

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

The Winter Road
Terry Hokenson
Asheville, North Carolina: Front Street, 2006
Reviewed by Barbara Bucknall

This is a first novel, written for a teenage audience. Seventeen-year-old Willa, grieving for the death of her older brother and feeling that her father no longer cares for her, has problems at school that can't be counseled away.

One thing she can do is fly an airplane, and she takes her uncle's plane when her uncle is too drunk to fly it himself, to fetch her mother from an outpost in Northern Ontario. However, she crashes the plane and has to make her way through the frozen wilderness, using all her survival skills, which are described in minute detail.

It takes her three weeks to find a Native community along the winter road of the title. When she calls her father, he is so glad to learn that she is alive that it thaws the frozen emotional tension between them.

Terry Hokenson mentions early on that Willa had attended Quaker Meeting until she was fifteen but he makes so little of it that I wondered why he had mentioned it.

Then I got a clue from the heading of chapter six: "A Way Will Open." In Quaker terms, that is what the whole book is about — waiting for a way to open.

But no passive activity is involved. Rather, it is a question of making progress one step at a time. Each physical step is accompanied by an emotional step, as the memory of

the survival skills their father taught them brings her closer to her father and brother.

At the end, she is a complete survivor. ☞

Barbara Bucknall is a member of Pelham Executive Meeting.

Wrestling with our faith tradition: Collected public witness 1995-2004
Lloyd Lee Wilson
Quaker Press, 2005
Reviewed by Arnold Ranneris

In 1993, a book with the unlikely title of "Essays on the Quaker Vision of Gospel Order" was published, became a modest success, sold out, and was reprinted. Somehow it spoke to the need of Friends to have messages from a "classical Quakerism" viewpoint. Lloyd Lee Wilson is a convinced Friend in the North Carolina (Conservative) Yearly Meeting. He had dedicated himself to "public witness" among Friends from 1995–2004. Now in 2005, we receive this collection of ten addresses, five in the category of "Faith" and five in "Practice."

These essays explore three areas: a listening spirituality based on silence, the direct experience/relationship of the person with God and Christ, and membership in a worshipping community that hears and obeys the voice of God. Lloyd Lee is rooted in the spiritual practice of Bible study. I recall him during his 1982 visit to Canadian Yearly Meeting at Pickering

College with his black Testament ever present with him. This visit, incidentally, gave the title of one of his addresses: "Why Do You Still Read That Old Thing?" He explains: "I was taking a short walk one afternoon during a break in the formal sessions, my Bible under my arm as usual, when a twenty-something Canadian Friend approached me and struck up a conversation. After some preliminary greetings, she got to the point. Pointing to my Bible, she asked, 'Why do you still read that old thing when there is so much more modern material available? ... I've been answering that same question in many forms, for the fourteen years or so since that day. Tonight I can give you a progress report.'"

Some chapter titles show the broad scope of titles: A Confession of Faith, Encounter with the Taproot, Biblical Basis for Quaker Peacemaking, Gathered With One Accord, Friends' Testimonies in the Marketplace. They are conversational, yet penetrating in tone, getting to the roots and marrow of Quakerism.

Francis Bacon, in his 16th Century essay "Of Studies" on study and reading, says, "Some books are to be tasted; others are to be swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested." This book falls into the latter category. It is recommended for those who want this grounding. It makes for good personal reflection and study as a group. ☞

Arnold Ranneris is a member of Victoria Monthly Meeting, and of the CYM Faith & Practice Development Committee.

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A Very Good Week Behind Bars
Janeal Turnbull Ravndal
Pendle Hill pamphlet 380, 2005
Reviewed by June-Etta Chenard

Janeal Turnbull Ravndal, a law-abiding, 67-year-old grandmother, has written an inspiring account about spending a week in Philadelphia's Federal Detention Center, for having blocked an entry to a courthouse, protesting the U.S. invasion of Iraq, in early 2003.

Janeal's account is a demonstration of the power of positive thinking and the importance of art as inspiration. These lessons shine through her talented writing, humble honesty, and creative sense of humour.

"When the first strip search began I called on my Grandmother Turnbull, who apparently had had no shame about her sagging old body, to come along as my guardian angel."

From the beginning, she and the other women kept strong through singing. "Every morning one of our number sang a jubilant "Good morning, good morning, we're all in our places with bright shiny faces" through her cell door into our corridor. Such spirit more than made up for the absence of private toileting and clean underwear."

