Spirit-Led Climate Action Among Quakers: What’s Happening?
Chuck Schobert
Madison Friends Monthly Meeting

A Consultation brought to you by the Friends World Committee for Consultation,
Section of the Americas (FWCC)

To all Friends Everywhere:

On Saturday, 19th day of the 3rd month a Consultation was held by FWCC entitled: Spirit-Led Climate Action Among Quakers: What’s Happening? This zoom event was attended by approximately 40 Friends, primarily from the Midwest region, from 14 yearly meetings. Our purpose was to better understand how Spirit guides our actions against climate change by sharing and listening about experiences with spirit-led climate action in our lives and among Quakers.

We were blessed with two Friends invited to speak from their experiences before opening things up for worship sharing. These Friends were:

- Hayley Hathaway, Communications Coordinator, Quaker Earthcare Witness (QEW) attender of Santa Fe Monthly Meeting, Intermountain Yearly Meeting.
- Paul Christiansen, Eastside Friends Monthly Meeting, Bellevue, WA, who travels in the ministry with a concern for climate change.

As Hayley said, “The climate crisis is, ultimately, a spiritual one.” This set the tone for our explorations on this day. She noted that Climate change is NOT a separate issue from the other issues we address as Friends. That is, work to address white supremacy is linked to environmental injustice. She spoke to the need for more youth-led work, supported by older Friends who can afford to be arrested for speaking their witness to the climate catastrophe that is ongoing.

Paul travels in the ministry with the message, “No Arks.” That is, we cannot expect to save some things and some...
people, while letting other people and things go. In response to asking congregations “How do you feel?”, getting answers like “that will NEVER work,” he realized he was seeing symptoms of depression around climate change work. He shared that the most important thing is to get started on this work. And you can start anywhere.

Friends were then separated into breakout groups for worship sharing using the title as query: Spirit-Led Climate Action Among Quakers: What’s Happening? Friends returned to the larger group to share what had risen for them in the small groups:

Clearly, Paul’s idea of “depression” around climate change resonated for many Friends. Another Friend was intrigued by the idea of climate change work as a “chore” to get out of the despair. One Friend spoke to the term “depression despair” and would like to add “trauma” to that idea. He feels a responsibility for causing other people’s suffering. The idea of “kinship” was raised up as a replacement for the Quaker Testimony of “Stewardship.” Stewardship is too hierarchical.

Another Friend felt that he “wanted more” of this kind of consultation work; noting that we had not quite reached the “spiritual taproot” that can lead to action on climate change and other issues. He suggested further consultations on this issue, perhaps in a small, committed group of Friends, a “cohort”, as he put it. He wondered, could traveling ministers spread this concern for discussion and ACTION?

One friend challenged us with a question whether climate change is caused by something spiritual. If it is, then what is it and what practice(s) can we adopt that will resolve this challenge. He spends a lot of time seeking that spiritual cause. What can bring love, gentleness, and light into the world?

The consultation was concluded with Waiting Worship, followed by a 15-minute optional time for Friends to discuss the issues further and exchange resources.

Several issues arose in the immediate aftermath of the Consultation, leading to these questions:

- Is there interest in further Consultations on Spirit-led climate change issues? Suggestions?
- Is there interest in further Consultations exploring deeply into how Spirit leads our actions on issues such as climate change, etc.? What is the Spiritual “taproot”? How do we find that place?

(Editor’s Note: Chuck Schobert was the convener of this Consultation that included 40 Friends, including many from the Northern Yearly Meeting. Contact Chuck at poodledok@gmail.com.)
The Seeds of Peace
Mike Soika
Milwaukee Friends Monthly Meeting

I read a news story of a Ukrainian woman confronting a Russian soldier, telling him to “put sunflower seeds in your pockets so when you die in Ukraine, at least sunflowers will grow here.” At first, I was impressed with the bravery and the imagery this woman conjured up. In my mind, the soldier was a young man, likely wondering what the hell he was doing invading Ukraine and killing its people. And, that was the power of this woman’s image. She was the one planting seeds in the thought process of this fellow, with a clear intent to impress upon him that he may very well die here.

As a Quaker, I am conflicted by this war. It is easy to be against Russian aggression: the bombing of civilian targets, the hegemony, and the greed so grossly on display. But it is also easy to pray for the efforts of the Ukrainian people: their courage in standing up to an aggressor, their care for each other, and their staunch defense of democracy.

I have often struggled with the Quaker Peace testimony, and this war is a good example of why. I am certainly for Peace — but I am also for self-defense. While the Bible exhorts us to “turn the other cheek” when struck — such an act on the part of Ukraine would have allowed Russia to quickly take over the country and accomplish its imperialistic goals with little cost to the aggressor.

While I support the efforts of Ukraine to defend itself, I also realize that Russian soldiers aren’t really the enemy. They are victims, as well. The Russian army is comprised of both conscripted soldiers and professional military volunteers, all of whom were misled on the need and purpose of this invasion by the Russian central government. In war, everyone is a victim — one way or another.

