

In 2007, I attended the Young Adult Friends Consultation in Burlington, NJ. Anna Peters-Wehking and I took a fifteen-hour bus ride from Toronto, and after numerous connections and very little sleep, we arrived at the large *historic* (are you catching a theme here?) Meeting House along with more than a hundred other Young Adult Friends. The weekend introduced me to quite a few issues affecting American Friends about which I knew very little. Among these was the desire to revive Young Friends of North America (YFNA) and to do other Quaker inter-branch work. One articulation of this unification impulse was to do work on an issue on which many branches were unified. The environment and peace work came up as top picks. I still feel that I only really know about YFNA from rumour and hearsay, but among the intriguing tidbits was that YFNA was in part shut down because of “free love” and other 60s ideals that weren’t entirely ‘jivin’ with Friends from “other” branches that I sometimes heard referred to as “less liberal”.

To learn of the existence of “other kinds of Quakers” was a bit shocking at times. I suppose I’d had a general sense that FWCC was an inter-branch organization and that there were Evangelical Friends in Africa (indeed, the greatest number of Quakers today are Evangelical and in Kenya). I don’t think I’d ever questioned why I hadn’t heard of “other” Quakers in Canada, or why there were separate branches. I think one of the most common challenges for Friends from FGC affiliated Yearly Meetings is to define “what Quakers believe”. (Yes! there are over 30 YMs in the US! Canadian Yearly Meeting is both FGC and FUM - Friends United Meeting - affiliated) If we’re such a wishy-washy bunch, how could we be drawing lines between “us” and “them”?

Asking why American FGC Friends don’t worship with the Friends across the street (literally) is a subtle and funny affair. I can’t say I’ve heard an answer that amounts to more than, “we’re cool with it. This works just fine”. Having thought perhaps self-righteously, that I was part of a Religious institution unafraid of having challenging and life changing conversations, I was shocked at what I still see as a fundamental weakness in structure. (Is it

not? Even as we try to undermine this structure, does “institution” or “Society” work best?)

The YAF conferences have been an incredible space in which to start the dialogues and friendships that address directly where ideological differences exist. (There was another at Earlham in Richmond, IN, May 2008, which 6 Canadian YAFs attended!) Travelling and working (and now living) with American Friends has certainly challenged me to articulate my beliefs more coherently. Do I believe in Jesus? And, what does that mean exactly? If not, why not? Although I have come to feel that I have, and receive, a great love for and from Jesus. I still struggle to have the “dialogic relationship” that Toronto MM elder and awesome goddess Kathleen Hertzberg had been challenging me to have for years. One light that my time with American Friends shines on my own life is how diverse our own beliefs are!

As a Canadian Friend among American Friends I got more curious about the history of our own Religious Society of Friends. (with some persistent nudging from the same incomparable Kathleen) This came in part from meeting Erin McDougall from BC who was studying Quakerism at Earlham School of Religion in Richmond, Indiana. (Yes! A Quaker college! One of many!) When she came to visit among Canadian Friends, Kathleen reminded us both that Canadian Friends have a distinct history. We no longer have the divisions American Friends have because we unified in 1955 at Camp NeeKauNis. This unification was initiated by Young Friends, among them the ever-wonderful Kathleen! Erin and I both rejoiced in reclaiming our distinct histories and have found the Canadian unification to be a source of curiosity and wonderment among American Friends. Our population of 1,000 to their 30,000 is among the reasons cited for not being an applicable example.

The Quakers of Barnesville, Ohio, where I now live, are historically Conservative. This does not mean politically conservative, but refers to conserving the practices of early Friends. For me this meant using thee and thy but not thou or thine (much to the amusement of my Old English professor) many years before I knew