

CROYDON FRIENDS NEWSLETTER

September 2021

Dear Friends: How like January September is! Not the weather yet a month of new beginnings: a new school year, a birthday, a new baby, a successful operation, a negative test, a new job. We look back at August: Yearly Meeting Gathering, the 2021 Swarthmore Lecture, meeting for worship in our own meeting house together. Our newsletter celebrates these events in our lives and many more to come.

Gillian Turner, David Parlett

The spiritual life of a meeting is greatly helped if its social life is vigorous, and its members take a warm personal interest in one another's welfare. . . . In the greater events of life, such as marriage, the birth of a child, illness or death, it is our duty and privilege to share in one another's joys and sorrows; and sympathy thus shown is a potent means of binding us in closer fellowship.

Quaker Faith and Practice 10.17, 1925

News of Friends in photos



Match the captions to the pictures! - Barbara and grand-daughter, Margie and grand-daughter, Joshua aged 16 (and Livy, looking very chipper after her op), Eka in post at his new job, Julia reaches a milestone.



July/August time

What a contrast to this year and last year!

For me I hold onto the bright warm sunshine in 2020, all so delighted at being able to travel a bit, meet friends and actually got two swims at the sea side.

We wore face covering while travelling, feeling adventurous and hopeful for the future.

2021, this summer somewhat different, changeable weather, and question oneself - is it really summertime?

Pandemic continues, anxiety levels rise, the world news is scary to listen to and very worrying. Can anything be resolved?

My immediate thought is Yes. (thinking of 'bob the builder'! That dates me!)

Be kind... Think before you give a reply... Keep hold of friends and family... Treat people as you wish to be treated... Listen... Enjoy life... Keep smiling...

Following my leg injury early in August this year, I have been overwhelmed by the kind messages and cards I have received from friends. Also lots of practical help.

One of the bonuses was able to watch a streaming of *South Pacific* live from Chichester theatre festival. The viewing option available for 24 hours. I watched it twice! Just wonderful, the production had a modern twist, beautifully presented. Amazing dance, music and songs where you heard every word.

Another bonus for me - I have read four books, slept a lot and had time to think.

Hoping I get back to meeting in person fairly soon

Happy autumn-time to friends. With love and blessings. **Margie Ashley**

Josh goes to Senior Conference

On August 14, I arrived at Sibford School for Senior Conference. Over seven days I experienced one of the best weeks of my life. I thoroughly enjoyed it and can't wait to go back next year.

When I arrived I saw familiar faces from other Quaker events. There were seven of us in the base group, one was my roommate. Later, after dinner, we had introduction and welcome games until it started to get dark, then drinks in the canteen, epilogue and bed.

The next morning, after a full breakfast, we had morning prologue, followed by base groups. Next we had our first speaker session. Unfortunately, the speaker had pulled out a week before and the committee had to find something else to fill the gap. What they came up with was that we had to create any country that we wanted, provided that it followed the instructions we were given. This gave way for a very interesting collection of ideas, one of which was a spaghetti land under the control of Shrek. It was very funny, but also taught us about some of the living conditions of people around the world. After lunch, we had our first workshop. Mine was Taskmaster - a lot of fun, as I found a lot of loopholes to the tasks set. Later was dinner, followed by base group challenges, in which my base group did very well and was amazingly fun.

As Monday morning dawned, I woke up early and managed to get a game of pool in with one of my friends before breakfast. Next we had chat rooms, where we discussed the many problems in our society and in places worldwide. We came up with questions for the speakers that were going to talk to us. Then another session of the taskmaster workshop and a short base group session. We had free time after dinner, with 'hunt the committee', who were hidden around the school, disguised as people from different countries.

After Tuesday's breakfast and a base group session, I got a surprise as today's speaker was none other than one of my grandparents' best friends, Colin South. Colin spoke about his time in Israel, helping to run a school for the native Palestinians. It was all very interesting, and I was a bit sad when it ended. After a short discussion with my base group about the lecture, it was time for dinner, then the open mic night, when people would come up to the stage in the Oliver studio and sing or tell jokes, it was all very jovial as everyone was in a good mood.

I was looking forward to Wednesday as it was time for Moxford (mock Oxford). Moxford was a lot of fun as there was a bouncy castle and there was time to socialise outside; we also had to create our costumes for the themed dinner that evening. The morning went by in a flash with a lot of jumping on the bouncy castle and bullying a straw head. Later came our second speaker session, on Zoom, with a Russian called Sergei Nikitin, who spoke about his time in charge of Amnesty International in Russia. He also spoke about how he found out that Quakers had operated in Russia during the 1910s. That evening, we had a quiz, which was a lot of fun, then came bed.