I keep coming back to the image of giving sunflower seeds to the Russian soldiers. Perhaps our prayer should be for the soldiers to realize that they don’t need to be fighting in this senseless war and that they can plant sunflower seeds as a sign of peace as they put down their arms and return home.

I come from Russian/Ukrainian heritage. I know this because I completed one of those ancestry tests and

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About the NYM Journal

The NYM Journal aims to inform and inspire Friends with examples of Quaker faith and practice.

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discovered that 42% of my DNA hails from Russia, Ukraine and Eastern Poland. My children and I are proud of this heritage, to the point that all three kids — years ago — went out and together had the words “My Family” tattooed on their bodies in Ukrainian: MoR-Cim’R.

I wish there was a way to send sunflower seeds to the Russian soldiers — who are my family, and to the Ukrainian freedom fighters — who are my family and ask them all to put down their arms and plant seeds of peace. But I understand that peace must rise up from the soul just as a seed must rise up from the dark and nourishing earth in which it is planted.

It’s pretty clear that the cry for peace won’t be coming from Russian leadership; that it will have to rise up from the Russian people; from the mothers who fear their soldier sons will die in a senseless war; from the young men and women who fear their loved ones will be lost; from the fathers who know the brutality of war and want no part of it for their sons and daughters.

Peace is a seed that is already planted in the soul of each of us. It is our job to nourish it until its roots grow deep and its stalk grows strong as it thrives in the light of the sun.

Peace is planted everywhere. Pray for it to grow.

(Editor’s Note: The news story referenced in this article appears at https://www.theguardian.com/world/video/2022/feb/25/ukrainian-woman-sunflower-seeds-russian-soldiers-video. This was first published in Milwaukee Monthly Meeting’s Shareletter.)

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Black Ashes with Prayer

ME Kilpatrick
Birmingham (AL) Friends Monthly Meeting

I can’t breathe -
Black ashes:
George Floyd’s need,
the cross flashes.

I can’t run from -
Black ashes:
Jesse Owens won,
hurdles and dashes.

I can’t sing the blues –
Black ashes:
Holiday’s “Strange Fruit” moves,
past white fascists.

I can’t defeat-
Black ashes:
Rosa Park’s seat,
as teeth gnashes.

I can’t inspire –
Black ashes:
MLK took us higher,
Civil Rights passes.

I can’t fight -
Black ashes:
Ali’s human rights,
uppercut smashes.

I can’t say it loud -
Black ashes:
“I’m Black And I’m Proud,”
the Godfather of Soul unlasheds.

I can’t grace -
Black ashes:
Arthur Ashe’s place,
in tennis matches.

I can’t dance and sing -
Black ashes:
Michael’s “Billie Jean,”
the King of Pop snatches.
I can’t jump -
**Black ashes:**
Air Jordan’s dunks,
over racial clashes.

I can’t talk -
**Black ashes:**
Oprah Winfrey knocks,
hearts open in masses.

I can’t lead -
**Black ashes:**
Colin Kaepernick’s knee,
where black lives flashes.

I can’t erase -
**Black ashes:**
Bubba Wallace races,
past race flag hashes.

But I can retrace -
**black ashes** with prayer:
On one knee before race,
breathe peace into the air.

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**A Quaker Tree**

*ME Kilpatrick*

*Birmingham (AL) Friends Monthly Meeting*


This fruit fell to the ground,
not far from the family tree,
surrounded in soil unsound,
the tree perished in me.

But this fruit’s seed was found,
and planted in new garden soil,
its roots grow free in the ground,
deep in soil rich and royal.

The seed became a Quaker tree,
encircled by friendly trees as strong,
with deep roots that freely feed,
this silent tree bursts into fruitful song

*(Editor’s Note: Marlin Kilpatrick is a Quaker living in Marquette, Michigan who attends meetings of the Birmingham (AL) Friends Meetings via Zoom.)*

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**Being Gifted Possibilities**

*Maia Twedt*

*Twin Cities Friends Monthly Meeting*

An old friend reached out to me this week. I had not thought about him for many years, but instantly I flashed back to when we met. It was a time of seismic shift in my beliefs and assumptions about God. I had just turned 20 and was required to attend a youth leadership training conference in preparation for a summer job. The camp was up by Canada; the timing was bad. I had spent prior months healing after my first episode of bipolar disorder, living two months in a hospital until things eased. Healing from this event involved a lot of tender care, and I doubted that I had the stamina to go a whole week so far away. Bless her heart, my mom offered to drive me up there. Her
parting words were, “I will come to get you if you need to come home early.” I must remember to thank her for that.

The camp was strange. For one thing, we had to grind wheat berries to make our bread for each day. I had never done that, and I struggled to understand what link that had with youth leadership. We slept in soggy tents and soggy sleeping bags. Besides homemade bread, I remember plain vegetables and no sugar. But the biggest stretch for me was not those things. The untenable task was the creation of a 30-year life plan. Every day we had a lecture about the importance of planning for the future, and we had to work on this plan in increments - plotting out the decades in five-year chunks. To be honest, I cannot remember where God was supposed to fit into this project design although I knew that was presupposed.

