walk well with a Zimmer frame. He is in isolation for a fortnight and will most likely remain there for some weeks until he is well enough to return home.

Rodney Giles, Brian's first cousin and a former long time attender at Croydon Meeting, died on 1 April aged 86. There will be more information about his life and funeral in our next edition.

Cathy Spence reports that the **Friends Family Group** met on 21 April for the first time since last December. The children and parents were delighted to be together again and the time passed very happily as the toddlers played together and the parents exchanged news.

Living adventurously

Live adventurously. When choices arise, do you take the way that offers the fullest opportunity for the use of your gifts in the service of God and the community? Let your life speak. When decisions have to be made, are you ready to join with others in seeking clearness, asking for God's guidance and offering counsel to one another? (Advices and Queries 27)

Over the last year our idea of what it means to live adventurously, like so many aspects of our lives, had to fit into the sphere of what we can do from home and the reach of our online connections. The passage below, from *Quaker Faith and Practice* (21.43), is a reminder that the fullest opportunities can be found on our own doorsteps.

For many of us, connections we have built are deep and enduring. They will stay with us long after lockdown ends and we start to reconnect in person with the people and places we have been missing, or put into action the plans we have made in anticipation.

Liz Collins

If we are getting older it will be harder to acknowledge that we have not been called to spectacular service, that we are unlikely now to make a stir in the world, that our former dreams of doing some great healing work had a great deal of personal ambition in them. A great many men and women have had to learn this unpalatable lesson – and then have discovered that magnificent opportunities lay all around them. We need not go to the ends of the earth to find them; we need not be young, clever, fit, beautiful, talented, trained, eloquent or very wise. We shall find them among our neighbours as well as among strangers, in our own families as well as in unfamiliar circles – magnificent opportunities to be kind and patient and understanding.



This is a vocation just as truly as some more obviously seen as such – the vocation of ordinary men and women called to continual, unspectacular acts of loving kindness in the ordinary setting of every day. They need no special medical boards before they embark on their service, need no inoculation against anything but indifference and lethargy and perhaps a self-indulgent shyness. How simple it sounds; how difficult it often is; how possible it may become by the grace of God.

Clifford Haigh, 1962

PHOTO Walking on the High Weald by Liz Collins

April 2021 : A Candle in the Window

Words to encourage us in tough times

This reflection from India's great poet and visionary Rabindranath Tagore comes from his prose/poem Gitanjali. I [Peter Millar] hope it speaks to you as it does to me.

I had gone a-begging from door to door in the village path when thy golden chariot appeared in the distance like a gorgeous dream and I wondered who was this King of all kings! My hopes rose high and me thought my days of penury were at an end, and I stood waiting for alms to be given unasked and for wealth to be scattered on all sides in the dust. The chariot stopped where I stood. Thy glance fell on me and then came down with a smile. I felt that the luck of my life had come at last. Then of a sudden thou didst hold out they right hand and say, 'What hast thou to give to me?' Ah, what kingly jest was it to open they palm to a beggar to beg! I was confused and stood undecided, and then from my folded cloth I slowly took out the least little grain of corn and gave it to thee. But how great my surprise when at the day's end I emptied my cloth on the floor to find a least little grain of gold among the poor heap! I bitterly wept and wished that I had had the heart to give thee my all.

The squirrel's heart-beat

If we had a keen vision and feeling of all human life, in its joys and sorrows, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heart beat, and we should hear that amazingly rich song of humanity which lies on the other side of silence. (Adapted by me from a passage in Middlemarch by George Eliot)

A Celtic blessing

*May the raindrops fall lightly on your brow.
May the soft winds freshen your spirit.
May the sunshine brighten your heart.
May the burdens of the day rest lightly upon you
and may God enfold you in the mantle of His love.
(A Celtic Blessing for us all)*

Peter Millar, Iona Community



Tulips and daffs by Margie Ashley

Spirituality and epilogue

Wednesday evenings, Croydon virtual meeting house 8-9pm – all welcome

I remember a session with Mark Russ at Woodbrooke some years ago. In it we discussed the value of spiritual practice and the fact that our own practice and experience of meeting for worship on Sundays was also shaped by what we and each person attending did during the week. We spoke of how the Sunday silence would be richer if our hearts and minds were prepared by our own practices, whether that was prayer, meditation, spiritual reading or just walking through the fields.

