



BeFriending Creation

Newsletter of Quaker Earthcare Witness
Affirming our essential unity with nature

Volume 26, Number 2 • March-April 2013

Galápagos:

Lessons from Finches, Marine Iguanas, and Islands

By Tom Small

NOW, AS WE CAREEN INTO THE ANTHROPOCENE ERA, the human species has seemingly become the prime mover of ever-accelerating change; but we are nonetheless subject to it. Subject to inexorable processes of evolution. “In this changing world everything is subject to change,” says the *Isha Upanishad*.

The Galápagos Islands, famous as Darwin’s “laboratory” of evolution, offer us lessons in natural forces and the ever-changing world: lessons from Darwin’s finches, still diverging and evolving, still surviving—precariously; lessons of the islands themselves, born of fire extruded from deep in the earth, sliding slowly (two inches a year) eastward toward extinction; lessons of marine iguanas, the world’s only seafaring lizard, the island of their origins 10 million years ago now drifted halfway to South America and 2,000 feet under the sea, still sinking.

The Galápagos are like no other islands on Earth. The endemic finches, giant tortoises, and marine iguanas are like no other species on Earth. To see them for ourselves, to wonder at them, to learn from them—such was the purpose of a recent New Year pilgrimage for me and my wife Ruth.

Evolution Brings Both Advantages and Dangers

The marine iguanas captivated our imaginations as did no other Galápagos creature. From their lost origins, they have adapted as seven distinct subspecies on eight different islands ranging from Fernandina, the



Tourist access to the islands is strictly limited: paths are clearly marked, with frequent “STOP” signs. They could be taken as cogent messages for our culture. Photo by Ruth Small.

youngest, to Española, the oldest.

We have watched marine iguanas ride the crashing surf, and dive from and climb up vertical lava cliffs. We have seen them feeding on green algae on the seafloor. We kneeled beside a few to marvel at them, unheeding as they warmed themselves in the sun, sneezing out salt they took in with their food.

They evolved powerful long tails for swimming, special glands to filter salt, snub mouths to feed

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BeFriending Creation

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We publish **BeFriending Creation** to promote the work of Quaker Earthcare Witness, stimulate discussion and action, share insights, practical ideas, and news of our actions, and encourage among Friends a sense of community and spiritual connection with all Creation. Opinions expressed are the authors' own and do not necessarily reflect those of Quaker Earthcare Witness, or of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers). The editor is responsible for unsigned items. Submission deadlines are February 10, April 10, June 10, August 10, October 10, and December 10.

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VISION AND WITNESS

WE ARE CALLED to live in right relationship with all Creation, recognizing that the entire world is interconnected and is a manifestation of God. WE WORK to integrate into the beliefs and practices of the Religious Society of Friends the Truth that God's Creation is to be respected, protected, and held in reverence in its own right, and the Truth that human aspirations for peace and justice depend upon restoring the earth's ecological integrity. WE PROMOTE these truths by being patterns and examples, by communicating our message, and by providing spiritual and material support to those engaged in the compelling task of transforming our relationship to the earth.

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Earthcare Calendar

April 10, 2013. Deadline for article submissions for May-June 2013 *BeFriending Creation*.

May 2, 2013. Deadline for QEW Mini-Grants applications.

Letters from Our Readers

"WHAT CANST THOU SAY" ABOUT SPIRIT-LED EFFORTS ON BEHALF OF EARTH, about your own stirrings toward care for the planet, in relation to the vision and thoughtful action of Quaker Earthcare Witness as a whole? We'd like to hear from you. Send your letters to Katherine at katherine@quakerearthcare.org, and share your thoughts and leadings with Friends and caring others throughout North America.

January 14th, 2013

R. Rajagopal writes,

There were two articles about the UN in *BeFriending Creation*, Jan-Feb 2013.

Oliver Robertson, from QUNO Geneva, wrote about the Doha Conference. He is not able to do what Quakers in UN offices have always done; namely, invite people of differing viewpoints, set the opportunity for frank exchange, and in the course of discussion help to reach into a deeper place to find commonality. His phrases include, "we might move to action, we might continue to observe and consider, and we might not to carry on," and "building relationships is exceptionally difficult when negotiations are based in their

national capitals and come together only a few times a year or two weeks of intense negotiations."

Mary Gilbert, QEW Representative to the UN, also wrote about UN, but in New York. Some phrases from her report are "draft contained language only from select nations and from the corporate world"; "a lot of good in earlier drafts had been deleted"; "but in general it is a disappointment for civil society"; "WEF sees that most decisions ... are being made by multinational corporations, which are beyond the jurisdiction of governments"; "their proposals would put corporations formally in charge of governance on global

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February 18, 2013

Os Cresson writes,

I approve of members of QEW helping each other sort our way through the philosophies of religion and science as long as (a) we support each other even when the results of this sorting differ from our own, and (b) we make this support clear to each other and to visitors, and (c) we don't ask QEW as an organization to endorse particular philosophies.

In the current issue of *Friends Journal*, Anthony Manousos asks us to be more open about our differences than in the past, to engage in an intra-faith dialogue, and to unite around practices rather than theology. Here is an excerpt from his article (quoted with permission from *Friends Journal*):

"Given this history of divisiveness, I can see why Friends are wary about identifying them-

selves as Christian or non-Christian. It seems safer, and saner, to keep Christ and God talk to a minimum. I am glad that many Friends are willing to bring up these concerns, however. I think we can be better Quakers if we are honest and admit our differences and have respectful dialogues about theological issues. We can learn much from each other when we open up and share our beliefs and spiritual experiences. And I think we can communicate with those in the ecumenical and interfaith movement, as well as our neighbors of other faiths, when we feel comfortable talking about theology among ourselves in a Friendly, non-exclusive way.... Two years ago, I felt a leading to reach out to Evangelical Quakers. This came about when I heard

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efficiently on green algae, special endobacteria for digesting marine vegetation, and dark colors for absorbing enough sunlight to warm their cold blood after seafloor foraging. They learned to cooperate with finches and Sally lightfoot crabs who pick ticks, mites, and algae off their hides. They evolved to fill their own special niche and thus minimize competition. In doing so they face other risks, including powerful surf and playful sea lions. When a strong El Niño strikes and the algae die off in warming waters, marine iguanas also die, in catastrophic numbers. Such are the risks of adaptation and evolution.



