



Penn Notes

William Penn House

Winter, 2010

LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK

As we thaw and melt our way through what has been one of the snowiest winters ever here in Washington, we have had plenty of time to consider what role William Penn House can play in the world of social justice and equality, and in the Religious Society of Friends. "Let Your Life Speak" seems to perhaps best sum up what emerges. This does not mean living by some inflated sense of higher purpose, nobility, or righteousness. It does not mean having a special formula for the right way to do things. For us, it means simply committing to promoting a sense of quiet both in our selves and in our facilities, trusting that these conditions create a safe place for each person's soul to speak its truth. Or, as Quaker author Parker Palmer put it, it means "living the life that wants to live in me".

For each one of us, this has a very different meaning. This challenges us to see that, even if we believe we are right, we are not entitled to be Righteous. It also means that there are a lot of mistakes to be made but each mistake is an opportunity to learn and to grow.

At William Penn House, we hope that each and every person with whom we have contact has an experience that connects him or her closer to the life that wants to live within. To do this, we know that each one of us who works here has to try and emulate this in our own ways. It is not easy, as the staff and interns are so different. But we share the same hopes: for a world of greater peace, equality and justice. So we seek to find our own common ground while letting our own lives speak. St. Francis encouraged, "Preach the gospel, and sometimes use words". We seek to embody this with as few words as possible. In this edition of our newsletter, we have asked some of our staff to share what this means to them, and hope it inspires you to reflect as well.

YOUR GLADNESS AND THE WORLD'S NEED

I admit I had to keep my eyes from rolling just a little when I was told that "Let your life speak" was going to be the topic of this newsletter. Sometimes there are certain phrases that become so overused that they mean nothing at all. For liberal unprogrammed Friends, "let your life speak" often seems like one of those. It often seems to be a way of saying, "Just make sure that you do something nice today" or "Push a progressive political agenda." But letting your life speak is much more than that. It is a call to link the deepest held truths we know to the way we act in the world in an intimate and very real way.

For example, I believe that God loves everyone. Or actually, I can feel deep in my bones, in the inner most core of my being, in my truest experience that God is a god of abounding and unending love for humanity. If I let my life speak this truth, if I allow this truth to be real for me and show through my actions, my interaction with my fellow human beings will be one of love and grace, caring and generous.

There are other truths our lives should speak to besides great universal truths like "God is love." There are things that I know are true about me and about my place in God's plan, my vocation. Frederick Buechner, an American writer and theologian, spoke of this as a "place where your deep gladness meets the world's deep need." The place of my deep gladness, where I find life and meaning, is creating physical and mental space for others to have the opportunity to be transformed by God's movement in their lives. This I know just as deeply and wholly as the fact of God's love. And one of the ways my life speaks this truth is working here at the William Penn House. We provide a space for conversation, a place of welcomeness, a bed and a breakfast and get out of the way so that new things can happen.

-Faith Kelly

NO MAN'S LAND

A friend, Shayne Moore, has a book coming out this summer about her journey into global activism. In it, she reflects on the friendship that developed between us ("a Protestant full-time mother and a Quaker gay man"). Our paths crossed when Bono came to Wheaton (IL) College in 2002 and energized the community to do something about AIDS in Africa. At the time I was running an AIDS housing program in Wheaton. The door had finally opened to build bridges that I knew were necessary to addressing HIV/AIDS as a truly global pandemic. Here are some of Shayne's observations and quotes that I think are examples of how my life speaks:

Shayne states that evangelicals and gays make a point of staying away from each other. She writes: "Brad is different. He doesn't stay away. In fact, he intentionally and purposefully engages the local conservative community. In the true spirit of his Quaker faith tradition, he is open and non-violent with his attitude and words and with those who he knows disagree with him. He forges unlikely relationships with the deep conviction we all must work together for real and lasting change. Not only is he willing to work with people who disagree with him, he finds it essential to solving problems."

