

Hamilton Quaker Newsletter

February 2022



Rejoice in the presence of children and young people in your meeting and recognize the gifts they bring. Remember that the meeting as a whole shares a responsibility for every child in its care. Seek for them as for yourself a full development of God's gifts and the abundant life Jesus tells us can be ours. How do you share your deepest beliefs with them, while leaving them free to develop as the spirit of God may lead them? Do you invite them to share their insights with you? Are you both ready to learn from them and to accept your responsibilities towards them?

Advices and Queries #19

Upcoming Events and Announcements

Upon the advice of the Meeting House Re-opening Committee, in-person Meeting for Worship at the Meeting House has been discontinued. Online Meeting for Worship will continue to enter silence at 10:30 a.m. The Clerks will try to open the Zoom space by 10:20 to allow people a time to chat and settle in before worship begins.

February 11, from 7 to 8:15 p.m, Hamilton Monthly Meeting will be holding an online Frivol in our Zoom space. The theme is vaguely St. Valentine-ish. “What role did chocolate play for you during the pandemic?” Please join us for this light-hearted gathering. Participants are invited to share a story about chocolate, or love or flowers, or just come along to listen and laugh.

The next meeting of the Reading group will be on Sunday, February 20 from 3 to 4 p.m. in our Zoom space. We will be discussing the first three chapters of Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*. Please contact Shirla (shirla766@gmail.com) to be added to the participant list.

Canadian Yearly Meeting Education and Outreach has decided to focus on offering restorative Quaker practices in 2022. Their first event will take place on February 22 at 1:30 p.m. (EST), with a 90-minute ONLINE workshop that introduces QREC’s Conversation Circles to Canadian Quakers. Come and learn about this exciting new way to hold deeper conversations about topics that matter to you and your Meeting.

Peace and Social Action Committee invites Friends to attend on Wednesday, February 23, at 7 p.m. Meetings will remain virtual, in our Zoom space, for the time being. Please contact Paul Dekar (pdekar@cogeco.ca) if you would like to be sent the link for this meeting.

On Saturday, February 26, Canadian Yearly Meeting will hold an open, online meeting at 1:30 p.m. EST. The topic of discussion is “Friendly Exploration on the Administration of CYM – Who gets to decide?”. Join Zoom Meeting:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/8671213216?pwd=VIRCRHhpSFFhRHIIS2dBcHNnc1kvdz09>

Meeting ID: 867 121 3216 Passcode: CYM1955

March 6 will be our next Meeting for Worship for Business. The meeting will be held at 1:00 p.m. in our Zoom Meeting space, unless the Meeting House Re-opening Committee advises otherwise. Email will be sent inviting members and attenders to this meeting.

It is time to start thinking about Half Yearly Meeting in the spring! It is our turn to host, so there will be tasks from cleaning and set up, to programming and presentations! Please contact Alice Preston or Chris Hitchcock if you would like to be involved.

Hamilton Monthly Meeting member Chelsea Rainford has received the Judy Marsales Award for Poetry for her piece “Turning Day Poem”, and member Selena Middleton (writing as Ellen Gunnell Lee) received an honourable mention in the fiction category of the short works awards given by the Hamilton Arts and Letters Magazine for her story “You Cannot Return to the Burning Glade”. Hamilton Monthly Meeting would like to congratulate both these talented women on their accomplishment!



Turning Day Poem

by Chelsea Rainford

Turning Day...

Her old head talks as young fingers grip bone
china, ancestor to the paper cup.
Smiles over tea, small bites of a scone,
a few choice pieces of whispered gossip
as a breeze plays through a garden hyssop
plant, blocks from the busy street café
ignored for calm sips of home-brewed Earl Grey.

There is a small pond, red fish drift inside
like live jewels in a clear noonish hue
of sun sparkling off a lazy tide
caused by dropping carapaces of blue
beetles that fall slowly from the tall yew
tree overhead, spinning with wayward fronds.
And a yawning mouth greedily responds.

Shaking sunflowers still tower above
like forests, sentinels to grinning light
that have risen higher than the tall tops of
trees, in her mind. Eyes see a sight of slight
stems bend in gusts like the tail of a kite;
those yellow petals burning bright like day
And illuming pine shadows as they sway.