A marine iguana (*Amblyrhynchus cristatus*), gazing out to sea, with Sally lightfoot crabs (*Grapsus grapsus*). Photo by Ruth Small.

The finches arrived much later than iguanas, two or three million years ago when there were only five islands. Molded by harsh terrain and shortage of food and water, they evolved into 13 distinct species, unlike finches anywhere else on earth. Each species has evolved for a particular role in an island ecosystem, a role often filled elsewhere by some other species. The insectivorous warbler finch becomes possible on islands without true warblers to compete. The woodpecker finch, adept at peeling bark and picking out grubs, becomes possible where there are no woodpeckers. Lacking a woodpecker's coiled tongue, it fashions probes from cactus spines to reach its prey. Nectaring finches evolve where there are no bees and hummingbirds and so replace them as pollinators. Sharp-beaked finches peck at the wings of Nazca boobies, drawing blood for liquid and food. Ground finches pick ticks from underbellies of giant tortoises, who raise themselves up to aid this welcome service.

The finches' minutely differing beaks are a key to



One of Darwin's finches, probably a Vegetarian Finch (*Platyspiza crassirostris*). Photo by Ruth Small.

the mystery of change. Darwin's finches are survivors of competition and conflict, their beaks swelling, bending, sharpening, diverging "as if to minimize competition by making themselves as different as possible" (Weiner, 55). Each beak becomes a specialized tool minutely different from every other. In times of drought and scarcity, half a millimeter is the difference between survival and starvation. The shaping edge of evolution carves as keenly as a knife blade.

The finches and their world not only witness to the wonderful diversification of life on earth, they offer subtle lessons on precarious adaptation to scarcity and stress that both they and we, their human counterparts, must face now and in the future. Darwin's theory of evolution, founded on competition, is ultimately and strangely optimistic; it predicts general reduction of competition through specialization of function, behavior, and habitat (Weiner, 144).

A Microcosm of Earth's Potentialities

Peter and Rosemary Grant, biologists who devoted their lives to providing minute proof for Darwin's theory of natural selection, sum up 30 years of work on Daphne Major (a small, almost inaccessible Galápagos island) with an anonymous statement often erroneously attributed to Darwin: "It's not the strongest of the species that survive, nor the most intelligent, but the one most responsive to change." The Galápagos were Darwin's laboratory of geological and biological change. "The origin of all my views," he called them; and they continue as a microcosm of Earth's potentialities for emergence of new beings, survival, and extinction.

The islands themselves are hauntingly beautiful and strange. As the Nazca plate passes over the Galápagos “hot spot,” magma wells up from hundreds, maybe thousands of miles down, to build volcanic islands. Over millennia, they drift slowly eastward, until they slide beneath the South American plate, to upwell again in the Andes. Nothing, including an island, ever dies. It returns to origins, and is reborn, transformed. That, perhaps, is a lesson of eternity.

Some early mariners—pirates, whalers, adventurers—thought the islands bewitched because of the churning, always shifting confluence of powerful ocean currents from all directions. Some thought the islands were floating, in motion. They were right.

These haunted islands are daughters of eternal processes and slow time, fire and water, birth and death, creation and extinction, continental drift and minute difference in the beak of a bird. Born of fire, they are shaped by the churning of ocean currents and sustained by unpredictable cycles of El Niño and La Niña, the divine child. In their isolation, they are a meeting place of earth, water, air, fire, space, and slow time. They rise from the sea as microcosm to that somewhat larger archipelago, the drifting continents of planet Earth.

We tourists seem to sense the mystery. We speak quietly, tread softly, leave nothing behind, take nothing away. Signposts along the trails offer sage advice: STOP.

Nothing Is Guaranteed—Except Change

What other advice might we take from Galápagos—

what lessons of time and ceaseless evolution can we learn?

Everything is interdependent in a world of limited resources. Possibility and innovation are unpredictable, and nothing is guaranteed—except change. Find your *swadharma*, what you were always meant to contribute to the flow of life. Regard your journey as pilgrimage; renounce destination. Every step is evolution, possibility.

Competition gradually, painfully, leads to cooperation, mutualism, and symbiosis, on the islands of the giant tortoises and on island Earth. Given time, life co-evolves to fill every niche, draw upon every source of energy, recycle everything, waste nothing, and perform its miracles of regeneration. Study nature’s processes.

The impact upon Galápagos, and everywhere, of human population, depredation, and introduction of alien species has been very great. The fragile remnant of Darwin’s species will not make it through this Anthropocene era without our own reformation, our active help, *and* our compassionate forbearance. Follow the Galápagos

example: in times of stress and shortage, simplify, minimize competition, conserve energy, and specialize in what is locally available.

Above all, cherish difference and restore diversity, essential to resilience and survival.

Remember that these Islands are the fabled Encantadas; they are Enchanted. Hold in mind the final sentence of Jonathan Weiner’s wonderful book *The Beak of the Finch*: “Darwin’s finches will keep their covenant with Darwin’s islands, witnessed by a heap of stones.”

Will we, Darwin’s own species, keep our covenant with the creation? ❧

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including an
island, ever dies.
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That, perhaps,
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Quaker Institute for the Future Summer Seminar

THE LOCATION FOR QIF’S SUMMER SEMINAR VARIES EACH YEAR, but the purpose is always to encourage spirit-led research using Quaker methods of discernment and reflection. Daily activities include silent worship, group discussion, solo research time and a convivial atmosphere of shared effort. Most research topics have a focus on the environment, economics or related issues.