This does not mean remaining silent. As Shayne puts it, "he never hides his opinions, but in that fine dance, which is an art or perhaps the spiritual discipline of true respect for others and non-violence in any form, Brad is never out to convert. Relationship is important to Brad and I never feel cornered in a debate or shamed for my journey. I am free to be me, ask honest questions and hold my own opinions yet I am still invited to remain in the conversation." I wish I were always this effective and true, but this does illustrate that sometimes, all you have to do is just be there. I never would have predicted this outcome, but it validates my faith in the process.

In these partisan times this way of being can feel like "No Man's Land". Shayne notes, however, that "maybe No Man's Land is a real place, not simply a place of limbo. In fact, maybe it is a position of real power and influence". I think that's true. No Man's Land really means new territory – a place for creativity, new ideas, new solutions, and optimism; a place that is less about problems and more about opportunities and personal action that are free of institutions and authorities telling us what to do and how to be. This is what I seek to bring to the world. The future is a place we have never been, and past experience will only take us so far. Bearing Witness, Radical Hospitality, that of God in All, Community, Simplicity, Love. These are all facets of the same diamond. When we unleash these with positive energy, openness and inquisitiveness, it truly can be fantastic. Ultimately, as Shayne heard me say once, "What I'd like to see is all people, all faith communities, dump out their buckets (of righteousness) into one big pile and start working together."

-Brad Ogilvie

BEARING WITNESS

Last March, I started thinking about witnessing when I was in New Orleans leading a group of high school students on a Workcamp. One morning we arrived late at the Lower Ninth Ward Village community center. I was anxious about the day, because the week hadn't been going as smoothly as I had expected. I wanted to get the students started on work projects and to keep them busy for the rest of the day.

When we walked into the center that plan totally changed. Mack McClendon, the director of the center, greeted us and immediately started telling us about his life, living through Hurricane Katrina, and his dream of transforming a garage into a community center. It was a powerful 30 minutes hearing how the hurricane impacted his life.

Witnessing is important. We didn't come to New Orleans to just help in the rebuilding process, but to become a part of the community. I used to think witnessing involved risking bodily harm, like standing in front of a bulldozer to save a Palestinian house from demolition or serving on Christian Peacemaker Teams in a dangerous place. But, over the past year, I have realized that witnessing is also being fully engaged, being physically, mentally, and spiritually present in whatever situation you are in. Witnessing can happen at any moment.

I have come to see that the people we serve are often more grateful for the relationship than the service. It is so easy to chase the next crisis, like in New Orleans, AIDS in Africa, and now Haiti. But three years after Hurricane Katrina, the media left before the hard work really started – building in a way that breaks the cycles of neglect. I envision WQW to be different: to serve as friends, not as givers and receivers; as a part of a community, not visitors and mission-workers. In doing this, I open myself to listening and learning, instead of having all of the answers. It has been amazing. I have heard remarkable stories, like Mack's, and found new teachers, such as the 89 year old woman who taught me how to change a lock. I have realized that the practice and discipline of witnessing can take place anywhere and anytime, not just in distant lands. I can witness in my own backyard in DC as I lead Workcamps. When I allow myself to listen and learn, to be still and be mindful, it is a wonderful way to connect with and speak - greater truth to the world.

-Greg Woods

PATIENCE

My experience with WPH has been a truly great spiritual journey. I have met people from all over the world, shared experiences, accents and a good laugh. Before WPH, if you had asked me what it means to be of service to other people, I probably would have thought that a strange question. After being an intern for almost three years, I know that service demands patience, humility and an upbeat attitude. William Penn House instills that in you and you don't realize it until someone comments just how patient you are with dealing with all kinds of situations.

I will leave the William Penn House a better person, having learned so much from sharing the house with my colleagues and the different guests who come and go. The experience will always be a part of me. With mixed feelings, I leave the United States and return home to Kenya. With a mixture of American and Kenyan hospitality I will welcome you.

-Lynnette Wambani Lusenaka

Big changes are in the works at William Penn House. Among them include:

- Funds for "greening" the coach house should be arriving soon. This Spring and Summer promise to be an exciting and productive time as we continue to move towards a greener world.
- We say good-bye to Lynnette Wambani Lusenaka, who has been with us for three years, and welcome Harry Caterson. Harry is from Levittown PA, has been very active in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Young Friends gatherings. We invite you to come meet Harry and learn more about him, his music and more.
- This summer we are embarking on a new kind of Workcamp. This Workcamp will explore the history, present and future of the relationships of Friends and Indians, and will take place over three weeks at Pine Ridge (SD) and here in Washington, DC. All are welcome, with 1, 2 or 3 week options. Information is included.
- For the first time, we are offering a GAP Year program for recent high school graduates. More information is also included.