Thursday was our movie morning, where most of us watched a hilarious movie in the boy's dorm (*Monty Python's Life of Brian*). After lunch we had a 22+ session, where some of the adults spoke about their life, then our final workshop session, and my pair managed to

get a conga line of attendees, which won us that round. After dinner we had the Shrek disco, which was incredibly exhausting, but still a load of fun.

As Friday morning dawned, it became apparent to me that this was my last full day in Senior Conference. However, I was determined to make it the best day so far. Unfortunately, that line of thought did not last long as directly after breakfast came business meeting, which was very long and arduous as people kept trying to correct the tiniest of grammar or punctuation problem. After lunch a base group activity. After dinner came the talent show which was even better than the open mic night, as the straw head from Moxford was strung up on display and looked very funny. Then we had epilogue and bedtime for those who didn't want to stay up all night. For those who did, we had a great time playing cards and other fun activities. At about 6am, we all headed outside to attempt to watch the sunrise - without success, as it was very cloudy.

The next morning was very sullen as everyone knew that it was nearly time to leave. Many people were upset as this would be their last experience of senior conference.

From a Quaker perspective, I learnt about the things Quakers do worldwide to help others no matter what and to try and keep the peace where you are. **Joshua Edgson**

May We All Grow in Grace and Peace

Much of the world stands watching in anguish at the chaotic scenes unfolding in real time as the gates of Kabul airport begin to clang shut before the final phase of the U.S.- led 31 August deadline for military withdrawal and the end of civilian evacuations. Aid organisations, amid random fire, a suicide bombing, missiles and drone rocket strikes, look for safe houses and road travel options, despite dangerous Taliban checkpoints, to try to help the thousands left behind and still understandably desperate to find places of safety. As is often the case in notable times, *Advices & Queries* offers deep and helpful food for thought, and the choice of the reading of A&Q 31 at Meeting for Worship at the end of this most extraordinary and difficult of months could not have been more timely. 'We are called to live "in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars". Do you faithfully maintain our testimony that war and the preparation for war are inconsistent with the spirit of Christ? Search out whatever in your own way of life may contain the seeds of war. Stand firm in our testimony, even when others commit or prepare to commit acts of violence, yet always remember that they too are children of God.'

One can only hope that politicians, diplomats and governmental agencies tasked with preparing to work with what Chancellor Angela Merkel describes as the bitter 'new reality' in Afghanistan may find the strength and fortitude for such a task.

At least a decade ago, while browsing in the library during a course at Claridge House, I came across this little story which exposes so well the insidious role of fear behind every act of violence. A King of Greece in 774 BCE posed a question to the Oracle at Delphi. He asked: 'How can we end the perpetual state of war between the city states?' The reply came: 'The problem is that fighting men and those that deploy them can't stop fighting because they are full of fear. They are fearful of looking weak to their opponents but, even more so, they are fearful of looking weak to their supporters. If you want to stop the fighting you need to find a way of allowing the fighting men to lay down their arms without looking weak'.

Shame, the toxic bomb of the emotions, often leads to a sense of inadequacy and powerlessness with a resultant fear of being perceived as weak. The reduction of this painful emotion may prevent the need for such pain and the growth of aggression. In everyday life, how we look upon, speak to and treat others has the power to engender peace and confidence or invite negative, destructive thoughts which can lead to feelings of insecurity. Walter Lanyon in his *Temple Not Made with Hands* encouraged each one of us to 'look again' and offer 'the healing glance' which 'does nothing but become aware of the Presence, and the flames of the hell of belief subside'. To Lanyon, this 'hell' was a belief in a sense of separation from the Divine, rather than a deep awareness of the living presence of God in us all.

Thomas Merton, Trappist monk, mystic, poet and teacher, said that 'our job is to love others without stopping to ask inquire whether or not they are worthy. 'What we are asked to do is love, and this love itself will render both ourselves and our neighbours worthy if anything can'. One form of love that we may offer (as our Friend, Reg Briscoe once ministered), is to have compassion for the ignorant. Another may be to cultivate the 'heroic labour' of peace within; for

as Merton wrote: 'If you are yourself at peace, then there is at least some peace in the world. Then share your peace with everyone and everyone will be at peace.'

Merton, of course, always suggested that we look within our own souls to check upon the appetites and disorders that may be the causes of war rather than 'hating the people you think are war-makers'. He counselled: 'If you love peace then hate injustice, hate tyranny, hate greed – but hate these things in yourself not in another'.