QIF’s summer 2013 research seminar will be held directly after Friends General Conference. The seminar will be Monday-Friday, July 8-12, at Heartwood Co-housing near Durango, Colorado (hosted by former QEW clerk, Dick Grossman, who resides at Heartwood). We will work with participants to arrange shared-transportation from FGC to Heartwood or to arrange pick-ups from the Durango airport. Housing will be provided at Heartwood and food costs will be shared. Please contact Shelley Tanenbaum at sheltan@pacbell.net if you are interested in participating in the 2013 seminar. More information at www.quakerinstitute.org. ❧

Life and Death in the Galápagos

By Richard Grossman

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"What havoc the introduction of any new beast of prey must cause in a country, before the instincts of the aborigines become adapted to the stranger's craft or power." Charles Darwin

WE HAD JUST SEEN A GALÁPAGOS HAWK SOARING overhead when we heard an incongruous sound: here were cats mewling beside the path. I caught a glimpse of a tabby kitten with the bluest eyes.

"I like cats," our guide said, "but I'll have to report these to the rangers. They will come here with dogs."

We were returning from hiking on the tortured volcanic surface of the world's largest active caldera, Cerro Negro, on Isla Isabela. We walked carefully along the border of the volcano's crater since the path was narrow and muddy with a fatal drop-off. Fortunately there was a narrow border of green between us and the sheer wall. This is where these feline invaders hung out.

Cats are an exotic species in the Galápagos Islands, maybe introduced to catch the rats that were also introduced accidentally by man. Sometimes bio-control (using one species to control another) works out well, but other times it can be a disaster. Cats in the Galápagos *are* a disaster. Darwin recognized this danger almost two centuries ago.

Galápagos hawks live only on that isolated group of islands; they are endemic there. They nest in low trees and in the hollows of walls of the volcanic rock of which the islands are made. Formerly the hawks had no natural enemies, but now their eggs, nestlings, and fledglings are easy prey for cats.

A census of Galápagos hawks taken late in the 20th century estimated fewer than 1,000 individuals. These

magnificent birds have been eradicated from much of their former habitat so this species is found on only four of the islands now. The Red List of endangered species (<http://www.iucnredlist.org/>) says that these hawks are vulnerable to extinction because of introduced predators and their small population.

Of the six ways that humankind sends other species to extinction, perhaps introduction of exotic plants and animals is the second most common.

Exotics may not seem so bad. After all, our homes and gardens are filled with beautiful plants from other lands. Unfortunately they can cause problems in at least three ways. Exotics may out-compete natives; they often don't have local pests to help control them, as is the case with cats in the Galápagos. Local pollinators often find exotics unattractive so pollinators become scarce, but they are essential to the native plants.

Ecuadorians are doing a fine job of dealing with exotic species. Before we were allowed to camp on the beach, our belongings were fumigated. We had

Humankind contributes to species extinction through (1) habitat loss; (2) introduction of exotic species; (3) climate change; (4) overharvesting; (5) pollution; and (6) infection.

already paid \$100 for a permit to be in the Galápagos; that money helps fund the rangers and other efforts to protect the unique environment. Our small group of “adventure tourists” also was given an orientation, urging us to respect this amazing place with its many endemic plants and animals.

Destruction of habitat and contributing to climate change are two other ways that humans are causing the mass extinction of species. As the numbers of humans has grown, and as we “improve” the landscape with more agriculture and construction, there is simply less space for other species. Not only do we use more and more of the land, but also we break up what there is so it is of less value to critters.

Climate change is also wreaking havoc with many plants and animals. Species that need cold, or whose pests are controlled by cold, are susceptible to our climate’s warming. A local example is little pikas that live high in the mountains. They are happiest with lots of snow and cold winters. They can move up in altitude as the world warms, but our mountains only go so high. If the world gets too hot, they will all “go to heaven.”

We were fortunate to see a number of giant Galápagos tortoises, although they were in special refuges. It is a wonder that there are any left, however. They can live for a year without food or water, so sailors in 19th century used them on board ship as living larders. Overharvesting is another way that

species have been sent into extinction; indeed there *were* 15 species or subspecies of Galápagos tortoises, but there are only 10 now.

There is hope for endangered species, at least in the Galápagos. Efforts to protect their endemic hawk have apparently been successful because recent population estimates suggest that there are now almost 2,000 members. There are even plans to reintroduce them to islands where they have been driven to extinction. I feel good that our small contributions paid for by the permits to enter the islands have been effective in helping to preserve one of the wonders of nature. ♪



A Galápagos tortoise.



What are the UN’s Millennium and Sustainable Development Goals?

By Mary Gilbert, QEW Representative to the UN

PEOPLE HAVE BEEN ASKING ME FOR CLARIFICATION, so here goes. The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) came out of the UN Millennium Summit in 2000. (See http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennium_Development_Goals.) There are eight goals, intended to improve social and economic conditions in the poorest countries in the world by 2015. A conference held in 2010 assessed progress so far and sparked additional plans to see how more of the goals could be met in the remaining years before 2015.

Each of the goals has specific internal targets, which when spelled out prove only partial. The first goal, for example, is not to fully eradicate extreme poverty and hunger; it actually specifies only cutting in half the proportion of people living on less than \$1 US per day, and the same with the proportion of those who suffer from extreme hunger. The other seven goals are similarly loosely defined and/or partial.

There has been very uneven progress toward meeting the MDGs. Some countries have achieved many of the goals, while others are not on track to realize any. A UN conference in September 2010 reviewed progress to date and adopted a global action plan to achieve the MDGs by their 2015 target date. Wealthy countries are supposed to be covering the costs the goals entail, but more than half the aid offered is toward debt relief, with much of the remaining aid money going to natural disaster relief and military aid, neither of which furthers development.