There are days when she sits open and nude
on her back porch, lets her garden shield her
from fir trees and bluebirds, from being viewed.
Autumn's reddish winds have begun to stir
up fallen petals, that dance, brightly blur
across her eyes and thighs, hidden by
a hedgerow whose leaves have begun to fly
away.

Employment Opportunity: Peace Program Coordinator

Canadian Friends Service Committee staff member Matt Legge is shifting his work responsibilities to be focused more on communications, so CFSC is now hiring a Peace Program Coordinator.

This is a part-time position (17.5 work hours/week) with the possibility of being expanded into a full-time position based on the work plan developed by the Coordinator and the Peace Program Committee and results achieved from the work.

Consideration will be given to all qualified applicants regardless of their location in Canada; however, preference will be given to those able to commute to the CFSC office in Toronto.

The Peace Program Coordinator is responsible for developing and adapting effective peace programming, one of the three core program areas of CFSC. This is a dynamic position requiring someone who is highly motivated to work alone and in a small team with volunteers. The Coordinator must be a self-starter excited about continually identifying opportunities to expand our work and impact.

The ideal candidate will have:

- A background in peace and conflict with solid knowledge of peace policy,
- Strong experience engaging with civil servants, politicians, and others around peace and/or social justice issues,
- Experience with public outreach or organizing on peace and social justice concerns,
- Experience working with small (under 10 staff) businesses or nonprofits that require adaptability,
- Proven leadership and creative and flexible on-the-job problem-solving skills.

Find out more and consider applying before the Feb 17 deadline:

<https://QuakerService.ca/PeaceProgramCoordinator>

Review of Michael Ignatieff's *On Consolation*

by Dick Preston

Over the years, I have had repeated occasion to appreciate Michael Ignatieff. I read *The Needs of Strangers* while I was still teaching The Method and Theory of Field Research to the doctoral students, and was so impressed that I gave each student a copy as a present when the seminar was finished. I read *Blood and Belonging* and was glad to get his up close views on the aftermath of wars. I read his biography of Isiah Berlin and appreciated the genius of that remarkable individual. Then Ignatieff became the Liberal candidate for prime minister and I had a half hour to urge a federal department of peace. He listened intently and spoke with detailed understanding of what we were proposing. I liked and admired him, and regret that the Liberals lost the election. We got Stephen Harper. Ignatieff returned to the academic life, and stayed there.

Why does he focus on consolation? Spoiler alert: consolation is a foundation for hope. I hope we needn't ask, "why hope?". But we can benefit by looking at what provides that foundation. Or we can discover it in unexpected experiences, as Ignatieff did at a choral performance of all 150 of the psalms, when he found enduring aftereffects (a non-believer's rapture?) that motivated him to write this book. It is not an easy read, but it is very worth the effort.

What are we to do about suffering? Hurtful things will happen, and we need to both find a way to accept these as inevitable facts of life, and to move on. We have many stories about suffering. Great literature sometimes emerges from individuals who tell of their experiences, their feelings, and their will to survive.

This book is a compilation of compassionate stories. Ignatieff has researched the stories of each of these individuals with thoroughness and rigorous attention to detail, so that we are given a sense of the person, where we may have previously known little more than the person's name. These stories are inspiring. It is a short book with a great deal of content. Its profundity is sometimes stunning, making me read it just a chapter at a time. Much of it will be news to most readers, and these vignettes are convincing because they are so well-

researched. They speak to us of pan-human feelings of suffering, solace, and hope for meaningful life in this world that we can recognize in ourselves.