Sometimes it is hard to sustain our spirituality alone.

Sometimes we can deepen our own experiences through sharing and exploration with others.

These times in particular feel like they are crying out for space for connection – with each other and with greater reality or the divine (however you choose to speak of it).

I felt prompted to suggest that we try a mid-week session to share and explore spiritual practice and have some quiet, gathered time. We're doing a ten-week trial of these sessions. The first half an hour or so is a different kind of spiritual practice each week. We try it out together and then have the chance to discuss it (so far, we have tried the Ignatian Examen, a Christian contemplative practice; and the loving kindness meditation, from the Buddhist tradition).

We then have an epilogue for around twenty minutes. Many Friends are familiar with epilogues from Woodbrooke or young Quaker events. They are a short form of a meeting for worship that might include a prepared element and they are intended to wrap up the day in a very Quaker way.

I would encourage Friends who would like to share a spiritual practice or something inspirational for epilogue as part of the series to get in touch. Everyone is welcome.

Michelle Dumont

How Joyce mastered Zoom

While having coffee and cake in the meeting house garden with Margaret Skelton (pictured), Margie Ashley, David Parlett and Gillian Turner, Joyce enthralled us with the following story:

I was able to talk with fellow Guyanese at a Zoom Meeting helped by my niece Pauline who did it for me on her laptop. The topic for the meeting was the architecture of Georgetown, the capital of former British Guiana (now Guyana). These were mainly spacious wooden houses / mansions



painted in white, and were situated in the more salubrious parts of the city and occupied mainly by wealthy white expatriates, or well-to-do families with nearly white complexions and surnames like Sharples, Kranenberg, Delph, McWatt, Campbell, Allsop. They would not be living in my part of Georgetown where low-to-middle income nearly black, or shades of brown, lived. Some of them were snobs, others were not. A nearly-white person would only be living in my area as the proprietor of property. This was the situation in Georgetown in the 1930's and 40's. It is against this background that I tell my story.

From 1935 to 1940 I lived with my mother and sister at 'S' Bent St. Wortmanville, Georgetown. It was a cottage in a yard owned by Mrs Allsopp

who lived in a house overlooking Bent Street. Our cottage was in the back. Mrs Allsopp was a nearly white. With her lived her daughter, Mrs Ivy Burnett, who wore glasses with very thick lenses, and her granddaughter, Marilyn who was about my age. Her mother was in America. Mrs Allsopp's other daughter was Mrs Campbell, who visited her mother very often. Mrs Allsopp was one of those nearly whites who was not a snob. Although she was the landlady, she was kindly. We called her granny Allsopp and her daughter Aunt Ivy, in the way that Marilyn did.

My mother, Gertrude Petrie, practised as a nurse midwife. In those days home births were the norm and my mother served mothers in our area among the mainly black/brown low income/middle income groups of families. Income for us was low and there were times when money was in short supply. It was, therefore a matter for comment and surprise that Granny Allsopp's granddaughter, Mrs McWatt, would book my mother to be her midwife. One day after a visit to Mrs McWatt, she came home with three white cambric blouses in pristine condition. In those days clean rags took the place of sanitary pads and they were referred to as 'bedding'. These three blouses were among the 'bedding' that Mrs McWatt must have received from well-to-do friends. She gave them to my mother and for the first time I had three blouses to wear to school, the highly prestigious grammar school in the country to which I had gained a free place. Mrs McWatt's 'bedding' at The Bishops' High School for Girls' (BHS) was really a matter of upward mobility. I wore my blouses with pride.

What is the connection of all this with Zoom? At the Zoom meeting with my fellow Guyanese I told the listeners that I used to leave 'S' Bent Street in South Georgetown to walk across the city to my primary school in North Georgetown so that I knew most of the houses under discussion. To my surprise later in the week I had an email from one Aubrey McWatt who was also at the meeting, telling me that he had lived at the same address in the 1953 with his great-grandmother, Elizabeth Allsopp, that his great-aunt Ivy had been invited to Toronto, Canada, where she had her eyes fixed, and that Marilyn was aged 95, living in New York, and that his mother had told him that the midwife who had delivered him was Nurse Petrie, my mother. What a turn-up for the books!

