

# **New Children of the Light**

**Quaker Youth Speak Their Truth to the World**

By Maurine Pyle

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## **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

1.Introduction .....	page 5
2.Metaphor of Light ...	page 26
3.Metaphor of Dark ...	page 41
4.Metaphor of Simplicity ...	page 64
5.Metaphor of As the Way Opens ...	page 89
6.My Life in Chapters .. Enon's Story	page 100
7.Reflections of a Listener ...	page 117
8.Resources for further reading ...	page 120

## Acknowledgements

If ever it has been said, "I could have never written this book by myself," it is doubly true here. The idea for it came from Thomas Hamm, Curator of the Lilly Library at Earlham College, who upon seeing my thesis proposal challenged me with a leading, saying "You should write a book about this."

I have set out to interview 16 Millennial Friends over the years 2013-2014 who offered me their insights into the classic Quaker metaphors of Light, Dark, Simplicity and As the Way Opens. This book uses their own words to express their spiritual experiences as children who "grew up Quaker."

My original thesis, *Contemporary Quaker use of Metaphor* -

[http://www.academia.edu/5078423/Contemporary\\_Quaker\\_Use\\_of\\_Metaphor](http://www.academia.edu/5078423/Contemporary_Quaker_Use_of_Metaphor) was inspired by the writings of philosopher Mark Johnson who encouraged me to pursue this book. I also wish to thank Paul McPherron, Brian Drayton, Usha Lakshmanan, and Janet Fuller, who are scholars in the field of Linguistics. They convinced me that even at the age of sixty years it was not too late for me to become a scholar.

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This book is part of a longitudinal study,  
with ongoing presentations from the original  
sixteen participants available on a blog, New  
Children of the Light.

<http://newchildrenoflight.weebly.com/>

## 1. Introduction

We are living in grey times. By grey I mean neither dark nor light. There are no clear answers to the issues we are facing, and finding certainty has become a rare commodity. Now, especially, the Millennial Generation is questioning the religious and cultural institutions that have been underpinning American culture and customs for decades. Why are they resisting the tried and true pathways of the past and striking out on their own? Peering into these intergenerational questions more deeply, I am writing this book to provide insight into the lives of 16 Millennial Quakers (ages 18-35) who are seeking their own religious pathways while still remaining Quaker. As a 65-year-old Quaker elder, I am opening a dialogue with them that may serve as a window into the lives and minds of American young people coming of age in the 21st century. Why should we be looking at Quaker young adults for insight into our own troubled times?

The Children of Light was the original name for the youth movement that founded the Religious Society of Friends, now commonly known as the Quakers. During the 17th century in England, a generation of Christians came of age when a war was raging between the English faith groups. Who were these rebellious young people? They were seekers rejecting the religious institutions of their day, namely the Puritans and the Church of England. You might say in current terms that they were "spiritual but not religious." Then as now, the elders were upset that the young people

were refusing to attend church. I have been observing some striking similarities between social conditions now and conditions back then.

From the beginning, the Quakers have never followed the doctrinal model of religious thought and instead have relied upon metaphorical language to embody their spiritual feelings. The most basic Quaker doctrine is called the Inner Light or Christ Within or "that of God in everyone." According to this belief, God's life, truth, and love is revealed in each life to every human being of every race and religion, directly, without the requirement of any intermediary such as church, priest or sacred book. And so the Children of Light are people who are seeking a direct experience of God using metaphor as their methodology. They are seekers in search of a higher Truth expressed through many metaphors, and especially the metaphors of light and dark. Here are two examples of use of light and dark metaphors. The first is from George Fox (17th century founder), and the second is a contemporary young Friend.

*George Fox: I saw, also, that there was an ocean of darkness and death; but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also I saw the infinite love of God, and I had great openings.*

*Millennial Friend: I don't really get much darkness when I meditate. I describe it as a strength, and I guess the strength could be a light growing out of the darkness, coming into*

*the light. It's not going into the darkness, maybe accompanying in the darkness. God is helping me in the darkness when I am meditating.*

Why is the use of metaphor in religious speech significant? How does it lead away from doctrinal certainty and toward new insights and spiritual understandings? Philosopher Mark Johnson and linguist George Lakoff have been leading us in a new direction with regard to the use of metaphor as an embodiment of spirituality. To demonstrate, here is a quotation from their book *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999):

*"An ineffable God requires metaphor, not only to be imagined, but to be approached, exhorted, evaded, confronted, struggled with and loved. Through metaphor the vividness, intensity, and meaningfulness of ordinary experiences becomes the basis for a passionate spirituality."*

If instead of certainty, young people are seeking a passionate experience with what has been called Spirit, the Divine, Source, or Breath, then metaphor is the method that brings them to that place. By inviting the new Children of Light, that is the Millennial Quakers, into conversations about their embodiment of spirituality, I hope to provide another view of what is happening today in the evolution of religious thought and practice.

How did my trail lead me here?

Where did the idea for this book come from? For many years I have been a volunteer traveling minister among the Quakers traveling

extensively across the United States and visiting the different branches of Quaker groups. It is important to note that Quaker ministers hold no authority over the members. We travel, we observe, and we offer to help congregations in subtle ways. My most recent winding career path had taken me back to graduate school in 2009 to study in the field of linguistics in order to become a teacher of English as a Second Language. Meanwhile on one of those traveling ministry trips, I began noticing the way that people were speaking in meeting for worship. It did not seem to matter which Quaker tradition they represented, whether Christian or Liberal, because each person spoke using metaphors. Wearing my sociolinguistic hat, I began wondering if our common language habit could be metaphor. Eventually I published a master's thesis on the use of metaphorical speech by contemporary Friends. That significant detour in my life's path has provided the genesis for this book.

Because humans live in bodies, we tend to describe our most abstract thoughts in language which revolves around our senses, our actions or our movements through space. We instinctively feel this approach will transmit our experiences to other humans more effectively than other forms of speech. I discovered that the Quaker way of seeking a direct experience of God by using metaphor has often led us in new directions. Many people today think of us as old fashioned people riding around in buggies, but in fact Quakers have always been looking for new ways to conceive of reality. For example, in the 18th century Quaker scientists were overrepresented



in the Royal Society in London at a time when they had no access to higher education. In the 20th century Quaker scientists were engaged in experiments in relativity, pulsars, light waves and astrophysics. Their ability to see beyond the accepted truths of their day has opened new doors and contributed to advances in many areas of science. My surmise is that they were able to think outside of the box of acceptable facts because of their habits of thought. They processed reality their own way based on observation, not prescription. They were following George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, who famously said, " *This I knew experimentally.*"

In this book the voices you will hear will be of Quakers, ages 18-35. These 21<sup>st</sup> century explorers are posing hypotheses rather than accepting the so-called wisdom handed down to them from previous eras. I have encountered some of them along the way as I have traveled in ministry across the country, while I have known others since their childhood. I hope that they see me as a Quaker elder, offering them an opportunity to express in their own voices what it means to be "spiritual but not religious." This book will be primarily their book. However, my own personal spiritual narrative will become interwoven into these dialogues. I am inviting them to tell their stories to me and to share their Truth with the world.

To begin, my own story and my early religious life is grounded in the Cajun Catholic culture of South Louisiana. The Cajuns (i.e. Acadians) were French settlers who were forced from their homes in Nova Scotia in 1756 by the

British with many of them eventually ending up in South Louisiana. They have added spice to the American culture in their spiritual practices, as well as their famous cooking. As a counterpoint to most of American culture, in my Cajun family we do not find it strange to hear reports of conversations with dead people or of receiving messages from the saints. From early childhood I knew that I could hear the voice of God speaking directly to me, telling me in which direction to go. This was not considered strange or dangerous in my religious culture. As a young adult coming of age and feeling dissatisfied with the Catholic hierarchy, I looked around for a place where a woman's spirituality was respected. I joined the Liberal branch of the Religious Society of Friends in my twenties. What I discovered was that for the Friends having a direct experience of God was normal religious practice. Their founder, George Fox, had challenged the Friends by asking them to seek direct guidance from God --- "You will say, 'Christ saith this, and the apostles say this,' but what canst thou say? Art thou a child of the Light, and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest, is it inwardly from God?"

Beginning in earliest childhood I felt called by God. The still, small voice was constantly with me. I was born knowing. I cannot ever remember not knowing. Dostoyevsky said it so well: "All my life I have been haunted by God." As I was growing up, I kept searching for a way to answer the ever-present and insistent message to serve God. For a female growing up Catholic in those days, the call to

service could be very troubling since the Catholic Church of the 1950's and 1960's was intensely patriarchal, a society largely closed to women. Only nuns could serve God. Anyway, I knew I wanted to be a mother; therefore, no religious path seemed open to me within the Church. As a young adult, I eventually left Catholicism quite angry over not finding acceptance of my gifts.

Later on when I heard of the Quakers, I was delighted to discover their long history of equality for women. I resolved to find them which was not an easy task. They are small groups usually and often hidden, so my attempts to find them met with little success. Finally it was through God's serendipity that my path crossed theirs. In 1973 my husband and I were living in Maryland. We loved to wander the countryside looking for colonial buildings. One day we spotted a "chapel-of-ease," a tiny Episcopal Church building where country residents in colonial times could worship when severe weather prevented them from going into town. As I approached the building, I saw a small sign which read "Welcome: Quaker Meeting." The following Sunday I joined their small silent worship group. The white-washed interior filtered a pure white light. In the pristine silence I found my joy. I was home at last!

At the age of 24 I was accepted in membership and made a lifelong commitment to the Quaker way. Many wonderful elders taught me by their example how to be a Friend. There was no catechism or instruction manual to guide me, only the elders gently guiding me along the path. I have been a Friend now for over 40

years, and it has been a richly rewarding lesson in how to live adventurously. Now I have become an elder whose role is leading young Friends in their adventures in spiritual development. In return they teach me how to remain refreshed and connected to life in all of its vicissitudes.

Among the Friends I found a spiritual community where I could be led in response to God's beckoning. At age 35 I received a spiritual calling to become a minister, and finally was recognized by a Quaker meeting in Southern Illinois that released me to become a traveling minister at age 60. As a result of my travels, I have had many opportunities to directly experience the varieties of Quaker worship, ranging from silent meetings to pastored church services. Without realizing it, I was becoming an investigator into the ways that we as Quakers are tied together linguistically. What I have learned is that the Light, Christ Within, or the Inner Teacher, continues to be viewed by many Quakers as a source of generative energy which moves the heart and the tongue to share insights while gathering together for worship.

For example, this classic George Fox quote can still be heard in meetings for worship among Friends around the world.

*"I saw also that there was an ocean of darkness and death, but an infinite ocean of light and love, which flowed over the ocean of darkness. In that also, I saw the infinite love of God."*

Among the branches of Friends I have found evidence that there remains a belief in the Light, and the "ocean of darkness" which accompanies it. These metaphors may be expressed in different ways, but the mental process of embodying spirit through language has never changed. We are still living experimentally. This is our common ground.

While doing research for my thesis I discovered a quotation from a 17th century English Friend to be a helpful tool for understanding how the Quakers have traditionally viewed their metaphorical speech. As asserted by Isaac Pennington (1584-1661)

*"...the names are but the signification of the thing spoken of, for it is the life, the power (the being transformed by that) that saves, not the knowledge of the name."*

Therefore, it is not the name itself, the metaphor, but the power it represents that has greatest significance to Friends. It is from this commonly held understanding that the use of metaphors has taken root as a form of religious expression among Friends. The practice of sitting in communal silence in the meeting for worship encourages the transfer of spiritual meaning when messages are spoken in metaphor as a form of shared wisdom.

What might the Millennial Generation mean when they say that they are "spiritual but not religious?" Nowadays, this designated cohort of young Americans born between 1980 and the

early 2000's often view formal religious institutions with a jaundiced eye. In the 21st century the spiritual paths of young adults have been changing radically, and they are either choosing to stand on the sidelines or refusing to adopt the religious identity of their parents. Commonly held belief systems such as Christianity or Judaism, that were once easily categorized into simple boxes, can no longer be clearly defined in one word.

Sociologists Robert Putnam and David Campbell in their 2010 survey of college students (*American Grace, 2010*), have discovered that the generation coming of age in America has been largely saying no to religious affiliation. When asked to select a religious identity, their most frequent choice on survey forms was "Catholic," but those who answered "none" marked the second largest group, meaning they had no preferred religious identity. Thus, Millennials feel free to try out different spiritual paths and to question the authority of the religious traditions of their parents. They are following in the footsteps of their parents, who also tended to question the religious authority handed down to them. These so-called "nones" tend also to hold liberal views on gender identity and sexual practices, often resulting in their quiet refusal to attend "gaybashing" churches. Notably, these young people are refusing to reject homosexuality in their friends or to name it as a sin. The "nones" choose to remain outside of the mainstream of religious culture, and their numbers are growing. Many

researchers have been documenting the trend away from formal religious involvement by young adults, but have tended not to directly communicate with them.

This book will be a conversation-on-paper between the Millennial Generation and myself, a Quaker elder. Although Quakers started out as uniformly Christian in the 17th and 18th century, currently they are moving beyond the boundaries of traditional religious definitions and increasingly choosing new identities. Millennials can be broadly characterized as being individualistic, avoiding membership in institutions, having high integrity, seeking proof over blind belief, declining the traditional symbol of God, not bearing wounds from religious upbringing and holding multiple religious identities.

Quaker elders, like the ones whom I met when joining a meeting as a young adult, were deeply engaged in listening to me with no apparent agenda except to hear me out. Their practice was to attend carefully to me, picking up salient points being spoken aloud, and then prompting a deeper conversation that followed my conversational thread. From my own Quaker elders who had grown up in the early 20th century Quaker ethos, I learned a lot about better ways to listen. As a minister, when I am listening deeply in this fashion, I try to have humility about the outcome which results from hearing both the Inward Teacher and the person speaking with me. I have used this form of deep engagement through listening with the Millennials in our conversations.

I am especially attracted to gifted outliers, people who see the unfamiliar and unlabeled in what appears familiar. They are willing to experiment, to try things, observe the results, and refine their understandings over time. I listen to them without labeling, critiquing or editorializing. When I do give an example from my own life experience, I try to share my truth in hope of eliciting their own truth. I also try to speak in each person's native tongue, so to speak. I speak in stories to a storyteller, answer wisecracks with one of my own, and especially, I evoke metaphors by using them myself. But I always try to follow the thread of who the person truly is - their energy and essence - behind the social mask.

Each conversation began with a dialogue asking about their religious background which they inherited from their parents or family. My initial conversational prompt was, "Is there any carryover from your parent's religious practice to your own?" Then I asked questions about how they use the traditional Quaker metaphors in their life or faith practice. I focused on only four metaphors - Light, Dark, Simplicity and As the Way Opens. There are actually many others in use.

These empathic dialogues have been shaped into individual stories, transcribed from audiotapes and presented in the original language of each speaker. They form the core of the book's narrative. As one who bridges two cultures fostering a dialogue, my voice is also present in the narrative as we relate their stories to my own.



Is interlocution essentially a Quaker practice?

An interlocutor is someone who speaks between any two cultures, bridging their dialogues while avoiding personal interjection or bias.

This is not an exclusively Quaker role, but one which can be found acting between any two cultures to deepen mutual understanding. In this book we hope to introduce the Quaker subculture to the broader culture, and the voices of Quaker Millennials to the older generations.

My intention with this book is to create a rich conversational interplay between generations. More than ever there is a vital need for intergenerational dialogue because of the rapidly changing cultural landscape. This book is intended to foster other conversations about faith and practice across the boundaries of age. The Millennial Generation is in the process of changing religious, spiritual and sexual customs in America. I am following their lead, learning from their thinking. I am listening deeply and not directing. As the way opens.

Millennial Quakers: Comparing the 17th and 21st Century

The theme of the 17th century which drove massive social movements was Millennialism, a belief held by some Christian denominations that there will be a Golden Age or Paradise on Earth in which "Christ will reign" for 1000 years prior to the final judgment and future eternal state. It was no small thing to see

King Charles the First, their divinely appointed leader, beheaded. Multiple Christian sects arose in England during that time in response to the civil and religious tumult hoping for a millennial age to come during their lifetimes.

