



# FORTY-THREE

OXFORD FRIENDS' MEETING  
43 ST.GILES OXFORD OX1 3LW

## NEWSLETTER

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### Same-sex relationships and the Society of Friends

It feels that the decision made at Britain's Yearly Meeting Gathering (YMG) on Friday, 31 July to treat same sex and opposite sex relationships equally in the matter of marriage marks the end of a long road (probably *more* than 22 years) towards genuine equality. This allows those of us lesbian and gay people who are sexual refugees from other churches and faith communities to renew our spiritual core fully and entirely. We hope at last to be allowed to be ordinary. Though my partner and I were content with our Meeting for Worship to celebrate commitment in 2001, and our witnessed certificate from that Meeting, I have found from my experience of being facilitator of Meetings for Worship for celebrations of commitment for OSAM and of helping to prepare couples for such celebrations of commitment, that it would have been difficult for us ever to have felt truly equal without being allowed to enter into 'Marriage', using the actual word. I will quote from an email received from Natasha Alden on 15 July 2009. She was prevented from coming to YMG partly because she felt it was likely that she would get very upset while the issues were considered, and that this would not have been good either for her or for the Meeting. However, she is willing for me to share these thoughts here. She and her partner, Claire Pickard, celebrated their commitment in a Meeting for Worship at Oxford Meeting on 31 May 2008:

*'I .... can't look at our "wedding" certificate without remembering that it is not a wedding certificate. It's humiliating. I hate, hate it that the Meeting had no legal significance – it flies in the face of Quaker beliefs about the role of the state... I hate it that it is only with Friends, who have a testimony to equality, that I feel I have to be careful to remember not to call our wedding a wedding.'*

Do you find it hard to share the word 'Marriage' with us?

*Continued on page 2, column 1*

#### From *Quaker Faith and Practice*

All true ministry springs from the reality of experience, and uses our gifts of heart and mind in its expression. But ministry is not the place for intellectual exercise. It comes through us, not from us. Although we interpret the Spirit it is that Spirit which will lead us to minister. The Spirit will decide which experiences are relevant and which will speak to the condition of the meeting. If you have to decide whether it is right to speak, consider that it isn't. If your words are important the meeting will find them anyway.

*QF&P 2.60, Conference: Exploring the fundamental elements of Quakerism, 1986*

**Deadline for contributions to the October 2009 issue: noon, Tuesday 22 September**

*Contributions, of 500 words or fewer, would be appreciated, preferably by email: [newsletter@oxfordquakers.com](mailto:newsletter@oxfordquakers.com). Paper copy can be left in the Forty-Three pigeonhole at Oxford Meeting House. For information: tel. 01865 557373.*

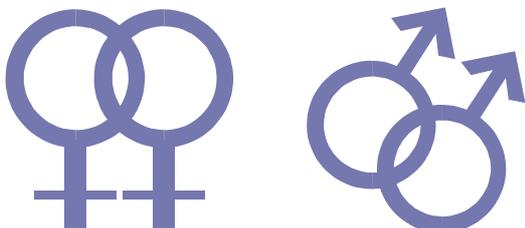
*Continued from page 1, column 2*

Some Friends may have felt reluctant to use the word 'Marriage' for our committed relationships because of a feeling that we represent decadence, and thus are poor patterns and examples. You may have seen our rebellious and enjoyable antics in Gay Pride as offensive. I want to say three things to these Friends, whose genuine fear is that we take them and our children with us down that road.

- During YMG I felt a surge of real love for the pattern and example of Christ, who moved equally and with respect amongst thieves, outcasts and prostitutes. I felt moved to return to a study of the Bible. I have heard Friends thinking this decision will take us further away from 'real' religion. I now believe that it is the opposite that is in fact the truth.

