

Experience of the Spirit in my life

by Anne-Marie Zilliacus

The library at King s-Edgehill is a lovely old building, all wood panelling, elegant and light. Twin metal spiral staircases frame a small dais at one end of the room and at the other a wooden staircase leads upstairs to a fortepiano that dates from the 1800s. We sat in our circle in the main room, waiting expectantly for the Spirit to move, for Friends to share with us how their lives had been touched this year. It is a wonderful way to begin the week at Yearly Meeting.

Caroline Parry rose and told us of a series of events that taught her about loss. The first of her losses occurred while she was in England last Christmas. Inadvertently she left a suitcase on a bus, and I cried.

Then in March, Caroline attended a workshop on hallowing diminshments at Friends House in Toronto, but she also had a dance workshop to go to. Not wanting to have to carry anything at the dance workshop she wrapped her wallet up and left it in a hiding place at Friends House. On her return it was gone. Was the universe trying to tell her something about being over booked?

May came, and she was teaching a course at a senior citizens home on writing in faith. The second week of the course Caroline hurt her back while gardening. That evening, weighed down as usual with a number of books and photocopies as well as her dulcimer, Caroline prepared to catch the bus. She asked a young woman to mind her things while she bought tickets. When Caroline returned with the tickets, everything was gone. She called the police but she still had to teach the class. She prayed that her things would at least be of some use to the young woman and felt that all she could do was trust that the best outcome would happen. At the break Caroline phoned her answering machine and a voice told her that her things had been turned in. Three losses, escalating in sacredness,

showed Caroline that you can lose anything and keep your centre.

Fifty years ago, Jane Zavitz-Bond told us, I went to meeting with a little girl, and she was fussy and I took her out. After meeting a dear Friend said Oh Jane, don t take the baby out, we like having the children. Today that meeting is half children. Some of them belong to me. I think they all belong to all of us.

At that moment ten month old Shan Li crawled across the centre of the circle towards Hazel Gifford, same age.

The children need us, continued Jane. We welcomed children into our Meeting. It s more important to do this than anything, for them to feel that love and care from all of us mean they ll have a sense of love and security which will help them through their lives. It will be the difference to many of them. Both babies looked up at Jane. I certainly didn t expect this, she said.

Hanna Newcombe rose to tell us of a little boy she had seen on a bus, who kept running down the aisle from his mother. Adam, come back called his mother, but he kept going to a woman on the bus who laughed and said to the mother, You see, my name is Eve.

Spirit in my life, Lyn Adamson told us, has been to make space in my life. As my children became teenagers I ve made space in my life for peace work. Lyn went to the Hague Appeal for Peace as the representative for Peace Brigades and this led her to a new project in East Timor. During her involvement with this work she first cut her work time from five to four days a week in order to focus on the UN Decade for Children. Then she decided to take a two day a week job with the Peace Brigades Indonesia project, having faith that she will have resources enough to put into the UN decade, and to focus on opportunities for youth peace workers. Lyn feels

this work is an expression of the Spirit in her life and is grateful for Friends for their support.

Seek first the kingdom of life and all these things can be granted to you, John Calder said, as he told us of his amazement that at this stage of his life there is so much to learn. New Brunswick Monthly Meeting has been enriched through its links with Native Elders, links that are precious to John.

John told us of a night when he had been weeding the garden and praying for a sick friend, a Native woman. He saw a beautiful eagle on the shore and later that night found an eagle feather which he thought he would take to his friend, but he was a bit shy about doing so. That night John was going to a conference and his friend lived nearby. On the way he saw a moose on the side of the road, eating grass, and stopped to watch. This pause gave him the chance to think, I ll take the feather. I ll take the feather. John told us that he found the whole experience humbling because he realized that God speaks to each of us in the language of our own hearts.

Sixteen years ago, Alison Lohans told us, my husband lay dying. There was a night when he was oxygen deprived, not expecting to live the night. A friend came to visit, bringing coffee, muffins, and a numinous presence. Her husband came around that night and lived another seven months, a time of good, close conversations and healing, a time to be treasured.