The 21st Century Millennials, born at the end of a 1000 year cycle in human history, share a similar intensity of concern about the future and a hope for a better world. Our time is filled with challenges from climate change to political crisis and a loss of formal religious participation by the young people. Perhaps this current group of religious seekers is also arising from these changing conditions.

What I have discovered over time and many miles of travel is that 21st Century Quakers are still seekers after truth, especially young Quakers. They are not seeking a singular religious ideology but capital T - Truth. At the time of its founding in England the membership of the Religious Society of Friends was uniformly Christian. Over time that condition has changed, especially in America where many religious subcultures have emerged. As I have noted before, Quakers who were born between 1980 and 2000 entered the cultural scene in a period when religious discourse became embedded in American politics, thus blurring the line between the spiritual and secular worlds. I suspect that these young Friends are suspicious, as was the founder George Fox, about the disconnection between the words and actions of appointed religious ministers. In addition, a continuous

homophobic attack on those identified as gay or lesbian and persons across the gender spectrum has greatly widened the gap between the generations. Young people do not see themselves as sinners when choosing another path beyond the heterosexual binary, and they do not want to hear their friends condemned for doing so. Thus, they are distrustful of the organized religious groups that promote narrow ideas about sexuality and belief; and most significantly, they often characterize such speech as "Christian."

I have selected for this book-dialog a group of 16 Millennial Friends who have grown up in Quaker households where one or more parent is a self-identified Quaker. Many of the parents were raised in other religious traditions such as Judaism or Protestantism or Catholicism. A large number of people converted to Quakerism in the 20th century which has counterbalanced the culture of "birthright Friends." As I introduce each person I will include some data about the religious influences in their religious upbringing. That may even include information about their grandparents' religious roots. My intention behind these conversations has been to determine if there is a language habit which derives from growing up Quaker.

Speaking in Metaphors: an introduction

We may not recognize how much our daily speech is deeply enriched by metaphors and is used as a form for cognitively processing our spiritual experiences. Philosopher Mark Johnson has conceived of the possibility of using metaphor as a form of embodied spirituality.

*"Human spirituality is embodied. For many people, their sense of spirituality is tied to notions of transcendence - of the soul, of spirit, of value, of God. The traditional notion of transcendence is what I call 'vertical transcendence' because it requires rising above one's embodied situation in the world in which we normally dwell."*

His definition of embodied spirituality fits neatly into the Quaker method in which there is human interaction with the spiritual world through a constant metaphorical process. By that I mean that the Quakers in their worship are seeking the words to express their mystical experiences. New metaphors are still being constructed even today as more Friends seek to explain their Light spirituality using such naturalistic terms like sunlight or photosynthesis. Johnson's description of the metaphor as an experience appears to fit within the religious speech pattern of Quakers, who from the beginning, were developing an inner and external way of shaping and sharing their experiences in worship.

Quakers often rely on several touchstone metaphors that bring them back to their history and hold them in the current community of Friends. When inquiring into the spiritual lives of these 16 Friends, I have asked them about how they experienced, in a sensory way, four classic Quaker metaphors - light, dark, simplicity and as the way opens. Rather than trying to explain these metaphors myself, I will allow you to listen to the Millennials

and learn directly how Quakers experience them. By using these metaphors as the starting point, I have prompted the following conversations. As you read each of their stories, told in their own words, I invite you to glean emerging truths about the times we are living in. You will find questions imbedded in the narrative inviting you, the reader, to participate in actively reflecting on the stories and what they mean to you.

Welcome to Our Town

As I was thinking about the structure for this book I was recalling the play "Our Town" by Thornton Wilder. In the opening scene the Stage Manager enters alone. He welcomes us to the town of Grover's Corners, and introduces each character, one by one. I think of our Quaker world as a small town. I agree with the playwright who states early on, "You know, a town. We like to know the facts about everybody." Quakers like to know all about each other too. As the play proceeds we learn each individual story and how their lives are not as simple as they first appeared to us. The Stage Manager says, "There's something eternal about every human being." I feel the same way about the young Quakers. I will describe some changes in current Quaker culture, then introduce to you to my Friends one by one.

As I have lived the Quaker life, especially as a traveling minister, I noticed some things. In America today our sense of spiritual fellowship in Quaker meetings, the feeling of belonging to the same tribe, is diminishing.

We no longer live in the same communities, and we come from diverse faith traditions. Our cultural values are no longer entwined at the roots, as were those of our founders. As a body we share less genetic and cultural memory of what it means to be Quakers. Different viewpoints often prevent us from looking in the same direction to find a point of convergence. We hold beliefs ranging from Buddhism to Non-theism to Christianity, or we may simply be ethical humanists. Just imagine a mixture of wild seeds cast into a single plot of land, producing a profusion of color. A wide variety of plants all blooming all together symbolizes our present condition in the Religious Society of Friends. We are living a great experiment of religious diversity.

Into this late 20th century milieu the Millennials were born. Most of their parents are converts to Quakerism like me. We call them "convinced Friends" because they became convinced on their own and joined us voluntarily. However, their children are "birthright Friends" meaning that they have been born into the culture. These dialogs that I have recorded to share with my readers come from this generation of Quakers who have never known another way. Yet they are mixed in their religious heritage. We have been enriched by the new cultures which have been added to our wildflower patch; of course, not everyone shares my perspective. There are some who feel that traditional Christian Quakerism has been challenged by invasive species that they think of as weeds. I hope that when they read this book they will open their minds to the potential value of this diversification.

## The Millennials and Me

In a casual conversation with my son, who is age 33, he asked me, "How do you know so many of these twenty-year-olds? I don't even know any." That is a good question that needs an explanation. Indeed, how does a 65-year-old Quaker elder gain access to so many young people? Some of these Millennials I have known for their entire lives from childhood up. They have been members of various Quaker meetings that I belong to. Thus they see me as a trusted elder who has been part of the landscape of their lives. Most recently I have been invited into the circle of what is known in Quaker parlance as "Adult Young Friends." Some of them are too old to be called "young," but they find themselves as junior members in a religious society where many elders live for a long time, into their 90's. So if the older Quakers' age range is from 60 to 90 years, then the twenty and thirty-year-olds look young to them.

Part of the attraction to me may be that I am challenging the notion that Millennials are young. Looking at Quaker history, among the followers of George Fox were dynamic twenty-year-olds, who as social groundbreakers, did not consider themselves to be too young to challenge the state religion. They founded a religious movement which raised up an estimated 50,000 converts during the first 38 years. I find great similarities between the Valiant Sixty of the 17th century and the 21st century Quaker Millennials whom I have dubbed Children of Light. This book is my way of inviting them to tell their own stories.

## Introducing the Millennials

Now I will move forward to introduce my dialog partners to you with their ages and demographics. In 2014 I have conversed with 16 Millennials. However, since they will be growing older and moving around, this will be a snapshot in time. These are their actual names and ages: Breeze (35), Jeremy (33), Enon (pseudonym) (33), Nick (32), Karla (32), Micah (32), Josh (30), Paul (30), Faith (29), Justin (26), Ashley (23), Shannon (23), Adrian (22), Noah (22), Katie (20), and Delia (19). At the time of the interviews they were residing in the Chicago area, Southern Illinois, Washington State, Ohio, Indiana and Kansas. One is from Kenya, and another has roots in Guatemala, which may surprise the reader. There are large populations of Evangelical Quakers in these two countries. For a further explanation see the appendix: Quaker subcultures in America defined.

This book is primarily structured around the voices of the Millennials. My role is to introduce each one and to open a dialog in which their voices will be prominent. The convention I have used to show who is speaking is to bracket the Millennial's dialog in quotation marks. Sometimes my voice will be heard as a prompter and sometimes as an elucidator. There may be some interjections of Quaker history and practice to make it easier for the reader to follow the dialog. The goal is to allow you, the reader, to listen to these conversations as if you were in the room. Following each section you will find



some reflection questions which you can answer for yourself or share with others. These are meant to deepen your understanding of what was said and what you have heard. You might even want to keep a journal of your responses. After all, by listening into these conversations you have become for a brief time, a resident of our town.

How do the Quakers listen?

Before you, the reader, step one foot into our Quaker town, it is essential that you have a guide. I have cut and quilted parts of the stories of the sixteen Millennials into a dialog format. These are actually transcriptions and not narrations. Imagine that you are in the room with us as we are engaging in deep listening to one another. But how do Quakers listen?

We Quakers are not only silent. We are constantly engaging in a unique form of communication that is both spiritual and dialectical. I believe it is a gift that comes from the way we listen in our meetings for worship. Listening for the Spirit, listening for the meaning, listening for the higher truth. We often call this the Light. Rufus Jones (1863-1948), a famous 20th century Quaker philosopher, puts it this way, "The Light Within, which is the central Quaker idea, is no abstract phrase. It is an experience. It is the type of religion that relies upon a real and vital experience of God revealed to persons, to their own souls, in their own personal lives."

Each of the voices you will hear in the next section is carrying on this tradition of listening in a Quaker way. They may come from different religions or cultures, but they share the tradition of seeking truth by listening deeply and waiting for the Light to lead them. So, for a while, I invite you to put aside your thinking-mind and just listen to our speakers tell their stories.

## **2. Metaphor of Light - Shannon Age 23**

**Shannon is a seeker of the Truth, rooted in Love, found in all religions and a practicing Quaker. Shannon has been raised in or has had significant exposure to the Hindu, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist and Quaker religions and believes they all contain within them paths to God and peace. Shannon works as a corporate major gift officer, and has a lifelong passion for social justice. Shannon has spent time in other countries including Nepal, India, Burundi and Zimbabwe working for international development NGOs and conducting ethnographic research on Hindus and Buddhist Monks.**

### THE LIGHT

"I don't know about the darkness. Yes, I have had a sensorimotor experience with a light or of light. I was in a job interview, and we were talking about the Divine. I had an experience of the light. It was like coming from my chest, and filling - not filling the room; it was much larger than me like beyond my wing span, beyond my arm span. And I could see the light in the person who was

interviewing me. It felt like concentrated goodness, potentiality to do goodness, faithfulness - felt different in that space than it does normally. It was like a free flowing of goodness, of good, force - but I don't know if force is the right word - of good. We were talking about serving the world, I guess, and helping others.

"One other time I experienced the same light was when I was laying *tefillin*. Most Christians are familiar with it from the New Testament, the phylacteries. They are the Jewish ritual objects that go with the most important prayer, the Shema... 'loving God with all of your heart, with all of your soul, and all of your strength. These words I command you today to speak of them always when you sit at home, when you walk along the way, when you lie down, when you get up. Make them as a sign upon your hands and between your eyes. Put them on the doorpost of your house and on your gates. Teach them diligently to your children.' That is the gist of what that paragraph of that prayer is, kind of a long prayer to the living God.

"So laying tefellin, they are sort of like boxes. Jesus talks about them. He says don't pay attention to people who have large tefillin. So it is a black box that goes on your forehead and there is a leather strap that goes round your head and ties behind your neck. The strap goes across your chest. And it contains phrases from the Torah. There is a phrase about sacrificing your firstborn, there is a phrase about loving God; there is

something about leaving Egypt. And then there is another one that goes on your left arm on the part of your arm that would put it closest to your heart on your left side. Then it winds around your arm eight times, and there is a special way that you tie it to your finger. And while you are putting it on, you are not supposed to think about anything except putting it on. You are supposed to keep your thoughts really pure. You are supposed to be focused on prayer.

"The reason why most people have not heard of women laying tefillin is that tefillin is largely an Orthodox Jewish thing and according to the Old Testament, it is not a commandment for women to lay tefillin. Now there are only three commandments technically for women in the Old Testament...almost nothing. And people who believe in equality for men and women, it's becoming more common; more women lay tefillin. It is a serious thing to do.

"I had an experience of the light when I was laying tefillin. It was like a little crinkling of Light, beginning to shine out from my chest where the heart is. It was a very good feeling."

FAITH Age 29

**Her life began in the parsonage of an Evangelical Friends Church where she lived with her family until middle school. Eventually her father left the ministry and her parents divorced. She says it is usually easy for her to feel that she has a personal relationship with God and feels a strong sense**

of connection with the Christian community. She feels called to nurture and encourage a small Christian group in an urban area with her husband and other Quakers. She also has a professional career as a librarian and is awaiting the birth of her first child.

#### OUT OF DARKNESS INTO LIGHT

"I had one experience where I felt like I saw something in Wichita at an inter-branch meeting of Young Friends in 2010 in worship. I felt like I saw the Spirit which looked like light flowing over the carpet. I sort of often experience in Quaker worship...a sensory feeling of...light driving out darkness. I don't so much see it as feel it during worship. The feeling is common, the experience is uncommon. Light and dark are words I use a lot when I talk about my spiritual experience, but I don't usually experience them in a sensory sense."

JEREMY Age 33

I observed Jeremy as a small shy boy growing up in my Liberal meeting. Now, as a mature man, he is confident and comfortable speaking with anyone and is actively engaged in the roles of father, husband, teacher and friend. This is a story of his transformation from an inwardly focused boy to a man who cares deeply for others and their human development. Jeremy says that being a Quaker is at the core of his life, and he has asked for his newborn son to be accepted into the same meeting where he had been raised Quaker from birth.

#### LIGHT ENERGY

*Maurine: You said you saw light in people, and you meant "that of God" in them. Did you actually see light? Some people see light.*

"You know there have been times where I felt like I have, but I don't know at this point."

*Just describe it.*

"If I were going to describe it, I would say an inch [of light] around them."

*Have you seen this?*

"Yeah, I have actually seen things. That was like, I was younger. So now I don't necessarily see that. But it was one of those things, '...maybe it's just the lighting in this room.' But there are times I actually have seen things. But I don't know."

*Have you seen anything in worship or experienced any energetic changes?*

"Not too much. Sure I felt things, an energy of sorts. I don't want say that I am Christian; I am almost more toward agnostic. I don't know, I don't know enough to not know. I can't presume anything. I believe in science, but I also look at aspects of science that energy can't be created or destroyed and think of a revolving cycle with like energy or matter. I am not necessarily talking about reincarnation. Talking more about how energy transfers from one thing to another. In the past I would describe connections with people, that we all have our connections with each

other. We are all part of the same energy. In the past I would describe connections with people sort of like a spider web. We all have our connections with each other. We are all part of the same energy."

*Have you ever actually felt energy? I don't see the light around people, but I can feel it.*

"There are definitely times. It is hard for me because being a scientist I try to rationalize things more so than necessarily feeling them. It could just be reading people's body language, but there are times..."

*But you have felt things. Let's go back to the classroom. Do you sometimes have an experience with a child? Let's use the dark metaphor here, where you sense something or see something in the child, even visually? Something that is not healthy maybe?*

"It is hard to say if I see things these days like that, but I will definitely feel anxiety."

*You pick up signals even when they are not displaying or saying anything.*

"Oh, definitely. I feel very good about reading, especially children, their moods. Part of it is body language, part of it is their attention, when they come in and sit down. You can just tell by their presence that something is bothering them. And I know I should go up to Jimmy and give him a little more attention. I don't necessarily see anything like crying but it's just about reading people."

*But they are not under the microscope, you are actually interacting with them. You went to the child. You don't say 'Hey Johnny did you have a rough day at home?' You are bringing something to the situation.*

"I do think I do that. I feel things that other people might not pick up on, but it is hard for me to say why. I try to rationalize it into concrete things that I could point to. There are slumped shoulders."

*What is the child's response? Does something change in the interaction?*

"Sometimes if I bring forth positive energy. It could also be like calling out their bluff too. 'How is it going? 'Oh good, good.' It is hard for me to know why, but I can definitely tell."