In this short prayer he offers hope and sound advice:

'May we all grow in grace

And peace and not neglect the

Silence that is printed in the centre of our being. It will

Not fail us.' **Barbara Earl**

New Seeds of Contemplation, Thomas Merton (New Directions Publishing Corp)

Redeeming the Gift of Power

For the past few weeks, I have been reading *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power* – a theological account of 'power' by the American author Andy Crouch.

In the modern world, power has a bad reputation. This is understandable, since the most deeply distressing events of recent years all show the harm it can cause at its most corrupted and exploitative: the brutal murder of George Floyd and the wider racist systems that violence exposed; stark inequalities exaggerated further by the pandemic; most recently, the botched power exhibited in the disastrous handling of the US-led withdrawal from Afghanistan.

However, what Crouch offers in contrast is a hopeful vision of power as our capacity to nurture, love, and renew one another (and the natural world). I found this vision unexpectedly resonant with a Quaker understanding of that of God in everyone.

The underlying thrust of the book is that we should not let distorted relationships with power become our starting point for understanding its true nature. Instead, Crouch encourages us, we should start by thinking about the 'proper use' of power, so we can learn 'what to hope for'. Shaping our hearts with *hope* enables us better to resist *fear*.

Crouch's own understanding of power is fundamentally as a 'gift' – and if it is a gift, there must be a giver. As a Christian, Crouch draws on a Christian understanding of God's nature (as the divine Giver) to think about power in its purest form.

What, then, is God's own first act of power?

Creation!

Therefore, while modern society is increasingly suspicious that 'even when power looks life-giving and creative, it actually cloaks a violent fist in a creative glove'. Crouch thinks this is 'exactly backwards', since 'the deepest form of power is creation'. From the very beginning, God uses (and gives us) power first and foremost as a means of bringing about our flourishing – our 'teeming, fruitful, multiplying abundance'. Our own power should, then, properly be used to unlock the potential in others and the world around us, to create new life, and 'to protect the possibility of creation'. Even *institutions*, which are often viewed with particular suspicion, are a necessary means of 'distributing' power and 'gathering' together people's own particular gifts to make effective and positive change. This includes Quaker Meetings!

Of course, what actually happens throughout the biblical story is a constant pattern of rebellion and rejection, in which humans instead use the power they have been given to diminish one another rather than seeking out their neighbours' flourishing. Violence is a particularly diminished form of power that can never create, never renew or reform, and only destroys. Perhaps Crouch does not give the very real – and very powerful – injustices caused by constant (and violent) misuse of power enough attention in his hopeful vision. Yet many of his conclusions, I think, would find agreement in a Meeting for Worship: 'The quickest way to the results we seek is generally command and control. But over the long run, the *only* way to the results we seek is creativity and true freedom.'

This is all so much easier said than done, of course. But at a time when the damage caused by 'bad power' is all around us, it strikes me that much of Quaker faith is similarly about returning power to its true form. By leaning on God for guidance and trusting the 'promptings of love and truth in our hearts', we are encouraged to follow something we believe

is worthy of trust – that has *real power* – and which will reliably tend towards creating human flourishing, rather than violent destruction. Just as ‘a simple life freely chosen is a source of strength’, so much Quaker ethical reflection is focused on ordering our priorities and desires so that we are free to ‘do what Love requires of us’ – and nothing else.

This is faithfulness to power as it is meant to be – and as George Fox encourages us, ‘the power of the Lord will work through all, if [we] follow it (QFP 3.31). **Maddy Pennington**

Co-housing as a response to the Climate Emergency

How can we respond to the climate emergency? The issues are so huge and complex that they often seem overwhelming. There is so much that needs to be done urgently, much of it by governments are so slow to take action. However there are many actions that we can take as individuals or, even better, by working with others, whether it be supporting protests like Extinction Rebellion, campaigning in traditional ways, like lobbying our MPs or joining political parties, using any power we have as shareholders or consumers or making changes in our own lives to reduce our carbon footprint. No one can do everything. I am focusing on ‘Still Green’, the co-housing community in Milton Keynes where I hope to live.

SG originated over ten years ago with a group of Friends in Milton Keynes Meeting thinking about how they planned to live well and independently in later life. They visited communities in Belgium and the Netherlands, as well as Hartrigg Oaks in Yorkshire, and were impressed by the co-housing model. So SG was set up as a Community Interest Company. Although we enjoy meeting in the Quaker Centre, we aim to be inclusive and now have a majority of non-Quaker members.