- Job, victim of a jest of God, remains faithful through unimaginable suffering, but keeps his independence as well as his faith, demands and gets an audience with his maker, is humbled and then restored to the comforts of family and wealth.
- The psalmists (the singers who composed them, over centuries) speak to us of our still contemporary feelings of despair and of hope.
- The apostle Paul takes the teachings of Jesus to everyone, not just to the Jews. He dedicates a long-suffering life to his mission of salvation for all humanity, ending with a sense of failure and an anonymous death, without glory, until long afterwards. His letters – being written documents – outlive him. Ignatieff brings Paul's relentless faith vividly and tragically to us in 15 pages of remarkable detail.
- Cicero, prominent Stoic Roman senator and orator, whose grief at the loss of his daughter makes for a more intimate story than Paul's, also gets 15 pages. His concern is with one person, not all humanity, and with his daughter's death in childbirth, failure of hope is certain. His grief is then compounded by Caesar's seizure of dictatorial power. Cicero is not present to bring his oratorical power to counter the takeover. So both his family and his secular world – the Roman republic -- are swept away (shades of Job here?). His consolation comes through redeeming himself, at least in his own eyes, by concentrating his intellect on writing a book about consolation. A Stoic, his solution is realized through embracing a masculine ethic. He loses his fear of death, and sets a permanent standard for emotionless political leadership. Maybe he was consoled.
- It appears that a great mind hard at work and producing a great book provides us with valuable wisdom, but the writing of it may not provide consolation for the author. And a great mind (Cicero, Dante), supplemented by an imaginary female guide, gives imaginative writing help, but not consolation. Dante, with Beatrice, goes beyond words, to faith. Are these mythic guides latter-day images

of gods? In any event, imaginary friends are probably not going to do the job of consoling us.

- El Greco takes us from words to a story built into a painting, with colours and shapes transcending time and place to depict one individual's ascent to paradise. I feel a heightened sense of mystery here, but then we return to wise words.

The historical context is shifting from faith to doubt, from varieties of Christianity, to societal ideals.

- Montaigne finally declines the intellectual life in favour of the sensate life.
- David Hume declines the intellectual guidance of others in favour pursuing his own intellectual path, with friends.
- Condorcet endures the brutally excessive purges of the revolution, with his faith in an innate force of human progress via human reason, literally the enlightenment [presages Teilhard de Chardin].
- Karl Marx was a relentless critic of a welter of mistaken claims, on both the political right and left. He was a husband and a revolutionary, engaging both in a lifelong partnership with Jenny and a utopian ideal of communistic democracy. His ideal was taken in brutal directions by Lenin and Stalin. But I suggest that Marx was closer to the Apostle Paul, in having faith in a means to a better life for all humanity – “a community of brothers and sisters”. Like Paul, Marx never saw his movement succeed. [Perhaps we may ascribe spirituality, as we use the word currently in Meeting, to Marx? Condorcet? Lincoln? Just a thought...]
- Abraham Lincoln, at his second inaugural, finds his faith shaken by the carnage of war. He finds a way to claim a belief that both sides in the civil war can have God on their side, if it is God's punishment for all slavery -- a solution that allows healing of a bitterly divided nation. His attempt at consolation speaks to us today, in our atmosphere of hostile populism.
- Gustav Mahler inherited from romantic music the hope that beautiful music could provide the consolation over which religion had claimed exclusive rights. He matched words to music and created great art, directed to our feelings of loss and grief.

- Max Weber dismissed the notion that a person’s “calling” was from God. Religion gave us a false promise. It was up to each individual to determine his own calling and to pursue it with humility and determination. This defined the meaningful life and gave us reason to hope. His message galvanized the young German students, recovering from the defeat of their country in WW1, and carried outwardly to the rest of the world. Building on David Hume’s mandate to find his own path, Weber saw it as the necessary means to a secular world solution -- more than his personal solution.

- Anna Akhmatova, Primo Levi, and Miklos Radnoti, “The Consolation of Witness.” When people are faced with their powerlessness in terrible situations, they may only be able to tell us their feelings, in poems or prose, or speeches. The most they can possibly do is to tell their truth, in hope that their suffering will not be ignored or forgotten. We have failed them.

- Albert Camus. Tubercular and isolated in a village in German-occupied France, with his wife working as a teacher in Algeria, he is faced with being a stranger in a plague of Naziism. If god is a delusion and humanity is so poor that it has a proclivity for brutality, what can console us? Friends, love, and the experience of being simply alive. And for Camus, joining the resistance in the face of defeat. But in choosing his own path, he went further, in refusing to judge others who did not resist. We must care for each other, whatever their convictions, like the health workers in our covid circumstances.