BREEZE Age 35

**She is the child of two intellectuals who became Liberal Quakers as adults. Her parents did not talk much about their religious views, but they regularly attended meeting and encouraged their children to decide about membership on their own. Breeze became a meeting member at the age of 12. She was aware of her nontheistic tendency early on, but did not have a name for it. She attended Quaker school where the Bible was a required course, but says "it's not my stuff." From a young age, Breeze and her family have been involved in activist social causes. When pressed, she defines herself as "Non-theist" but does not like labels. She attends a Liberal Friends Meeting with her two children.**



## HOLDING IN THE LIGHT

"I am very very connected to light. I realized years ago how attentive I was to meeting house windows. I can tell you detailed information about windows in various meetinghouses I have worshiped in, more than most other details about the building. I think light is incredibly powerful. Those moments where the clouds break, and you have that direct sunlight are spiritual for me, absolutely.

Imagery of fire and flame is very significant to me. I come from the sweat lodge tradition so all throughout my teenage years I participated in the Quaker sweat lodge and was one of two people who were second generation in facilitating the sweat lodge among Quaker youth. So that fire and the role [of] communally building that fire - and then the role that fire played in heating the rocks that created the experience within that lodge - and then conversely the darkness. As you build the lodge you place the blankets across the frame to look for those patches of light to identify where they are so they can be covered up. So that when the door shuts that sense of complete darkness creates a neutrality and an alternate space where you can cleanse those wounds and you can come out reborn. And you can be balanced again. So I feel a lot of connection to those words.

"For probably for the last 20 years of my life in most correspondence other than my professional correspondence I sign off "in the light." I type it without thinking. So I think there is a handful of phrases, but a very

small handful, that I have taken the opportunity to explain to non-Quakers. Light is definitely one of those... That concept of light, holding people in the light is huge, and it is huge in my family. It is shorthand among my immediate family for 'I am thinking about you, I love you, I am sending you energy. If there is any way in which my thoughts and energy directed at you can improve your condition know that I am doing my part over here contributing to that.' That's thrown around regularly...

"Because, you know, we are not nonverbal people. We worship in silence, but that doesn't mean we are non-verbal. I am only 35, but I have been clerking (leading) for over 20 years. I am...trained as a clerk, and you are looking for that sense of the meeting; you are looking at body language, you are listening to the words that are being used, but you are listening for that 'agree'. You need to hear that participation from your room. If you don't hear it or you hear like two 'agrees' your room is not in the same place. Maybe it's 'phoning it in,' but it is not actively participating in decision making. So I am aware of some of those words like agree, holding in the light, way opens... I think [about] my lack of Christian roots that now have turned into something non-theist. I am honest with myself and willing to admit [it] divorces me from what that means for a Christian. I imagine there is some Christian rationale for way opening. That it is some divine something. Some other actor. It's just not defined."

ASHLEE Age 23

**Ashlee says her upbringing was influenced by multiple streams of religious thought. Her father was African American and attended the Pentecostal church, and her paternal grandmother was very active in the church. Her maternal grandfather was born a Jew, and her maternal grandmother was Catholic. They both converted to Quakerism as young adults, so Ashlee's mother was born and raised Quaker. She claims that the Jewish culture is evident in the emphasis on a value of "family comes first" and the importance of education. She is studying to become a science teacher.**

OUT OF BAD IS GOOD

"I so like the description my grandmother gave me - I try, I do try to find the light in everyone. There is something good in every single person. This particular incident was at a time in my life when I was not happy. I was not feeling very joyous. I was getting bullied at school, which sucks, and I was being very verbally abused by this one person. My grandmother, who is a social worker, said, "One of the things I most enjoy about you is the fact that you find something good in every single person. Find the good in her. Find something that you think is light because there is that of God in every single person. You know, you have to rely on your faith. You have to know that there is something good in that person or they wouldn't be around; exist."

*Did it help?*

"It did. It did. One of the things that happened was she graduated, and I never had to see her again. She was a grade above me. So this started when I was about in 6th grade and went throughout 7th grade. She was a really awful, awful person. She would physically beat 4th graders when she was in 8th grade. Not a pleasant person at all. It did, it helped me deal with it better, brush it off more. She was never physically abusive with me because simply I was bigger than her. That did kind of scare her even though I would have never put my hand on her. But she wouldn't realize that or know that about me. But it just made it easier to deal with knowing that there is something going on with her, that's making her do this. There is probably good in her. I am not seeing it, but I am sure it's there."

PAUL Age 30

**Paul attended his first meeting for worship at age two weeks and slept through it. He was raised in Eastside Friends Meeting in Bellevue, WA, and attended Earlham College (Class of 2006). He works several part-time education-related jobs, which give him some semblance of an income while allowing him to devote many spare hours to writing and doing Quaker work of various kinds. More of his wild notions can be found at his occasionally-neglected blog, the Generous Grasp.**

HOLY FOOLS

*Maurine: Imagine how that is, to get yourself out of the way, to be that centered at all times.*

"You get yourself centered in the morning and never get out of it."

*You know, St. Paul's prayer without ceasing? That is what that is - God-consciousness, to be in the God-consciousness, going in and out of the water, but in the deep end most of the time. It is fascinating what encounters I have when I am in that state of mind. People come forward in surprising ways, and we have really deep conversations that have no preamble.*

"Interesting because why would you need a preamble?"

*Well, people generally operate on 'Hi, do you want to know my name?'*

"That's what I am saying, if you really are on a different level, you don't need a preamble. Why would you need a preamble? That's the way it's supposed to be. I had a conversation with a fella in Seattle that was like that. He was homeless, but he had been attending a Buddhist temple, and you know, there's a certain resonance there. He said some things I found slightly hard to believe and a few things that made a whole ton of sense. I had gotten out of the car that I was borrowing and was just going to pick something up, and it turned into a 45 minute conversation. I was like 'Okay, yep.'"

*Have you ever heard of the Holy Fools? The Holy Fools are really sages on the street. They are disguised, and we tend not to take them too seriously unless you stumble into a conversation, and you recognize you are*

*talking to a sage in disguise. But we don't typically have that awareness. I have had a number of life changing experiences with Holy Fools.*

"I wrote an essay on 'So what would Jesus actually do?' One of the points was, 'How would Jesus treat homeless people?' Well, first and foremost he would talk to them, which is something Americans can't abide to do. He would talk to them, he would heal them, he would feed them. He wouldn't necessarily give them money, which is of course what we ordinarily do. I unpacked that just realizing, 'Oh, Jesus, if he were alive today, would be the guy you would hate to be friends with. Because he would ride the bus, he would *absolutely* ride the bus - and he would have conversations with all these people who you would find so obnoxious. He would talk to the people who smelled terrible; he would talk to the people who won't shut up. All these people you just wish would go away; and he would talk to *all* of them. I thought, 'Oh, right!' because he would see them as what they are; people. We see them as obstacles."

*I have had several friendships with homeless people, and I certainly don't try to befriend each one. Sometimes it is not a long conversation, and sometimes it is very long, and the person ends up changing your life. You may not recognize it, but the Holy Fools are out there.*

NICK Age 32

He is a visual artist, a rock musician, a writer and an avid reader. To support his art he works part time at a bar and as a legal researcher. His mother is a recorded minister in the Liberal Quaker tradition, and his father is an atheist. From birth to age 13 he was required to attend Quaker meeting regularly. Then he was allowed to choose if he wanted to continue and decided to stop. He has no religious feelings.

#### ART AND MUSIC

"Quite possibly something subconscious about what I draw. I do tend to use black ink on stark white paper; so the contrast, it is a metaphor that I use. It doesn't have anything to do with the actual image. I do like to set a general mood. Suns and moons and campfires then caves and dark places, lighthouses, lamps, candles and things of that nature. When I think about it, there is quite a lot of that in there - all over the place. I guess I use the metaphor of actual physical light a lot for being lost and having one little source of light to guide you through a massive black cavern. I don't know where that comes from exactly. I suppose I feel lost but not in that cute way. I know what I should be doing; I'm not just doing it. I know who I should be talking to, but I just haven't talked to them. Because all of these drawings are of myself.

It might be a reminder to myself to pull the candle up closer to your face to see where you are going instead of just keeping it down away from your face. Something like that."

*You are also a musician. You play rock and roll music. Is there any darkness in your*

*music? What are you thinking about in your compositions or in your playing?*

*"The music is very dark, very dissonant, and very low and heavy. Everything is tuned down very low. I play electric bass. Lyrically, I have written lyrics for a few bands. They are mostly about angry things. I don't think I have ever written a happy song in my life. It's all about being angry or nervous - are the two main things. When I do it, I use a lot of metaphor in it. I am not a very good or practiced lyricist, but I do like what I write and I am very careful about how I choose my words. But mostly they are all about me. Certain historical references are made. but they are almost always about me. Battles, moments in antiquity, ancient history. But nothing fun - at all."*

*So really both your music and your art are expressions of light and dark.*

*"I suppose so, I just don't see the light part."*

*Not in the music, but definitely in the drawing. Many more symbols of light lately.*

*"Yes, elucidation."*

*In the middle of that word is light, so you were throwing light on something. This is kind of interesting how this use of metaphors has become integrated into your self-expression. The black ink on the white paper is not religious in context, but it has almost a Jungian kind of archetypal expression. Lots of symbols. It is really interesting that this is*



*an expression of yourself, but you don't want that to be obvious.*

"If you know me or know what happened that day, it would be exceedingly obvious."

### **Reflection Questions:**

Each person was asked in the interview, "Have you ever had a sensorimotor experience with the light metaphor? Have you seen something, heard something, or felt something? The following questions can be used for your internal reflection, in a journal or in a group discussion.

What have you noticed in their responses? When were you surprised? What excited you? How would you respond to this question from your own experience?

### **3. Dark Metaphor**

DELIA Age 18

**Delia is a college student in the honors program. Her father was raised Catholic, but her mother's parents rarely attended church.**

**She was raised in an actively Quaker family where both parents and her sister were involved in a Liberal meeting. Her mother continues to be an active Quaker, but her father has recently dropped out. Delia no longer attends meeting, but still appreciates and tries to practice the ideals of Quakerism. She alternates between being atheistic, agnostic, and thinking it's all too exhausting to bother with.**

## THE LITTLE MOMENTS

*You have had some really dark experiences for a young person.*

"My thoughts involuntarily make me go to places dark enough to make me nervous. I think it's because I am so inundated all the time in my own mind that it's hard to move past it to think about the good things - 'We're all connected because maybe there is a God.' None of it! I've got none of it. I don't have the energy. I spend so much of my energy on the dark stuff that there's nothing left over to even attempt to contemplate anything else."

*Yeah, if you fill your mind with darkness, that's all you have.*

"That's all there is. When I was tutoring today, there was a thing in a book. They were in a library, and the ceilings were very tall, and there were lamps on the floor. And it said the tall ceiling soaked up the light. That's what it is - the darkness soaks up the light. But I do like weird coincidences. Some people say 'God'... I just love 'em. That's a kind of harmless way; maybe there is something because it's little. It doesn't mean there's no evil. That's just a cool thing that happened. Those little moments make me believe - 'Isn't the world a fantastic place? Then there is a God'... I do revel in those little moments... Isn't that awesome?"

*I see "as the way opens" in little things like that. I call it my stepping stone theology. It's not like you have a pathway or a highway;*

*it's like you are walking over a swamp, and you see a stone. You have to pay attention to look around and find the next stone. These little coincidences, I call them synchronicities, are like little guideposts - go that way, go that way, go that way - and they lead to something. And to me that's as the way opens because they are incremental, usually not bolts of lightning, but one next thing. To me it's not like a big movie finale; it's small things.*

"And I like the small things; it's just the small things don't outweigh the bad things."

*Maybe they don't at the moment, but it takes a lot of small things to make a big thing. You know, like atoms! But I think that people sometimes refuse to notice the small things, but you are noticing them. You are not putting them in some big picture, but you are noticing the next thing. That is what's keeping your light going - those little things.*

"I don't know, I don't know... I just like 'em! I have an extreme fondness for the little moments."

*There is a contrast in this world. You've already noticed it, and you are only 18. It's a contrasted world.*

"Yeah!"

*Most people probably aren't paying that much attention.*

"Which is why it's so frustrating to be around other 18-year-olds."

*Because they are not wanting to see that. But that's how the big thinkers thought stuff up...They have stepped outside the box and they have noticed something...You have the ability to see, and that's a big gift.*

"Yeah, I kind of trade in the little moments for the big ones because I don't have any big moment god-thoughts. But the little moments aren't even god or religion or spirituality thoughts - I just like 'em! I keep saying-- just like 'em. But there's something more to it... They have a little place in my heart, the little moments."

ADRIAN Age 23

**Adrian's obsession with words began at an early age, and does not appear to be abating anytime soon. Many experiences with bridging very different groups have convinced Adrian that living and loving together is possible, and concern for justice remains at the forefront. While currently working as a college admission counselor at her alma mater, Adrian continues to remain open and hopeful of the ways the Spirit may move. Her first message as a child in meeting for worship was "uh oh," and while they may have become somewhat more articulate since then, they have not quite lost the edge of wonder and dismay.**

BETWEEN ECSTASY AND THE LAUNDRY

"I think most of my spiritual journey is vying between light and dark. Sometimes very much in touch and very much gone."

*So it's an absence of something?*

"I know it's me. I am not capable of feeling God right now. It is like God leaves, but it's not exactly something that I think God ...

*...did to you?*

"Yes, right. It's not a punishment, just the state that I happen to be in. It will pass."

*So you have a sense of it rising and falling; it is there and it withdraws, sort of like how the ocean goes in and comes out, a natural rhythm of back and forth.*

"Right. When that first happened, I thought it was never going to not come back. That was why I thought I didn't believe in God anymore. But it's happened often enough I have faith, as it were."

*Are there other physical places that you can go to feel restored in some way?*

"Often times there are the places where I run, and Pendle Hill has become one of those places. I have had a powerful dream about going back to Pendle Hill\*, and everything was just bathed in golden light. The director met me and held her hands out and touched me, and said 'Welcome home, we have been waiting for you. You are a beloved child of light and you are here. That's what Margaret means (Adrian's original name) Child of Light. So that is something that has stuck with me for a while...I would like to discover the difference between ecstasy and laundry, this opening and closing and what Thomas Kelly calls the constant inward prayer."

*It's a time related thing for me, it's over time, not learning a lesson in a snap. I think of the ocean coming in and going out. You are grabbing bits of wisdom and then letting go. It comes back, and you let go. Over time you do gain, but they are small gains that build on each other.*

"Being human I am quite impatient."

*God made us impatient. How many patient people do you really know? Not many. We sort of decry impatience, but it is a driving force or an energy force. Look at George Fox, how impatient that guy was. Walking around the country annoying people with his questions, climbing mountains, declaring things, traveling all across the globe and inspiring people to take off from safe places, take risks.*

"Make mistakes, which seems to be the best way we learn."

*It's the only way I learn. I have to fall down and get up again and fall down again. My path is about stumbling and falling and getting up again. I need to learn some lessons down on my knees. It's hard because we don't like to be down on our knees.*

"I particularly struggle with failing. I never learned how to fail properly. I am just starting to figure that out so that is why I am so hard on myself."

*Can you accept that failure is a lesson, an opportunity?*

"Intellectually I can."

*Because we are part of a culture that doesn't allow for it. A failing is a failure. But it's really not. It's a learning. I love the Fox quote - "This I know experimentally." What did that mean? He was experimenting. He first asked the wise ones and then discovered they knew nothing. Then he began experimenting with other young folk like himself. The idea of being experimental is very appealing to me. That's what Quakers do that's different. They don't come up with a doctrine or a truth this is fixed. We are always adding and testing it again.*

"I think my difficulty is knowing when failure means the harm of somebody else, the life of somebody else."

**\*Pendle Hill is a Quaker, Philadelphia-area retreat and conference center which "seeks to transform lives and foster peace with justice in the world."**

NICK Age 32

AT THE BAR AT MIDNIGHT "I do notice if someone truly has an inner light. I will consciously think sometimes when I notice someone like that. I have a friend that I work with that just doesn't have a bad bone in her body, doesn't have anything of it, just pushes everything good all the time even when she is very very sad and distressed, which I have seen her be that way as well. Even when it is very noticeable there. And quite nourishing to be around. I do see that part of it.