Please visit our website for more information, and feel free to contact us for more information.

UPCOMING PROGRAMS AND POTLUCKS

Friday and Saturday, March 26 and 27. **The Art of Questions: Applications of Appreciative Inquiry for Social Justice.** This two-day workshop will explore ways that Inquiry through open questions helps to bring greater peace to the world while promoting justice and equality.

Thursday, April 1: **Jon Watts—Music and Ministry.** Singer, songwriter, and Friend Jon will perform and talk about his music as his ministry. \$10 donation requested. Program starts at 7PM.

Sunday, April 5, **"Pacifica Radio and Freedom of Speech"** Pacifica Radio is a radio station that is one of the few remaining voices for social justice in the world of big-media. Grigsby Hubbard, former William Penn House board member, will talk about his work, especially commemorating the anniversary of the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King. Potluck starts at 6:30PM

Sunday, May 2: **The Friends Women Association (FWA)** in Kamenge, Burundi is an organization led by and for women. It was started in 2002 by women to help each other and to address the problem of HIV/AIDS and violence against women in their community. Executive and Medical Director Dr. Alexia Nibona will be sharing about this work. Potluck starts at 6:30PM.

Sunday, May 16: **Quakers and Web 2.0.** Come hear Young Adult Friend Mary Crauderueff, librarian and archivist, explore the new media and how Quakers, both personally and institutionally, are using facebook, blogs, and other new media to create spiritual homes and dialogue. This will be both an overview of what is currently happening and an opportunity for those who want to incorporate Web 2.0 into their own lives. Your questions are welcome and encouraged. Potluck starts at 6:30.

Sunday, June 6: **Washington Parks and People** was started in 1990 after the murder of a 17-year old youth on Martin Luther King Day. Friend Steve Coleman, who lives right next to where the shooting took place, helped start this organization as a way to help connect people with the land and to use the land to help all life. Potluck starts at 6:30PM.

Every Tuesday: Yoga. 6:30PM. \$15/person.

Please check our website for updates. Also, if you have a special passion or topic you would like to present, please let us know.

NURTURING LEADERSHIP AND LEADINGS

In monthly meetings, yearly meetings and national Quaker organizations, we seem to assume that only older Friends and Friends of means can let their lives speak through service and that someday when our younger Friends meet these benchmarks, they too can serve. Our appointees tend to be middle age or older. Without asking our youth, we choose for them and then lament the fact that our leadership is aging.

For many organizations, leadership is shared based on ability not age. By being open to the gifts of others we are enriched and challenged to be more than the sum of our parts. We cannot assume that age, education, or traditions are precursors of wisdom. If our Quaker faith is to grow and survive, our youth must be engaged at all levels. They must be given roles in leadership and in the challenges inherent in a vital faith. We must ask the younger Friends to serve and then give them meaningful work and respect their decisions and approaches. We must recognize that with young people, the past informs not dictates. We must accept that we will be challenged. When cost is a factor the funds needed must be provided.

At William Penn House, we have worked to make this a reality;

- The average age of the staff is 34 and dropping.
- The Hospitality and Workcamp coordinators are in their mid 20's
- 5 of the members of our board of directors are 30 or younger.
- We release our staff to travel among Friends and allow them to serve our broader community by paying their travel and registration costs.

If our small Quaker organization can do this then the challenge is for each monthly and yearly meeting to recognize the gifts of our younger Friends and to change priorities to fund this service and to nurture the many gifts that these younger Friends bring.

"You have faith; I have deeds. Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do." Book of James

-Byron Sandford

We would also like to encourage you provide these same opportunities to other youth by supporting our work in any way you can. As Friends organizations struggle in the present, we are firmly fixed on the future. Planting and nurturing the seeds of that future is our present work. Please do what you can to help.

Look inside and check our website for upcoming events, programs and information

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