I was the holdout as the lone voice of skepticism about this project. I was only 20, but already I knew based on the year of illness I had just been through that no one could create a 30-year life plan when they are 20. The experience of illness and the path toward recovery created a deep imprint on my life. My values shifted, my faith disappeared and reappeared in a new way, and my limitations were made clear. Relationships changed and deepened in ways I had never imagined, while some relationships found their ending. My diagnosis would accompany me at every new juncture, and this new companion had a foreboding and sinister personality. Nonetheless, I am a rule follower, and I tried my mightiest to create that blasted document.

Fast forward to 2022. Our world has just been through a long pandemic, which changed the course of each of our lives in an unpredictable fashion. Not one of us would have worked this into their 30-year plan, if they had to create one. And not one of us has been unchanged by this event. Unforeseen events create new pathways and new priorities.

Since that first onset of bipolar disorder, I have been suspicious of goal setting and resolutions. I also never subscribe to the idea of God having a plan for my life. Yet after a period of absolute absence of faith, a new way of imagining God’s role in the design of my life did start to develop for me. At some point, after yet another turning point in my life, I heard the process theologian Marjorie Suchocki speak; her ideas gave birth to my emerging faith. I heard her say that God offers the possibilities, but it is the people’s work to fashion those possibilities using innovation and instinct. In this way patterns emerge in the world from a co-creative energy. This co-creation utilizes our prayer and our effort toward conscious design of the future. This belief is as far as I will go in affirming that there is an ultimate intent for the world.

I have sifted through my childhood bedroom and basement, and this 30-year plan is nowhere to be found. It will soon be exactly 30 years since I have written it, and I would have loved to look back at it over a good glass of wine and someone to laugh with. Not a lot turned out the way I designed, so many goals and dreams never accomplished. But, there have been new opportunities I would never have imagined when I was 20. I would like to think that some unpredictability helped birth creativity and innovation. In this season of so much unpredictability in world events, this creativity is something to hold onto as a harbinger of hope.

I may never be ready to write another 30-year plan, since I am certain I do not know all the future possibilities. So much of what lies ahead is predicated on something beyond my control. There will always be another turning point. In the midst of twists and turns, however, I will use my imagination and God’s possibilities to step in the direction of renewal and healing.

(Editor’s Note: Maia is co-creator of Way Opening Workshops and blogs at wayopeningworkshops.org. A recent favorite read is Disability Invisibility: First Person Stories from the Twenty-First Century by Alice Wong.)
This Little Light of Mine???

Annemarie Adsen
Milwaukee Friends Monthly Meeting

It is easy for me to become overwhelmed in light of the tremendous pain and suffering all around us. I tend to think of myself as small, weak, ineffective and powerless. I am capable of doing nothing, so why even try? This is a false narrative. I have been working to change that story in my head.

I spoke with Friend, Jim Schacht, before writing the following. At the start of the Chanukah season, he retold the tale at Meeting for Worship. There was only enough oil to light the lamps for one night. Yet miraculously, the lamps continued to shine for eight nights. He made a comparison between the Chanukah light and our Light within. I paraphrase his words, “If somehow there was enough oil for eight nights, then maybe somehow our little Lights together are enough to make the needed changes in the world.” His words struck me as deeply true.

The only thing that I would change in his beautiful analogy is in reference to the size of our Light. Quakers believe that we each have a “measure” of Light. A “measure” is anything but definitive of size. To my knowledge, no one has ever seen the Light within. Why then, do we assume that we have only a smidgen, a pinch, or at the very most, a mere dab of Light?

This line of thinking originates from a scarcity model. Since there are so many of us here on Earth, clearly we each must have an infinitesimally small speck of Light. This makes logical sense. The more people seated at a table waiting to take part in a pie, the smaller the piece received.

What we seem unable to comprehend, is that God defies our logic. God is the polar opposite of scarcity. God is endless, boundless and ever abundant. It doesn’t matter how many of God’s kids are currently at the table. Nor does it matter how many more kids arrive hungry. God will always be there to lovingly welcome more. There will always be yet more Light.

Perhaps then, our Lights are larger than we think. The biggest measuring implement in my kitchen is a two quart measuring cup. Eight cups is quite large if you’re making bread. Maybe even this vessel is much too small a container. Our Light could be bigger than the whole kitchen.

It’s possible that there is no construction worker, nor architect equipped with an adequate tool for taking this cosmic measurement. There may be no mathematician intelligent enough to make a theoretical equation that demonstrates the size of our Light. Our Lights may actually be immeasurable and infinite, just like The One who bestowed them within us.

I am beginning to think that that isn’t far from the truth. God had some hand in creating us, therefore, we couldn’t possibly be lacking. Of course, we have enough Light! Think of what each of us would attempt and accomplish, if we actually believed that!

(Editor’s Note: This was first published in Milwaukee Monthly Meeting’s Shareletter.