"As far as darkness goes, yes, I do see that. I work in a bar three to four days a week. I am essentially being paid to be with people at their worst. No one gets better the drunker they get; they become who they really are. A lot of their artifice drops away, and you see their behavior and what they default to when their inhibitions are gone, and it is quite noticeable. I notice it [the dark] in my father and brother and in myself quite a bit. It is not tangible; it is a behind-the-eyes thing that I can see. I don't know where I picked that up; probably it might be genetic. I am not sure what that is. I don't know that I was taught it, but I do definitely. When someone is in a very dark time, I am instantly aware of it. Again, I don't know how."

*I wonder if you encounter other people, not just in the bar, but on the street or other places, that you sense dark in those people.*

"And I want to be clear: it is not evil. I don't really believe in evil, but I do believe in the confluence of emotion and circumstance that will make people, maybe not necessarily outwardly look different, but I can just smell it. I don't know what it is, but I can tell definitely. It is not necessarily things I recognize in myself, but I have a mirror. I can feel a little bit as well. I can't really put my finger on it. It is very apparent when people are drunk. Or if you are on a train, and two people have to collide and all of a sudden you feel it. You feel the tension, you notice body language things, but even that is not a steady signifier. I am not a person that



smiles very much even when I am happy, so I can't really tell from that. But it is there definitely... I was expected to treat people very well. Not even as well as they deserve, but as well as every human should be treated. As I said earlier, even the jerks are entitled to you treating them like a human being. Even after they have been caught being a jerk. I do have a sense of my mother pointing out that jerks don't start out jerks. They get there eventually by other means, and you being a jerk back to them doesn't fix it at all."

JOSH Age 30

**As the son of a Quaker pastor, he grew up in the tradition of Friends churches with evangelical and charismatic influences. He currently attends a Liberal Friends Meeting, which has a strongly Christian culture and worships in silence. While attending a Midwest Quaker college as an undergrad, he was suspended from school for a politically-oriented prank. This has led him down many unexpected paths and currently to the co-creation of a small Christian commune in an impoverished neighborhood. He supports himself by working with mentally-handicapped people and is trying to start a massage practice. He tends a large communal garden and gives away much of the produce.**

DARK NIGHT OF THE SOUL

"I experience times of darkness in terms of time of day and special opportunities for spiritual experiences, especially like early morning and night; and I don't know, maybe

it's just less distracting when there is no light. There is something cosmic going on. For me it's just much easier, the veil just kind of backs off a bit. I am more likely to have intense spiritual experiences, at least by myself, during dark times."

*Would you say early morning hours, the threshold of light and dark?*

"Or also at night. But in terms of more interior experiences of light and darkness I think during meeting for worship, I sometimes experience Christ as light. When I experience that I almost want to walk it; if I am worshipping, and I am reaching a kind of deeper place, there are times when I resist a little bit because I'm scared of what might happen. I am starting to lose my ego in worship, and that's a little scary. So there are times when I resist that a little bit."

*So would you say you come to the edge and then come back?*

"Right, right."

*Does it ever push you over?*

"Yeah, not when I am consciously aware of it. Especially if I have just given a message often I feel that my spiritual vulnerability just opens up. I just let go."

*Do you think about it afterwards or is it something that just flows through and goes away?*

"I do think about it afterwards."

*So, have you ever had any other kind of overpowering experience with either light or dark? Maybe not in worship but just on your own.*

"Not that I can think of."

*So it sounds like an active processing metaphor for you. Were you taught about this at all in your Quaker studies? You know, George Fox talks about the ocean of light and the ocean of darkness.*

"At home my dad is kind of an amateur Quaker historian and for him words are important, and he would sometimes talk about the important distinction between *inner light* and *inward light*. For him that distinction was about the inward light coming from God and the inner light he seems to see it as a humanistic approach of we all own the inner light."

*Is he reacting to Liberals taking Jesus away?*

"I think so."

*Years ago, in 1984 I had never experienced Light and certainly wasn't trying to do that, but that is exactly what happened one night in meditation. I ended up with the women at the foot of the cross. Being raised Catholic we had a lot of the crucifix scenes with the women, often very near the altar, so you were constantly looking at that image. But I was just in my living room, and all of the sudden I am with the women, physically with them looking up at the cross. Protestants don't put the body on the cross, but Catholics always*

did. But there was no body, just this brilliant light. That is the moment I became a Christian. I was not planning to be a Christian. I was just meditating and then pow! There I was. It was one of those threshold moments where I knew I wasn't going back to the way I was thinking before. I could only go forward. There was this new direction, and it was very overwhelming, overwhelming. It was the Light. Only later did I begin to understand the Christology. Catholics don't teach you anything except Catholic doctrine. They don't teach you about Jesus. We didn't have Bibles. I was unfamiliar with the Bible. So that was a pure baptism of the Spirit with light. So I can identify with your trepidation about getting too close. It can overturn your life, definitely. And the dark seems to be more womb-like, a place where you can go to be closer to God. You are not distracted and then you can explore.

"I read *Dark Night of the Soul* by John of the Cross, and it was definitely a rough read. I read it by myself. I did not grow up Catholic, so the language was definitely different. I am not from the 14th century or whenever it was written. I went through a dark night of the soul shortly after I was kicked out of school. I had just moved to an area where I didn't know anyone. I was feeling, not quite depressed, but the closest I ever came to that. I came to a point at which I no longer had access to God. That was very difficult, and I felt kind of abandoned. That idea of the dark night of the soul allowed me to experience that it wasn't my fault and experiencing God is not formulaic: like if you

do A, you are going to experience B. Before that, I had sort of understood it that way. Through that experience I went through a sort of spiritual cleansing. I began to see what was important in life, and a lot of the things I had valued were not - at least not in the way that I had seen them."

*So there is an action there. It doesn't happen to everyone, and a lot of people think I am purely weird because I really do pay attention to what God says. And so God might say, 'leave here and go somewhere else.' I compare it to Abraham who lives in Haran and God says 'leave your hometown and everything you know and go to this land you have never seen before but I am preparing it for you.' That is very much how I have operated in my spiritual journey.*

*God says, 'time to leave, pack your stuff and go this place and I am not going to show it to you till you get there.' So I have that sense about you having been cut off from all that you knew and you had to follow but in the dark because there were no road signs.*

"Right."

*That's what the dark night of the soul is all about, the Apophatic Way, the withdrawal. We can't always have meat and drink. There are times of fasting. So I think of these as spiritual fasts, and they are very hard times because of withdrawal of a lot of comfort. It is like you and God, and that's it. Face to face. There is nothing else to really lean on. It is a cleansing motion, clearing for something new. Kind of like how you do your gardening; you have to take out the old stuff*

*and till the ground. I feel like God is tilling us. Saying sit here a while and do nothing, by yourself. That is the really hard part. We like to think of the comforts of Christianity, the joy and the resurrection. There is also this withdrawal and a period of tutelage. 'Let me teach you something, but you have to clear your head'...God was saying to me that you have to trust. Take a risk here. That was when I was 35 years old. That has certainly flowed into who I am now. I had a calling into ministry in a liberal meeting that was post-Christian. Some thought I was crazy. When I said, God told me to record my ministry, they were confused. 'We don't do that here. You need to go down the road to those Christian Quakers.' I kept saying, 'God, get me out of here.' The truth was I was called to that meeting. I was called to that yearly meeting to challenge them about their anti-Christian behavior. Eventually I left the meeting and moved to another meeting that could answer the call.*

"That has been my frustration with Liberal Quakers in general. There is not a sense of calling. Not at my meeting or at a lot of meetings, but most of the liberal meetings that I have visited, most of the people are there for support. They are not there because they feel that God is calling them."

"...Going back to the conversation about darkness how that can be for me, and perhaps for you too, a time for intense spiritual activity. I also wonder if part of that is also the spiritual world is more alive. There is maybe more going on at that time."

*You mean, at that time of day?*

"Yeah, yeah, yeah."

*It is one of the monastic hours. You know 4:00 in the morning. The Book of Hours has a different set of prayers for each hour. But that for me is an active time of prayer just before dawn.*

"[That is] part of what leads me to think that I find it easier to settle into worship than and reach more intense spiritual experiences. There is more of a sense of spiritual struggle at that time. The background that I come from, and I have also had experiences that confirm this - I don't feel that there is just God, that the spiritual [life] is just great - I have also experienced evil too."

*I have too.*

MICAH Age 31

**Micah grew up as the son of two Evangelical Quaker pastors in Wichita, Kansas. As a child, his family was part of the Friends of Jesus intentional community, but after age 12 he was only sporadically involved in church activities. Micah became a Quaker as an adult in 2005 when he joined a silent meeting in Wichita. During and following studies at Earlham School of Religion, Micah traveled extensively in gospel ministry. In 2009, he married Faith and relocated to Washington, DC. For several years, they were deeply involved in Ohio Yearly Meeting (Conservative). Today, Micah is one of the founding leaders of the Friends of Jesus Fellowship, a network of**

**communities and ministries gathered around a common experience of the living presence of Jesus.**

WANDERING ALONE

"The time I most remember is the image of mist or fog [that] is actually a more common one for me. With light and dark, I was feeling the metaphor powerfully enough that it did not feel like a metaphor. I was in my first semester in seminary and was going through some pretty intense spiritual work. God was doing some important spiritual work on me. I was literally wandering about for days on end on the college campus and the residential neighborhood...being mopey and introspective and sort of like groaning. I felt that I could see God's light shining on inward parts of me that were dark and revealing them and challenging them. So the light sort of first revealing and then breaking down and melting and overcoming. An image of a valley with deep pockets where the light could not shine all at once but [was] revealed successively. It was a process of being laid bare. I do go through more intense or less intense periods. There was a lot to be done. Or maybe it was because I was so new to it that it seemed overwhelming. One of my classmates thought I sounded psychotic."

PAUL Age 30 WALKING IN THE DARK

"As a child and as a teenager, I was much more concerned with salvation and heaven and hell."

*Did you go to the Presbyterian Church?  
(stepfather's church)*



"Very rarely but it came in, it leaked in. I can remember thinking about this girl I had a crush on in college, and she wasn't Christian, so that meant she was going to hell. How on earth did I get that? It was pretty gradual, but there were a couple of crucial moments. Christianity has kind of pushed me away rather than drawn me in."

*Do you still call yourself Christian?*

"I do but I am very careful about it, and I say that the only reason that I can call myself a Christian is because I am a Quaker."

*'Christianism' is bothering you? I call that 'christianism' because it is political.*

"Yeah, that is a good way to put it. You are absolutely right; it is political. There are lots of wonderful, wonderful people in congregations out there who I have no problem with. But they are not the ones shouting from the rooftops. Not nearly so much."

*Somehow you escaped that framework though.*

"That's a good word. I just became increasingly frustrated with the current politics. A real key turning point was the treatment of gays and lesbians. And now of course I have to add transgender to that."

*When did that come into your awareness?*

"That came in at college. Roughly 2002-2006 were my undergrad years. Here the embarrassing stuff comes out. I fell in love with a woman,

or had a serious crush on a woman, who was only dating women at the time. So with my somewhat awkward stance - 'Well, if she is dating only women, and I really, really, really like her, it can't be that bad.' So I was actually meeting them. My first roommate at college was gay. We never had a problem."

*These were your first encounters?*

"Yeah, not strictly. There must have been some people here and there."

*It has become much more overt in the past few years.*

"Now my mom has been pretty pro-gay because of the friends she had back in the 60's and 70's and 80's."

*But the whole conversation around transgender, bi (bisexual) is pretty recent.*

"It is all pretty recent. Over the course of my lifetime I had gay professors at Earlham, and it was just no big deal. You look back at the Christianity side of things, and it's a huge deal for my father. It's still a huge deal."

*Is he very disturbed by it?*

"He is, he is. He has in fact left his church because it is starting to approve gay marriage. It is hard. It is hard for me because...[of] him being so closed minded. That's not going to do any good."

*I heard a Quaker professor speaking to Liberal Friends about the people in Indiana, the*

*fundamentalist Friends, who worked in the auto-industry and are now a poor middle class having lost their livelihood. They don't understand why the rules changed, and they don't recognize their children and grandchildren. It went from black to white for them. But it was a call for compassion. What if everything you recognized suddenly changes?*

"That's where a lot of the fundamentalism comes from. Islamic fundamentalism is absolutely rooted in the fact that three centuries ago they were among the most powerful empires on earth, and now they are really not. They got run over. Jewish fundamentalism comes from the modern world, and absolutely Christian fundamentalism does."

*And for you in your household, were you living at home when all this was going on? Or had you already graduated and gone on? Has your father rejected you because of your stance?*

"No, we just don't talk about it. I had a realization a couple of years ago that I was not put on this earth to win arguments. So I kind of try to move away from that. So there was a lot of just standard Christianity in the air, but the more I learned about...it has had a pendulum effect. Not entirely, but when I was surrounded by that atmosphere and so forth, I didn't really question it. In high school and college it starts to be eroded; and I finally end up on a complete different side and am very much in line with my mother now... [At first] it was strange to me and out of my experience, but college made it part of my

experience. I learned a lot more, and I became increasingly upset with the traditional Christian religious stance. So then I became increasingly upset with Christianity as a whole. It was like - 'I still believe it, but dang does it make me twitch.'

"There was a time [I was speaking with] a member of my yearly meeting who tells Bible stories...and I said, 'Joe, I think I believe this stuff but it makes me twitch!' And he says, 'Have you read the Bible?' I said, 'Parts of it.' 'Read the whole thing and that will take care of that twitch.' And I read it and it did, dang it! I actually went through, sort of a personal quest, and I tallied up all the times that it biblically talks about gay people or same-sex sexual encounters. It's about six or seven if you count both testaments. And at the same time I tallied up all the commands to give money to the poor and support the poor, and it was like 105. Then I learned more still from other young Quakers who are queer and gay and lesbian."

*Are there a lot?*

"Quite a few."

*Are they coming in from other places? Joining Quakers or are they already here?*

"I think a lot of them really are already Quakers but feel pretty much at home here because it is safe. I learned a lot more about Queer Theory and how a lot of opposition to gays and lesbians in general is rooted in oppression of women, and so it all started

making sense. One of the things that I noticed finally is that in the Gospels ...usually the Bible says, 'brothers and men.' And the translators have changed it to 'brothers and sisters,' and they usually have a note that says: in the Greek it is actually just 'brothers.' But there is a place in the Bible where it originally said, 'brothers and sisters.' It is one of the things that Jesus says in [Book of] Mark and so you have Jesus who is always talking to women and always hanging out with women and encouraging them to leave home and follow him and all that. Then if you read the letters of Paul, as they happen to be arranged, it gets more and more restrictive for women as you get farther and farther from the Gospels."

*You know, Paul [of Tarsus] is so interesting. A lot of feminists hate Paul. I don't. I see him as a regular human being. I see him as a traveling minister, a kind of funny Jewish guy with a passion to share the good news. Some of the most beautiful writing is in Paul. I take him as a man of his time.*

"I take him as a man of his time too, and I know he probably didn't write a lot of the letters."

*And just allowing for all that, I don't go back and try to edit history to suit today's values. So what is eternal about these messages? Paul said, 'In Christ there is no male or female.' He says to the Jews that the Gentiles who join us do not have to be circumcised. He is a fascinating character because he has gone through a huge transformation. I give him a lot of leeway.*

*But it is what people do with the Bible that is the problem, not the Bible itself. Back to the Quaker way of looking at the Bible, they saw it as metaphor, as a tool to be used in prayer, not doctrinal perfection, and not inerrancy. They could quote it certainly, but it was not used to hammer people.*

"Well, Fox and the early generation basically said, 'You've got continuing revelation and you've got the Bible and they can't possibly contradict because they come from the same source.'"