Co-housing communities vary greatly, ranging from country houses with land for growing their own food, to co-operatives in deprived urban neighbourhoods. They have certain common features:

- Each household has its own private space, which may be owned, part-owned or rented;
- A common house, normally with shared cooking and dining areas and sometimes guest rooms, laundry facilities, tool-stores and cycle-sheds;
- Cohousing is usually designed, with the prospective residents, so as to encourage informal meeting in the common areas;
- Members aim to create a self-managing community, managed by all the residents;
- Communities are inclusive and usually contribute to the wider community.

These are exciting times for SG as, after several disappointments, we are working with developers TOWN on a regeneration project for the centre of Wolverton, a Victorian railway town within Milton Keynes. Last month planning approval was given for a low carbon/low energy development of 115 homes, small shops and community space. Within this SG will have a block of 29 flats around a courtyard garden. We expect 25 will be for market sale and four for social rent.

In order to reach ‘net zero’ we need to make better use of scarce land. Co-housing enables people to ‘downsize’ to smaller private homes, as we will also have access to shared facilities. The sustainable design has already won a Design Council Pineapple ‘future place’ award. Buildings will be well insulated, to reduce energy use, and we will be close to public transport and have access to electricity from a community micro-grid, a car club and bike hire schemes. We now hope our block will be completed early in 2024.

To find out more about co-housing visit: <https://cohousing.org.uk/> **Rhiannon Rees**

A wartime Reading List

During lockdown, many have probably spent more time reading than is their wont, and it is instructive to look at the books my father chose to take with him during his time abroad in the Friends Ambulance Unit. Contemplating his choices whilst packing he writes: ‘Beyond the Bible and Shakespeare and the *Oxford Book of Poetry*, and some modern poetry, it is really going to be hard to choose. It should be long and sustaining, nothing light and quickly read like a detective story. Possibly Jane Austen, Trollope, Scott or Meredith, perhaps something Russian. A little history I think too – but what? I’m not sure about autobiography, but something about the country and birds and one or two of the Oxford Books.’

In his letters home he often refers to his eventual choice of books that accompanied him on his travels. 'On the whole I was very satisfied with the books that I took with me', he writes. 'Shakespeare is an ideal companion and *Othello* a good play for a sea voyage; between Karachi and Basra, Falstaff and Prince Hal were welcome additions to the passenger list!'

Brought up in an old Quaker family, the Bible was an essential part of his reading: 'In the Middle East the Bible is excellent company. Driving through Beersheba, coming down the long slope into Hebron, or going through Bethlehem and looking out from the road to Jerusalem over the Red Sea to the mountains of Moab, one can understand why this country made so strong an impression on the Hebrew writers and why their work is so full of flocks and herds and vineyards, dawn and sunset, and the stars of night – '*Canst thou bind the sweet influences of the Pleiades, or loose the bands of Orion?*'"

But he read far and wide, including the aforementioned histories: 'I have just read the history of the Crusades, which is a fascinating story of action and devotion, of bravery and endurance, ruined by ignorance, stupidity, jealousy and faction. As one sees British army lorries on a road near Acre, one remembers that over seven hundred years ago Richard Coeur de Lion stormed and took this town. For how long now have British troops fought for Christianity, or for what they believed to be right? As Shakespeare's *Henry IV* says: *Therefore, friends, As far as to the sepulchre of Christ – Whose soldier now, under whose blessed cross, We are impressed and engag'd to fight in those holy fields, Over whose acres walk'd those blessed feet, Which fourteen hundred years ago were nailed, For our advantage on the bitter cross.*'

Of course, there were novels too, including 'something Russian'. '*War and Peace* is surely the perfect book for a long voyage, and lasted me from Suez to Bombay! It is one of those books that can be read incessantly with little fear of coming to an end. How many people must have read it since the war began? I cannot say, however, that I entirely agree with Tolstoy's philosophy of war, which hardly seems applicable to this war. But I would certainly place him alongside Shakespeare, at the top of my list.'

And of course, his beloved Jane Austen: 'Could there be a greater reading contrast to Shakespeare and a history of the Crusades than *Pride and Prejudice* or *Persuasion*? What a secure and comfortable world it was! The working class never obtruded. There was a plentiful supply of male and female domestic servants, duly subservient, and how much depended upon their housekeepers. Yet it is not wholly escapist. Jane Austen does not hesitate to condemn her worthless characters and commend those who are "sensible and gentlemanly". But if they have ten thousand a year, so much the better.'