Photo: Jake Soika, Used with Permission
Soaring High

Lyrics & Photo - Ann Winschel
Music - Don Pardee

Available on
Apple Music ~ Spotify
YouTube ~ Amazon Music
and others

Hear Soaring High only a click away on YouTube:
https://youtu.be/c_70I0JKNaQ

The Story Behind the Song
Ann Winschel
Milwaukee Friends Monthly Meeting

My Mom sang around the house a lot, mostly songs she heard on the radio, and I picked up the habit. She was from a small, German-Catholic farming community in southeastern Missouri where I once scored cred with one of my many cousins because I was able to correctly identify the song the band was playing as one by Hank Williams, Sr. Hank must have had a Quaker sensibility to write lyrics like this:

The silence of a falling star
Lights up a purple sky

One day, just about ten years ago, I was in my car, alone, trying to sing along with the radio. I couldn’t. Nothing music-like would come out of my mouth. As I sat there trying to croak out that song I realized that it had been years since I had sung in my car — or in my home. That did it. Gave me the clarity and courage to see that it was time to leave, I could no longer stay in a marriage that was so stifling I had even lost the ability to sing.

Talk about feathers flying, it was the divorce from hell. When things had more or less settled down, I bought a new car and began to travel. I went on several solo, 4-6 week long road trips to the West Coast, singing along with my music all the way. I drove white-knuckled over breathless mountain passes, got rained on in Death Valley, and once I found myself in the Mojave Desert when the spring flowers were in bloom.

There is a lot of country between here and the Pacific Ocean, so sometimes I flew over all those mountains and deserts. On one trip, while I was high in the air, an old friend, whom I had lost touch with, sent me a series of rambling text messages. Most of it didn’t make much sense but one part was clear. “Please come.” So I did. That was the beginning of a long distance romance. The song reflects the high hopes we both had for the relationship. It didn’t work out in the end, but that’s a story for another song, one that is still waiting to be written.

Now I sing all day long, the same two lines over and over and over. Drives me, and anyone else within earshot, crazy. It is fabulous.

(Editor’s Note: This was first published in Milwaukee Monthly Meeting’s Shareletter.)

After Disaster
Gundega Korsts
Sand Ridge Worship Group

Brief awakening.
Black night, low red horizon.
Fire? No. Day’s promise.
Friends EnLightening Friends — Spring 2022

Experienced
Gundega Korsts
Sand Ridge Worship Group

Where each is unique,
how odd the bond
of common hurts
unveiled.

“You too?”
Mm-hmm. Me too.

“Even that?”
Even that.

We touch our scars, in wonder
at one another’s wounds,
relieved.

Oh, yes—humankind
again proves human,
kind.

NYM Statement of Interest to be
Included in an Amicus Curiae Brief
to New York Yearly Meeting’s
Petition to the Supreme Court

February 10, 2022
Kat Griffith, katgriffith@hotmail.com
Becky Marty, beckymarty@outlook.com
Co-Clerks, Northern Yearly Meeting of
the Religious Society of Friends

We, of Northern Yearly Meeting, a regional organization
of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) are deeply
concerned that standard and customary Quaker religious
activities were terminated at Green Haven Prison in
New York State by state prison officials. These acts
significantly interfere with the practice of the Quaker
faith, and if allowed to stand are a threat to all religious
practitioners.

For over forty years, Quaker meetings and activities
were held at Green Haven Prison under the supervision
and care of the Friends Meeting in Poughkeepsie, New
York. In 2015, prison officials at Green Haven Prison
canceled the annual regional Quaker gathering. In 2018,
they canceled the weekly Quaker Meeting for Worship
with Attention to Business. A regular weekly Meeting for
Worship continues at the prison. For prison administrators
to cancel more than half of Quaker religious activities,
including those that have been engaged in for decades
and that are integral to Quaker faith and practice, is of
great concern.

The cancelled activities are customary and essential
Quaker religious procedures. The goal of a Quaker
Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business is
to collectively follow God’s leading as informed by
Quaker practices, testimonies and Scripture. A Meeting
for Worship with Attention to Business begins with a
period of silent worship. Out of the silence, Friends at
the meeting address issues of shared concern and make
decisions grounded in the “inner light” that guides and
illuminates their deliberations. Decisions are taken by the
“sense of the meeting” -- the shared sense of unity in the
Spirit. This “business” is collective, deeply spiritual, and
an integral part of the faith and practice of Friends.

Meeting for Worship with Attention to Business is a
necessary practice for Quakers in any circumstance,
including those confined in prison. To deny a group of
Friends the opportunity to hold such Meetings is to deny
them the opportunity to make decisions in a manner that is
faithful to their tradition and their beliefs. It is to deny them
the opportunity to live out their conviction that there is that
of God in each person; that each person holds a measure of
Truth; and that each person has a right and responsibility
to share their Truth in group deliberations. It is to deny
them the opportunity to engage in a process where spiritual
struggle, growth and surrender can occur, and where
individuals and the Meeting as a whole can come to a new
understanding of what the Spirit is asking of them.