- Vaclav Havel, we all make history, but not necessarily as we intend. His choice of a path is to “live in truth” - to feel responsible, not just for himself, but for all humanity. He realizes this in a burst of feeling for the confusion of a TV weather announcer who learns, while on air, that her communist regime has collapsed. She doesn’t know what to do or say – she is stunned by her predicament. He feels somehow responsible for her bafflement.

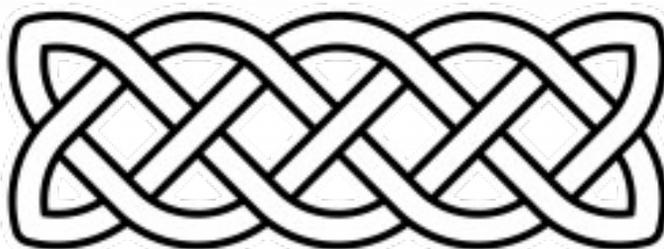
1. Michael Ignatieff begins the final chapter with the deaths of his parents, both of whom were in hospital, where their passing was regarded as medical failure. He describes the hospice-aided alternative as far kinder, “a secular practice of consolation.” The dying person may be told the truth, provided with pain

control, be listened to, say their goodbyes, and have their affairs in order. These, taken as a whole, allow some sense of consolation. The lead in providing these changes. Cicely Saunders (and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross) brought forward the goal of dying with acceptance and the presence of family and friends. The epilogue is lovely, personal, friendly. I will not try to say more.

As these chapters span the centuries – we can see that fervent belief in a heaven with eternal reunion with past loved ones was challenged. Gradually, reluctantly, many people felt diminishing confidence in the existence of heaven.

The alternative to a heavenly future is not to try to live vicariously in the stories of past lives; they were people who had their own life situations and were trying to live their own truth. Their stories may help us to seek and recognize the truth of our own lives, with all their failures and their successes, and to continue to live with hope. Whether it is with wise words, or art, or sheer pleasure in the awareness of having been alive, we can try to hallow our diminishments. And, if paradise is not to be had, we can seek spiritual solace in our retrospective sense of unity with myriad others in having attempted “a life (sometimes) well-lived”, friends, and a gentle, perhaps even a loving exit. It’s a far cry from the promised land, but maybe its all we’ve got. And, truth be known, it’s quite a lot. So we have to keep going, and hoping.

Ignatieff is a very intelligent, very well-informed person. It is only fair that I sometimes felt overwhelmed by his erudite, compactly written wisdom. I am aware that it’s my age showing, leaving me poorly able to retain what I read. I did not have this problem with three of his other books, but I was younger. He is 74, was recently president of Central European University, in Budapest 2016-2021, and has written ten books. Consolation now looms large. Maybe his old-age sense of urgency prompts this dense prose. It is excellent.



Anguish and Hope: A Journey with Allie

by Pete Cross

Many Friends have seen my granddaughter Allie participate with me in Meeting for Worship. She is always greeted warmly and I believe Friends are very happy to see her participate. Some know of the tragedy that befell her. Others do not. Allie had a terrible fall on November 10, 2009. I wrote several pieces about that event. One while I was sitting in the hospital starting November 10, 2009. Another the following January and a third included with an annual report I distributed in 2015. Allie and I had intended to participate in the carol sing this past Christmas. It occurred to me that some who recognized Allie might have been surprised to encounter her disabilities.

Extracts from what I wrote starting the day she entered hospital

She was just here. What happened to her? Where is she? Somewhere between here and there – in a coma. My precious brown jewel – eyes dancing when we play, stretched out when we ask how much we love her, knowing I’m going to tickle her.

And now I can’t touch her -- can’t stimulate the mind. I can’t pick her up to comfort her – can’t tell her to rub the part that hurts to help the pain go away. I cry – my body breaks down and shudders convulsively. I lose my upper body strength and almost fall off my chair. I want to sing with her as we frequently did. Dance with her as she laughs while I sing “I’m gonna dance with a dolly with a hole in her stocking and her knees keep a-knocking and her toes keep a-rocking”. I guess I need to change “gonna” to “wanna”. I hear a baby cry and wish it were her.

A little brown baby with Allie’s type of unruly hair was rolled by on a gurney. Why can’t that be her?