Young Friend Reykia Fick rose to tell us of her experience as Clerk of Young Friends Gathering at Friends General Conference this past summer. After a year of working on Sundays, unable to attend Meeting for Worship, she arrived at the gathering feeling ungrounded, unsure of her role even though she had attended a clerking course at Pendle Hill. The Clerks realised that people had been encouraged not to speak at Meeting for

Business to save time! Reykia was led to minister on the importance of business meeting and how the spirit moves so that the best decision may be reached. For the rest of that meeting she felt a deep centredness and gratitude.

Some 67 years ago, said Ed Abbott, I started down the road that eventually brought me to the Religious Society of Friends. My father was a country pastor and I aspired to follow in his footsteps. While at school Ed came across an article in *The Canadian Churchman*, by an English pacifist, and realized that if he took the teachings of Jesus seriously he could be nothing but a pacifist. When the war came he could not identify with the military, even in his field of medicine, so registered for alternative military service. In northern Alberta he met Isabel Showler's brother and heard of the Wider Quaker Fellowship. It was through them that Ed joined the Friends Ambulance Unit and how he found his spiritual home among Friends.

Katie Vaux's neighbour, whose father had just died, asked Katie how she would explain spiritual maturity.

It is to leave your ego at the door in worship, Katie told her, leaving you open to experience the will of God. Katie felt this because of an experience at a Quaker wedding a few weeks earlier, where she knew no one, including the wedding couple, but had felt called to speak. In spite of her resistance, she found she had to put aside her own needs, her ego, her feelings and say that Love is the alpha and the omega. Love is our task in this life. And she was called to share this with us tonight.

At King's-Edgehill in 1998 way opened for Keith and Ellen Helmuth to find housing and jobs in Philadelphia. Ellen told us how thankful she is for those blessings because she knows that good fortune doesn't always last, and it was only months later that their beautiful farm was burnt down, probably through arson, opening Ellen to doubts about evil. She could not hear people say Everything happens for a reason, because she felt that was

blaming the victim. In time Ellen has been able to reflect on evil, on the ocean of darkness, and to remember a friend, whose son died in a logging accident, who told her that there are some things in life we will never understand. She also remembered Muriel Bishop Summers' words at a panel at FGC last year. Muriel said that we need to name evil. There is so much in the world and Quakers are not good at talking of it.

I've tried to remain very humble in my approach to ministry, said Kathleen Hertzberg, and, as Douglas Steere said, mind the call, that is all. And as I look back at my own life I see that the call has been there and that I've responded with humility before the Lord, and the sense of the dialogic relation with God. Everything has to be related to the presence of God. I pray that this may be our prayer and experience, that God speaks to us in our innermost lives. Who is this God that whispers songs in our mind without making claim for it? This is our greatest call, that we answer that call in our innermost being.

I came to Friends about 26 years ago, Ruah Swennerfelt told us, young, lost, a single parent with three young children. That first Christmas, we went to Meeting. The children began to giggle. I was so embarrassed. I told them quietly to go outside and get the giggles out. And they did, and there was a burst of laughter outside. They came back, bumped their heads, began to giggle again and Ruah was mortified until an older woman stood and said how wonderful it is to hear laughter in the Meeting. Then Ruah felt loved, embraced, and at home.

Grace Wolf told us of a fellow, an alcoholic, who hangs out at the garbage near her work, collecting recycling. Over twenty years her colleagues have grown used to him and he, in his gentle way, cares for them. One day a colleague lost a knapsack, and Eddie found it, with its contents scattered all over. He gathered everything together and returned it to Katie who felt honoured

that he had entrusted it to her, that they had become friends through this.

I've been struck by the idea of listening, a woman rose and said, and have been pondering it as a concern in my life. She told us of an experience in a workshop a few years back, with an exercise called the door, which is an exercise in listening. There are three roles, one who goes out, one who is an open door, the rest are closed. When the person re-enters they must discern who is the open door and through this process gains a new insight into listening, using all senses.

Another woman rose and said, I'd like everyone to open the doors of this Yearly Meeting to the other creatures who have much to teach us. We have much power that we are using for destruction. Bit by bit we're losing them all. I'd like us to invite them in to share with us before it all goes. With this invitation, Yearly Meeting began.

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