*One of my favorite things that Fox said was to some Methodist minister who was saying "the word of God," and you can hear this said in any Protestant or Catholic church; but Fox says, it's the words of God and more words are coming. So the idea is that God is still speaking, there is a revelation coming and you are part of it, you are not closed off. And that is where I want to move us toward these metaphors. They are classical Quaker metaphors of light and dark. I want to find out how you use them.*

"Funny you should say that. Light and dark, um. Well, we are going a little bit deep here just to warn you. There have been times in my life when I have felt the sensory motor experience. I get seasonal affective disorder, so literally if there is not enough light in my world, I slow down, I lose all energy, I get sad. So with daylight savings time this morning, this evening will be interesting. We will see how I do. The moment that comes to my mind though was one time back in high school [when] I had mild to moderate depression. And

there was this one time I felt very cut off from the rest of the group. I saw a whole bunch of people having fun. I wasn't having any fun. We were out at this camp, and I just started to walk away. Walking away from the light and into the dark, and it just got darker and darker and darker. I knew somewhere out there was a cliff and an edge and I was headed straight for it. Something - I have always credited it to the Holy Spirit, or you could view it in other ways - something turned me around and dragged me back to the light. That was a powerful experience.

"So for me, light is sustenance. I make jokes about how I am actually a sunflower. Not that sunflowers do turn toward the light; that is not true - any kind of plant that moves toward the light. I am exactly like that. So that is the metaphor for me: light is life. Literally, it is actually not a metaphor. I take a lot of Vitamin D now, but the awareness that I need sunlight, I need it, and that translates easily over to the mystical world. So I will draw specific parallels. In the natural world the only reason that it works is because there is this immense and immensely powerful source of energy that is constantly pouring energy into the system for free. It transfers so beautifully over to the mystical world."

*How about dark by itself?*

You know I can take it two different ways. You know there is something to be said for walking in the dark. If you are walking in the dark, you can see the stars, you can see the moon. The sun is powerful, but it doesn't wash things out. Sometimes dark can be comforting.

You know, the dark under the covers, under the bed, in a nice safe warm cave. Dark by itself is much more warm and cozy than light and dark."

*There's no contrast.*

"There's no contrast. I never noticed that before."

#### **Reflection Questions:**

The spiritual experiences related by these young Friends are often described as a journey. What do you think they mean when they use that metaphor?

How does the dark metaphor help them to understand their journeys?

In your own life, what experiences have you had with darkness on your journey?

#### **4. Metaphor of Simplicity**

KARLA Age 26

**She was born in Guatemala and brought by her parents to Los Angeles as a one-year-old child. Her mother died when she was 4 1/2 years old. They attended the second Hispanic Friends Church planted in the U.S. in the 1970's by Guatemalan Quakers who are evangelical and pastoral. This story evolved from the time Californian Evangelical Quaker missionaries were sent to Guatemala to form churches in 1902 and since then 180 churches have formed there. As a youth leader among Evangelical Friends, she has traveled the**



**world with a Christian mission. Her father is a pastor who is planting a new church in Indianapolis, and Karla is helping him.**

FOCUS ON GOD

*Maurine: How do you feel your ethnicity? Do you feel more American than Guatemalan or more Guatemalan than American?*

"I feel both. I have gone now back to Guatemala, and I felt at home. There were a lot of things that I didn't know, but I felt that I could have fit in easily after a few months of being there. I also feel comfortable with Americans."

*What about your church in Indianapolis? Did your dad start that church?*

"Yeah, that one started about three years ago. And we had our ups and downs. Right now we are pretty low in average attendance. We share expenses with another Quaker meeting."

*You are not a blended congregation.*

"No, we are not. We are actually very, very different theologically. Even if we weren't theologically different we probably wouldn't be able to blend it yet because a lot of the people who are attending are first generation immigrants, maybe second generation."

*Just learning English. Your programs are all in Spanish?*

"Yeah, we meet in the evening, and they meet in the morning."

*What style of worship do you have?*

"We have singing, we have sermons, right now we are starting some sort of dancing for the children so that they can begin getting involved with the worship and give them something active to do."

*Do you have open worship, silent worship at all?*

"We don't. We are trying to start something like that with the teenagers who are the ones asking more for it than the adults."

*Really? They want open worship?*

"We have ten to fifteen minutes. They have visited places like Indianapolis First Friends, and they have seen it and they are able to understand and grasp the concept more than the adults."

*So do you feel comfortable using the open worship model?*

"It depends on where I am in my life. There was a time when I went to Indianapolis First Friends; they have an open worship on Wednesday nights for one hour. And for about a year and a half I went every week. But then I felt I wasn't comfortable there anymore.

Probably, maybe I needed to move on. I stopped attending. But right now I feel like I want to go back on Wednesdays and start attending there again."

*So you are really a blend in the way you are worshipping. Maybe more traditional Guatemalan*

*type of service and also open worship. There is more gospel in use than gospel in speech among Liberal Friends, but they are not talking about it anymore. How do you experience the Quaker metaphor of simplicity?*

"It is a very important part of who I am. I have seen my dad's simplicity in his life. Not in the way that most white people do it [like] 'I drive a Prius.' Or things like that, but I have seen the difference between him and other family members. They are very preoccupied with having a career, achieving goals, having this house and a car like this and the latest Smart phone and the latest shoes. My dad is like, 'It's okay if you want to have it, but that shouldn't be our goal, that shouldn't be our focus.' We have been actually a little criticized for the things that we are, but at the same time my dad's thought is that is not what is really important in life."

*Criticized for what? Your materiality or the lack of it?*

"The lack of it. We don't want to achieve anything, to amount to anything. In fact God has blessed us because we don't go around looking to be better. But at the same time God has blessed us, and he has blessed us a lot. I have been able to travel to Europe, to Africa to Latin America. I'm still working on college. I feel very blessed. But that doesn't have to be the focus of our life - to gain things."

*So you say 'we' meaning the whole family. This is also something different about Latin Americans; you say 'we' and in America we say*

*'I.' It's the group, it's the family.*

"I am the only one living with my dad right now. I help him with the church. That is mostly why I am still living with him."

*Any other way that simplicity helps you or leads you? Spiritually even?*

"Speaking for me, I feel that having goals in life is very important. But at the same time God should be our focus and our family. If we want to get to our goals, it is because we want to share it. That has allowed me to free up."

*You seem very peaceful to me, very happy. You are not driven the way Americans are.*

"For me it is more important experiencing with people than having things. It is pretty hard for people to understand in our Latino community, which is mixed. I think because in Latin America we come from really poor backgrounds. When people come here they want to get the American dream, and the American dream is having a house. It is not a bad thing having a house and a big car and being able to spend as much money as you can. That's the American dream."

*My relatives came here many decades ago with the same ambitious compulsion to have houses, to have land. They were really driven people. So I think America is a place where a lot of ambitious people end up.*

"Yes, very ambitious people, and it's hard because, for example, when I go to Latino communities I feel that sometimes they could

even look down on me because I haven't gained the American dream."

*I loved the communal feeling in Guatemala when I visited there. It is a different feel in the way people are with one another. Whereas here you feel the electric energy of drive, drive, drive. Like the women were down washing clothes in the lake together. There was a feeling of community and oneness. I went to a church one night full to the brim with people there on a Wednesday night. There were these boys who wanted to go to America. 'I'm going to America. I'm going to have my dream.' And they do struggle and they do come.*

"Their background drives them."

*Poverty does drive people, but somehow you have found a simpler way. It sounds like your father has provided a lot of leadership.*

"Yes, yes he has."

**Noah, age 22, is a college student and self-identifies as Jewish/Hindu/Quaker. His mother was born into a secular Jewish family, but she is very religious and has proceeded from Judaism to Sufism to the Art of Living practice, a form of Hinduism. Noah has been with her on her spiritual journey all along. His father was raised in a Protestant tradition and joined the Quaker as an adult. His father's sister converted to Judaism. Noah is a regular attender at a Liberal Quaker meeting. In 2016 Noah completed his BA in Therapeutic Recreation in December and needed an internship so he went to Jerusalem where his living expenses would be covered by the state of Israel.**

NOAH

"Yeah, yeah. I think there's a lot of talk about living today like you are going to die tomorrow. And to be simple is totally not that. I think to be simple is to live in what makes you happy. You know you are gonna survive. It's not like to you have to go out and get drunk every day. In a way I interpret it that way, but I also interpret it as being yourself and doing what is natural.

*Maurine: Is there a way you choose to lead your daily life that you would say is simple?*

You're not gonna die tomorrow so you might as well live simply. In a way my perspective very much disagrees with this idea of dying young."

*Do you think some of your peers are trying to "live hard and fast and die young?"*

"Yeah, definitely."

*And you don't share that perspective...*

"I don't share that...I have never thought that way, I've never acted that way...In a way it's almost a myth because these kids survive."

*Some do.*

BREEZE - COMPOSTING THE FUTURE

"I realized about this home that I have been waiting for 20 years. Since I was a student at Scattergood, (Quaker farm school) I have waited 20 years to have a compost pile. It's the thing I am planning. It is the thing I am

most excited about. Every time we go to the house...we have to go over there to tend to the yard; we have to make good impressions with our neighbors. I talk a lot about the compost pile. Tell me what we are going to do, where it is going to be, what materials do we need? Like my husband is so done with me talking about it. I have a tremendous amount of Quaker guilt throwing away food scraps...I am so excited about the compost pile. It's that connectedness. That would be my other definition of simplicity...we are all connected...I should back up and say I could have had a compost pile in a house that I rented. I could have been more aware of where my food comes from, and sourced more local in Chicago. It was a lot harder there. So I am totally "fessing up" to the fact that I live in the Farm Belt now, and I am expected to have a certain agricultural understanding that I don't have. So I welcome the meal with that food knowing that it will return to the earth and will become the compost that will feed the garden that the boys and I will have... I grew up with a garden in the backyard.

KATIE - LOOSELY HELD PLANS

"One form of simplicity that isn't material that I have been practicing quite a bit this past year at college was my ability to say no. I think that's a form of simplicity because it is saying I am simplifying my commitments. I am simplifying or narrowing my responsibilities and sharpening in a way, too. Even in things I was responsible for when people would delegate to me, I would feel like I couldn't. So instead of saying, 'yes,' and

trying to figure out how to get everything to fit, said, 'no,' because I need to keep this simple. And right now I know I can't. Ask me in a week maybe but the answer is 'no.' Learning that ability to say no, even to people who are older than me and have a lot of expectations, was a big process of learning. Because it turned into things like 'Oh, can we meet this week to talk?'-- like, 'Do you have time for dinner this week?' And I would always have to say 'No, I am busy.'" And one of my roommates said, 'You know, what's a better word than busy? You are really full. Your schedule is really *full*.' Yes, which means it's not simple, it's really complicated. Color coded in my phone calendar, everything I have to do. Wanting to simplify that. Have it be full, but if it is full to be full of things that are meaningful. Being able to have dinner with people instead of being at a meeting with an advisor or meeting with someone for coffee or going on a train ride by myself."

*Have you been programming some 'nothing time'?*

"Yeah, I have started doing that. Where we are in Chicago is on the Brown Line on the CTA. You can get on at Kimball and go all the way through the Loop without having to get off at Kimball or stand up on the train, and so once a week I would do that and take a book I needed to read for class - but knew I wasn't going to. It took an hour and a half, and I wouldn't take my phone. So people knew Katie's on the train right now. We can't get in contact with her."

*I love it!*



"It's great. You get to see the city. Oh, I love it. You get to watch everyone and sometimes feel fearful. It's important to remind yourself how small you are.

*So in terms of simplicity the major thing you have talked about is time. Your own time.*

"[My college] has a ton of opportunities for clubs you can be a part of, to lectures you can attend, to extra-curriculars or sports, so it is real hard to say no to that. It is hard because there were things I said yes to in my freshman year that I had to say no to this past year in order to say yes to other things that I felt more called to. So it is a process."

*So if you were going to define your life in simple terms, to sort of imagine it forward, how do you think your life would look in a few years? I mean it is boxed up by college right now. Have you sort of allowed yourself to imagine that?*

"Ideally, I liked the image you used of midwifing [metaphor for coaching]. I think that applies really well to what we are all called to do as humans is really to be midwives for others. Whether that be by resolving conflict like you do or I am called to do or in your relationships with others, kind of helping them [with] individual development. I think after college, and where I see myself there, ideally, I picture myself living a life of midwifing in the Middle East. Just really inviting people to the table,

these are all things you said, and saying "how, how, how, how?" and also opening up people's eyes here to whether or not you are pro-Palestine or pro-Israel: pro means also being critical. Why are we supporting one [side]?"

"So it has been really good to be in a community, a very small one, where I feel I can really develop those skills of inviting people to the table there, and saying this is a conversation that needs to start on our campus, and then spread. So, next year we are going to start that conversation on our campus and then spread [it] hopefully. I am on a delegation of college students who want to start that conversation on our campuses, which is really exciting. But like you said, college is a box that holds you for a few years."

*And someday as the way opens, that box opens. I like to invite people to imagine something beyond the box.*

"But it is something that I have held kind of loosely, because going into college I had a very defined idea of where I was going to end up and how my major was going to get me there piece by piece. Certain things started to fall apart: like different Arabic dialects, and no options in the Middle East - required for my major. I was just frustrated sitting there realizing I needed to change my major, because it wasn't working out. I started to learn that I needed to hold more loosely those plans. I definitely have a direction, a forethought, of where I want to go - but it's more of just a sense of who I would like to be than where I end up..."

JOSH SPEAKING SIMPLY

"Maybe this is a little tangential, but for me in part, it has been avoiding getting too caught up in careerism. Most of my friends are making a lot more money than I am making, and they're the friends I grew up with in high school and college. They are successful in terms of having good jobs, being married and that kind of thing. There are times that I feel a little behind, but my focus is different than trying to build a career - at least not in that sense. Now I am trying to start a bodywork practice [and] my reasons for that are different. My motives are not perfectly pure. My reasons for doing that are more mission-oriented in what I am called to do."

*How does simplicity work into your mission?*

"I was thinking more of starting the bodywork practice I feel called to do, and I am not doing it to make a lot of money. I probably couldn't make a lot of money doing it anyway."

*So do you see it as a spiritual practice?*

"Bodywork? It certainly can be. That's not its primary function."

*The way you do it.*

"My better sessions I feel there is some guidance there. Actually, when I was doing some work with a Quaker I know fairly well, I think she can take as much credit for this as I can. She experienced a third presence there

during a session. I wouldn't have called it that, and didn't necessarily experience it the same way. When I am giving bodywork, I generally feel guided in some sense, but sometimes that feels as much intuition as God."

*Let's talk sensory again. How does it feel?*

"Well, sometimes I know I need to go to a certain place or I need to do a certain thing [with the body]. Just like in meeting for worship, it may not make logical sense. It may not match up with anything they told me, or anything else that I have been able to work out. I go there and later they may report that something happened - or there was something they hadn't told me. For whatever reason, they didn't think it was important."

*Do you feel energy or see light?*

"I more feel things. Some people see things. I feel the energy. A couple of times I have sensed, I have kind of known that something has happened to somebody."

*You are not working alone. You are the hands of Christ, in a sense.*

"Yeah, I think I'd like to approach it that way more consciously. I have not avoided it, but I am not as conscious as I want to be."

*You are working in secular settings generally. Does that stop you somehow?*

"No, it's probably more like I, like anyone, am also influenced by business approaches - just trying to keep things professional."

*You still are, and you still can, but there is this other thing happening here.*

*"Exactly."*

*Because you started off by saying that your friends are off pursuing careers, but you are doing something different. So your simplicity is -- how would you define that in this particular area?*

*"Speaking to this point, it is not getting caught up in what people call the rat race. Not being overly concerned with status."*

*But that is the negative side. I hear an alignment between your values and your practice.*

*"It is kind of hard for me to talk about simplicity without the negative. This might also be negative, but it is kind of stripping away, just kind of bringing things to a focus, stripping away everything that is not important so that I can experience things as they are."*

*I see God as a lathe worker. You put a block of wood on a lathe, and as he turns it, he carves away the wood - and you get a beautiful form. Thinking of God as the lathe-turner and you as a piece of wood, there is this simplifying of shaving parts off your character that are not necessarily bad, but getting down to the true form. I am hearing that you are trying to hone down to what is the essence. We tend to do the simplicity conversation in negatives [like] 'I drive a*

*Prius, I don't drive a Cadillac.' To me simplicity is a much larger understanding. Coming into agreement. What does God want for me? What is my life supposed to be? Then all the other cultural influences seem to be less important. They do command a lot of attention these days. I hear you trying not to be distracted by what is going on around you.*

"I think a kind of interesting [thing] that I guess has influenced my experience. And places, like where I live right now, support my neighborhood. I have lived in poor black neighborhoods before, in places that have rural poverty, but this is white poverty, which is different than black poverty. There are a lot of things about people's lives here that aren't simple, but at the same time being with people without much education...even though there are a lot of things about the neighborhood like drugs and messy violence that are really disgusting. At the same time there are people who are living their lives with simplicity in a way that people with a lot more money like to talk about. You know, [they are] using wood stoves and growing their own food. They are not doing it for political reasons. They are doing it because that's what they grew up with, and what they can afford.

