

IRON HORSE

BY SARAH CHANDLER

I was standing on a street corner in downtown Kamloops one afternoon, waiting for the pedestrian traffic light to change, when I noticed an elderly “street person” negotiating his way up the sidewalk toward the corner. As I watched him approach, it was clear that his functioning was inhibited by some kind of substance abuse.

When he reached the corner, he looked at me, saying, “D’ja wanna walk with me?” After a moment’s discernment I replied, “Sure. But first we’d better wait for the light to change.” We waited together, then proceeded to cross the intersection. When we reached the other side, he again looked at me, and said, “No one’s ever said ‘yes’ before.”

Stunned, I said, “That’s terrible.”

“Awww, I’m just an old junkie,” he replied.

“I’m sure that’s not all you are.”

“What do you mean?”

“You’re probably somebody’s father.” Nods.

“You’re probably somebody’s brother.” Nods.

“You’ve probably been somebody’s husband.” Nods again.

“You’re probably Secwepemc.”¹

Startled, he looks at me more closely: “Who are you?! Are you a missionary?”

“No, my name is Sarah. I live in Lillooet. I am a Quaker, but I’m not a missionary.”

“Well, my name’s Iron Horse, and I live under a bridge. So whaddya think about that?”

“That depends. Is this where you want to live? Do you feel safe there? Are you warm enough there?”

“Come on,” says Iron Horse to me, “I wanna buy you a cup of coffee!”

At first I’m stunned at this surprising turn of events. Then, I’m saddened that I cannot accept his offer. I have to leave for home now, because I have an evening commitment there. I tell him so.

“Come on,” he says, “I wanna show you where I live.” Again I explain, “I can’t come with you now. I have to be back in Lillooet by six. But I’ll look for you the

next time I come to Kamloops and we can have coffee then.”

Iron Horse agrees, and we assure each other that we’ve enjoyed this conversation.

When I reach home I place a telephone call to Stephanie Hyde, of Vernon MM, who works as a street nurse in Kamloops.

“Hi Steph, it’s Sarah. Do you know a man named Iron Horse?”

“Yes I do.”

“Do you know that he’s living under a bridge?”

“Again?”

“Yes, that’s what he said.”

“OK, I’ll go check on him ... it’s getting to be cold at night.”

“Thanks, Stephanie.”

“No problem.”

Fast-forward two years.

I’m at home in Lillooet, and we’re beginning an Alternatives to Violence Project Basic Workshop. Two participants have signed up. They live in Chase and learned about AVP from a non-violence workshop that some of our Lillooet AVP team had facilitated for the Sun Peaks Defenders a few months earlier.

A friend of mine has agreed to billet the two participants from Chase, but she’s away from home until late. The men are uncomfortable staying there without her, so I bring them home to stay with us. One of these participants is an elder who seems to know street life in the region very well.

As we’re making up his bed, I ask him if he’s ever come across a man named “Iron Horse.” He turns. Giving me a long, penetrating look, he says, “I’m Iron Horse.”

Ah. “No wonder you remind me of him,” I say.

“Where did we meet?” he asks. I tell him the story.

“I don’t remember. Jeez ... I hope I wasn’t rude! I can be really rude.”

“No, you weren’t rude. You even offered to buy me a

cup of coffee. I was surprised by that, because when we first began to talk, I thought you were impaired.” “I probably was, but you can straighten up real fast with somebody who’s genuine. I must’ve thought you were genuine.”

“Do you know a woman named Stephanie, who’s a nurse in Kamloops?”

“Do I! She’s an angel. She’s saved my life more than once. She’s even let me sleep on the floor of her office when I didn’t have anyplace else to go.”

“I’m glad.”

When I last saw Iron Horse, he was clean, straight, sober, and living with a new partner in a house they shared together. It is a struggle to stay clean. His friends all want to come stay with him,

too, now that he has a roof over his head. He knows how hard it is to stay clean, however, and he says, “If I want to see them, I know where to find them.” He was a gift to our workshop.

What if I’d said, “No?” I remain grateful to the Spirit that led me to acknowledge Iron Horse as we stood together on that Kamloops street corner. He has become one of my teachers. *

Note:¹ Iron Horse is a member of the Secwepemc (Shuswap) Nation whose traditional territory extends from Williams Lake to Merritt to Revelstoke, BC. A map of the territory can be found at: <<http://collections.ic.gc.ca/secwepemc/map.html>>.

Sarah Chandler is a member of Vernon Monthly Meeting.

Sunday Morning in Meeting for Worship By Rosemary McGruther

The term “Meeting for Worship” suddenly bothers me. Why worship? I don’t worship anything in Meeting for Worship. How could I? Worship is such a distasteful word. I associate it with the scruffy apprentice tugging his forelock and saying, “yes, your worship.” And with gods who need their egos bolstered by having someone say, “Yes, you’re the greatest. Have mercy on me, this miserable sinner.” Is the problem just that I don’t see God as a man with a white beard sitting on a throne (frowning)?

I amuse myself by inventing new names for Meeting for Worship:

Sometimes I begin meeting by giving thanks for the events of my life and the beings and people around me, so — Meeting for Gratitude?

I appreciate the birds, squirrels, trees, and mountains I see out the windows, maybe — Meeting for Appreciation?

I send love to distant people and world trouble spots. God is love. Love in everything, how about -- Meeting for Love?

**Meeting for Gratitude.
Meeting for Celebration.
Meeting for Praise.
Meeting for Joy.
Meeting for Oneness.
Meeting for Worship.**

And, in a gathered Meeting, I feel at one with everything, perhaps (giggle) — Meeting for Communing in Bliss?

Sinking deeper into the silence ... a memory surfaces ... Garrett, my son, as a newborn child. An

amazing miracle with fingers and toes, cries and gurgles. Born from me, still nearly one with me. Christmas carols playing on the radio, every one singing of the amazing miracle of Garrett/God come down to earth. I am awed and grateful and in love.

The light dawns – I worshiped Garrett! So real worship must be a synthesis of bonding, gratitude, love, awe, oneness.

Meeting for Gratitude. Meeting for Celebration. Meeting for Joy. Meeting for Praise. Meeting for Oneness. Meeting for Worship. *

Rosemary McGruther is a member of Argenta Monthly Meeting, currently living in England, and attending meeting in Broad Campden in the oldest Meeting House in England (1663 - possibly this is the oldest meeting house still in use as a meeting house?).