



Penn Notes

William Penn House

Fall, 2010

LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK

With both sadness and celebration, Greg Woods has announced his plans to leave William Penn House after almost two-and-a-half years.

Greg has been an amazing asset to us. When he arrived in March, 2008, his first job responsibility was to go to New Orleans and run the Workcamp. Over the subsequent 2 and a half years, through fits and starts, demonstrating patience often, impatience occasionally, but clarity throughout, Greg worked with staff, interns, Workcamp committee members, and Workcamp leaders in integrating the Workcamps into the fabric and soul of much of what the organization does, while nurturing spirituality into the service. This edition of the newsletter is an opportunity to reflect on his example for all of us.

Over 70 years ago, our Dad left his childhood home in Eastern Kentucky to become a trapper and gold miner in Alaska. He was 19. Our Mother soon joined him in their log cabin, without running water, without electricity on a creek 20 miles from the closest settlement. Their lives were transformed as were the lives of their unborn sons.

When we talk about transforming lives, we usually refer to the spiritual dimensions, yet the reality is for one to be transformed the whole body and soul are engaged. As Parker Palmer says in Let Your Life Speak: "It is more akin to the ancient tradition of pilgrimage- 'a transformative journey to a sacred center' full of hardship, darkness and peril". We must break our cycle, we must be able to discard that which is comfortable and be willing to look at the world with a different view.

"Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent." – Parker Palmer.

Unless we challenge our comfort zone, unless we take risks to live our lives fully, we cannot learn what our lives offer us or how we can bring our vocation, our avocation, our spiritual journey, and our selves together.

Greg Woods has served us for over 2 years as the coordinator of Washington Quaker Workcamps. At his interview for the position, this young man of 23 told us how participating in Workcamps had transformed his life and how he wanted to share that experience with others. We seek to keep that goal as the foundation for our Workcamps, our programs and our service here at William Penn House.

Can we transform lives in a weekend, in a week? No, but we can begin by structuring our Workcamps and programs to be reflective, to help us to seek and to question. We may be the first step or a later step on that journey but this pilgrimage must come from within. As we tell Greg goodbye, his spirit, his energy and his zest for living a full and engaged life has changed each of us for the better. With young people like Greg, the future of the Religious Society of Friends will be rich, will be challenging and will be transformative. We recognize that with young people, the past informs but does not dictate. We must accept that we will be challenged and then we too can be transformed.

Thank you Greg.

Byron Sandford

WORKCAMPS for the 21st CENTURY

In my ten years of experience with Quaker Workcamps, I learned a lot about others and about myself. I made lifelong friends and found new interests. My faith deepened as I worked alongside people of different faiths and heard their passions and dreams. I came to appreciate Workcamps as an outward expression of the Quaker testimonies (Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, and Equality).

As I grew into my identity of being a Quaker through the Workcamps, I decided to dedicate my life to working towards a vision of the Peaceable Kingdom on Earth. Workcamps are a way of living simply, peacefully and truthfully in community - glimpses of what the world can be, where we are all equals, there for each other, and working to make the world a better place.

In Workcamps, we learn about ourselves, about other people, and what it is to be in relations as we work and live together. Stereotypes of all kinds break down as we discover our own gifts and passions. One of my friends, Eddy, became interested in building houses after Workcamp experiences on Pine Ridge Reservation and now, ten years later, he is now building his own house with an eye towards sustainable living and service. I see the Testimony of Community as an integral part of the workcamp experience. As a community, we support each other as we learn and teach each other skills, as we explore what is possible, what is ours to do, and what is "mine" to do. The lines between teachers/students, adults/teens, givers/receivers, us/them, etc. crumble. The Testimony of Equality then emerges.

The challenge is that, to do this, we need to create a way of service that includes exploration, creativity and inward reflection. At William Penn House, we have been working to do this, but in a society that is always doing and moving, with the expectation of immediate results and quick fixes, this is a challenge. We try to say, "Stop and Look!" in the center of a major bustling city. A lot of the times, youth pastors and/or chaperones will tell me that they want to keep busy on projects during their Workcamps, and they want to make a "real difference", but given that we are addressing age-old problems, it is going to take decades of people making huge commitments and sacrifices, not just a few days of service every year. Staying busy can provide moments for the groups to bond and we will continue offering groups meaningful work projects, but we want to deepen the experience so that some participants may alter the very course of their life through these experiences. We want to nurture the fact that taking time to learn and listen can be just as important as or even more important than just focusing on

working on a house project. At this time, we at William Penn House are asking ourselves: In what ways does what we offer bring Quaker testimonies to the world of service learning, and in what ways can we improve on this?

William Penn House has taken on this challenge. We have been redefining what Workcamps mean in the 21st Century. We believe Workcamps are not just a type of service opportunities Quakers, but offer opportunities for any group to look deeper at complex

issues using Quaker testimonies as a template for exploration, whether in Washington DC or West Virginia or South Dakota. Workcamps also are a great opportunity for schools to explore more deeply issues they talked about in the classrooms. In the last year, we have hosted several school groups who came to Washington DC to look at topics of poverty, hunger, and transportation through education, reflection, and service. The trips allowed the students to explore the topics outside of a classroom and get firsthand experiences. We want to continue building on these relationships to explore more in their experiences.

Please join us in this journey of learning and exploring as we further look at what Workcamps mean in the 21st century and how we can help to transform our communities together.