There are questions about the methodology used with the MDGs: in each case, what is actually being measured, and what does it mean? Many poor countries are unable to collect good data. Use of different yardsticks (indicators) in different countries and regions results in confusion and data that cannot be compared.

The MDGs are generally judged to have failed. However, despite many flaws, having the goals has provided a political and operational framework for addressing serious problems. For difficult-to-measure goals, best practices have been identified and their positive effects on progress are measurable. Importantly, the MDGs bring attention to measurements of well-being beyond income. Many such tools already exist, including the *Human Development Index*, the *Ecological Footprint*, the *Sustainable Society Index*, *SAFE* (*Sustainability Assessment by Fuzzy Evaluation*), the *Environmental Performance Index* and others.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) do not yet exist. The decision to create them was made during preparations for the Rio+20 Summit in June 2012. Here is a good “think piece” from Stakeholder Forum during that preparatory period sharing what the SDGs should be: <http://www.stakeholderforum.org/fileadmin/files/Beyond%202015%20MDG-SDG%20relationship.pdf>. In the months following the Rio+20 Summit, the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN DESA) conducted a survey on what nations want to see in the SDGs, and in January 2013 Stakeholder Forum released a lengthy synthesis of responses from the UN Member State missions. You can read that report at http://www.stakeholderforum.org/fileadmin/files/Analysis%20SDG%20UNDESA%20Survey_Final.pdf

Once the goals have been developed and agreed upon, they will apply to all countries, not just the poorest. They are to be ready for use when the MDGs lapse in 2015. An Open Working Group on the SDGs, composed of 30 member states—five from each of six global regions—was to have been named by September 2012, but a problem agreeing on which countries would serve delayed forming this body until early 2013. A system has now been agreed to where each of the 30 seats will be shared by several countries. No nation wanted to risk not participating. Meetings have finally begun.

It was agreed in the Rio+20 outcome document that SDGs must be action-oriented, concise, easy to communicate, limited in number, aspirational, global in nature, and universally applicable to all countries while taking into account different national realities, capacities, and levels of development and respecting national policies and priorities. Work is ongoing in several tracks. We will see what eventually comes out of this process.

THE EIGHT MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

1. Eradicating extreme poverty and hunger
2. Achieving universal primary education
3. Promoting gender equality and empowering women
4. Reducing child mortality rates
5. Improving maternal health
6. Combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases
7. Ensuring environmental sustainability
8. Developing a global partnership for development

Indicators Matter

The selection, development, and use of indicators tells us what we as a society value. Money, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), has been our only universally applicable indicator. While much is unclear, we know that the new goals will go “beyond GDP” to assess general well-being.

The UN is seeking ways to measure what matters, to help societies improve in many ways. Can indicators be created to evaluate societies in honoring human rights? For honoring the rights of other beings too? The rights of our sacred planet Earth? What could we measure to see whether we are making progress? People at the UN are talking about these rights, but can they be operationalized?

I would like to see the development and use of an indicator for *subsidiarity*. This is the idea that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level. My strong hunch is that subsidiarity would correlate positively with both the success of projects undertaken to meet the SDGs and with reports of life satisfaction. ∞

ADDITIONAL ASSESSMENT RESOURCES

- Human Development Index: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/statistics/hdi/>
- Ecological Footprint: <http://www.footprintnetwork.org/en/index.php/GFN/>
- Sustainable Society Index: http://www.eoearth.org/article/Sustainable_Society_Index
- Sustainability Assessment by Fuzzy Evaluation (SAFE): <http://www.sustainability.tuc.gr/>
- Environmental Performance Index: <http://epi.yale.edu/>

Considering *Earth*

By Louis Cox

WHAT DO WE CALL OUR PLANET? *The earth*? Or just *Earth*?

It has long been common usage to say *the earth* (and to spell it lowercase) when talking about this planet in a scientific context. This goes along with the practice of referring to *the sun* and *the moon* as objects that we observe in the environment. In recent times, however, many ecologically conscious Friends and others have been led to drop the preceding *the* and use a capital E, as in *Earth*, to emphasize our planet's significance as subject, as the great jewel of Creation, the Mother of the living community of life of which we are members.

Their preference for *Earth* is in keeping with a long tradition of Western astronomy, which gave names to all the planets in the solar system. Astronomers easily reached consensus on borrowing from ancient Greek and Roman religions, which associated many of their deities with celestial bodies they saw meandering through the heavens. When astronomers finally concluded that their own planet was part of that solar system, giving it a mythical deity-based name seemed fitting as well.

A logical candidate therefore would have been *Gaia*, the goddess who the ancient Greeks believed presided over the natural world. But there was a drawback to that choice. English speakers already had a venerable name, *the earth*, (from Old English *eorthe*) that they would have been reluctant to give up. Originating before anyone suspected they were living on an orbiting globe, *the earth* meant simply *the land*, as distinct from *the sky* (Norse origin) and *the waters* (Germanic origin). English speakers likely would have been similarly unwilling to call the sun *Sol* and the moon *Luna* in deference to pagan Greeks and Romans.

In conclusion, although the choice wasn't traditionally associated with a mythical deity, English-speaking astronomers apparently settled on *Earth* (capitalized) as their second choice as a name for the third planet from the sun. (Gaia didn't lose out entirely in the modern naming process, however. With a name derived from the ancient Greek word *Ge*, also meaning literally *the land*, *Gaia* lives on in such modern scientific terms as *geology* and *geography*.)