Quakers of the unprogrammed faith tradition like those at
Green Haven Prison have no pastoral leader. All members
of the worshipping body have responsibility to care for the
“business” of the body. Without Meeting for Worship with
Attention to Business, they cannot adequately carry out the
task of discerning God’s will in corporate affairs nor take
care of issues typically addressed by formal clergy.

Similarly, a regional Quaker Meeting is not a mere social
gathering. Annual or quarterly meetings such as those that
were conducted for decades at Green Haven Prison are, like Meetings for Worship with Attention to Business, about both governance and worship. These meetings are an opportunity for Friends to guide, inspire, challenge, nurture and love one another, and to help each participating congregation be faithful to the shared principles and practices of our faith. The broader Quaker community provides deep and sustaining spiritual support to the gathered individuals and Meetings. The importance of its role in the corporate life of Friends should not be underestimated.

Prison ministry is a longstanding and important part of the Quaker presence in the world. Like many other Quakers in the United States, Northern Yearly Meeting Friends in Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, North and South Dakota, and northern Michigan have been and are currently active in prison ministry. We have corresponded with and visited inmates, counseled and supported prisoners on death row, facilitated Bible fellowships and reading groups, taught classes (including college-level courses) to inmates, led Alternatives to Violence groups, supported a ministry of incarcerated fathers recording themselves reading books for their children, supported the work of prison chaplains, helped maintain a hospitality house as a place for families of inmates to stay, hosted families of inmates during their loved one’s execution, handled funeral arrangements for inmates without families, and helped establish and support Quaker worship groups in prisons. We are concerned when administrative constraints interfere with the legitimate practice of Quaker faith and ministry in prisons, and we ask that this threat be addressed by the court.

The Religious Society of Friends has been an active religious movement in North America since early colonial times. Quaker prison ministry has been part of our faith tradition for over 370 years, and was born out of Friends’ experiences with their own widespread persecution and imprisonment in 17th century England. We treasure the freedom that our nation’s constitution guarantees to engage in our religious practices. Permitting the current constraints on the practice of the Quaker religion at Green Haven Prison threatens all religious practitioners, and we ask that this threat be addressed by the court.

Let Us Lay Down First Day School
Shel Gross
Madison Friends Monthly Meeting

I had been an attender at Madison Monthly Meeting (MMM) for about 10 years when, as part of our First Day School (FDS) Committee, we brought to Meeting for Business (MfB) a recommendation to lay down our FDS program. Actually, we weren’t really a committee and we didn’t really want to lay down FDS. But, we had clarity about the action we were taking.

As in many, perhaps most Meetings, our FDS program was entirely volunteer run. The Coordinator, who was a volunteer herself, had the job of recruiting other volunteers to run the classes and supporting them in doing so. The FDS “committee” was not nominated, and primarily served as a support group for the Coordinator. In the recent past, we had had large cohorts of children (20-25/week) and vibrant classes for five groupings of children and youth. However, at the time we recommended laying down FDS the number of youth attending was low (6-8, with sometimes only two or three), classes were small — making planning more difficult — and teachers harder to recruit. While processing all this at one of our meetings with the Coordinator someone voiced the thought that we should recommend that the Meeting lay down FDS. Even as the words left that person’s mouth, we all recognized that this was the correct thing to do. Whether or not this is what we wanted, we recognized it was beyond us to know what to do. It was time to speak this truth to power.

The Committee prepared a report addressing the two main factors we saw as underlying our challenges: those related to families of young children and those related to recruiting volunteer teachers. MfB’s response to the FDS Committee report was to call a series of threshing sessions to give the MMM community the opportunity to consider the report, identify values with regard to FDS and supporting families with young children and begin to discern potential solutions. Following this initial set of threshing sessions a small group summarized the sharing that took place and presented these to those present at another meeting to begin to discern a leading on the way forward. Some key expressions from this process included the following:
The participants affirmed a commitment to caring for the children in our community as well as for supporting the need of parents for worship. They expressed a value that we are a community together and must address these issues in that context.

A number of parents of young children spoke movingly of their desire to be a part of Meeting but the difficulty they face in getting their children to Meeting on First Day and some of the concerns they had about the lack of continuity in the FDS program. Thus, the concern became framed more broadly as supporting our families with young children rather than narrowly as one of FDS only.

A number of individuals spoke to the idea of creating a time between our two worship meetings for a variety of “community” activities, which might include religious education, singing, educational forums, intergenerational activities and just plain socializing.

Some individuals spoke to creation of some level of programmed worship that might better appeal to young children and their families.

There was considerable discussion about who should be teachers and how they should be supported, how to develop continuity within the FDS program. The idea of paying a Coordinator and/or Lead Teacher, which had long been opposed by the Meeting, was raised as a way to provide better support for volunteer teachers.

The results of these sessions affirmed the FDS Committee’s leading to bring this issue to MfB. The Meeting recognized that supporting families with young children was critical to the future survival of the Meeting, and this support was not limited to changes in the FDS program alone.