- Lesbian and gay people, just like Israelis, are stained by our relationship with our past history of victimisation and discrimination. We both act out these 'stains' by behaving in less than laudable ways. I believe that lesbian and gay people were bound to express their 'stains' in the sexual arena, because that is where the greatest damage has been done to us. It has been fun to mock the puritans sometimes, but it was bound to cause a backlash. Of course it is difficult for others to identify entirely with us, and I think it has undermined respect. I believe this has happened because we have been very angry about the injustices we have experienced for so long.

- Research into the parenting of children has long demonstrated that the gender of the parents is irrelevant when looking at qualities of good parenting. Friends will not be surprised to hear that it is love and consistency that make good parents. For Friends to include same-sex parents as equals to opposite sex parents will serve to enhance our abilities in this area; now we will feel the support of our Meetings in our parenting, and for our children, such as when they face discrimination for the sexuality of their parents, as my own children certainly did. Their teachers may be influenced by the decision too.



Finally, I wish to thank all the Friends in Oxford Meeting who have been upholding us so well during this discernment.

**Jill Green**

## **Equipping for Ministry**

'I already have two friends who trained for the ministry when they retired. I find it interesting that you are thinking of doing the same!'

This was the response from an elderly friend on reading my Christmas letter! An easy mistake to make for someone who isn't a Quaker, but the Equipping for Ministry (EFM) course seems to be a bit of a mystery for most Quakers too.

So what is EFM about? What I had put in my Christmas letter was 'The Equipping for Ministry course entails a combination of time at Woodbrooke (the Quaker College in Birmingham), and projects for personal study and reflection, and aims to "give you a solid grounding in thinking about what it is to be a Quaker in the world today and how you are personally to live out that calling".'

I started the course last January, with an induction weekend at Woodbrooke. I had taken early retirement last summer and had decided to give myself two years to decide how I wanted to spend the rest of my productive life. I'd been wanting to do the EFM course ever since I'd first heard about it twelve years ago and this seemed the ideal time to do it. There are sixteen of us starting this year, all except one are women. We have many different skills, backgrounds and experiences, but what we all have in common is a deep interest in spirituality, and we are all at a time in our lives when we want to make changes. Over the course of the two years we shall attend two residential weeks and choose six courses from Woodbrooke's programme. We are also assigned a personal tutor, to help us on our journey. At the end of the two years there will be a closing weekend.

I have already been to Woodbrooke five times this year and attended three courses! The first was on 'Discernment'; described as 'how we might recognise and respond to the promptings of the spirit of God in our personal lives and in the corporate life of our worshipping community.' It was a good weekend, although the emphasis for me

was too much on corporate decision-making, whereas I had hoped it would be more on spiritual practices. But there were three other members of my EFM year group (EFMers) on the course and it was good to start to get to know them better.

Our first residential week was just before Easter. It was in many ways an extraordinary week. To spend such a long period of time discussing spiritual ideas with a group of other like-minded people, and to have the benefit of Woodbrooke's team of experienced and dedicated tutors is a real indulgence. We had sessions on prayer and spiritual practice, early Quaker history, testimony and peace, journaling, discernment, and an Appleseed day (arts-based activities). Each day also had free time and a group reflection time. In the evenings there were various options – I did circle dancing, singing, knitting meditation, and listened to talks given by other EFMers. I also had a very helpful session with my tutor, reflecting on the week and discussing a possible project.

It was an intense and exhausting week. My group of EFMers are all fascinating people whom I am enjoying getting to know, and we were warned that it would take quite a few days to fit back into our normal lives. I decided to 'declutter' my life and make more time for spiritual practices. My second course was 'Plant Portraits in Water Colour' - this turned out to be botanical illustration and was a very peaceful, meditative weekend during which I painted one geranium flower. The third course was on 'The Fullness of Life: using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to foster creativity and integration'. It has helped me to understand how it is necessary to nurture different facets of oneself at different times in one's life.

Do please feel free to ask me more about EFM – I hope that it will not only enrich me but also the life of the Meeting.