But English-speaking scientists in other fields weren't as constrained by that particular naming tradition, and for many centuries, the older, plainer version, *the earth* seemed sufficient for their needs. And that gives rise to the main point of this discussion: for



some 400 years, Western science unfortunately has taken a rather materialistic, reductionist path, which seems to have contributed to modern civilization's loss of a sense of connection with, and responsibility for, the health and integrity of our living planet. For all of its marvelous achievements, the Western scientific tradition still operates largely within an obsolete paradigm of the universe as a collection of objects. Consciously choosing *Earth* as a proper name makes it easier for us to balance an enlightened scientific outlook with an I-Thou relationship to the planet (after the writings of theologian Martin Buber) and to outgrow the exploitative, objectifying I-it relationship that has brought on today's global ecological, economic, and energy crises.

If we changed much of our usage from *the earth* to *Earth*, we might find ourselves caught in the crossfire of sometimes opposing quarters: from those who say we are replacing good science with sentimentality, and from those who say we are speaking blasphemy by supposedly worshiping the planet itself and replacing a transcendent Creator as the object of our ultimate concern and respect. There is a lot at stake, I believe.

Once it was common to say *he* when one could not, or did not wish to, identify a person as male or female. Today, usage has largely shifted to alternate, gender-neutral expressions, such as *they* or *she* or *he*, and many of us have switched from *mankind* to *humankind* in order not to discount half the members of the human family.

When we make such conscious corrections in our word choices, it doesn't mean that we are claiming to have risen above prejudice and discrimination in our thoughts and actions. More often such political correctness serves to humble us, to remind us gently that we aren't there yet. The words we use have a way of framing and restricting our thoughts and perceptions, which in turn have a tendency to direct our actions in unhealthy ways. If we want to stop killing the planet, it may be necessary to change the way we talk about it. ♪

Making Space for Young Adult Quaker Leadership

By Emily Higgs



Learning how to be effective change agents in the world.

LAST SUMMER, PENDLE HILL, WITH CO-SPONSORSHIP from Quaker Earthcare Witness, the Pickett Endowment, and Willistown (PA) Monthly Meeting, embarked on designing an innovative and powerful six-day training-oriented program for young adult Friends who have an interest in social action and environmental justice. With the help of QEW's financial and programmatic investment, 30 young adults from across North America were able to gather together from June 15 to 21, 2012. Through worship, workshops, games, service, reflection, speakers, musicians, art, and fellowship, the young adult Friends dove into the weighty and complex work of creating a more just, sustainable, and spiritually connected world. The conference demonstrated the power of collaborative experiential learning and provided a model for a new and cutting edge approach to young adult Quaker programming.

Here are just a few comments from the evaluations we received:

"The future of Quakerism is being and will be defined by the young adults. I want my activism to be led not just by the philosophy of my faith, but also by the spirit of it."

"I have a fervent belief that our world has to change drastically...I would like to find how my faith as a Quaker and my spirituality with this earth can inform the way I live and walk on our planet."

"The conference tapped into the deep pain and the exhilarating opportunity that many young adults feel about the daunting tasks that rest upon this generation's shoulders when it comes to creating a more just and sustainable world for the future. The group gathered laughed together, cried together, struggled, debated, sang, worked, and planned social change campaigns."

Our program included several elements that QEW members would find inspiring: we enjoyed a keynote address from Transition Town activist Steve Chase; former QEW clerk Hollister Knowlton led an Awakening the Dreamer mini-workshop; EQAT Campaign Director Zachary Hershman led exercises in nonviolent direct action campaign design; and former Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Eco-Justice Coordinator Michael Gagné, alongside Viv Hawkins, facilitated a training about activism, organizing, and gathering the tools needed for social change.

Every participant told us that they would attend another conference in the future, and more importantly, that they would recommend it to their friends. With such a powerful confirmation that the program was meaningful and valuable, we began planning the second year of the conference.

Continued on the next page >



Making art for protests and marching on "Harrisburg capitol," with Spiral Q Puppet Theater.



2013 Conference: “Be Brought Low, and Back to the Root”

This year’s conference, “Continuing Rev_l_tion,” will be held at Pendle Hill from June 14-19, 2013 and will focus on the Simplicity testimony, following a similar format and structure to the 2012 conference. Young adults from around North America will be invited to come to Pendle Hill for six days of programming, including speakers, workshops, silent and programmed worship, creative expression opportunities, skill-building activities, and fellowship. The program itself is still in development, but our plan to focus on simplicity will allow us to use that important Quaker testimony as a lens through which we can examine all personal, communal, and global implications of living in the world, not of the world. We hope to bring 40-45 young adults to Pendle Hill for another successful year of Continuing Rev_l_tion.



Young adult Friends gather for a group picture at the 2012 conference.

This conference is one of the only opportunities available for young adults to come together for spiritually grounded training and capacity building around issues at the heart of Quakerism. We have the potential to nurture a generation of well-connected, environmentally conscious, and mobilized young adult Friends. We are so glad that QEW is a co-sponsor of the 2013 Continuing Rev_l_tion conference. Here are two things you can do to ensure the success of this summer’s program:

1. Spread the word! Please tell every young adult Friend (between the ages of 18 and 35) you know about this conference and encourage them to attend. Last year we had many participants from across the US and Canada that were informed of this program by QEW members. Participants do not need to be members of a monthly meeting, but they do need to be prepared to engage the questions at the heart of this conference from a spiritual foundation, and they must have at least some familiarity with the Religious Society of Friends. More information and applications are available at www.pendlehill.org/yald.
2. Please consider giving a financial gift to ensure that each and every young adult Friend, regardless of their financial situation, is able to take advantage of this incredible opportunity. Please see Anne Mitchell’s request for your support in the box following this article.

Quakers have played a leadership role in other important change movements throughout history. It is my hope that the Religious Society of Friends will be at the forefront of the much-needed environmental awakening yet to come in the world. Empowering and making space for young adult Quaker leadership is one of the best ways to ensure that Quakerism will be not only relevant, but will play a vital role in the transformation ahead. ♻

Inviting Your Support

By Anne Mitchell

AGAIN THIS YEAR, QEW IS SUPPORTING the Young Adult Friends gathering at Pendle Hill, and we invite you to join us! Friends who feel led to join in this work are heartily encouraged to make a donation in support of this effort.

