



BeFriending Creation

Newsletter of Quaker Earthcare Witness
Affirming our essential unity with nature

Volume 26, Number 4 • July-August 2013

Variations on “Summer Light”

by Tom Small

Editor’s note: We’ve been referring to this issue of BeFriending Creation as our “summer lite” issue because we planned to publish a shorter issue with content designed to give you space and time for reflection. Additionally, we enjoy being able to thoughtfully reduce our use of the paper, ink, and energy required for production. The phrase “summer lite” inspired Publications Clerk Tom Small to adapt portions of an essay, “A Yardful of Yellow Flowers: Celebrating the Sun,” from the book that he co-authored with his late wife Nancy Small, Using Native Plants to Restore Community (2011). Nancy, a member of FCUN’s Publications Committee from 1993 to 2000, passed in 2009.

QUAKERS HOLD ONE ANOTHER IN THE LIGHT. Summer Light holds us, enveloping and embracing us through long, quiet days. The very air is bright as the yellow flowers of July and August gather sunlight and offer, in return, an earthly reflection of celestial energy. My favorite image of full-blown summer is our yardful of yellow prairie flowers, native to this place on Earth, full of its spirit, history, and potency.

At every stage of the growing season, it’s the yellow flowers that enliven our yard and illuminate the beauty of other flowers. To the mostly pale flowers of spring, yellow flowers bring substance and zest. In full summer, yellow flowers come into their own, blazing away like miniature suns even in patches of shade. In early fall, goldenrod foams up along the highway and in vacant fields. And as the growing season closes, yellow flowers



Black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*).

provide the last rays of light in an herbal layer that, despite the bright-colored leaves overhead, is steadily darkening.

Composites: The Eye of Day

Softly at first and then with increasing intensity, the yellow-flowered members of the composite family (Compositae) announce the arrival of full summer. A yellow daisy-like flower—its central disk encircled by yellow rays—reminds us of the sun, the source of all life. Many of them we call sunflowers. Even the word daisy—as we see from its Old English spelling

See “Summer Light” on page 3

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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

August 10, 2013. Deadline for article submissions for September-October 2013 *BeFriending Creation*.

Letters to Share

Dear QEW Friends, Quaker Earthcare Witness encourages all Friends, monthly and yearly meetings to thank President Obama for his planned action on climate change. We see the need for a groundswell of support to counter expected strong opposition. These proposals are long overdue and represent a first step in what is needed. We encourage Friends to communicate their support of urgent action on climate change to U.S. Senators and Representatives.



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July 4, 2013

President Barack Obama
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Dear President Obama,

Quaker Earthcare Witness of the Religious Society of Friends is very grateful to you for your major address on the U.S. response to climate change. We support your plans to use Executive Orders due to the urgency of climate change and the failure of Congress to take positive action. It is important to act now because climate change is impacting our environment more severely than previously anticipated, as indicated by the increasing frequency of extreme weather events across the globe (e.g., droughts, floods, heat waves, hurricanes, and tornadoes). The resulting loss of topsoil and fresh water leads to widespread crop failure, food insecurity, and species extinction. Your proposals are a welcome first step in responding to the climate crisis. This community looks forward to working with you as together we move toward a healthy and vibrant low-carbon economy.

In Friendship,

Shelley Tanenbaum
Clerk (President)

Anne Mitchell
General Secretary



“Summer Light” *continued from page 1*

“daegeseg” (day’s eye)—refers to the sun. Of course, not all members of this family, also known as the Aster (star) or Daisy family, bear yellow or daisy-like flowers. Blazing stars and goldenrods, also composites, don’t look at all like daisies.

Daisy-like flowers, typical of the Aster or Composite family, are not the simple, straightforward flowers they seem. Each flower actually comprises many smaller flowers. Dozens of disk flowers form the prominent center. Surrounding the center, posing as individual petals, is a sunburst of corollas or ray flowers. In all their variety and elegance, the Asteraceae, or Compositae, are perhaps the most highly evolved, most efficient family of flowering plants. With more than 1,600 genera and 23,000 species, they’re probably the largest family as well (only the orchids rival them).

Anticipated in some years by golden ragwort and lance-leaf coreopsis, the first yellow composites of summer that bloom in our yard are black-eyed Susans (*Rudbeckia hirta*). Each ray, or petal, is sculpted by two longitudinal veins, the mounded center a glowing maroon and satin-smooth. A long, close look at this familiar, early-blooming flower can take your breath away. Then, steadily, the sun calls forth more floral reflections, until by late July almost all the yellow, daisy-like composites are in glorious bloom.