There she lies – motionless. Eyelids don’t flicker. She is deliberately paralyzed with muscle relaxants. Tubes coming from everywhere.

A Grandfather's Anguish (written about January 3, 2010)

On November 10, 2009 our lives were changed in a matter of seconds. Our precious 2 year old granddaughter flung herself out of her father's arms in a fit of temper, and hit her head on a marble countertop as she fell to the floor. She immediately had a stroke on the other side of the brain from the trauma. Allie was airlifted from Thorold to Sick Kids in Toronto, operated on by a team of 3 or 4 surgeons for 4 hours, had a flap of skull (bone flap) removed so as to permit the brain to swell without damaging the brain stem and remained in a coma. Our lives were turned upside down.

We spent 18 days living in the hospital; supporting our daughter and Allie however we could. We understood she might not survive or she might live as a vegetable. The pain was incredible. A child isn't supposed to go before its parents, much less its grandparents. One's parents are easier. They are supposed to go first. We were constantly in tears. Two months later we still break down occasionally. (*Note, still do 12 years later*).

At one point doctors called a meeting to tell us we should start thinking about organ donation. After it became apparent she would survive, we were told we shouldn't expect her to walk. She might not talk, she might eat through a tube.

About 3 1/2 weeks ago, Allie began to respond to us. She responded to a request to stick out her tongue and another request to blow at her aunt. A friend who taught kids with Allie's symptoms (some of you will know Ginny Walsh) visited her and by the end of the visit Allie was saying some words and singing da da da in time with the songs she recognized.

Allie and I have always enjoyed singing together. I would start a song she knew and she would carry on until she needed to be prompted again. While she was in the coma, and ever since, I sang to her. And that was one of the first things we did after she was visited by our friend. She has learned words from some of the new songs I sang to her when I didn't know if she could hear me.

Allie has little control of the left side of her body (controlled by the part of the brain injured in her fall) but is gaining mobility on her right side (the side of the brain that was damaged by the stroke). A couple of times they have tried to get Allie on her feet, aided by a walking device. She clearly is frightened. It takes a huge amount of effort and she becomes irritable, however that is the price to be paid to try to recover, I suppose.

We were told it wouldn't be unusual for her to have a personality change, as is common with stroke victims. It seems that hasn't happened. She is still the happy little girl with the sweet, slightly shy smile.

We have learned so much during this episode. Everyone in critical care at Sick Kids is dealing with a child in a terrible state. Words of support and kindness from someone who has been there a long time were very encouraging. A mother of a 17 year old who has been in and out of Sick Kids since he was 3 and who has accepted their lot in life gives us courage. She loves her son probably more than most parents love their children, even though there is severe brain damage. People who are in the wards for longer periods of time try to support each other. We hope we were able to do the same. Words of encouragement to a mother whose daughter had been hit by a car (she went home on Sunday), another 11 year old boy who was hit by a car and dragged 80 feet with similar sorts of damage to Allie's except that he had skin scraped off various parts of his body. We told them of the terrific care our granddaughter had received, how the hospital is reputed to be amongst the five best in the world for the treatment of children.

The support we have received from family and friends is incredible. Prayers have been said for us by Muslims, Hindus, Jews, Chinese (perhaps Buddhists), and of course, Christians. In my mind they all count, and have been a great support to help Isabel and me get through this tragedy. It helps dry the tears of a grandfather who continues to suffer for his granddaughter.

There is a sign in Sick Kids that said "If we had a dollar for every time someone in this hospital asked "Why my kid?" we would need to do no fundraising". There is no answer. In light of all the other sorrow in this world, I guess the answer might be "Why not?"

August 13, 2010

I wrote those comments soon after Allie had moved from Sick Kids to Bloorview Rehabilitation Centre (on December 23). Shortly before she left Sick Kids, she was visited by one of the doctors who had been responsible for her immediately after her accident. He left her room in tears after she was able to say “Thank-you doctor” and he told us it made his Christmas.

Allie spent slightly less than 4 months in the rehabilitation centre. She made remarkable progress and at one stage her mental capabilities were evaluated as being at a 4 year old level. By then she was approaching 3 1/2.