The QEW Mini-Grant program continues with some exciting projects. We welcome your partnership in this effort as well.

QEW has now received accreditation with the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC) of the UN, which enables us to participate in online and in-person

UN gatherings. QEW is seeking support to help make the most of this new opportunity.

In October 2012, we also launched the Three Year Resilience Fund to help us stabilize our finances and plan for the future. We welcome your involvement.

If any of these ideas inspire you and you’d like to contribute toward their support, you can you can make a secure online donation at <https://secure.quakerearthcare.org/civicrm/contribute/transact?reset=1&id=1>. If you prefer, you can send a check to QEW at Quaker Earthcare Witness, 173-B North Prospect Street, Burlington, VT 05401-1607. If you have any questions, please contact me at anne@quakerearthcare.org. ♻



Finca La Bella is in the back of San Luis Valley, framed by the gateposts.



Blossoming and Building at Finca La Bella

By Os Cresson

RECENTLY SEVERAL MEMBERS OF QEW visited Finca La Bella in the San Luis Valley in Monteverde, Costa Rica. Bill and Alice Howenstine were accompanied by their daughter, son-in-law, and two high school-aged granddaughters, and Os Cresson was with his great-nephew, also of high school age. This was a special experience because Bill and Alice worked with many others to found Finca La Bella 20 years ago, and they have hosted Costa Ricans from San Luis at their farm in Illinois. Previous reports on the Finca La Bella Project can be found in previous *BeFriending Creation* issues from May-June 2011 and Sept-Oct 2011 and on the QEW website.

Bill, Alice, and Os joined Friends in worship one sunny Sunday morning in the old wooden meetinghouse in Monteverde. They met with Guillermo Vargas, a member of the Monteverde Institute board, and with Katy van Dusen, clerk of Monteverde Monthly Meeting, and had many visits to Finca La Bella and other places in San Luis Valley.

Debra Howenstine and her daughters were able to stay in the home of Gilber Lobo and Amalia Rodriguez, who had known Bill and Alice and Os 20 years ago. We were shown how coffee and sugar cane is grown, harvested, and processed; and we visited the papermaking factory of seven women led by Yadira Ramirez, president of the Finca La Bella farmers association.

We spent one morning with Eugenio Vargas, a neighbor of Finca La Bella who had visited the Howenstines in Illinois long ago. He was a close associate of Ann Kriebel, whose vision and work gave impetus to what has happened in San Luis during the last 30 years. Another morning we visited Lucky and Wolf Guindon, who helped find the farm that became

Finca La Bella and were catalysts in building the relationship between Monteverde Monthly Meeting and FCUN/QEW. We also visited their son, Benito Guindon, who for many years has been a member of the Ann Kriebel/San Luis Working Group, which is now called the Finca La Bella Project. There was even time for lunch at the University of Georgia biology station across the road from Finca La Bella. We enjoyed a particularly memorable evening when 60 members of the Finca La Bella community hosted a community dinner in their library building.



Bill, Alice and Os with Amalia and Gilber in their Finca La Bella home.

There is good news from Finca La Bella: a commission of five members was formed, consisting of two people from the parceleros' organization (Asociación Agrícola Finca La Bella Ann Kriebel), and one each from the Monteverde Institute, the Asociación de Desarrollo Integral de San Luis, and the Monteverde Monthly

Meeting. The commission negotiated an agreement to pass the land title from the Monteverde Institute to the parceleros. This agreement was accepted by the Institute board and by a general assembly of the Asociación. The land that was mostly open pasture 20 years ago is now a dense combination of coffee, banana, sugar cane, papaya, fruit trees, and vegetable gardens. More than 10 percent of Finca La Bella is now forested, and this will be protected by a conservation easement. Details still need to be worked out, particularly involving rights-of-way across the common forest. The parceleros will each pay the legal costs of the transfer of their titles, and the QEW Finca La Bella Project has offered to pay the costs of establishing the conservation easement for the forested land. As a result of these negotiations, there has been increased cooperation between the parceleros and their neighbors in San Luis through their mutual commitment to the valley's development association.

At the supper meeting with the parceleros, Bill spoke of his conviction that although some of the future is unclear, we see the tremendous success that parceleros have already achieved. This is a wonderful outcome for a project as complex as this one. ☞

You're Invited!

QEW has been invited to join the parceleros and their neighbors to celebrate San Luis Day on June 21-23, 2013. This is a once-a-year festival with a shared meal, dance, and religious service. There will also be a raffle and auction, horseback events, soccer, a half-marathon, Bingo, children's games, and lots of Latin American junk food. If you would like to join the fun, please contact Bill Holcombe, at bholc7@hotmail.com.



Catching Up with Barbara Williamson

Barbara Williamson was clerk of QEW from October 2004 to October 2007.

I'M DOING REALLY WELL here in Abingdon, Virginia. I am primarily working to end Mountain Top Removal (MTR). I am serving on the Board of Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards (the only organization in Virginia working primarily to stop MTR). I am the secretary, write grant proposals, and serve on several other committees. I am a representative to the Alliance for Appalachia, a group of non-profits working to end MTR, from the Sierra Club's Appalachian Environmental Justice group. I also serve as the chair of the Environmental Justice committee of the Virginia chapter of the Sierra Club. And with so little else to do, I am working to start a Sierra Club group in the five counties and one city centered where I live—Highlands group.

In coal country, people's lives are in danger (see Hendryx's

work on health as one example); sometimes discernment seems like a luxury. What we don't stop *now* may result in losses that will last forever.