He was always keen to improve his knowledge and learn more about the Society of Friends: 'It is instructive for a change to read something of one's own society, and reading William C Braithwaite's *The History of Quakerism*, enables one to see Quakerism set in perspective, in the mystic tradition, a tradition which later generations have tended to overlook. To read this in parallel with Margaret Irwin's novels, proves, if proof were needed, what a rich and varied century was the seventeenth. This book is a history to be proud of, and there is no excuse for not reading it; it is most readable.'

From my earliest childhood, he would read to us and encouraged us all to read widely too. Every Sunday he would read to us from The Bible and as we grew older we children took our turn to read too. His choice of books to accompany him on his travels make for a fascinating reading list, and remind me just how well read my father was, always able to summon a quotation at will, and like his father before him, he could recall whole sections of both the old and new testaments. One of the joys of his letters is the way a view, a scene or an incident reminds him of a poem or a story from something he has read. **Antony Barlow**

An Exacting Mistress - the wartime letters of Ralph and Joan Barlow available from Amazon Books, Quacks Publishers - info@quacks.info or ordered from most Bookshops.

Events

Sunday 12 September: Croydon Friends Local Business Meeting (via Zoom), 1pm.

Sunday 17 September: South London Area Meeting (via Zoom) hosted by Croydon meeting, 1:30pm.

Sunday 26 September: Sutton Friends will be holding an in-person meeting: *Re-writing the red book*. This is an opportunity for Friends from South London AM who would like to meet and share their thoughts with Friends from the Book of Discipline Revision Committee, and to learn about how the committee is approaching this task.

Monday 13 September: in person briefings at Friends House 11:30-13:30, repeated at 14:00-16:00

Monday 13 September 2021: Peace vigil at Royal Victoria DLR. Come along to this silent vigil held the evening before the September DSEI arms fair at the ExCeL centre in East London. Quaker Peace & Social Witness has been working with Pax Christi and Quaker Roots to organise a silent, multi faith candle-lit vigil. This event is open to all ages.

Tuesday 14 September: Day of action outside the DSEI Arms Fair. Friends plan to gather for the day of action starting at 9:00 am outside the Crystal Building near Royal Victoria DLR station. Do NOT go to Cunday Park, the action is at the Crystal Building.

Wednesday 15 September: Walk of Death – 11am at Friends House. Friends will follow a guided walk with Meetings for worship outside the Headquarters of four major Arms Manufacturers active in the UK industry, all clustered round Westminster and Victoria. About 2 hours.

Sunday 3 October: Help celebrate World Quaker Day. This year's theme is 'Resilience and hope: drawing strength from our Quaker faith'. How will your meeting be marking the day? For more information and ideas please visit <https://www.worldquakerday.org/>

Friday 15–Sunday 17 October: Young people talking: Facilitation and Leadership. This is an engaging training event for 16–21-year-olds. It's a great opportunity to understand groups, try out facilitation skills and engage with interesting ideas. Past participants say that they felt comfortable and valued, enabling them to develop confidence and presence as facilitators.

Collecting in September

September 12 Open, **19** Quaker Work at Home and Abroad,
26 Worldwide Alternatives to Violence (WAVE), **October 3** South London Area Meeting

The deadline for the October edition is 26 September 2021 Please give, send or email contributions (no longer than 500 words, please) to Gillian Turner Tel 07805087981 email gillianturner033@gmail.com, photos to David Parlett on quakers@davpar.uk

Armstrong Woods

*Do you kneel down in forest groves
And beg for forgiveness?
Do you touch the ground
With the palm of your hands
In prayer
Feeling the pad of pine needles
Whilst scratchy in their softness?
Do you revel in their Fibonacci magnificence?
It's the knowing
That takes my breath away
Their roots beneath the surface
Reaching and touching
Connecting the whole grove as one
That leads me to kneel before them
Palms to the ground
As if to gather their strength
And in those moments
When I'm there*

*Even if only in my mind
Feeling the sun rest upon my shoulders
Gazing at its dappled rays
Highlight the ferns riding the waves of roots
With perfectly formed spider webs
Their lace undisturbed
And when I'm done kneeling
I imagine myself craning my neck skyward
To see the tops of these giants
Who've known so much more than I
I wrap my arms around them
As far as they can reach
I thank them for their understanding
For staying strong in our destruction
And in that moment
I crave the day I can go to the home ravaged by our fires.
Until then
When I feel sad
I will send my spirit to your groves.*

Tamara Subotnick- Winer