**Tina Leonard**

## Introducing Members and Attenders of Oxford Meeting

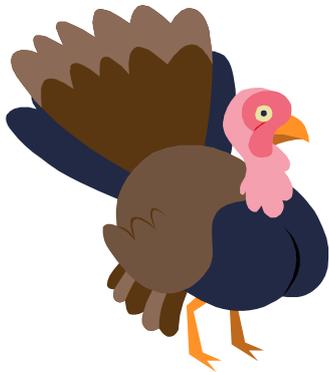


**Anne Watson**, talking to Tanya Garland

I had an absolutely extraordinary childhood – born as the war began in 1938 and when my father was already 60. My mother was 22 years younger and I was their fifth and youngest child. I was really brought up by my brothers and sisters who were seven, nine, ten and twelve years older than me. I'm 71 now and they are now all dead. My father was an amazingly quiet, retired, Eton schoolmaster and a classics scholar – who stayed in his library reading Greek plays, and only appeared at mealtimes, then to say Grace in Latin. He was a real Victorian (born in 1878). We lived in a huge, rambling, Cornish house with no electricity and not much in the way of drains, but with a lovely garden – so beautiful and wild – though lovingly tended by my father and various of my elders. More than once, we were visited by some high-ranking army people wanting to requisition the house as a field hospital, but when they discovered there was only gas lighting and no drains, they left us to it. (My father made the gas from calcium carbide and water, in a shed in the garden). Looking back, I don't know how my mother managed it all. She had an elderly husband and an invalid son. Hugh was always poorly. He had diabetes from the age of two years and there were always problems with him having comas. I'd run to tell someone the moment it looked as if he were going to pass out. Possibly this prompted me to become a doctor later on – I thought, there must be a better way of him and managing his illness. I remember Hugh propped up in bed, knitting a navy blue scarf 'for the war'. He taught me to knit on that scarf – 'slip one, knit one... drop one' – and we would both roll about laughing. I remember piggyback rides and being whirled about by my brother, Christopher – huge excitement – and something my father never did. One of my sisters taught me to sew on a machine and cut out from paper patterns. My father played the piano and we all sang. We lived at the back of beyond (Polbathic) and there was no school, so it was my mother who taught me to read and write. I was a diligent pupil as I then had her undivided attention!

Continued from page 3, column 2

My sisters subsequently both became teachers: their 'teaching practice' gave me a lot of help, so that when I finally went to school at seven, I moved up three classes in three days. I could do 'reading, writing and 'rithmetic', joined-up writing in ink, and I'd started French.



I was aware that the grown-ups were worried about the War. Our War effort was to keep turkeys and I felt I was taking a heroic part by feeding them. When I was about four or five, I felt they were as tall as I was. One day I came out with a huge bucket of

food but they would rush at me with their wobbly necks, making gobble-gobble noises. I threw the bucket at them and fled – that's how brave I was! Then there were the evacuees. Rita and Molly, and a mother and her little boy called Ian, among many others. I was keen on them, as they became playmates of my age. My mother had grown up in Bristol, which was badly bombed and she wanted to do something to help Bristol, so most of the evacuees came from there. Her sister Dorothy was an Anglican nun and had a great influence on us. She used to come and stay for her 'rest'. We lived three miles from the sea but she taught me to see angel's wings in the sky, which helped the long walks home. I so wanted friends of my own age... and she said 'to have a friend – *be* a friend'; wonderful advice.

But I had to grow up. The awful thing was that I was sent to boarding school – Whitford Hall in Bromsgrove, Worcester – a very long train ride away. I was nine. My parents knew nothing about the school but sent me as they had an Eton connection with the Head Mistress. I wrote long letters home in my joined-up handwriting and later the Head told me, '*I never sent those baby letters you wrote*'. Throtting misery! I never trusted her again. When I was eleven I went to my big school – The Abbey School in Malvern. My sister, Elizabeth, was also there in her last year at the top of the school (being seven years older) and I was at the bottom. I went on being terribly homesick right up until I left school – but I never was at Oxford. I came up to St Hilda's to do medicine 53 years ago and I am still friends with my tutor! I was three

years and two terms there, and then on to UCH to the clinical school in London - seven years in all. My parents did not have spare money but I had a school scholarship, various state scholarships and at UCH I got a Goldsmith exhibition from Oxford, so it ended up being a low-cost medical training.

