

Book Reviews...Book Reviews...Book Reviews

The Promise of Spring

Jack Ross

(Available from Jack Ross, General Delivery, Argenta BC V0G 1B0, for \$15, plus \$2 shipping)

Reviewed by Bert Horwood

Jack Ross's latest book is a delightful collection of personal stories and poetry. Some poems stand alone and others, in particular "Listen," have stanzas inserted between stories. This technique gives both the poem and the preceding story extra impact. Jack has avoided making the collection merely a set of personal reminiscences. Each story illustrates some aspect of a human's pilgrimage, however halting, toward non-violent activism.

The stories range from Jack's childhood, through his experiences in the Pacific theatre of World War II, social work in Chicago and with AFSC, to his most recent actions for peace. They are short, readable, and pointed. They are organized by theme rather than chronologically and this adds to their interest. Some of the stories are scary, depressing and painful. Others are warm and funny. The best of them illustrate the clown's art, namely to make us laugh and cry simultaneously at a deep truth about the human condition. Jack uses comedy as a loving device to wring our hearts at the usages of injustice and violence.

Another device Jack uses is the occasional punch line to a story placed in boldface type. This works rather like the moral of an Aesop fable. Two of my favourites are "Refusing cooperation with stupidi-

ty of authority is sometimes the only method available to the powerless," and "My criterion for a successful project is that after it is over you can invite the other guys to a potluck supper and they would come."

In keeping with ancient Quaker tradition, Jack has self-published this book and given Friends everywhere the testimony of a life and faith lived to the full. He has also given the benefit of his instructive experience as a relentlessly active worker for peace and justice. The design of the book is simple, and the editing somewhat rough, though it radiates the hope implicit in the title and the beautiful cover. I can't think of a finer gift that Jack has given to all those who are moved in the spirit to seek peace and justice. ☞

Bert Horwood is a member of Thousand Islands Monthly Meeting.

The Human Right to Peace

Douglas Roche

Ottawa: Novalis, 2003

Reviewed by Anthony H. Richmond

Douglas Roche has been Canada's Ambassador for Disarmament and Chair of the United Nations Disarmament Committee. In this book he reviews the efforts that have been made, since the end of World War II, to remove a culture of war and to obtain recognition of the human right to peace. Resolutions have been passed by the U.N. General Assembly outlining a programme of action for a "culture of peace." Other international

agencies, such as the U.N. Human Rights Commission and UNESCO, have all gone on record declaring the "human right to peace." The author examines the reasons why these hopes and aspirations have failed to eradicate the "culture of war." He notes that war is profitable for some, notably the multinational corporations that make up the "military industrial complex." He recognizes that, through the entertainment media, we have become conditioned to violence. At the same time he rejects the view that there are inherent biological or psychological causes of violence.

Douglas Roche examines the role of religion in promoting peace, and emphasises the shared concerns for peace and reconciliation that are common to all major religions. He places emphasis on the need for education, and for an active role by non-governmental organisations and the emerging global civil society, to bring pressure on governments and the private sector to eliminate poverty, promote sustainable development, and end the arms race.

The book includes many useful references to other sources of information concerning the right to peace, including a list of websites. Although the Quaker "Peace Testimony" is not mentioned, Friends will find the book a valuable resource, and an encouragement to those who "speak truth to power." ☞

Anthony H. Richmond is a member of Yonge Street Monthly Meeting.

Book Reviews...Book Reviews...Book Reviews

Abolishing War: One Man's Attempt
Nicholas Gillett
Sessions of York, 2005
Reviewed by Bert Horwood

After a slow start I found this a fascinating read. The book, an autobiography, is best read as though listening to an old man recount the stories from nearly a century of life dedicated to Quaker ideals. It should be read with patience for its non-sequiturs and leaps in time, just as one would listen patiently to elderly reminiscences. In them there is a gold mine of exemplary service, wry acknowledgment of failure, modest acceptance of success, good humour, and above all shining hope for betterment of the human condition.

Nicholas Gillett, a son of an old Quaker family, rubbed shoulders with great and humble persons alike. He learned from them all. Dedicated to education, particularly to training teachers for work in community schooling, his main work was with UNESCO. His stories of success and frustration are a telling summary of both the hope and the failures of the United Nations through the latter half of the last century. My own career as an experiential educator paralleled his, although much less adventurously. I found each page ringing with the truth of educational promise which failed in the delivery and was unable to overcome inexplicable resistance.

