

# Penn Notes

William Penn House

August 2007

## Living in the Shadow of Congress—Without a Vote

It is quiet in our neighborhood right now, the Congress has gone for their August break. The senators and congressional representatives have returned to their states and districts to report to their constituents. They have left behind a number of uncompleted bills. Including the one that would provide me with a vote in Congress.

We had a meeting here in our Cory Conference Room last week, facilitated by the DC office of the American Friends Service Committee, on DC Voting Rights. The different factions in the room ranged from those who think we should settle for nothing less than becoming the 51st state in the union to those who are promoting the recent bill to give DC one congressional representative but no Senate representation.

For those of you new to the discussion, here are some facts:

There are approximately 600,000 residents in the District of Columbia, states with comparable populations are Wyoming (fewer) Alaska, Delaware, North & South Dakota, and Vermont.

The bill currently waiting for Senate approval is a political compromise that would add one House seat for the heavily Democratic District and another for the next state in line to pick up a seat, based on population. Currently, that's Utah, a Republican bastion.

I must confess that before I moved into the District, I was aware of (and shocked) that DC residents couldn't vote, but I was not engaged in the

issue. It wasn't my issue, and there are so many issues that need our attention.

But now is a very important moment, and there are three things I want everyone to know about DC voting rights.

1) **This is an issue founded in racism.** Even though it plays out as an issue of Democrat vs. Republican. African-American residents of DC call the District the "last plantation". It wasn't an issue to begin with because most of the residents of DC were already disenfranchised. 137 years after the 15th amendment was passed, DC residents still can't vote.

2) **Opponents argue that giving voting representation in the Congress to DC would be unconstitutional.** This is rooted in the way that the District was created and that "states rights" are protected by the constitution. Opponents continue to argue this in spite of rulings by the US Supreme Court enshrining the principle of "one person, one vote".

3) **You can influence this discussion.** Your voice is important right now because there is a lot of momentum to address this injustice. Please, contact your Senators and Representative, find out how they stand on the issue and let them know how you would like them to vote. You can find more information about the bill at the Library of Congress web site. <http://thomas.loc.gov/> search for **S.1257 District of Columbia House Voting Rights Act of 2007.**

Patricia Newkirk ■



## “Wherever you go, make sure to laugh.”

In mid-June I traveled to War, West Virginia with 11 extraordinary young men from Sidwell Friend’s School on a Washington Quaker Work-camp. When we arrived at Big Creek People in Action, we were met by 20 some-odd young men and women with the Buckhannon-Upshur County Youth Group. In addition we were met by about six wonderful group leaders. My trip was truly amazing and the most rewarding experience of my summer thus far.



As a group leader I worked with six high school age students and painted the house of three lovely women. Mrs. Johnson was such an inspiring person. She raised a family of nine in the unfortunately dilapidated house we were working on. The most uplifting part of my trip was her enthusiasm. Her daughter and granddaughter were also extremely gracious to have us and were essential in helping the students and I understand the living situation of those living in McDowell County.

War and its surrounding towns are coal-mining communities. Before the coal industry decline in the 50s, McDowell County was a huge asset to West Virginia’s Economy. After the decline the county’s population drastically decreased. It was shocking to read the statistics about War. 66.5% of those under age 18 are living under the poverty line. The majority of our group was in that age range.

It became clear to me that a large portion of our job at Mrs. Johnson’s house was not just to paint her bedroom and kitchen. Much more importantly it was to visit with her. It was obvious that she was pleased to tell stories about her life. It is

just astonishing to think that she has lived through so many changes within society.

I will forever remember two things from this trip. The quote which is the title of this article was from one of Mrs. Johnson’s daughters. Laughter is the best medicine she told us. Regardless of the situation, the people of McDowell County, are a community working and laughing together. Another important message came from

one of the boys from our group when he said that we are all essentially cut from the same cloth. Regardless of what part of the cloth you were cut from, we all have something in common that bonds the entire human race. I had never thought of humanity in that way.

Our last night in West Virginia included a reflection period that gave me the chance to talk about what I will walk away from the trip with. For those of you who know me, you know that I am rarely at a loss for words. However after contemplating everything I had seen I felt a mix of emotions including everything from happiness, to sadness, to despair, to appreciation. While I know I am extremely fortunate I realized that I have no right to have had all the wonderful opportunities I have in my life. I realized that I am nothing special. I was merely lucky. It took a little while for me to sort through those feelings and come to terms with what I experienced. To quote Luke 12:48, “To whom much is given much is expected” Where I shall go from here, I do not know, but I do know that I will use what I have to make a difference.