Talking with them, they're not trying to use big words or great ideas to impress anyone, just a couple of guys talking."

*So do you find you can communicate with them?*

"Yeah, well I didn't finish college and to some extent having a professional degree can sometimes be an obstacle to relating to the

people, even though I did come from an educated background."

*Sometimes just the words we use can make people feel 'I can't talk to him, he's too smart, I don't have the right grammar.' So another form of simplicity I am hearing is how you are communicating with your neighbors to try to have direct communication with them, and it also sounds like you are trying not to be in a higher position.*

"Definitely."

*So that is an action of personal accountability like, 'I don't want to appear to be above them in any way.'*

"And that is a bit of a challenge within our house because we know in our house we have the ability to kick people out which we have done. Those are really difficult dynamics especially when we have African Americans staying with us, and there is the racial dynamic; years of oppression and privilege, different cultures."

*But you're not letting that dominate you. You are saying that you have certain house rules. These are our agreed upon community values. We don't care what color you are. You can have some jerks with lots of education. It's not about a poverty thing, it's an attitude thing. So simplicity sounds like it is a core of who you are.*

"I'd like to think so."

*Sounds like you are climbing with it too.*

"I have to admit there are times when I get caught up in not necessarily wanting to have more money or nicer things...but just wanting to be the best, the most successful Shiatsu therapist in the area. Wanting to be known for what I am doing, but at the same time, knowing that's not important. It is sometimes hard not to."

ADRIAN - WHAT ELSE SHOULD I BE DOING?

"I do use this metaphor and for simplicity, my relationship with it is quite complex. One of the easier ways to think about simplicity is material things. In some respects I am okay with that, and sometimes I am not. I would like to be a little simpler with my possessions, but also the things that I buy or the things I pay attention to. There is also simplifying of interests, of places where you put your energy. Simplifying the way you choose your words. Using academic jargon, or plain speech, or religious metaphor. I think simplicity is tied up with honesty, not telling what one can or should. Straightforwardness of love and other feelings.

"I think it can also talk really to God, and it does not have to be through ceremonies or prostrations. Even within Quaker practice, there are a lot of ways you make supplications to God.

You can also simply be with God and Christ. So I don't think simplicity necessarily has to do with abnegation in the material world. It



could mean simplifying stuff that you do that isn't necessary. Simplifying may mean letting go of things that you like, but are distractions. So I think simplify means letting go of that kind of that distraction which we all have. Or, it can be twisted into thinking that self-sacrifice is a virtue. It can be twisted the wrong way. If you are attached to simplicity that might be a problem.

"I was impressed by simplicity of the Kenyan Friends that I met. When I was in Kenya, we were at Kabarak University, and the nearest bigish town was Nakuru. I met a Kenyan woman named Marcy who had studied in the United States before coming back. She invited me and another Friend to come back to help them do their weekly duty of serving food to the homeless in her town. The first thing we did was go to the market where we were politely told to stay in the car. Otherwise, the sight of white people makes the price of food go up. We went to their house for lunch, and they were extremely helpful. We were ostensibly helping with the food but mostly, they were showing us how they live. It was a gift they were giving us. Even down to the way they were washing dishes...

"When we were done, we stuffed the meat, rice and vegetables into a plastic bag which was tied off so that people could tear off a corner and eat it. We made about 100 of those. So then they drove out to where most of the homeless people normally congregate because they knew that it happened every week. It switched between different families, so there was someone giving out a meal once a day. We

were told to stay in the car, but if we got out do not bring anything of value on our persons. I stayed in the car because I did not want the focus to be on me. There were about 80-90 people, and so many of them were kids.

In addition to giving out food, they were giving out tiny microloans to either buy a small cart that would enable them to start a self-sustaining business to get people back off the street.

"They all knew; they were expecting it. They knew what to do. Marcy and the others got out of the car and organized themselves. They had them all say a prayer and then they started handing out the food one by one starting with the kids first and working their way up. I would see her occasionally talk to these people who were regulars... She was involved with them and their problems and what they were doing, but there was only so much she could do... The way I was approached, with the simplicity in that respect, was when Marcy's mother described what they had been doing with the organization of the group and how often they fed people. So she sat back and folded her arms and asked me, 'So what else should I be doing?' I was in stunned silence because I was thinking, here you are doing more than anybody else I know in my yearly meeting to address the needs of your community, here directly. It just struck me as a gesture of the purest attunement with God. There is always something more you can be doing. Always something more you can be learning from other people.

JEREMY

## STAYING FOCUSED

"I think about my mind and what I think about. I try not to encompass everything, but I try to focus on a few things, and I try to do them very well. I have two or three things that I focus on and the rest sort of falls to the wayside. Like if I want to be a better father I feel like there's a million things I could be focusing on. But for me I really need to focus on these one or two core values and let go of some of that other stuff. Part of it is I need to take care of myself. If I can take care of myself, I can lead by example. Letting go of a lot of things I am worrying about; I feel there is so much in my life that I can think about or focus on, but I just try to limit it. So if I limit what I focus on and put my energy into, then I put my energy into *that* wholeheartedly. Multitaskers at the end of the day don't do any of it well. So let's just focus on one thing."

*I am wondering if as a child with learning problems you had to really engage in certain areas of learning, like your dyslexia. You had to pay attention to that; it was a huge stumbling block. I am wondering if that has translated into a behavior which is not about that -- but about the need to focus, with the knowledge that you need to work on something.*

"Growing up, my deficits were very clear with certain things. It really helped me to understand what I am good at, and what I'm not; and try to come up with ways to compensate for the things I am not good at, in balance with the things I am good at. Not

beating myself up for 'I am not very good with spelling. I am going to try to learn phonetics better. I am not going to learn phonemic awareness no matter how hard I try. I am really going to struggle with that'... That translated into simplicity in that I don't overwhelm myself with having so many things on my plate at one time... I see what I want and take different routes to get there and not all of them are successful. But just being okay and letting go of things that aren't working and trying something new. Simplicity is sort of a broad interpretation, but I don't want to take on all these things that aren't important. I don't want to focus on that stuff... I open up my mind to what I am focused on, and it's sparse, but it is deliberate to achieve what I want."

ASHLEE

SIMPLE LIVING

*Maurine: Do you consider simplicity to be one of your core values? What does it mean to you?*

"That's a hard one. I consider it to be a Quaker value that I hold very dear. I don't necessarily see it in my day to day life because our lives are so complicated. Technology - not that I hate technology - I love technology. My [personal]aesthetic has certainly gone to simplicity.

*In terms of how you live?*

"How I decorate, how I dress. That's very much ingrained in me. That's how my mom showed simplicity in the way she dressed and her

aesthetic was very simple because our lives become so complicated; and it is so hard to make it simple when you are just trying to get by."

*She had to struggle economically.*

"Yeah, a lot. That is hard, to live the simplicity while also still getting by. I think of it a lot as not trying to over-complicate your life. I think of Quakerism as a lifestyle, it's not just a religion. For me it's a way of life, it's the way I live my life. And everything that I do, I try to keep it as simple as I possibly can; I try, not necessarily to live simply, but to not overcomplicate things."

*Do you think simply?*

"Yeah. In a sense I just try not to over-complicate my life by adding too many things to it. If there is a problem I try to think of it, as simply as I can; break it down as simply as I can. But I think it is difficult to live simply in a complicated world. Because it is a complicated world."

*The world has always been complicated. The complications change.*

"Yes, yes."

*So do you think that this value has guided you on another path than some others you know?*

"Certainly."

*You sound very conscious about your simplicity.*

"Yes, I try to. I try as much as I can. It is intrinsic in my personality to be this way. To know that simplicity is a core value of Quakerism. And to understand that that is something I should always be trying to strive for in my life. I may not always achieve that goal, but there is nothing that is going to penalize me for not reaching that goal every single moment of the day."

*You talked about having children. That sounds like a goal... so let's just fast-forward to when you are a mother. How would you teach your children about simplicity?*

"Living it, exactly as my mom did."

*Let your life speak.*

"Yeah. I think I would explain a lot more than was explained to me. But I would live it every day. That's exactly how it should be. If I think of Quakerism as a lifestyle, then you need to live that lifestyle. You need to show them, not through words, not for discussion, show them through my actions what it means to be a Quaker and that is how I would like to raise my children."

JUSTIN Age 26

**Born in South Korea and raised both in Kansas and Illinois, Justin subscribes to both Jewish and Quaker traditions. He attended a Jewish camp for most of his childhood, singing prayers and hymns and swimming in Little Grassy Lake near Carbondale, which he loves dearly to this day. He is a practicing Quaker,**

highly influenced by his time volunteering with Quaker Voluntary Service in Atlanta. He lives in Portland, Oregon working as a Starbucks barista and nurturing his ambition to become a professional journalist by writing regularly on his blogs and social media. He is a hopeless romantic, a raving Jayhawks fan, has a passion for the French language and culture, and is an enthusiast of fine coffee and food.

"Our culture is consummately not simple. We are barraged with temptation to have another device, a thousand apps and a new car. Simplicity is very difficult to live out and runs counter to the mainstream culture. I find it difficult to finish a 200-300 page novel. I am tempted to jump to another news story or Youtube video. By my nature I am an addict of video. I am a lover of media.

"I make decisions at my own pace and try not to let the influence of people to shake my conviction to make decisions that are as sustainable and positive and productive as I can. I know very much that I stray from that quite a bit. Everywhere I go there is a voice that says - 'Buy this!'

"A lot of people believe it is man vs. man and competing at all costs. How am I choosing to live my daily life? In any situation, if a person is more disadvantaged than I am, I will try to help them. However long it takes me, I will test my patience to help a person who is in a lower position than I am."

SHANNON - JUST HUMBLE

"Simplicity. Some of it is the embodied love of God. God's love embodied in the world. If I am loving my neighbor as myself, then I am not buying really expensive stuff. Equality too, like I am not buying stuff to make me look better than other people. I don't know. When I am engaging in discernment if everything is still cluttered and there is chaos. The opposite of being clear, where I know what I am led to do. A lack of simplicity could be a lack of connection with the Divine, maybe. Awareness of what God wants me to do, confusion."

*How do you clear a path?*

"Clear a path, it usually means I haven't given over my own will so I can't listen. I am not open to whatever God wants me to do. Or my head's just cluttered. My monkey-brain is going, and I haven't been able to be still enough to really listen to "the still small voice." Or listening to something besides God. My experience of the light has been very humbling and that feels related to simplicity somehow."

*Sometimes my most profound messages from God come from really humble people. It doesn't come from some glorious thing: it is a very humble person saying 'let me help you.' So it is humbling for me to realize that there are people out there trying to reach me to give a message and help. And then you have to give over your will at that point and say, 'Oh, I accept your help.'*

"My experience of actually feeling the presence of the light was that I just was



humble. Often times when I give vocal ministry it is simpler than what I would dream up in my own head. Dreaming up and thinking up something more elaborate. I often lose my guide when I think I have a really good idea."

*I have often given vocal ministry that definitely doesn't come from my mind. It comes from someplace else. I will speak it and say to myself, I wonder who that was for. And often someone will come up to me and say, 'that was for me.' Although it did come from me, it wasn't something that I prepared or even had been thinking about.*

"Yeah, that's my experience of vocal ministry as well."

### **Reflection Questions:**

Quite often the response to questions about simplicity are answered with a materialistic response about what you do or do not own. In these dialogues there were many different ideas about simplicity.

What did you notice in each of these stories about the meaning of simplicity? Did you find any similar themes? How do you try to practice simplicity in your own life? What is your definition of simplicity?

### **5. Metaphor of "As the way opens"**

NICK - FINDING THE PATHWAY

*Maurine: Have you used the expression 'as the way opens?'*

"If I were to visualize it, it would be walking through the woods into a clearing and then finding the path. Being stuck in some primeval swamp and managing to find the rock path."

*Quakers have used this expression probably for several hundred years. It actually comes from the fact that they got rid of authoritarianism. Because you would never hear the pope saying 'as the way opens.' They have already decided which way you are going to go. So Quakers are free thinkers, but it is not totally liberality - there is a way, there is a path. So 'as the way opens' is opening yourself to the way. And I see lots of paths in your artwork. You may be exhibiting this metaphor without even knowing where it came from. Because in a sense you have been given permission to find your own way. And it is not prescribed. For some people prescription is exactly what they need. They want to hear - 'heaven is that way, do these ten things in the right order, and you are going there.' What was it like growing up without those theological boundaries?*

"I didn't have any theological boundaries. I only had some basic guidelines and people's example to follow, human people that I know. As far as I remember, they [Quakers] do use the Bible strictly as metaphor - aside from things we can verify through history or counting tree rings or carbon dating - that we can verify, but [for] a lot of it the Bible was used as that, as a tool. Maybe not a

hammer, but a screw driver. Something to tune up, not smash. But now when I think of it, I don't explicitly think of that as the way I operate now. I can't think of an instance where I learned it."

*So you are not inhibited by lessons from the past. Nobody put a template down and said, 'Do this. Stay within these lines.' So instead you were given a way of thinking and the freedom to explore for yourself. There were no real firm rules. On the other hand, it was not boundaryless. There were things that you were expected to do, values that you were taught about.*

JEREMY

MOVING FORWARD IN FAITH

"[In graduate school] my mentor/teacher told me that I should not be a teacher. It was awful, it was awful! I said, "Why not?" and she said, 'You are missing two things - you don't have intuition, and you don't have experience.' And I am like, 'Well, clearly I don't have experience.' You see, she was very enthusiastic, wore her emotions on her sleeve, bouncing up and down off the walls, had a very unique style. It worked with some students, didn't work with others. That wasn't me. She looked at me as someone who is very relaxed, laid back but still engaged, still learning. But she looked at me as very different from her. She said, 'You don't have a passion for this. That is something you should be doing.' She made me go to a website to seek a

different career path. So I had to redo my student teaching, and I failed my first student teaching. It was such a hard experience for me. It was not that I was late or couldn't take criticism. I told her, 'You know what? This is going to work out.' Here I am in the face of failure, and she is not going to pass me; there was nothing I could do about it. Our relationship wasn't working. 'It's gonna work out.' And it does! That was something that was really hard for me."

*But of course you are a fabulous teacher.*

"Yeah, National Board Certification."

*You have the confidence, like your father, who has an inner compass, that unerring true North. You can move him anywhere on the map, but he always knows where true North is. That is what I am hearing in this story. No matter how many prevailing winds there were or terrible storms, you knew where you were headed.*

"To me that is a faith."

*But things were hard for you as a child. You weren't a natural.*

"Dyslexic, couldn't read, awkward socially, and I still struggle with proper nouns like remembering names and places."

*That is why when I asked you to teach with me in Sunday school your mother was so shocked. 'He can't even learn; how can he teach?' I*

*just sensed something in you. You were a natural teacher. You and I paired up, and you were teaching all these old people about Quakerism.*

*"It was great. Learning was very hard for me. A lot of it was playing to my strengths, learning what I am good at and what I am not. Showing off my strengths. Playing that up a little bit. Also being aware that there are also these limitations. But being okay with that."*

*I think you are living 'as the way opens.' What I am learning after interviewing several Millennials is that they often say, 'My parents really didn't tell me anything, but they showed me.' It was by demonstration. So there is a certain ethos that I call the Quaker ethos. Kids growing up in those households feel comfortable because they see it every day. They know how to do it. To paraphrase George Fox: Let your lives speak. Be patterns, be examples - wherever you go - and then you will walk cheerfully over the earth. What I found in my previous research was that children growing up in Quaker families saw the pattern and followed it. It's a very healthy pattern. It is a pattern toward self-reflection and independence, good core values. They saw this behavior in the whole community, not just with parents, they saw it in Quaker elders.*

KATIE Age 20

**Until age eight she lived in southern Peru where her Quaker parents were called to serve as missionaries at a Quaker Bible school.**

While living in Peru, Katie spoke English and Spanish, and some Amayra Indian phrases. She sees herself as someone bridging cultures. She grew up in the Evangelical Quaker church tradition in Oregon. Now she is attending college in Chicago pursuing her passionate interest in building peace in the Middle East among Israelis and Palestinians in particular.