Creative use of scrounged materials allowed them to have art. "When the news was shouted down the hall that toothpaste works as glue, I began tearing individual letters of the alphabet from magazine ads and newspaper headlines and pasted the motto,

"GOD BLESS THE WHOLE WORLD —NO EXCEPTIONS" on the metal strip at the end of our bunk, facing anyone who looked in.

And afterward, writing, "Now the daily homework is to continue, in this more complicated world outside prison, a journey toward faith, away from fear."

I would say this is required reading for anyone contemplating civil disobedience!

Fire of the Heart: Norman Morrison's Legacy in Vietnam and at Home
Anne Morrison Welsh
Pendle Hill pamphlet 381, 2005
Reviewed by June-Etta Chenard

It was a gift to read this story, so many years later, by the wife of the man many of us in North America would never forget — the Quaker who held his child until moments before his self-immolation in the Buddhist tradition, done to protest the horrors of the Viet Nam War (called the American War in Viet Nam, we find out).

By 1965, as he sought to follow his inner guide, which he felt he dared not ignore, the U.S. violence in Vietnam had become increasingly unbearable to Norman Morrison, the devoutly radical Quaker.

Anne tells of suddenly being catapulted into living with the consequences of his decision — "caught up in a whirlwind of challenges: relating to the media, responding to letters, phone calls and visits, as well as

attending to the children's needs."

She recounts a trip to Vietnam, made with her children 34 years later, and of her forgiveness, acceptance, and gradual recovery from the wounds of his act.

"When I looked into the eyes of the Vietnamese people and saw the love they still have for Norman, I knew without doubt that something beautiful had risen from the ashes of agony and loss. Because his death, terrible as it was, was an act of love and courage, it conveyed an unspeakable beauty. Norman has become a part of the heart and history of Viet Nam, and his act has become part of the Great Mystery of life."

This pamphlet, offering many important insights into Norman's leading to give his very life for the Peace Testimony, and the resultant impact on his family, is highly recommended. ☞

Wider Visions
Photographs by Mike Hoyle;
Words from Quaker Experience
Quaker Books, 2005
Reviewed by June-Etta Chenard

The beauty of ordinary life itself, captured in Mike Hoyle's photos, is an exciting complement to excerpts from Britain Yearly Meeting's *Quaker faith and practice*.

No air-brushed, plastic-looking models are presented here; rather, we are treated to everyday people in scenes of everyday life, albeit often from a creative and unorthodox viewpoint.

Wider visions, indeed. Page after page of often strange, at times, disturbing; always, beautiful, photos — consciously minister through being paired with the spiritually-based texts.

These photographs would be fascinating enough if we saw them on their own. To have them carefully matched with Advices and queries, quotations from Margaret Fell,

John Woolman and other Quakers, breathes fresh life into the familiar writings.

For instance, one page has a photo of a smiling man alone in a work room, looking as if he is about to sand the old piece of furniture in front of him. Below the photo, we read Advices and queries 33: “Are you working to bring about a just and compassionate society which

allows everyone to develop their capacities and fosters the desire to serve?”

The unexpected juxtapositions in this lovely volume offer many new and surprising perceptions, often as if reading the words for the first time, or hearing ministry within meeting for worship. ☞

June-Etta Chenard is a member of Pelham Executive Meeting.

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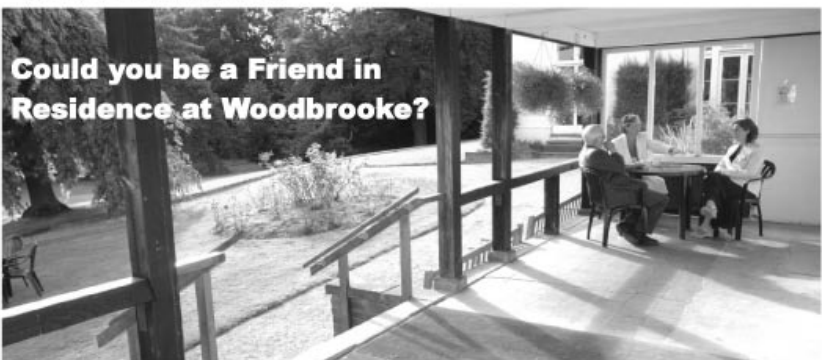
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