Upon consideration of what emerged during the threshing sessions the Meeting decided to “experiment” with a social hour during the time between the two First Day worship meetings. The experiment was deemed highly successful as it brought together people from the two worship hours (the “early” worship attenders were generally long gone by the time the late worshippers arrived) as well as providing a soft entry into the FDS program for the children. The presence of food was considered critical. Not having to provide food for children before coming to Meeting made it much easier for families of young children to attend and having the food allowed the children to tolerate the longer time being spent at the Meetinghouse.

Based on this experiment MfB approved a two-part plan to address the issues raised originally by FDS Committee:

- Implementation of what came to be called “The Weekly Gathering” in the time between early and late worship, and
- Approval to hire a part time Lead Teacher and part time FDS Coordinator. These were both very part time positions: about 5 hours/week each.

The result over the next couple of years was a rebound in the number of youth participating in our program and the number of families with young children involved in the Meeting. Of course, this is not a controlled experiment so we don’t know what would have happened if we had done nothing. Nevertheless, this comment is typical of many we received at the time:

I have heard two families comment more than once that their children ask when they can go to Meeting. Our own family used to go through very negative drama about participating and going to Meeting. Now there is some drama, but once our children are there at Meeting, they don’t want to leave. The proof is in the pudding! The critical piece is that the burden of preparation and clean up has been lifted and I actually enjoy volunteering my time. What a gigantic difference compared to a year or two ago!

We also know that volunteering to teach has been made much easier because the paid Coordinator was able to do much of the legwork to get materials ready and help make suggestions for lesson plans.

Another “outcome” of all this was my decision to apply for membership. Growing up Jewish (and still being Jewish!) becoming a member of a Christian denomination seemed a bridge too far. It wasn’t clear to me what I could do as a member that I could not do as an attender. However, having been intimately involved in this process, I was struck by the power of the Quaker way. It was something I wanted to affirm publicly through membership.
worship with a song performed in ASL, a practice we started when a hard-of-hearing attender joined us. We have found experiencing the world through ASL rich and full of surprises -- we recommend it! The link below has the ASL poem.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JnU3U6qEibU&ab_channel=Nanimoeru

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**The Sparrows**

Shane H. King
Milwaukee Friends Monthly Meeting

To commune with wildlife after 27 years in steel and concrete feels a little miraculous. You’ll see the apparition of a bird flying by the window, sometimes perched on a ledge in a maximum-security prison, but watching sparrows hop around after bits of bread at your feet is very different. Looking up at you, head cocked, a prayer in tiny translucent brown eyes reaching your affections. Looking into the eyes of

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**Nurture for Whimsy**

Kat Griffith
Winnebago Worship Group

As we go through the door to a place where language is not spoken words but dancing hands,
Where language is not sound that travels from tongue to ear,
But read on a face and deciphered in fingers,
We find a world given life and enacted on the canvas of the human body.
A body that becomes an ocean, a mountain, a forest, a heart in love, a poem.

Hands dance,
Now a flapping butterfly,
Now a soaring hawk,
Now a gun being loaded,
Now the gun itself exploding, propulsive,
Now the bullet,
Now the chest that receives the bullet.

Now a forest of trees
Sprouting in air, poised, quivering, alive,
Pregnant with treeish possibility.
Leaves falling delicately, playfully, in no hurry to meet the earth
Zig-swoop, zag-swoop,
Zig-swoop, zag-swoop,
oooop

  oooop
  oop
  aaaaahh...
Gently landing on the ground.
A world blood red,
A world in flight on diaphanous wings,
A world passionately embodied,
A world in which in the silence
a dancer shoots his arrows straight into the hearts of listeners
who listen with their eyes
And cup their hands to receive the precious words.

Poet’s Note: I wrote this after watching a riveting video of a poem about poetry performed in American Sign Language. Our worship group has been starting online
creatures that see a world you can’t imagine. Eyes without condemnation.

When I got to Fox Lake, a medium security prison, where I could spend more time outside, I saw people throwing broken pieces of bread to these tiny birds the color of tree bark and grey sky. I learned these are House Sparrows after searching illustrations in the prison library’s ancient bird books. I was smuggling bread out of the chow hall that same day; an adventure in and of itself; I was recently called out by an oddly small and haughty voice just after I’d stuffed a bag of bread down the front of my pants, where no guard is inclined to search.

“Are you planning on leaving the chow hall with that bread?”

As I turned and stood, I nearly stepped on a small dark-haired twenty-something whose expression would lead you to think she’d gotten the drop on an armored car robbery.

“Well, yeah,” I smiled, “I’m about to do just that?”

“You can’t take bread of the chow hall.”

“Sure I can, I do it all the time.” She meant it’s not allowed. My English teacher would be so proud of me for passing on her grammatical tutelage. That day the sparrows had some peanuts and crackers I’d bought from canteen instead.

As I fed them, I picked up on mannerisms and some bits of language in the various chirps and whistles: a descending tone at the sight of food, an excited squeak as they’d make off with dinner in their beaks, a chattering hello. Just for fun, I began to imitate the first with a crude whistle when I’d toss a peanut, an apparent favorite, and stumbled on a rudimentary language the sparrows and I both seemed to understand. It fast became their dinner bell. They’d come swooping in 10 or 20 strong sometimes.