She laughs constantly and sings almost as constantly. No longer is she shy. She is able to stand as long as someone balances her. She can walk if she is balanced. There continues to be left side weakness/paralysis but we are hopeful that she will some day be able to cavort with her friends. Her left hand lacks fine movement but she is able to direct it to where she wants it. For a while she could put her hand in a bowl of candies and clutch and hope to come away with something. She now has better control of her fingers and is able to direct her hand towards a specific candy and has some chance of picking it up.

We are told she must learn to crawl before she will be able to walk. She can pull herself across a floor but hasn't realized how to get her feet to help her. She can support herself on her hands and knees but collapses when she tries to move. Since her right leg is unaffected, we think it is just a matter of time until she learns how to use it to help her. Hopefully the left leg will start to make a contribution as well.

I learned of Allie's accident when I was called out of a training session for an emergency phone call. Isabel was en route to the hospital, obviously in an emotional state and unable to talk except to say Allie was being air lifted to Sick Kids and that I needed to get there right away. My course was 20 minutes from Sick Kids so I arrived before she did. I was in a fog. The entrance to Sick Kids seems like it should be off University Avenue. There actually is an entrance there but it is small and involves numerous turns. I arrived at a public area

which provided access to computers and other information. Not knowing where to go, I stopped and asked the young lady at the reception desk how to get to the emergency. Before I knew it I was sobbing uncontrollably. She dropped what she was doing, walked with me to critical care and looked after me as if I were the only person in the hospital.

The entire hospital staff were the same. One therapist drives from London to work there. The people who work there do so because they love kids and want to make a difference. I have been in hospitals where you get the impression, (and I'm not being critical because I think it is human nature), that hospital staff work there because it is a job and perhaps one they are trained for, but they have gotten hardened to the feelings and needs of people who are being treated. Not so at Sick Kids.

Looking back, we consider ourselves and our granddaughter to have been very fortunate to have come as far as she has. Looking forward we still feel the pain of not knowing if she will ever run and play with her school mates. And it still hurts, and we still weep from time to time.

Update -- 2022

Above, I said we hoped that Allie would be able to cavort with her friends. She can't! She still hobbles considerably. But the kids all seem to like her. At school events, many come up to greet her. I have always anticipated that some day another kid would treat her badly but that has never happened. Allie has some learning disability. Her best friend is her *abuelo* (grandpa in Spanish)

At one school event, an Indigenous group was doing a dance demonstration. At the end, they invited students to participate. Allie immediately joined the group, and in fact won the prize. We know it was a sympathy award but the entire audience agreed.

Sometime within the last 18 months, Allie was featured in the magazine Brain Injury Association of Ontario as the face of brain injury recovery. Allie asks for very little. She is happy with her life and her two younger brothers.

A Remembrance of Thich Nhat Hahn

by Judith Murray

I want to share with you the day I interviewed Thich Nhat Hahn in Hartland 4 Corners, Vermont, near the Vermont – New Hampshire border, for the CBC Radio program, Tapestry. I drove to Vermont (from Toronto) via Montreal, where I picked up my 28 year old son, Gregory Walle, to help with equipment and driving.

In mid October, 1999, Thich Nhat Hahn was living and working from a large old brick house on a hillside in the Vermont countryside. There was also a house for novice Buddhist nuns, and another for young monks.

Arriving the morning of the interview, I waited while Thich Nhat Hahn's right hand person, Sister True Emptiness, met with local tree specialists. She was instructing them in how to prepare the fruit trees for winter; she asked that not a worm be harmed.

She greeted me and we spoke for fifteen minutes. As you may know, she spent most of her life at the side of Thich Nhat Hahn, facilitating his appointments and travels.

Thich Nhat Hahn was in his upstairs office, a large former bedroom, with windows overlooking the fields and hills. He was working on a book manuscript. He was seated on the floor, he turned to me with a large low table between us.

He was level, reserved, kind, observant and welcoming. We did a few sound tests and began. He wanted to speak mainly about a theme he had spoken of many times, the "hungry ghosts" roaming the streets in today's society.

The physical interview was awkward in that I was extending my arm with microphone across the surface of the broad table. The recording part went well, sound levels were fine. What was not fine was that his English, while fluent, was heavily accented. We continued the interview; he spoke to me for about 45 minutes. After the interview he stood, bowed, and invited me, with Gregory, to stay for lunch before departing.