The Author, Stephanie Kirby, is a Summer Intern ■

## Summer Interns

I Started at The William Penn House just a few short hours after my last final exam as a junior at the College of Saint Elizabeth. I am now a rising senior at the small all-women's college in central NJ working toward a degree in psychology with minors in women's and justice studies. Upon my return in the fall I will serve as Student Government's Executive Board President. I am also an Academic Freshman Peer Advisor, a Student Ambassador, and a student liaison for the Student Life Committee and the Food Service Committee.

This past summer I traveled to Poland on the March of Remembrance and Hope to learn about the Holocaust and Religious intolerance. When I am not working at the William Penn House I am interning with the White House Commission on Remembrance. The Commission is a non-partisan, independent, government agency that encourages Americans to honor the sacrifices of America's fallen and the families they left behind. It promotes acts of remembrance throughout the year and asks Americans to pay our debt of gratitude in memory of our fallen by giving something back to the Nation. The Commission is also tasked to unite the country in the National Moment of Remembrance at 3 p.m. on Memorial Day. ■

### Stephanie Morgan Kirby



### Lynnette Lusenaka

What does a 24 year old lady do when she is tired of the same kind of lifestyle and she yearns to see more than what she sees everyday? I will tell you what she does; she packs her bags and makes her way to the United States, all the way from Kenya in Africa.

I graduated from the University of Nairobi with a BA in Communication and Sociology in 2006. I then came to the US to do an internship with Amnesty International and later, joined WPH for a one-year internship. I belong to the Njoro Village Meeting, Nakuru Monthly Meeting, and Nairobi Yearly Meeting.

I am the program, and hospitality intern at the William Penn House. I love working at WPH, everyone is a delight to work with. Right from the Director Byron, who puts us all in a light mood, to Stephanie our youngest Intern who is full of adventure. For anyone out there who wants to carry out his/her internship in an environment where flexibility, humor, and learning are the order of the day, William Penn House is the right place for you! ■

### Kate Smith

I am the newest hospitality intern at the William Penn House where I work nights and weekends. During the work day I am an intern for the Save Darfur Coalition.

I just graduated from Wellesley College with a double major in Political Science and Spanish. While at Wellesley I played for the varsity field hockey team and was involved with organizations such as the International Relations Council.

I have also had the opportunity to travel to both Spain and Mexico. I was in Spain for a semester during my junior year and I participated in the American Friends Service Committee Mexico Summer Project during June, July, and August of 2005. This was an amazing volunteer opportunity where I was able to live with a local community and directly help them with various projects as well as engaging them in cross-cultural exchange through language and traditions. I too am a Quaker and grew up in Swarthmore Meeting in Swarthmore, PA. ■

## Fiscal Year 2007

William Penn House completed our fiscal year the end of June, and what a year it has been.

We have grown our occupancy to 64% of capacity for the entire year with the last 4 months of the year exceeding 80%. During the year our beds were occupied over 6800 times. We sponsored Washington Quaker Workcamps in New Orleans and in 2 West Virginia hamlets and renovated the homes of local elderly. Our peace and social justice programs were lauded for their depth and professionalism.

While we were on this wild ride of service and hospitality we continued the structural and cosmetic upgrades of the House and grounds. Working with other Quaker organizations, we are providing health insurance to our staff through the Friends Mutual Health Group. Our relationships with the American Friends Service Committee and Friends Committee on National Legislation continue to deepen and grow. Our generous supporters donated over \$89,000 of our record \$371,000 income. Each of us here at William Penn House has been enriched through this Quaker and interfaith service and we thank you.

Byron Sandford, Executive Director ■

## Coming Events

***Teachers of Peace: Educating for Peace and Social Change***, Thursday, 10/18, 8PM to Sunday, 10/21, 12 noon. For teachers and youth leaders working with middle- through high-school aged students.

***Annual Youth Seminar: "Simply Awesome"***, Friday, 11/2, 7:30PM to Monday, 11/5, 2:30PM. For high school youth. Will include a workcamp. Visit the website for details.

***Monthly Potluck*** Each 1st Sunday of the month we host a potluck and lecture series featuring Quakers from the Washington DC area sharing their leadings.

In ***September*** Eric Goldman from the **Alexandria Friends Meeting** will talk about **Friends Peace Teams** Service in Bududa, Uganda.

In ***October*** Byron Sandford, Executive Director of William Penn House will talk about **The Testimonies and Bottled Water, are they Compatible?**

***Gulf Coast Workcamp*** October 5-7 All ages welcome. Visit the website for details. ■

A Quaker Center  
located on Capitol Hill

515 East Capitol Street, SE  
Washington, DC 20003

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