While I was at UCH, I had a terrible road accident and for six months I was a patient in the hospital where I was training. It was a formidable part of my time there. I was very well looked after – the nursing was wonderful.... (in contrast with the completely different approach today) – but it was a dreadful time and very painful. I had fourteen fractures, multiple injuries all on my right side and right leg and it is probably the reason I still have trouble in that leg today. I was not weight-bearing when I left hospital so was on crutches for months afterwards, at home. It all gave me an interest in pain management and a great insight into what it is like to be a patient. Back in the medical school I had another eighteen months to do to qualify, but I was all behind and had to join a new set at UCH. I dreaded this, but I had a special bond with the people I'd started out with... and then I bonded with this 'new' set I finished with, so in the end it felt like I had twice as many friends. Now, we are in different branches of medicine (or retired), from all corners of the world and I love the reunions.

The most wonderful thing in my whole life was meeting Christopher... and our subsequent marriage. We first met in Oxford when we were both students. He crossed the room at a party to ask me if I had ever been a model for Picasso? I was offended! (How old did he think I was?!) We didn't meet again for three years – not until we re-met at a friend's wedding. He was already interested in Russia and he went out to Moscow at the height of the cold war (1964) to the Lebedev Physics Institute as part of a Royal Society Exchange scheme. We corresponded and I was very pleased to see him again on his return. We've been married now 43 years. He became a Junior Research Fellow at Merton College and we got married in the College chapel in 1966. We had three children in four years. All parents have their concerns over their children and we have had our fair share. We always wonder if we could have prevented things. We are older now and so they are grownup. We can't (or shouldn't!) give advice... but we can carry on loving them. We are blessed with the new-born joy and excitement of three grandchildren.

We came to Quakers 37 years ago. Prior to our marriage, Christopher was Church of Scotland and I was C of E. After trying the local and beautiful Cumnor Church 'family service' we found it was Quakers that seemed to be what we were looking for. We found several families in our situation, in the Meeting House... and appreciated the children's groups (and being part of helping with those as young parents) I think of the Gilletts and feel hugely grateful to them and privileged to have our Meeting House and our access to Charney Manor.

My first job was in Paediatrics with Dr McCarthy. He was especially interested in children's very early years and their bonding with their parents. Not wanting to compound the stress of separation with the stress of illness, he encouraged parent visiting in hospitals; a pioneering attitude. Now, thank goodness, it is the norm to visit freely our children in hospital. It was a wonderful job but I soon got pregnant and I had a long time at home with the children, only doing evening work at a Family Planning Clinic. Eventually, I became a part-time GP at Kidlington Health Centre. I was there 21 years. While I worked there I elected to do my annual study leave at Luther Street Medical Centre for Homeless people, and it really grabbed me. The life of people on the edge of our society is so varied and full of surprises. If it is not itinerant Irish gravediggers it is people from many walks of life. I was shocked to find people who'd once had professions on the streets: a bereaved architect, teachers and an awful lot of ex-service people with their accommodation and pay suddenly gone on leaving the forces. People can easily become homeless – usually because of drink or some awful accident or bereavement. After I retired from Kidlington I did more at Luther Street and became a sort of spare wheel there.



OXPIP started in 1998, the year I left Kidlington but while I was still working in Luther Street. OXPIP stands for the Oxford Parent Infant Project. The aim is to help people who are finding parenthood hard – parents and babies up to two years old. There are so many reasons why help is needed

– baby crying all the time, very young parents or who themselves never felt loved as babies,

separation and so on. The founder, Sue Gerhardt, wrote the book *Why Love Matters* – drawing together the evidence from scans etc to show the vital significance of this early time. I very much wanted to support OXPIP because of Dr Mc Carthy's famous words to me 40 years earlier: 'It's the very beginning of everything that matters'. So I became a Founding Trustee and have only very recently resigned due to my health.