Aubrey hosts a family zoom meeting every Saturday. I had to talk to this 'baby' that my mother had delivered, and whose mother had provided me with three white cambric blouses. I just had to. So with the help of my two nephews Michael and Howard, I was provided with the Zoom facility and I was able to talk with Aubrey and his sisters, one of whom is named after my friend Marilyn, and who remembered me when I taught for two terms a BHS while she was there in 1958.

The bonus: I can now attend Meeting for Worship by Zoom. Hallelujah!

Joyce Trotman

Margie's month

The month of May begin lots of celebrations in my family, with many young members reaching 18 or 21 years.

Over the years I have made Albums for each child using photos, pictures or the poems they write and send me.

While doing this I have moments of doubt. Which do I choose? Would it be upsetting if I put that picture in, and yet so memorabl-. It's also time consuming.

The pleasure in seeing the end result is wonderful, I so enjoy seeing the young people looking through the albums and asking questions.

I look back in amazement at progress each child has made, the choices they make their lifestyle, and rejoice that they still remain a loving caring person.

The May Bank Holiday weekend was Emelia's turn, my millennium granddaughter reaching 21 years .

A little bit low key, but a successful day. We visited her home garden on a rota basis.

The delight and excitement in the air as Emelia organised everyone!!

The month continues with more birthdays, moving house for some, a wedding in July, also a great grandchild on the way.

How lucky I am? I count my blessings every day,

Love and warm smiles to all.

Margie Ashley

'Let us then try what Love will do'

In 1693 William Penn asserted that when in fear of harm or unpleasantness 'we are too ready to retaliate, rather than forgive' (Qfp 24.03) It is certainly true today that social media enables acts of virtual retaliation to be fired off all too quickly. Certain areas of Twitter, for example, are full of the pithy and spiteful accusations and barbed retorts of those who might not have thought it's good idea count to ten before hitting the keyboard.

The comedian Sarah Millican has a skit on YouTube (hard to know if it's based on real life or poetic licence) entitled *An email from my school bully*, which centres around an unsolicited, long and rather bumptious communication from a person from her schooldays who, after detailing the triumphs of her own life, asks that Sarah reply. The whole point of the piece was to point out that, as a child, the comedian had experienced this individual as a bully and was not keen to dash off a chatty response. Bright and very clever with words, it's clear that an acerbic comeback could have been framed quite easily but instead Sarah was short and to the point: 'To be honest, I won't be replying more fully than this, as I don't remember you favourably.' Whilst this reply does not reach the realm of forgiveness it was, at least, restrained.

Real forgiveness would need us to go beyond our initial response to hurt feelings and disapproval and use understanding and fellow feeling to help us to process such challenging interactions. This does not mean that we have to sanction poor behaviour or go along with unacceptable conduct but rather that we appreciate our shared humanity despite foibles and frailties. We all stumble at times and fall short of the glory of God. Those who display troubling behaviour towards self or others, may be experiencing overwhelming and stressful events, memories or situations rather than being merely downright rude, offhand and curmudgeonly for no apparent reason. The American psychiatrist Karl A. Menninger (1893-90) went much further and wrote of his belief that criminals should be treated therapeutically rather than simply punished. He felt that much destructive behaviour originates in a bleak, traumatic past and could be a response to harsh punishment in earlier years. Further similar experiences only sought to worsen the situation. Menninger used an analogy of a fish caught on a line to explain such human troubles:

'When a trout rising to a fly gets hooked on a line, and finds himself unable to swim about freely, he begins with a fight which results in struggles and splashes and sometimes an escape. Often, of course, the situation is too tough for him'. Menninger goes on to explain that the struggles are all the world sees and it 'naturally misunderstands them. It is hard for a free fish to understand what is happening to a hooked one'. In the same way, human beings tussle with both internal and external pressures and emotions. There may be complex, invisible vulnerabilities and dilemmas which may serve to entangle and snare the individual.

Our Friend Reg Briscoe once ministered briefly but powerfully that we should 'have compassion for ignorance'. This compassion for lack of awareness, unskilful choices and the struggle some may have to contain destructiveness, is best extended to include ourselves, for it is difficult to give away to others that which we are not able to apply to ourselves. Re-setting this intention daily may help us to use whatever measure of Light that we have to practise this advice from Penn:

'Let us then try what Love will do...Force may subdue, but Love gains: and he that forgives first, wins the laurel'. (QFP: 24.03)

'The Human Mind', Karl A. Menninger (1930) (Alfred K. Knopf)

Barbara Earl

April in the Meeting House Garden

As the bulbs and the cherry trees burst into flower at the beginning of the month, Eka reported that the thin white rope which encircled the grassy slope facing the meeting house had been cleanly slashed through. Premises Committee worried that a maniac with a lethal knife was wandering about the premises in the middle of the night, and thought the police should be informed.