Later Nicholas Gillett worked with the Rowntree Trust and with other aspects of the United Nations Organization. His observations on

the use of funds and the internal dynamics of international peace work are relevant and candid. In the book he uses Shakespeare's words to describe another person, "... they make their exits and in his time one man plays many parts ..." This book is the story of such a man. ☞

Transcending Trauma
Ruth Morris, with Ruth Bradley-St. Cyr
Winding Trail Press, 2004
(Available at Quaker Book Service, \$29.95, plus shipping)
Reviewed by Sheila Brown

Ruth Morris shared with us some of the traumas she faced in her life, including the diagnosis of incurable cancer, and the discoveries she made while dealing with them.

The even-numbered chapters tell of her observations, which we may apply to our own lives; odd-numbered chapters detail her own experiences. She says middle-class North Americans, unlike most of the rest of the world, have a belief in life without trauma, and feel rage, blame or even defeat when trauma happens.

Chapter headings: Shock, Grief, Acceptance, Forgiveness, Healing and Reintegration indicate the path many follow, while other people become stuck at any one of these stages, and lose life's wonderful opportunities for growth and development.

The book is full of examples that demonstrate her points, and practical steps for sufferers and for their

friends and well-wishers. We should remember that people don't react to traumas in the same way or at the same speed. It is better to pass on bad news in a letter before phoning or visiting, so people can moderate their reactions.

Ruth's deep faith and wide reading fills the book with apt quotations. The poem *Be Gentle*, by the Rev. Richard S. Gilbert, moved me to read it after Meeting for Worship on Christmas morning.

This is not only a quick read, but a book to keep on hand and reread frequently. ☞

Sheila Brown is a member of Vancouver Monthly Meeting.

Checkpoints and Chances: Eyewitness Accounts from an Observer in Israel/Palestine
Katherine von Schubert
Quaker Books, 2005
Reviewed by Sheila Brown

In October 2000, Katherine von Schubert went to the West Bank for Quaker Peace and Social Witness, based in Bethlehem. Later, she stayed in Jerusalem for another organisation. With a master's degree in Arabic Studies, and further studies in Arabic-English and English-Arabic translation, she was well equipped to communicate with Palestinian people. Her studies in Hebrew, and the time she lived in Jerusalem, gave her a better understanding "of the depth of history and misunderstanding of one side by the other that makes the situation so

Book Reviews...Book Reviews...Book Reviews

complex and tragic.”

Katherine’s e-mail messages form the main text of this book. The vivid depiction of life under military occupation, with its unpredictable curfews and checkpoints (some of which were mobile), the sudden loss of home and livelihood, and the effects of the illegal security “fence” built mainly on Palestinian land — without advance notice — is horrifying.

“There can be no reconciliation without truth and without justice.” “Both peoples need safety and a home, but the security of one can never be obtained at the expense of the security of another.” Two States are at present impossible, but perhaps if the “Security Fence” were moved to the Green Line, and if West Bank settlements were given to Palestinians, while their Israeli occupants returned to Israel proper, peace and security for both nations would be possible. ↻

Sheila Brown is a member of Vancouver Monthly Meeting.

Whispers of Faith: Young Friends Share their Experiences of Quakerism

Edited by W. Geoffrey Black, P. Zion Klos, Claire Reddy, Milam Smith, and Rachel Stacy

Quakers Uniting in Publications (QUIP), 2005

(Available at Quaker Book Service, \$19.20, plus shipping)

Reviewed by Andrew Gage

The voice of Quakers is often an older voice. Not only are young

people under-represented in the Religious Society of Friends, but they are also less likely to have written about their spiritual experiences.

Anyone listening for the voices of Young Friends should pick up a copy of *Whispers*. Edited by five Young Friends, this book brings together the writings of 45 Quakers (primarily American, but with some British and African Friends included) between the ages of 12 and 19.