This year, for me, has been dominated by my health: first the broken leg and then the cancer. I've received so many kind thoughts and wishes and cards, it brings tears to the eyes. How do you say thank you to people? One of the cards from a friend I knew years ago pictured a beautiful a lake surrounded by hills and with the sky overhead. She had written in it: *'The stillness of the lake, the strength of the hills, the vast space of the sky – find these within yourself and be at peace.'* This had a big impact on me. There is still more surgery to come so I try not to look ahead too much but enjoy the present. I *am* better *and* alive and it's made me very grateful for life.... but I also know how fragile it is to hang on to. I have an operation coming up in August from the cancer, then surgery on my femur and I may need to have a bone graft. I have felt extremely precarious and I prayed. I had a wonderful surgeon and some dedicated nurses and I imagine that they were provided and that's how God works – along with all the loving friends as well. I suppose because of my Christian roots I value the prayer: *'God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, Courage to change the things I can change, And wisdom to know the difference.'* I also remember when going on home visits as a GP (and standing on the doorstep feeling uncertain and inadequate and not knowing what I would find), I found it helped to remember those lovely 16<sup>th</sup>-century words:

'God be in my head, and in my understanding;  
 God be in my eyes, and in my looking;  
 God be in my mouth, and in my speaking;  
 God be in my heart, and in my thinking;  
 ... (It ends with  
 'God be at my end, and at my departing'.)

I talk to God and always have done, starting with my amazing aunt, the nun. I feel able to ask for guidance and I hope to be guided. Once, as a small child, back in the old house, which was so dark, I was very frightened, alone upstairs at night. The

*Continued on page 6, column 1*

grown-ups were downstairs and I kept calling out but no-one came. It was so dark, but one night I saw a sphere of light in the corner of the room. It gave me incredible comfort. It felt very good and it was warm. As to feeling afraid – I just wasn't any more. (I later told people I had seen an angel as I thought it sounded better!). At the time I told everyone about the light and they all rushed upstairs to see if there was a hole in the blackout. So many religions speak of the Light. It's easy to forget but I know it is there.



## Come Together: Imagine Peace

Lauren Rusk has given the Meeting House library an anthology of peace poems: *Come Together: Imagine Peace*. It contains 'The People Who Pass By', a poem written by her in August 2003, remembering a demonstration against the invasion of Iraq. Lauren is an Oxford Friend as well as a California one, staying every summer here. The demonstration she writes about was at the corner of Carfax, Oxford. There are also some excellent poems in the anthology by the Palestinian Mahmoud Darwish and the Israeli Yehuda Amichai, among many others. That terrible conflict provokes – and maybe can be dissolved only by – deeply felt and popular writings and music from both sides.

My favourite poem in the book is by Denise Levertov (1923-97). She was born in England, served as a civilian nurse in World War Two and lived in New York and Seattle thereafter. Hers was a powerful voice against the Vietnam War. Her poem 'Making Peace' seems very Quakerly. Here it is:

## Making Peace

A voice from the dark called out,  
"The poets must give us  
imagination of peace, to oust the intense, familiar  
imagination of disaster. Peace, not only  
the absence of war."

But peace, like a poem,  
is not there ahead of itself,  
can't be imagined before it is made,  
can't be known except  
in the words of its making,  
grammar of justice,  
syntax of mutual aid.

A feeling towards it,  
dimly sensing a rhythm, is all we have  
until we begin to utter its metaphors,  
learning them as we speak.

A line of peace might appear  
If we restructured the sentence our lives are making,  
revoked its reaffirmation of profit and power,  
questioned our needs, allowed  
long pauses....

A cadence of peace might balance its weight  
on that different fulcrum; peace, a presence,  
an energy field more intense than war,  
might pulse then,  
stanza by stanza into the world,  
each act of living  
one of its words, each word  
a vibration of light –facets  
of the forming crystal.

**Denise Levertov**  
Introduced by **Stephen Yeo**