Southern Appalachian Mountain Stewards (SAMS) has a weekend workshop each fall and invites people to come to learn about MTR first hand. QEW members are always welcome. We also sponsor Mountain Justice weekends, primarily for college students and young people in their 20s, but everyone is welcome. Mountain Justice spring, summer, and fall breaks offer a wide range of workshops, panel discussions, entertainment, and service projects. I think you will find spending time with the young people who attend Mountain Justice events as educational, inspiring, and fun as I do.

Check out the Mountain Justice website (<http://mountain-justice.org/>) for the event closest to you this spring, summer, and fall.

I am also working with the

Highlands group of the Sierra Club and Virginia Organizing to keep hydro-fracking out of Washington County, where I live. I am also on the board of Virginia Interfaith Power & Light. And to help keep me grounded, I belong to a book discussion—liberal women all.

I live less than a block from one of my nephews and his family, which means I get to spend time with my great-nieces (ages 5 years, 6 years, and 1 month). With my slower pace here in central Appalachia, I would love to have guests from QEW come for a visit. ☞



Barbara decorating the tree at the SAMS 2012 Christmas party.



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Peaceful, Joyful, Random Thoughts During a Blizzard

By Jim Kessler

*Cancellations and freedom from pressing responsibilities
The beauty of horizontal flying snow
Blessed isolation
Enchantment and heat from flames in the fireplace
Time to think great thoughts
The purity of fresh pure white snow
A day to do whatever came to mind
Thankfulness for a warm, tight abode
Birds flocking to feeders a hundred at a time
The joy of spending time with my beloved
Dazzling white savanna and prairie
Quietness and simplicity
A sense of the greatness and power of God my protector,
provider, and Saviour
The intricate patterns of drifts
Delicate snow and intricate snow flakes
Childlike joy and breathlessness on a snowshoe hike at
dusk
Smallness when observing power in the wind
A simplified landscape
The beauty of the Creation magnified
A day of peacefulness, joy, calm, and thankfulness
More reason to care for the Earth and its multitude of
living forms
Fullness and purpose for living
Peaceful Rest*

Clerk's Message

See You in Colorado This Summer

TWICE A YEAR THE QEW STEERING COMMITTEE meets to support each other in our work in our home Meetings and in the wider world, to make decisions for QEW on broad policy issues for the organization, and to share and hear our stories. This year we will meet June 27-30 at the Boulder Meetinghouse in Colorado, just prior to FGC, which meets June 30-July 6 in Greeley. Everyone is welcome to attend—whether you are new to QEW or you have years of history to share. We especially encourage all Yearly Meeting representatives to QEW and all at-large members of the Steering Committee to come.

This is always a rewarding and nurturing time to reconnect, meet new folks, and help QEW carry out its work in the world. The June meetings will be primarily in-house—taking care of QEW business and holding committee meetings—though there will be time on our agenda for walks in the nearby mountains. Our October meeting in Chicago, October 24-27, will include both business and outside speakers.

As a means to keep our costs down, Boulder Meeting has generously offered their meetinghouse for our sessions and Boulder Friends have offered Friendly hospitality. Friend Maia Wolff is planning and coordinating food preparation. We have been invited to join Boulder Meeting at their First Day Meeting for Worship, and Boulder Friends have been invited to join us for our sessions.

Registration materials will be posted on our website closer to the event. Be sure to save the date and plan on being with us this June. I hope to see you there. ☞

Shelley Tanenbaum, Clerk



Letters, continued from page 2

issues”; “WEF envisions a very limited role for civil society”; “One-way flow of information ...”; and “narrow national interests make it hard to make effective decisions based on the common good.”

Both reports point to an ominous development: decisions are made by one thousand multinational corporations which are beyond the jurisdiction of governments and do not pay attention to civil societies. They take care of corporate interests, “above” and “apart” from civil society. Even UN-sponsored conferences are being steered by corporate interests juggling with national interests, leaving little room for input from peoples’ groups. (Decision-makers from corporations often move to positions in governments, regulatory agencies, and trade delegations, making it possible to have seamless flow of decisions. In addition, corporations are contributors to political parties of all stripes.)

Nowadays international conferences are in different cities (instead of at the UN in New York and Geneva). Delegations are in a hurry, with no time for candid

exchange in small groups to cultivate mutual respect and consider problems that cross state boundaries. Oliver Robertson says, “It could be that this is not the way Friends are called to witness to climate change and that not everything that needs to be done, needs to be done by Quakers.” A new approach for Quakers to disseminate our values and processes about the common good needs to be discerned, one that is appropriate to these changing settings. We need to move forward in doing grassroots work with Quakers and cognate affiliates. We need to discuss what goods ought to be bought and sold and how their prices are set, determining whether they should be treated as public or common goods and services and maintained by society.

These decisions cannot be left to corporations. The role of the individual state remains crucial for the simple reason that we have no democracy to speak of above the state level. To look forward we need to look back on how we were in the forefront of changes in the past centuries.

Quaker Earthcare Witness is in contact with several other international Quaker organizations and I understand from Anne Mitchell, QEW General Secretary, that there are some discussions on coordinating programs and communicating with each other before issuing public statements or calls, to prevent different nuances appearing in different “epistles.” QEW could expand on that initiative by starting a Circle of Discernment to consider new ways to approach the changed world. Oliver’s sentence can be a start to this search. We are increasingly concerned about the human prospect and the future of caring for Earth, but we are at a crossroads as to how best to give expression to our voice. Government bodies and agencies seem to have gone increasingly deaf. How do we give witness in a world in which decisions with global impact are made by a thousand corporations who are beyond the reach of governments?

P. Rajagopal
Toronto Monthly Meeting

the theologian Marcus Borg speak at the Friends General Conference gathering. I asked him, ‘What is the biggest challenge for interfaith dialogue?’ His response startled me. ‘The real challenge is not interfaith dialogue, but intra-faith dialogue.’ He went on to say that some of the bitterest misunderstandings are among people within a faith tradition....If Friends cannot unite around theology, could we instead unite around practices like peacemaking and social justice? George Fox said we need to be ‘salt’ and ‘light’...To be ‘salt and light,’ we need to transcend our differences. We need to share our stories, listen to those we disagree with, and be open to a change of heart. We also need to seek common ground wherein we can put our faith into practice.”¹

QEW can be a model of intra-faith dialogue, a pattern for others. We can unite in faith-based environmental

action even as we differ in religion and science and in the specific types of action to which we are called.