There is no doubt that *Whispers* is a valuable contribution to Quaker literature and an incredible accomplishment on the part of its authors and five clearly enthusiastic editors, themselves between the ages of 15 and 19. There are few, if any, other books which even attempt to record the experiences of Friends in this age group. I found myself comparing *Whispers* to *Who do we think we are?* — the 1998 Swarthmore Lecture prepared by British Young Friends — but in that case the Young Friends who wrote that (also remarkable) book were almost all between 18 and 30 years of age.

The depth and power of the contributions themselves are extremely mixed. The collection seems to take its name from its first contribution — a wonderful poem entitled “Whispers.” Its power enfolded me in the silence as I read it, and I was frankly stunned to find that its author was only 13 years old. There are other similarly articulate and powerful contributions that would be at home in any collection of Quaker writings, from Friends struggling with thoughts of suicide,

or the death and illness of loved ones, to Friends looking for the words to explain their beliefs to their classmates.

However, there are also many contributions that seem based more upon what the authors have been told about Quakerism than original “experiences.” It is perhaps unreasonable to expect a uniformly high level of insight among the authors, but contributions which sound like an excerpt from a “What I Learnt In First Day School Today” essay do little for the book as a whole, and pale next to the truly spirit-led and personal contributions.

I got the impression that the editors themselves had something of the same problem: a little too much book learning about what Quaker experience is “supposed” to look like. The book might have benefited from a little more openness to the Spirit to trust that a range of personal spirit-led sharing, even if not always obviously Quaker, might better convey the experiences of Young Friends. In one case the editors even went so far as to annotate a contribution, noting that it represented only a partial account of Quaker belief.

I also wished that the editors provided some background about how the book came to be. Who decided to write such a book? How were the contributions collected? How many were received? How were the editors selected? The development of the book itself was probably an engaging exercise in Quaker practice; however, although there is an interesting

Book Reviews...Book Reviews...Book Reviews

description of the meeting at which the editors came together to “sift through the submissions” and make their selections, we are left in the dark as to the rest of the process.

Despite my quibbles with some of the contributions and the editing, there is good and powerful stuff in this book. In addition to providing a voice to encourage Young Friends to

articulate their belief in and experiences with Quakerism, the book consciously attempts to capture the full diversity of the Quaker community, from Evangelical to Liberal, from African to North American. Those contributions containing a powerful insight or heart-felt cry from an articulate teen demonstrate that the editors have done us all a

service. Although in some ways a less consistent book, *Whispers* deserves a place on the shelf beside *Who do we think we are?* and other better-known collections of Quaker writings. ☞

Andrew Gage is a member of Vancouver Monthly Meeting.

BOX 4652 STATION E OTTAWA K1S 5H8

QUAKER BOOK SERVICE

Quaker Book Service



Mail orders, enclosing payment, may be sent to:
Quaker Book Service, Box 4652, Station E,
Ottawa, Ontario K1S 5H8.

Phone orders cannot be accepted.

For orders from Canada:

Please add the following mailing costs.

Value of an order up to \$12.50 - postage \$2.00
Orders between \$12.55 and \$20.00 - postage \$4.00
Orders between \$20.05 and \$50.00 - postage \$6.00
Orders over \$50.00 - postage \$8.00

For orders from the United States:

With payment in U.S. currency, you pay only the catalogue prices. No extra payment is necessary for the postal charges since the exchange rate difference between Canadian and U.S. currency is sufficient to cover postage costs to the United States.

For orders from outside North America:

We require an extra 20% to be added to the total cost of the order, to cover the extra mailing charges.

The following titles have been added to our stock. For a complete listing of QBS books, see our 2005-2006 Quaker Book Service Catalogue (CF: October 2005). Our Book List is also on the CYM website: < www.quaker.ca/qbs>.

Becoming Peacemakers by Meredith Egan and Marc Forget (Deep Humanity Institute, 2004). Based

on the authors' years of experience, this book is for educators, parents and students interested in changing the way conflict and violence are addressed in the school environment. It aims to foster a restorative approach to behaviour, transgressions and discipline. (117 pp; \$30.00)

Crash by Jerry Spinelli (Random

House Children's Books, 1996). This comical novel for young readers tells the story of the evolution of the relationship between Crash Coogan, a seventh-grade football sensation/bully who has been mowing down everything in his path since the time he could walk, and Penn Webb, his conscientious, vegetable-eating Quaker neighbour. (162 pp; \$7.95)