He asked one of the novice monks to show us around the grounds. It was a very pretty Vermont setting, woods, fields, rolling hills – lovely.

Then we joined young nuns and monks and other civilian guests in the kitchen, preparing lunch. Vegetable washing and chopping. Rice cooking. Happy chatting. When the phone rang everyone froze in place, silently. After three rings, someone answered the phone and people began interacting again. One of the nuns told me that Thay asked everyone to pause for three phone rings when the phone rang, as a reminder to return to themselves.

I moved into the room designated for meals... It was a long rectangle, with large windows on two sides.

I was caught up looking out at the hills and the sky. I sensed someone else, and I turned to my left and there was Thich Nhat Hahn, observing me closely. I had not seen him when I walked in the room, he was *contre jour* in the natural lighting. Behind him was a very tall Buddha. I was not startled. He bowed to me, I bowed to him. He silently bade me sit. I did. When everyone filled the room Thay asked all gathered to not speak during lunch. Instead, he asked us to envisage the life cycle of each vegetable we were eating. I felt the carrot seed being planted and nourished, I felt rain fall, felt the sun, felt breezes and then wind. At the end of the meal he greeted each person. He walked towards me and Gregory and said he would walk us out to our car.

He walked with us, smiling, chatting. As we were getting in the car he looked directly at Gregory and said, “Please be present every moment when you drive today. Pay very special attention.” He said farewell, smiled, and watched and waved as we drove off.

We were going back to Montreal via a two lane Vermont highway that led us to a small town called Island Pond, in north-eastern Vermont. By then it was late afternoon and the skies had turned dark grey. Suddenly, a female moose emerged from a wood and crossed the road in front of us. Gregory pulled over to the side of the road and stopped. I got out and quietly watched as the young female moose descended into a bog and traversed it.

Gregory had to turn the car around (we were in sparsely populated country) and chose to enter a half circle drive way to make his turn round to pick me up. An inebriated man with a rifle came screaming out of his house, shouting, “You goddamn Canadians, get the hell off my property, what do you think you are doing...” Gregory apologized, said he was just turning around, and the man screamed louder, pointing his rifle at Gregory. Close up.

As I watched, Gregory bowed his head. He lowered his head and did not respond or move. Finally, this drunk man gestured with his rifle that he should “Get the hell off my property.” Gregory did just that. Picked me up.

I have always thought that the quiet steady influence and intent of Thich Nhat Hahn saved Gregory’s life that day. We learned from friends in Island Pond that this man was a well known menace, but the incident still shocked our Vermont friend, Janet McKenzie.

I have read, heard since of other people who had the blessing of a long intentioned gaze from Thich Nhat Hahn. A little girl in an audience, who has remembered it all her life. I had never felt anything like that strong quiet piercing gaze... Who is this? Why is she here? The smile that followed this examination was heart illuminating.



About this Newsletter / Submission Guidelines

This Newsletter is a monthly publication of news and announcements relevant to Hamilton Quakers.

It is also a venue for members and attenders to share creative works or articles they have written on subjects that may be of interest to our Quaker community. As a general guideline we are looking for submissions that are inspirational and related to Quaker concerns, as well as announcements and news. Members and Attenders are encouraged to submit works for the newsletter.

Requests for newsletter items are announced after Meeting for Worship and/or via email during the week before Meeting for Worship for Business. Submission of materials implies permission to publish. Copyright for original material resides with the author.

If the person submitting the article is unknown to the editor or if there are questions as to whether the article will be appropriate for the Quaker newsletter, the editor will consult with the clerk(s) who will together discern what will be included. Written permission to publish must be obtained from the copyright holder if a submission is not the original work of the submitter, unless the works are in the public domain, or are covered under the creative commons license.

Hamilton Meeting reserves the right to edit submissions for length or content in consultation with the authors. When opinion pieces are included a line will be added indicating "Submissions reflect the opinions of their authors, and not necessarily of Hamilton Monthly Meeting".

Submissions should be directed to the current editor, Síân Reid, daywitch@gmail.com.