They seemed to know my face as well, unexpectedly landing at my feet no matter where I was with pleading eyes, dinner bell or no. I began carrying a small bag of peanuts in anticipation. People started calling me “Bird Man.” To be fair the original Bird Man was far more learned about these adorable avians than I was.

But then no one ever hassled him about bread. They even let him have an aviary.

The sparrows on the hill usually meet me at the “Health Services,” building on my twice-daily medication excursions. A few weeks ago, I emerged to find a particular guard, Wiley, with the rather curious idea that the taxpayers would find a war against showing kindness to animals a splendid use of their hard-earned dollars—right up there with bread smugglers. I had pled guilty to “showing kindness to God’s creatures,” my words not his, when he “finally caught me,” a couple years ago.

This day he had parked his Caravan outside awaiting my departure. I whistled, before I saw him, as I walked out into daylight and was quickly greeted by the familiar whoosh of wings which always makes me chuckle. Who doesn’t like being appreciated?

Wiley rolled his window down, “Mr. King,” condescending as usual, “Do I have to tell you again not to feed the birds?”

“No,” I said, “I’m sure you have a choice in that regard.”

He raised his eyebrows, rolled up his window and remained, ostensibly to ensure no birds would be treated to a peanut on his watch. My heart hurt for the sparrows as they hopped along on the grass beside me with expectant eyes. When they would fall behind with the hopping they would flutter up ahead, a few at a time like children playing leap frog.

When I was far enough down the block-long colonnade overhanging the walk, the columns screened Wiley’s view enough for me to risk dropping some peanuts behind me. The sparrows would break ranks a handful at a time and snatch them off the sidewalk to dine al fresco or fly off to enjoy their meal in peace. Wiley pulled his Caravan ahead as I turned left to go down the hill but the sparrows had had their fill by then.

I always try to make sure I have food for all of them. The thought of disappointing one of them aches. And I noticed they had changed the way they treated one another since I’d been feeding them regularly. At first, they would race for the peanut scolding and chasing one another trying to get their food. But as time went
by and they apparently learned I was going to make sure they were all fed, they would simply turn their eyes back toward me and wait for me to toss the next peanut. I never intended it to be an experiment in economic injustice but it seems to have made a point. I guess in some ways sparrows and people are not so different.

The seagulls that come by the hundreds from July to October pose another challenge for the sparrows and me; they eat everything. Feeding sparrows with seagulls trying to steal their food is an art. Keeping myself between the seagulls and the sparrows, each with their own steps is a dance I have yet to master. The seagulls always manage to cut in.

One little male sparrow learned how to get around this problem. I saw him pirouette right out from behind such a seagull in a way that reminded me of a wide receiver trying to shake a defender. He planted himself ready to spring—his eyes locked on mine, pregnant with his intentions.

The seagull waddled right, pursing my gaze perhaps.

I homed in on a spot about four feet beyond him and launched the peanut as the sparrow bounded after.

I wish I could say that a sparrow racing after a peanut was a graceful sight but it’s something more akin to a running face plant which landed a mere tick after the peanut. He was ten feet in the air with supper in his beak before the seagull even realized he had a rival.

As I watch him flying off, I found myself laughing with amazement at what had just happened. A sparrow had hatched a plan, found a way to tell me and we pulled it off together. The sparrow and the birdbrain. A moment I will always cherish.

(Editor’s Note: This was first published in Milwaukee Monthly Meeting’s Shareletter.)
My life reordered,
To places not of my deciding.
My somber face
Alongside
Her perpetual smile

Decade by decade
The figures grow older
Silhouettes rounder

Energy grayer
Side by side
Volume by volume

Imagination unreeled these pictures
When she was twenty-five
Demanding that we begin the album.

And now
Memory recalls
The predicted moments.

Today
While recording what is,
I see again what was.

At the breakfast table
In unkempt loveliness
She shimmers with the indelible past,

Before “John” and “Edie”
Were each half a name.
Incomplete without the other.

“My life reordered,
To places not of my deciding.
My somber face
Alongside
Her perpetual smile

Decade by decade
The figures grow older
Silhouettes rounder

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“Don’t you speak German with me!” a nursing home attendant mocks a tiny, delicate, fragile woman whose weak body is held upright in bed by three pillows. Surprised, the woman raises a small hand stiffened by arthritis and asks, “Which language do you want me to speak: Russian, French or English?” The puzzled attendant turns and walks away.

Today, I have come to the nursing home to visit Lisa, the small woman with a quick mind. While she describes the above incident to me, she smiles a mysterious smile. She fluently speaks Russian, French, German and English. Often, she talks about “the hard times” in France, when somewhere near Toulouse during World War II; she hid her Jewish/German husband from the occupying German army.