Byron Sandford and William Penn House: 10 Years Together

Byron Sandford entered the doors of William Penn House in 2001. Just after his arrival, the 9/11 attacks brought travel to a standstill. Byron weathered this and many other storms over the subsequent decade, always looked forward while being mindful of the past. He balanced the financial needs of the organization with an uncanny and subtle ability to nurture Quakerism in all that we do. Selfless dedication that included truly selfless acts of dedication and sacrifice are what Byron means when he says "Let your life speak", and for him this holds true.

Join us on Saturday, January 22 as we celebrate 10 years of Byron and William Penn House together. We will look back at the impact Byron has had on the organization, and the people who have been touched by his work and his presence, as well as look to the future.

Details:

Date: January 22

Time: 6 to 9PM

Location: Josephine Butler Parks Center, 2437 15th St. NW, Washington DC

Ticket are \$50/person. Dinner included. Cash bar.

We hope you will join us for this evening of appreciation and fun. Tickets can be ordered by calling or e-mailing us, or through our website.

GAP YEAR 2011-12 Applications are Available

Is anyone you know graduating from high school in 2011 and quite ready to take the academic and financial plunge of college? Or are they already in college, but not sure what course to choose next? Our Gap Year program is designed with these challenges in mind. Participants in the Gap Year will have an opportunity to develop work and independent living skills while exploring their own leadings and passions through the broad range of activities that are held and developed at William Penn House. In addition to learning about our own programs, participants will be nurtured and supervised in developing their own programs and connecting with other organizations to learn about the world of social service, justice and advocacy. This is a great way to make the transition from high school to college on solid ground.

Applications are available on our website, or you can call us and we will be glad to send one to you.

PROGRAMS AND POTLUCKS

We had a very busy and active summer. Lodging at William Penn House remained very high throughout the season, while Workcamps were held in West Virginia and in South Dakota (we encourage you to visit our website to see more about these Workcamps). We are also continuously exploring ways that we can provide meaningful opportunities for people of all ages to explore the broad range of justice and equality issues of our times and what we can do to make a difference. Increasingly, what we are finding is that the challenges are often as much organizational as cultural. Consider the Marcel Proust quote: "The real voyage of discovery is not in seeking new landscapes, but new eyes". This is exactly what we are striving for—new eyes with which to see the world we have been seeing, and then to venture forth with energy, optimism and vision.

Some programs we are developing:

- "Radical Hospitality". Saturday, November 6, 9AM to 3PM at Annapolis Friends Meeting. Contact Sylvia Oliva at soliva@erols.com to register.
- "Storytelling Workshop". Still in the planning stages, but looking to early 2011. This will be a two-day workshop on the art of storytelling for all those who feel they have a story to tell, or just want to learn the freeing and expressive art of storytelling. We will be sending out more information via e-newsletters and e-mail as it gets finalized. Please let us know if you are interested and do not receive these.
- "Earth Building in the mid-Atlantic". One of the projects we participated in while in South Dakota this summer was helping in the building of an earth home. This is a technology that is art as well as science, and is very-much evolving. One of the architecture student there is also attending George Mason School of Architecture. We are working with Bryan to host a workshop/introduction to Earth Homes in our region. For all those who see the need for us to become a more sustainable community, this is a vital aspect to consider.

In addition, we have potlucks/presentations the first Sunday of every month at 6:30 (bring food to share), and every Tuesday we have Yoga at 6:30PM (\$15/person).

MISSIONS AND VISIONS

Non-profits of all stripes often have mission and vision statements that do not include an active vision of the future as part of their day-to-day operations. Many mission statements focus on a problem, but do not necessarily nurture the kind of actions that get to the root causes of the problems. Some service providers want to be the best at what they do; some schools want to produce the best students (a troubling proposition when one considers what the measurements are—best grades, best test scores, getting into the best colleges, but not necessarily the best thinkers).

How many boards and staff members take serious time to reflect on the question: in what ways is **the world** better because people come through our programs/services/doors? In what ways **will** the world be better in 2 and 3 generations because of this?

The differences in operation may seem subtle on the surface, but are pretty profound underneath. Institutional survival is not the goal, but the vehicle to a greater goal. It is about seeing oneself as a piece of the puzzle, but being able to visualize the completed puzzle, and seeing where one fits. The work of non-profits is fundamentally different from the work of for-profits—or at least, should be. But, as many of us have seen, when the success of an organization is keeping

caseloads full rather than celebrating that the need for the services is decreasing, this is not the case. Even in education systems, competition for students and marketing based on the success of the student can miss the vision of the greater good. Organizations may see other pieces of the puzzle, but the completed puzzle is the real goal. That's what mission and vision should be about.

At William Penn House, under Byron's guidance and leadership, we often reflect on these things. It is reflected in our presence and active involvement in the larger Society of Friends and beyond, as we are active in Young Friends gatherings, Pendle Hill Board, Baltimore Yearly Meeting and FGC committees, as well as the cyber-community of blogs and twitter. We strive to nurture that we are all greater than the sum of our parts, and when we truly operate from this awareness, our present and future world is better.

As Greg leaves us, we will carry this process into conversations about Workcamps for the next few years, and how they can be a vehicle for bringing the values of Friends to the world while nurturing those values in all who participate in them. Whoever steps into his place will influence this, for sure, but the ultimate vision remains the same, as it does for all we do: a world that is better—more just, equitable, loving and compassionate for us having had this time together.

Byron Sandford and William Penn House: 10 Years Together. See more inside

A Quaker Center
located on Capitol Hill

515 East Capitol Street, SE
Washington, DC 20003

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