It happened again a few nights later, and Will, looking at the wi-fi, could see no trace of an intruder, although there was what seemed to be a family of foxes running about. Every morning, when he opened up the building for hirers, another section of the rope was cut. Eventually, when delivering some flowering shrubs for the back garden, Terry assured us that the culprit must be a fox and sure enough, that night Will had a perfect shot of a young cub chewing on one end of a section of rope like a bone. Eka has removed all the pieces of rope and the patch looks really beautiful.

Kate Orchard, her friend Owen, and Eka planted hundreds of daffodil bulbs along with tulips and bluebells, and, with the cherry trees in full bloom, the Friends who came along to see the garden in April were very happy to meet and chat in the sunshine.

Eka has prepared the long bed along the back fence with topsoil and compost and planted a dozen flowering shrubs, started a herb bed, put in alpines in the rockery, and planed jasmine and honeysuckle against the fence at the back. We are planning an insect-friendly garden with wild flowers in the grass. The roses and rosemary in the courtyard garden are in bloom waiting for us, but I don't think the tulips will last long enough for us to see them this year. Still, we have the camelias and magnolias to look forward to.



*Eka and Will in the garden
photo by Michelle Dumont*

GT

Some morning...

...when you wake
take time to be intentional.
In a leap of faith, you sow
seedlings or whisper wisdom,
you'll never know its ending.
While you prepare a mug of coffee,
or plan a conference, choose
to spread your tenderness like a cloth
on the table, welcoming the whole
unknown into your new day.

by Mary Lee (via GT)

Events

Sunday 9 May Local business meeting via Zoom, 1 pm. Premises committee will present a sustainability report for both of our buildings, and we will be asked to agree on the May open collection and consider urgent issues with our central heating system.

Sunday 16 May Area business meeting via Zoom from Streatham & Brixton

Tuesday 18 May 'Encounters with Peacemakers' will run via Zoom over four weekly evenings from 6.30pm to reflect on what connection across communities can achieve in places of conflict and times of isolation. In the decades-long conflict between Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories those voices of peace often seem to be drowned out by the eye-catching if true stories of repression and violence. But ordinary people on both sides determined to build bridges and move forward in faith can still be heard if we are willing to listen carefully. This retreat will be an opportunity to hear some of those voices. Participation will be free although donations are welcomed, a proportion of which will be forwarded to organisations represented by the speakers. Further details can be viewed at <https://qva.org.uk/about/news/>. Contact: <https://qva.org.uk/category/retreats/> for enquiries and booking.

The Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA) and Quakers in Britain are organising an online conference 'The possibilities of peace education: Evidence and opportunities'. The conference will explore together how education can sow the seeds of sustainable peace and heal divisions, drawing inspiration from a long Quaker tradition of peace education work. Details and booking: <http://www.qcea.org/home/events/conferences/>

Collecting in May

2 South London Area Meeting

9 Christian Aid

16 Quaker Social Action

23 Friends World Committee for Consultation

30 Open

The deadline for the June edition is 23 May 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)

Blue-Bells in the Shade

*The choicest buds in Flora's train, let other fingers twine;
Let others snatch the damask rose, or wreath the eglantine;
I'd leave the sunshine and parterre, and seek the woodland glade,
To stretch me on the fragrant bed of blue-bells in the shade.
Let others cull the daffodil, the lily soft and fair;
And deem the tulip's gaudy cup most beautiful and rare;
But give to me, oh, give to me the coronal that's made
Of ruby orchis mingled with the blue-bells from the shade.
The sunflower and the peony, the poppy bright and gay,
Have no alluring charms for me, I'd fling them all away:
Exotic bloom may fill the vase, or grace the high-born maid;
But sweeter far to me than all, are blue-bells in the shade.*

Contributed by Pam Sellman, who adds: Bluebells being one of my favourite flowers, I was glad to come across this poem by Eliza Cook in *Between the Apple Blossom and the Water* edited by Pamela Norris (1994)