MISSION DRIVEN

*Maurine: It sounds like your mission childhood has helped you to stand in between. How did your own spirituality develop? What is your own spiritual style?*

"I don't know that I really found it till camp when I was in high school. I would go to summer camp every year. It was a church camp. It was always like a haven for me because I was in the midst of the pressure of being a pastor's daughter. No matter your denomination, it has some struggles to it. Church politics always exist. It was always a haven for me to say 'This is my time.'

"In my sophomore year right before camp I did a week of homeless ministry where we stayed in our church's basement for the week. I thought 'This is ridiculous, this isn't anything different, this is where I go to church.' I kind of expressed to them all the pressures I felt as a pastor's child. Having a dad who is pretty well known in our yearly meeting was always a struggle. Anything I do, it is expected that I do it, not because I feel called."

*You felt you had your own mission, but you weren't sure anyone noticed because you were*

*always viewed as a preacher's child.*

"Yes, that was always 'fun'; in the midst of the teenage identity crisis, too. So in the homeless ministry experience, that was the first year it had been offered, they asked us to learn how to serve your local community, and I said, 'Yeah, I want to do that.' It was the first time I got to choose to do something... Getting to choose, that was huge and yet people said, 'Of course you are doing that; you are [the pastor's] daughter.' But one of the leaders recognized I was there because I felt *called*. He said 'This week God is going to give you a name that is just yours. That was huge for me realizing in the midst of the community I am in, I might be known as [the pastor's] daughter, which is a huge part of my identity, but to God I am just who I am...definitely a moment of that in a lot of ways.

"That was a huge turning point because this relationship doesn't exist because of my family or who my dad is, but because I am choosing it, and I am called to it as well. It was then cool to see that summer at camp how much I connected with silence. At that camp we had solo time each day where you went out, and it is up the coast where you have a huge mountain; and so we got to spread out all over camp for an hour just meditating or reading through a book they gave to us. I loved being able to wrestle with who am I and who God was calling me to be and what I needed to change in order to be who God was calling me to be."

*Did you see parts of yourself that needed to change?*

"I did. A lot of that was who I was at school, was very different from who I was at camp in those settings, where I knew I was being called to things. A lot of that had to do with not wanting to be known as the preacher's kid. I don't think I told anyone until my junior year in high school that my father was a pastor. I held it so fearfully inside myself, not wanting people to know that [it] was a big part of my identity. People knew I went to church, but I never said, 'When my dad was preaching.'"

*Did you have some sort of fear that your friends would not understand or appreciate that?*

"I think so, and I think it was hard knowing too that pastors' kids have two reputations and one is being super rebellious and kind of going off the deep end as often as possible, and the other is being the nerdy home-schooled kid who really likes making dolls or sewing quilts... I am kind of in the middle of that spectrum. I enjoy doing homey things, but I'm also not a homebody in every sense. I just wanted to develop my own identity. I didn't want my identity at school to be compromised."

"I was eventually able to talk to my parents about it. I said 'This is the pressure I have been feeling.' And different things came together; I was able to shape my own relationship with God and learning how that was leading me into different walks. The summer of homeless ministry, the week or so of that led me to want to expand that globally. So I got to go to Cambodia for three weeks with seven peers and two adults. I was 16. It



was good to go on a mission trip without my family. To identify what part of that I had been called to: not being told who I was in the past. That was super-transformational.

Coming home from that was really hard because, all of the sudden, these things you learned about yourself in another country you don't know how to reconcile in your own. Culture shock happened a lot worse coming back than it did going."

#### JUSTIN SEEKING CLEARNESS

"I spent a year doing Quaker volunteer work 2012-2013, so I was very engaged in Quaker circles then, and up until very recently, I went to Quaker meeting every Sunday up until my work interfered with it. So Quakerism is my practicing religion... Quakers try to support people's leadings, and that is based on this idea that there is a God in every person. That God exists in each individual, so Quakers are renowned for having clearness committees where individuals gather with an individual who is questioning what to do. And bounce questions off that person in order to help him or her clarify what their leading is. Quakers have this system of corporate spirituality where the body works together to determine what the Divine leading is. And I think that is pretty unique among faith traditions. I like that because it runs counter to the cultural tendency in our nation...to battle, battle, battle, come up against each other, until some particular belief wins. There's the Democrats, and there's the Republicans, and one of them

wants to pass a law and they will fight and fight and fight until one of them gets just enough votes for that law to be passed.

"But if it were even possible, then the Quaker approach would be - you think and pray and wait till the correct and proper, and the Divine path becomes clear and emerges. So I appreciate that it's a more patient tradition. It tries harder to ground the decisions that members of the Quaker church make in deliberation, community togetherness, ethical principles and truth. Basing things on truth instead of basing things on other prerogatives: whether that be money, whether that be political motives, there is a God-based motive."

NOAH - DANCING WITH GOD

*Maurine: So in your own life, 'as the way opens' means you are coming to a new understanding.*

"Right. Actually when I think about "as the way opens"... I think of my sexuality. I don't push my sexuality on women, and that is kind of part of my spiritual path."

*I remember that story you told at a Quaker potluck where we talked about gender and acceptance, and you talked about a conversation you had with a friend in high school...*

"Yeah, at the prom. It was more 'Am I gay?' and she said, 'Do you like men? Are you attracted to men?' and I said no. She said, 'Then you're not gay.'

*So that was a little clearness process right there.*

"Right, that was a clearness process."

*I liked what she said about 'Just dance. Be who you are.'*

"And that was very much, very much a spiritual experience. While I was dancing, I was thinking about my religion. I remember the thoughts coming into my head - 'I feel truly Quaker right now. I feel truly Jewish.' Like as I was dancing and the dancing, I was totally entranced in dancing. It was like an hour or two, and I remember my dad picking me up afterward, and I couldn't really talk. I didn't know what to say [except] 'Yeah, prom was good.' But it was a spiritual experience. There have only been one or two times where I have been totally lost...but dancing is one of those things for me that can really bring about identity in religion, like identifying with your religion in a positive way. Those thoughts have come into my head. I love my religions whenever I'm dancing. I love my upbringing."

**Reflection Questions:**

Nick: "If I were to visualize it, it would be walking through the woods into a clearing and then finding the path. Being stuck in some primeval swamp and managing to find the rock path."

What is the implication of looking at life this way?

What other examples of the way opening struck you from these stories?

Where did the way open or close for you?

## **6. My Life in Chapters**

**Enon (not his real name), age 33, is a Black Evangelical Quaker pastor from Kenya who joined a Quaker church at age 14. He eventually came to America as a scholarship student at a Quaker divinity school where he accepted his gender as a gay man and became open with his fellow students. When his Kenyan yearly meeting heard about this, his life was threatened, and he was separated from his church and family. He is living alone now and has dropped out of school. The US Asylum Program will shelter him for the next seven years.**

*Note: The following is a transcription of Enon's oral history. English is his second language.*

"I am a convinced Quaker, and I grew up in the Episcopal Church because my parents were part of the Episcopal Church. So I went to a Catholic School; that was my elementary school... In Kenya schools are mostly sponsored by churches... Then when I joined high school I went to a Quaker school...so when I was there, I heard people coming saying, "We are going to meeting for worship and business meeting," and I could not understand all these terms. But something that made me to admire Quakerism was the way they treated me because I had never been treated like that! In my [Episcopal church] when you

are a young adult, you know you cannot just go and sit with elders or elderly people, share the same table, share the same meal, be on the equal status. That is what I am talking about. So when I saw they say, 'We are equal in the eyes of God,' it became something new to me. They said, 'You know, we are all Friends.' [I thought] we cannot be friends; if I don't know you, how can you be my friend? I have to know you, I have to understand who you are before we become a friend. So I started being curious wanting to know, what is this community that impresses all people like a person like me who comes from a complicated background? They impressed me. They welcomed me, so I became so active in their meeting.

"In school in my second year in high school...they chose me as the Christian Union Leader for 1200 students. This is a boys school, not mixed, only boys... I was the school captain and Christian chairman... The school was sponsored by the Quakers, but they allowed these other diversities, so students who come from a Catholic background would have that opportunity. Students who come from the Seventh Day Adventists will have that opportunity... I was very active at school.

"So at the time I felt the leading of God; leading me maybe, not suspecting that I might be a preacher or not. It was my third year in high school. It was time for the national exams for Form Fours. The seniors were going to sit for a national exam. We were waiting for someone to come and give a message for the school assembly [that] we made for students and teachers. Then the (headmaster) came to me

and said, 'You are the student leader of the Christian Union. Do you have anything to share?' I said sure. Inside me there was a scripture written three days before. The spirit of God telling me, read this. When I was reading that scripture, I did not know where I would be reading this scripture. I did not know where to take the message, but I strongly felt the message in me. It was so strong. So when they asked me, 'the Spirit said this is the right occasion for this scripture. You are going pray this message.' I opened the Bible and read... the Letter of John, 8th chapter of First John. So I read that, and I expounded on that. I had never been to a theological school. I had never been a pastor, not even a Sunday school teacher. I found this courage from nowhere. I was lifted up by the Spirit. The experience - it was something mystical. And the power that I used to share the message, to pray the message, was so strong that after 15 minutes of delivering the message, the whole school, the principal of the school, and my friends were telling me, 'You are such a wonderful pastor.' I did not want to hear anybody telling me you are a pastor. Something I did not like.

"The reason why I am saying I didn't like it [was] the life of pastors in Kenya. They are not paid. If you are a pastor in Kenya, you are of the low status. I wanted to work hard to become a lawyer [earning] top good money. I had my ambitions, and that's what I was working for. No one should tell you to go and be a pastor. That is nothing to exist in my life. These people were telling me, 'Oh, you

spoke so powerfully.' I was overwhelmed with all these remarks from people...

My classmate said, 'That was a powerful blessing. It changed my life.'

Enon: 'How did I change your life, can you try to explain to me?'

Classmate: 'The things you spoke is me... I am a Christian. I need to change.'

"I was just a boy; In fact I was the most tiniest boy in the school, the youngest of all, tiny. I did not count myself in the worth of God. Based on the background I was brought up, it affects me a lot... I am a child of a third wife, and the child of a third wife cannot be a pastor... My father is a polygamist person, so how can I be a pastor when my mom is a third wife. Again, I am the youngest, the last boy. You are supposed to be the first born of the first wife. Those were some of the feelings in me. Speaking what they don't know, so forget about that.

"When I went back home, the Quakers had what is called the workshop for the Young Adults. I went to the youth conference. I was so active they gave me the responsibility of being a Sunday school teacher. In my 4th year in high school my home monthly meeting nominated me to be the youth pastor. It is a big meeting, almost like 300 people. No training and I am still in high school. And I have no idea which college I will go to after I am done with high school education and here. When we came home from vacation, and my mom said, 'Members of your church came here and they prayed ...'

Enon: Why have they come here?

Mom: 'They say they have nominated you to be their youth pastor, and so they came to pray with the family to support your ministry.'

Enon: 'It's like, Mom! What are you talking about supporting my ministry? I need to go to school to become a lawyer. They say these crazy things to me. I don't feel the calling in me! And I didn't feel that calling because the pastors are treated as nobody.'

Mom: 'You cannot argue with God, whatever God has planned.'

Enon: 'Like Mom, you are just trying to put these words, and these words are not God's words. How can you think that God has...don't try to change things around.'

Mom: 'Well, it's up to you how God will lead you.'

"So, I finished high school, I graduated from high school and went for my further studies in college. In Kenya you have to go to the law school first before you go to undergraduate school. And I didn't have like money to pay for my school fees. I talked to my family, and they said 'We don't have money to send you to school.' So I was stranded, and there was no money to take me to college. I got admission later to go to a college, but you have to pay. No scholarships, no scholarships. I tried the medical as a nurse and got admitted in a nursing school. I had no money to pay for the nursing school. I tried several, and I was so mad. Then I had to move out of the house. Of



course... I had come home to see my parents and other stuff. So one of my friends said, 'Hey, we have a food restaurant, an opportunity for work there because you will need money for rent and food and other stuff.' 'Well, it sounds good.' So my first job was to work as a waiter in a restaurant.

"But during that time I kept going to my meeting. And my quarterly presiding clerk he...worked in Nairobi, but he was a man who supported young people. He was a man who had the ambition to support young Quakers who are coming up. And he had the heart for the pastors. So he came and talked to me. At the time he was talking to me [saying they] were having the Quarterly Meeting for business, and they were nominating officers for the quarterly meeting. At this same meeting they nominated me for the pastor for the youth of the quarterly meeting.

Enon: "I say, 'You guys are trying to do something that I don't understand..."

Clerk: 'No, you have to go to school.' Enon: 'Which school?' Clerk: 'Bible School.'

Enon: "What are you talking about?... I have all these letters for admission to school. Why are you telling me to go to Bible School?"

And he told me - look at me. You don't know what God has for you. You are just talking, you don't know, calm down.'

He used the Quaker terminology I never heard of the *leading*. The leading of the Spirit gives you the way...it's me that do the

thinking. Which type of leading are you talking about? I was confused at that time. I respected him so much. I had to go back home but not fully accepting what they are trying to tell me. I went to Friends Theological College. If I said that I wanted to go, I would be lying. Let me just go... Why all these students? Why just me? I didn't want to be recognized. I didn't want my tutors to be close to me. I was just wasting time, and maybe I would go. So my total changing in accepting the call...the first year was just testing the waters. I did not know what was happening in my life. I did well in my classes. They were teaching me all about this stuff [from] the New Testament, the Old Testament, Quaker literature and history. It was a waste of time for me. They are wasting my time of me because I don't feel inside of me. But the second year things turned around. I thought maybe God is trying to tell me something...

"I did not know what meditation meant. I had never heard the word meditation. To me, to pray aloud, to pray while you are moving - you touch things - to pray shouting at the top of your voice - that is something I was used to. I had never known you could sit in silence and meditate. I used to run away and hide... I used to go on the Hill of Vision and look at the trees. And something so strong that connects with me up to now is Mother Nature. I see all these trees and good stuff, and good things, you know, happening. And I started feeling something different inside me. And God started talking to me... I could hear the voice, and I turn around and I don't. When I

close my eyes on the Hill of Vision I could see an aeroplane where I am going. I find myself just in trains going somewhere. I see myself in a biii-ggg congregation and people lifting up their hands and the pictures were really scary. And I look at myself, and I couldn't measure myself to the vision. When I told my friends, they said 'You need to pray about it.' It was scary. And when I go to bed I dreamed of preaching hard and...people doing the evangelism thing like far, far, far, far places. I dreamed of flying out of the country, and I did not know where I am going. I had no idea.

"So that kept persisting in me, but anyway I finished Friends Theological College, and I went home. They made me associate pastor, but I was still young. I was maybe 18. Still young, I was really young. I talked to some people, and they said, 'You are still young, so you can't perform a ceremony. You are not married, and you can't counsel people who are married. You are still struggling maybe with your last stage of adolescence...

"Well, I went back to school (of theology) to take my religion and philosophy... In the 4 years I was at school, I matured... It was more like liberal that can open up your mind; school about wrestling with these hard questions, not someone telling me the Bible says. Open up your mind and wrestle with the tough issues in the Bible that people don't want to talk about. That was something that was scary to me because when the Bible says you have nothing to add, nothing to subtract -

that is the word of God (slap). Face the facts...you can ask questions. You can't ask questions of the Bible!...crazy...

"So in my third year the principal said, 'I want you to go to Zambia for the missions.' So I got my passport, and we flew with him to Zambia, to Congo, and I started going out of the country. Then flying out of the country, the vision started to be confirmed. Now I understand. I would go out and meet people.