Her body now riddled with arthritis, exhausted from an operation that left her right leg atrophied, her eyes begin to shine when she tells stories of her life. But she sadly says, “I could not do today what I did then! I don’t think I would have the courage, today! Do you know that I hid my husband? That’s how he survived! In the attic, we had made a nest out of grape vines for him to hide in. I lived downstairs. Then, I was a French citizen. And many good French village people knew I was hiding him. They brought me food. Every day someone knocked on my door and supplied me with a bit of one or the other kind of food for us.”

I ask, “Could you trust your French compatriots?”

“Oh, certainly, I did not have to fear much from the villagers, only the German police. One day, when my husband was downstairs with me, I heard some suspicious sounds and I said, ‘You better quickly go upstairs!’ My husband grabbed his pants, and could not get them on, because his hands were trembling frightfully. I said, ‘You are such a big man, why are you trembling?’ and he recovered from his spell of anxiety and went upstairs.”
“At that same time, partisans were hiding from the Germans in a forested area. A group of Quakers was supplying them with food and clothes, but they needed someone to bring it out to them. I was the one who did it. I walked along the road in the forest and sang a song: ‘Les fraises sont mûres dans le jardin...’ [The strawberries are ripe in the garden...]. When the people in hiding heard this song, they knew it was safe to come out and receive new supplies from me.”

“Then, I had no fears. Today, I don’t think I could do this. Once, on my way back from the forest, some German men from the Gestapo stopped me. They asked for my passport, but one of them said, ‘Laß sie laufen, sie ist ein Mädchen vom Dorf. [Let her go, she is a girl from the village.]. They didn’t know that I understood German! I curtsied like a child, thanked in French, and ran. My smallness was my strength. I always looked like a girl. Ah, those times! I could write a book about them. My husband was always shocked when I told him where I’d been and what I had done.”

“The mayor of this French place had provided me with an identification card, which declared me a former resident of Alsace/Lorrain, because this gave me privileges to receive food, to move about and help the French in hiding. Later, of course, I did end up in a concentration camp in France.”

One day someone must have reported them. Lisa was called in to the headquarters of the German police in Paris. She said she had dressed up beautifully to make a good impression. She was led to some German official, who made her the following proposal: “We can divorce you from your Jewish husband within the next 24 hours. Then you will be home free and we will hold nothing against you.” While telling me this, Lisa looked at me and then straightened her fragile body and raised her right hand to emphasize the stance she had taken when she responded to the Gestapo man, “I married under French law and I swore to be loyal to my husband through good and bad times, through sickness and until death! I will not divorce him!” Lisa looked at me triumphantly and then her eyes wandered away to the times she was remembering, and then, as if coming out of a trance, she said emphatically, “You don’t know how much courage I had. Sometimes, too much! Sometimes I was downright arrogant!”

Soon after her assertive words at the Gestapo headquarters in Paris, she was seized and sent to a concentration camp. The conditions were terrible and affected her health and her mood. During a morning roll call, when she did not say her name quickly enough, the French camp supervisor slapped her in the face and asked, “Why are you here? You are French.” In response, Lisa had raised her arms in desperation and said, “My husband is Jewish! L’amour, l’amour!” She also remembered how, after this incident, the camp supervisor had given her an extra ration of food, by tossing an extra potato to Lisa when food was distributed. Lisa said she was terribly hungry, but secretively gave the extra potato to a young boy. “He needed to survive,” she said. “My survival was not as important!”

While I listen to Lisa, a dark-haired woman in her fifties enters the room and hands Lisa a cup with a Russian delicacy. Lisa had befriended this Russian woman’s 90-year-old mother, who lives across the hall. Without any hesitation, Lisa begins to speak Russian. She still makes connections. An American nursing home can be a desolate place in spite of all the good will and good care. And it can be especially desolate to immigrants.

How did Lisa learn all those languages? She learned Russian in Leningrad, where she lived until she was 11, and where her German parents spoke German with her at home. When she was 11, the family moved to France, where Lisa became a French citizen and learned French. Other languages came easily based on the first three she had learned.

After the Russian woman has left, another visitor enters the room. Lisa introduces the middle-aged woman to me, saying, “She was also in a concentration camp. Her mother was Jewish!” We begin to have a three-way conversation. I have brought books along, which I offer for reading. They are of “those times.” We share some wonderful memories of beautiful places in East Prussia, Silesia, Berlin, Southern France—memories of a time which was raped by Evil. Our “good memories” of the beautiful landscapes of a lost
“Heimat,” of a lost culture, of our lost loved ones and friends, become clouded in remembering unspeakable crimes. Insensitive as people can be, they sometimes convey to extremely sensitive survivors the idea that they must have forfeited their right to good memories by having lived during the Nazi terror. The woman who joined our conversation looks at one of the books and says, “When I read about this past, I cry!” and I say, “Just like I do!” and Lisa nods in clear agreement.

It was over 30 years ago when I visited Lisa and jotted down what I remembered. Our conversations were in German. She died in the same year in which I visited her. I believe after she had immigrated to the US, the American Friends Service Committee honored her for her bravery, but I cannot remember any details of it. Her husband, Phillip, also survived a different French concentration camp. When we met, we had believed something like the Nazi terror was a thing of the past. Alas, we were wrong.