Let us worship together, and practice collective discernment, and in other ways be Friends together. And then let us focus on the environmental issues, describing them in our own characteristic ways, supporting each other as we teach and learn about our environment and as we seek paths we are called to follow.

QEW can be a bridge among Friends who differ in religious and scientific philosophy. We can unite in our practices as Friends and in our actions as environmentalists. Let us treat our diversity as a benefit rather than a barrier, celebrating it openly and joyfully and frequently.

Os Cresson
Iowa City Monthly Meeting

¹ Manousos, Anthony. “Are Quakers Christian, Non-Christian, or Both?” *Friends Journal*, 59(2), February 2013, pp. 19-22, Online at <http://www.friendsjournal.org/are-quakers-christian-non-christian-or-both/>.



A five-page thank you note from Silver River Worship Group in La Plata, MO, sent November 8, 2012.

Notes of Gratitude

THANK YOU TO ALL OF YOU who have sent us kind and encouraging notes this month and made contributions to QEW!

We'd especially like to thank the youth group of **Chapel Hill Friends Monthly Meeting**, which send six donations in January, totaling \$185!

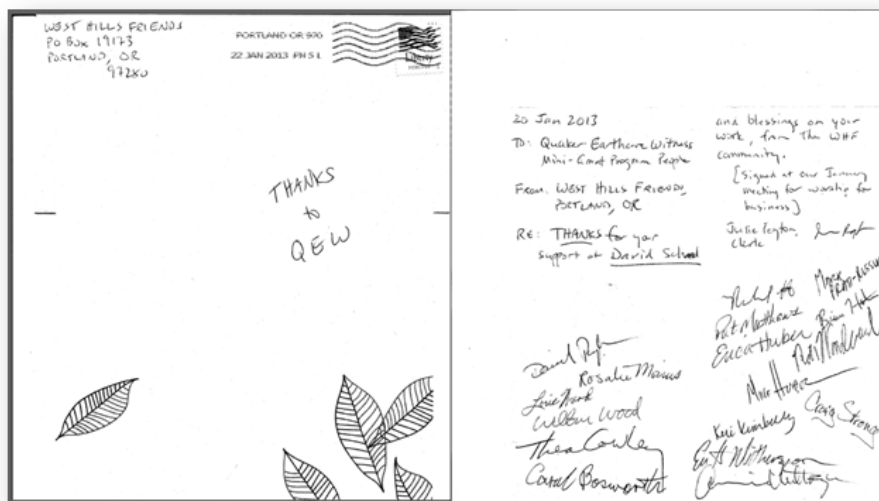
In a note accompanying the checks, Leslie Rountree, First Day School Coordinator said, "Their First Day School class organized an 'alternative gift mart' for our Meeting, and chose your organization to be one of the recipients of their efforts. These young teens solicited donations for three weeks prior to Christmas, and the enclosed are your designated gifts. May you put it to good work!"

What a wonderful and hopeful way to begin the new year, with the spirit-led thoughtful action of young Friends!

We also received two beautiful notes from Friends who have been

recipients of QEW Mini-Grants. We include them here for your enjoyment.

Thanks for your thoughtfulness and creativity, Friends! ~



A thank you note from West Hill Friends in Portland, OR, sent January 22, 2013.

Keep in Touch!

We welcome your notes, Facebook posts, emails, and contributions to the QEW Discussion board. You'll find the QEW Discussion board at <http://lists.quakerearthcare.org/mailman/listinfo/qewdiscussions>, or visit us on Facebook at <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Quaker-Earthcare-Witness>. ~



BeFriending Creation March–April 2013

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On Synthetic Biology

By Anne Mitchell, QEW General Secretary

Canada Yearly Meeting in session in August 2012 directed Canadian Friends Service Committee (CFSC) to write to the Canadian federal government to find out about current government efforts to protect the common good from unintended social, biological, and environmental consequences of research and development done in the field of synthetic biology, while sustaining its benefits. In its letter to the Canadian Minister of Industry in November 2012, CFSC asked:

- *How can the benefits of this technology be applied in an equitable way, a way that serves the common good?*
- *How can damaging and potentially disastrous consequences to ecosystems and social systems be foreseen and forestalled?*
- *Are there zones of organic processes and ecological relationships that should be ethically off limits for synthetic biology, and, if so, what are they?*

To get to this point, CFSC had prepared a brief document called *Towards a Quaker Perspective on Synthetic Biology*, which was used for discussion at a Special Interest Group at CYM in 2012. This document attempts to answer the question, “What is ‘Synthetic biology’?” and provides some useful links for more information. You can read through the document by

going to <http://quakerservice.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/Synthetic-biology-concern-at-012013.pdf> on the Canadian Friends Service Committee website.

In January 2013, CFSC received a reply to its letter from the Deputy Chief Public Health Officer of the Public Health Agency of Canada, stating, “The Government of Canada is currently exploring the issue of synthetic biology, and as such, your questions are timely and relevant. Currently, the Government does not have answers to the questions that were raised at the CYM of the Religious Society of Friends.... We look forward to working with your organization to further this important dialogue. Your questions will help guide the work ahead of us in this rapidly evolving area of science.”

We will be following this up at CFSC’s meeting in March. I have also brought this issue to the attention of the Biotechnology Reference Group of the Canadian Council of Churches, of which I am the current chair. If you are concerned about synthetic biology and its potential impacts on human health and the environment, why not organize a learning circle at your Monthly Meeting or community group? ☺