Here I am talking to people, so it was very true something that I was dreaming was to be right. That is something that happened in my life, and I started now getting the knowledge of understanding things that were happening in my life at the Hill of Vision, Friends Theological College.

"The time I spent in meditation, and [at]the time God talked to me. By praying hard and crying I felt that I was only expressing my emotions. I wasn't communicating with God. But the time I spent in meditation and silence, that is when God met me face to face, and he spoke to me so strongly and confirming some things. I did not know about silent worship. Later a professor was teaching me about silent meeting. So what I was doing was silent worship.

"Anyway things went like that and in my 4th year so the elders talked to me - We want you to get married because from here you have to be ordained, and you have to be a pastor. And you have to be married.' I had never even talked to a girl, so who am I going to marry? That was another question I asked myself... I

don't know one. I don't know even no girl I ever talked to. So my friend took my problem to a Quaker pastor who called me to his office and said... 'I want to help you get a good woman from a Quaker family, and I have a dear friend so would you come with me to visit when we call vocation. So I said, I will. He took me back home and introduced me to the ladies in their home. So as someone who has never talked to women, how could I know these beautiful girls coming and looking at me and all of them were beautiful girls? Who am I going to pick? It was a big problem, and all of them were in the [nurses training]. So I saw them and I went and chose one girl...

They organized a wedding and a wedding that I have never seen. People gave their vehicles to support me. If there was food, there was plenty of food, and people came like cousins I have never seen before, to a wedding like that. I thought, what is going on? But inside me something is telling me it's not gonna last. This is not gonna work out. I had to tell one of my close friends, 'I'm sorry... I don't think I am for this marriage.' They asked me why. Inside me I have different feelings for sex and stuff. I am attracted to different stuff. I just don't understand how this is going to be handled. If you don't love...and the love has to come deep from your heart. You don't need to force yourself to some things. Either I am lying to myself or I am lying to God. It is a requirement for me to qualify to be a pastor - I have to get married. So I will do whatever they want me to do to become qualify to be a pastor, but that will be fulfilling the desires of men but not

my desire.

"So we did a wonderful wedding, and it was good... She moved nine hours away from me... Out of that marriage we were blessed with a boy. He is five years old now. But I did not spend time with her. I spent time with another guy. This was hidden, and I was always scared. I cried, I cried a lot. All the time I go to preach I look at myself and say, 'Lord, I am evil. I am not worthy in your eyes. How do you allow me to preach? How do you allow me to lay hands on people? How do you allow me to hold kids in my hands and bless them? Lord, I am evil. You know that. How can you stand that? I am not right in your eyes.' I fasted for like seven days, dry fasting, no water, no food...for seven good days. Nothing! I cried. I hated my life so much. I didn't like myself.

"I moved and went to the seminary school as a teaching assistant; then they made me the school administrator for Bible College...then I met [two American Quakers who said], 'We want to support you. You are a powerful Quaker, and God is going to use you to bless the ministry you have. When can you apply to an [American seminary]?' 'I said that's a good idea.' So they helped to get the forms and I applied, and they accepted me ...My quarterly meeting helped me to raise funds, and I had to borrow money. I came here in 2011....

So after two semesters my professors suggested I take the M.Div. because they saw me as a minister. During that time I find people together, and I asked them, 'What is going on here? This spectrum [of gender], what about it? No, this is sick. This is not what God

expects to happen.' I went to class, and people were introducing themselves 'I am [name], I am transgender.' I got scared, and I didn't want to hear this. So these guys looked at me, and I didn't say nothing, kept quiet. But they kept looking at me and one of them said, 'I think you are gay.' I said, 'How can you call me that?' But he kept on talking to me. He said, 'You just need to be yourself. Don't hide.' Because in class I wasn't a happy person. I lived a desperate life because I was struggling with my faith, struggling with my culture. Accepting myself with a lot of stuff, being a pastor, how could I be gay? This would be a disaster in Kenya. I don't want this to happen. But through the counseling of my friends and my professors, I accepted the first step toward accepting myself as a gay man. And it wasn't easy, by no means. If there is anything harder in this world! I really wrestled. Remember I am a theologian in seminary school for seven years, studying the scripture from Genesis to Revelation. All this stuff through the hands of many professors, they are charismatic and conservative people...they are my mentors. Based on that background and my family background, how could I accept myself as gay?

"Yes, it was a big crisis in my life and I've never solved that crisis yet. I am still fighting it. I've never been back home. They know that I am gay, and they knew that from life in the church... So I could fellowship with them and see other gay Christians worshiping together and maybe to give me that courage of coming out because I was going to an [American Friends Meeting], which is

welcoming and affirming, and I only saw two couples and they were old people, not people of my age. Life in the church provided that avenue to support me to come out. But it was that article, that news bulletin that brought the chaos because one of my friends at school [in Kenya] saw the article.

While I was just struggling to plan, hiding, accepting myself and trying to struggle with my emotions, already fire was [at] home burning! I began receiving emails from home. And they forwarded the article to me. It was an unexpected thing. 'We have seen this. You are gay. You are evil. You will die'...It was hatred and bad emails, and I was horrified, I was terrified. I was stressed to death...

"Now what am I studying? To go get what? I had better die than to live. And I started planning how I could take my life. Because I didn't know something that would happen in my life. In my culture, if I happened to go back home, I will die. Because whatever they say, they mean what they say. And no one is going to accept me. I am not going to get no job. They will discriminate me from the community.

No one is going to talk to me. When I sit down and think about it, I wouldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't keep up...couldn't do the assignments. Sitting in class, I am wasting my time. I am going to die. It was really hard. I could not understand what was going on in my life. But I accepted myself as gay.

"It has been a journey for me, and it is still a journey for me. Coming out and recording that video has caused [trouble]... When



Quakers in Kenya saw the video, I have become a laughing stock. My family, people talk about them now. They are more angry with me because the people are talking about the boy who went to the U.S., and he was a pastor but turned out to be gay. 'We are ashamed, we don't even want him to talk'... How can [my meeting] communicate with people in Kenya if my own quarterly meeting wrote me a letter that was really bad? - 'You used to be a pastor here.' I didn't believe Quakers could write something like that.

"No one has ever said, 'We appreciate the way you are.' No one ever said that. 'You are stupid. We thought you were a wise boy. We thought we were supporting someone who is coming to bless us and support us. You are very stupid. You will die like that. You go to hell. You are doomed.' This is what I hear all the time. No one ever calls me on a friendly basis like trying to tell me something. I have never had a call from home. Even my ex-wife, I think maybe she is afraid. She thought she was getting married to someone she was going to spend her life with. She is just writing this out of anger. But she has no love for me. I tried to live with her but nothing, and I can't change her. And I understand, and I forgive her. I still love her. We have this child we need to bring up, we need to support.

She doesn't understand, but I say 'I can't force you to understand, and I will leave it like that...no one accepts me in Kenya. No one...they counted me off from society. I don't belong. In the Bible when you have leprosy they have to throw you out the city.

You stay there like that, and you will die there like that. Everyone calls [from Kenya], they cuss him; they prayed and cursed. They did all those things. Whenever bad things happen to me here, I think maybe they are praying... I just don't understand.

"Well, I deferred my school for one year because not turning in assignments on time; I failed some of the classes. I need to finish that, but I ran out of the scholarship. The remaining class I have to work and pay for it, if I finish school. That's why I couldn't [finish] school. I had to come out of school and work and pay for my rent, food and maybe save a little money. I did most of the work so just a few classes and supervised ministry, then I will be done with school.

"When I came over here I have been to a [Friends meeting that has a gay pastor)]. I am thinking of transferring my membership... Right now I am praying God, I am praying for the leading of the Spirit.

Well, now I am gay. I have confirmed it. I gone through all this trauma and struggle, and I want to settle in, but I am praying God bring for me that right man. Now if they say he is gay, I need to get married to a man and settle in married because I love God, and I want to raise my family. I need a family. I pray for that person to come into my life. And I wish I could find a Quaker because denying myself as a Quaker, it is just hell. I can't make it. Quakerism is stuck in my blood. It is just like everything to me... I can't really say it must be a Quaker, whoever comes my way

and accepts me as a Christian and support my life, I will really appreciate. Challenging again in the gay life, they ask if I am dating someone, and I say I am not interested in Blacks or Whites, I am not interested in this, for that it is becoming for me a cultural shock. I don't understand it, but I am coming to understand it. What I am doing right now is to take it slow. I am just taking it really slow and praying and waiting on the Lord.

"Yes, for example, in the time I was really confused with the news breaking out that I am gay; at that time I felt that I just wanted to commit suicide. I was in total darkness. But *that of God* in me, that small light of God in me was shining and it kept shining, and it was the one that saved my life. I truly believe that God still loves me so much. Though sometimes I screw up myself and become mad at God. I become angry at God - 'Why did you do this to me? Why did you lead me to be like this?' So there are moments when I am stressed and pushed to the wall, and I look and there is no light. It is all darkness. But then, the light comes. And the joyful time that I fully enjoyed myself.

"... I live close to a park, maybe five minutes walking to the park, and I look at a spot, and I sit down. I can't express myself, I only see darkness. I still go back to sit in the meditation, in silence and engage myself to the voice I can hear coming deep from inside me, it brightens in me. I see that light, chases away all the bad thinking. Go, go, go! When I see the Bible, I find it is judgmental. The Bible is not inclusive but exclusive. I hate it. And when I am reading it

I am hearing the voices of the pastors in Kenya talking to me.

"We used to call it in Kenya, Quaker spices\* - simplicity, honesty, integrity - one thing I really love in Kenya is whether they are rich people or even squatters on their farm but when they come to church they are humble. I am not saying about humble in that you don't want material things. I am talking about a humbling of the spirit. Leading the simple life of the Spirit; not looking so much to be more higher than others. Bringing yourself down to the level of even the poor people sharing your life, who you are, what God intends for your life, that is what I understand about simplicity. It is me giving my life for the ministry. I look at Christ, he was the king, he was the son of God, and he humbled himself. He came down to the level of people, died for us, he shared his life with us. I studied the book of Mother Theresa, and she humbled herself. St. Francis of Assisi, look at what he started, what he did. So to me even though my people at home they say this to me they accuse me, but I forgive them and I still love them.

"One thing still speaks to me...what am I going to do for them...it is a calling in me...it has humbled me down to that level of seeing my suffering in a different way. As an opportunity for ministry. I am finding maybe that God is calling me to something that I really don't understand... I read one of the books by John Woolman saying 'living life in chapters.' My life has been in chapters. Right now I am in a different phase of my life, a different chapter. I am on the edge of

accepting all these things...and not wanting to commit suicide but being strong and stable facing the world the way it is. And now I am asking [of God], what next do you want me to do?"

Reflection Questions:

Enon expresses a wide range of feelings in response to the pressures from his religious community to become a pastor.

How did the way close in his life story as he tells it? Can you see the way opening for him in the future?

*\*Quaker SPICES refers to the mnemonic for their values of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship.*

## **7. Reflections of a Listener**

As I come to the end of my book, I am wondering about how to bring it to a close. We have asked the Millennials to tell us how they use the metaphor of "as the way opens," and now I will ask that question of you, my readers, and of myself. How is the way opening for this generation and for us? Quakers have used this expression or practice for several hundred years. It probably comes from our founders of the 17th century who threw out authoritarianism. Doctrinal religions in those days dictated the path to their followers and had already decided which way they should be going to avoid sin and damnation. The rebellious Children of Light, by following

George Fox and Margaret Fell, found another way to go. Quakers are free thinkers, but that does not mean totally liberality - there is a way, there is a path. So as a practice Quakers are always opening themselves to the emergent way.

Growing up Quaker often means learning by example, seeking discernment, and looking for the next stone to step upon when crossing a swampy place. Young Friends who grow up in a Quaker cultural environment learn early on that they are not inhibited by the lessons from the past, although they are informed by them. Nobody puts down a template and says, "Do this! Stay within these lines," there are no rigid rules, but on the other hand, it is not boundaryless. There are things that you are expected to do, values that you are taught to follow. Instead of imposing rules or dogma on Quaker youth, they have been given the freedom to explore a new path under the watchful eye of the elders.

Intuitively, as a teenager, I too was always seeking my own path. For example, my parents' mantra was *my-country-right-or-wrong*, and I was a Vietnam War protester and ardent pacifist. They tried to teach me the traditional rituals and prayers for avoiding hell and going to heaven. As a young woman, I was expected to marry by age 21, have children, and stay home to raise them. The feminist revolution changed that paradigm of the homebound mother for many young women like me. Just like today's Millennials we were listening to the sound of a different drum.

So what are we, the older generation, wondering about the Millennial Quakers? In asking them for their stories I have invited you, the reader, to have a glimpse of the world that is coming, one we will not be part of. While listening to this generation, I went through periods of culture shock myself, and I expect that you may have felt some loss of certainty when hearing them, too.

For our generation, the poetry and art of Kahlil Gibran was singularly attractive. His famous poem, *On Children*, is found in his book, *The Prophet*. It has always spoken to my heart. I often wondered as a teenager why I found it to be so important to me. Looking back, I can see why his poem gave me hope as a young person in a time of distress and change. I was the arrow, and it was clear to me that the bow (my parents) that let me fly could never touch the distant world I had entered.

In this season of my life, I have begun to understand the poem now from a new perspective.

I am now *the bow that is stable* that guides the living arrow, and I am learning for the second time that the generations have differing points of view and will in fact inhabit different worlds. I have learned that it is important to hear these voices, even from the distance of my own world.

An important lesson I have learned while listening intently to their stories is this: ***their souls dwell in the house of tomorrow, that you cannot visit, even in your dreams.***

## **Resources for further reading**

Books:

*Friends for 350 years.* Howard Brinton and Margaret Hope Bacon.

*Metaphors We Live By.* George Lakoff and Mark Johnson.

*Philosophy in the Flesh.* George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. Website: Branches of Friends worldwide explained.

<http://www.fwcc.world/kinds.html>

Note: Over time we have been known by many names including Children of Light, Publishers of Truth, Friends of Truth and finally Quakers, a derogatory nickname which arose from the quaking motion visible when speaking from the silence in worship. The official name is The Religious Society of Friends, and we are currently known by title as Friends or Quakers.

## **Quaker Subcultures in America Defined**

There are four basic branches of Quakerism in North America today resulting from numerous theological schisms which have occurred from the 18th to the 20th centuries, and are described briefly below:

Liberal Friends practice unprogrammed worship, which means waiting in silence without any program. The worship is led by individual members who are "moved to speak" out of the silence with no prior preparation. They emphasize the authority of the Inward Light.



Some are Christian, but attendees are welcomed from any faith tradition. No agreement to a creed is required to join this type of meeting. Members are active in service work, especially in social justice and peace arenas. Among Liberal Friends there is also an emerging culture called non-theism, which may include neo-pagans, atheists, secular humanists and others who do not recognize the inclusion of God in their religious practices.

Conservative Friends are so named because they seek to conserve Early Friends' practices including plain speech and plain dress. They rely upon the concept of the Christ Within, whom they feel is the "head of the meeting" or holds the place of spiritual authority. They rely upon the Bible and the writings of Early Friends (i.e. from the period of the 17th-18th century), and they worship in silence without a pastor.

Orthodox Friends may be pastoral or unprogrammed, but now usually there is a pastor. Their worship style is similar to a Protestant church with hymn singing and a sermon. There are also could be silent periods in the midst of programmed meeting for worship. Their governance is authoritarian and biblically based. They engage in mission work in foreign countries like Africa, especially in Kenya where there is the largest Quaker population.

Evangelical Friends are fundamentalist Christians, who seek to convert others to the Christian faith. They worship in the style of Protestant churches and are engaged in active evangelistic mission work abroad.

All four of the branches described above have diverged from the same root of 17th century English Quakerism, although there has been subsequent influence from Wesleyan (Methodist) culture in America beginning in the 19th century. The English Quakers have not experienced the sectarian schisms which have become so common in America.

In the current state of affairs of Quaker practice there are often surprising cultural crossovers between the so-called branches of American Quakerism.