Their Glory Is Passing from the Earth

With their bursts of daisy-like yellow flowers, the majestic silphiums are my favorites. They capture my imagination as they did Aldo Leopold’s: “What a thousand acres of Silphiums looked like when they tickled the bellies of the buffalo is a question never again to be answered, and perhaps not even asked” (July, *A Sand County Almanac*). Three of our four local species of silphium are rare in the wild and listed as threatened. All the more reason to cherish them.

Ranging from five to nine feet tall, they hold up, into the sunlight, clusters of large yellow ray-flowers, invitations to bees, butterflies, and birds. There’s compass plant (*Silphium laciniatum*), with large, lacy leaves, and prairie dock (*S. terebinthinaceum*), with massive, rough basal leaves and eight-foot flowering stalks. Those lovely, tall stems of compass plant and prairie dock persist during fall and winter, providing perches and seeds for birds, and harboring more insects both in the stems and in fallen litter than almost any other plant.

The most distinctive of the Silphiums may be the cup plant (*Silphium perfoliatum*), especially for the oddity of its leaves, which clasp the plant’s strong, square stalk so as to form a cup with rounded lip, able



Tiger swallowtail butterflies on cup plant. Copyright Amelia Hansen. Used with permission.

to hold rainwater. Goldfinches drink from these cups, perhaps finding insects in them as well. In bloom, its sprays of yellow flowers held on high, the plant reaches eight feet tall. Its many-rayed flowers distill the fragrance of summer itself. Tiger swallowtail butterflies, drawn to their nectar, sometimes seem as numerous as the flowers themselves.

Another favorite, gray-headed coneflower (*Ratibida pinnata*), has several other common names: yellow coneflower, drooping coneflower, prairie coneflower, and—best of all—weary Susan, because its petals, unlike those of black-eyed Susan, are drooping. Tall, branching stalks and widely-spaced, divided leaves make this an airy, graceful plant. The cone or disk of its flower is at first grayish-green, later turning brown. The long slender rays are translucent—almost silky or gauzy—and lemon yellow. Native Americans used the plant to make a vivid yellow-orange dye. Stirring slightly on long stalks above the leaves, their delicate

rays drooping from the cones, these flowers are a lovely sight.

Many Reasons to Love Them

These vigorous yellow composites—sunflowers, silphiums, coneflowers—are as basic to prairie as heat is to summer, as sunlight is to life. So, when they start to overpower other plants you love, you push them back, preserving space for pale purple coneflowers, prairie phlox, or blazing star. You dig them up and give them away, or you isolate them along with other aggressive species and let them duke it out. But whatever the vigorous spread of wild species like downy sunflowers or cup plants, you never consider getting rid of them. They are vanishing from the wild, and the passing of such beauty will leave us desolate.

The supreme reason, however, for fostering these yellow composites is not the sunlike brilliance they

bring to our lives but all the pollen, nectar, and seeds they provide to bees, birds, butterflies, and other wildlife, as well as their essential role as host plants for the caterpillar larvae of butterflies and moths. If these prairie plants hadn't been so attractive to wildlife, so adaptable and opportunistic, they would not have survived the wholesale destruction of their habitat by our forebears, compounded by ourselves.

These are the rare and disappearing variations on "summer light," symbols and generations of the maturing sun. Hold them in the light, as they embrace us with their light and enliven us with their breath. Provide them and their relations with homes in your yards and meeting-house grounds, so they may continue to provide shelter, food, and life to entire communities of species, both those we love and those beyond our notice or ken, invisible to our eyes but not to the "eye of day," which beholds and cares for them all. ❧

A Statement from QEW's UN Working Group

Statement to the Post 2015 Consultations

Submitted by Quaker Earthcare Witness, July 10 2013



For more information about QEW please contact Anne Mitchell, General Secretary, at anne@quakerearthcare.org or go to our website at www.quakerearthcare.org.

As Quakers, part of our tradition is to remain open to all sources of wisdom and recognize that we are all seekers and stewards of creation. Rather than prescribing courses of action, Quakers seek truth by first questioning the actions of their own lives, rather than prescribing courses of actions for others.

The following questions and concerns have come from many Quaker groups. They may be helpful to other civil society organizations and other faiths. In Friends World Conference's Kabarak Call to Peace and Ecojustice (2012) we committed to "cooperate lovingly with all who share our hopes for the future of the earth." We begin by asking ourselves:

- Do our lives speak? Do our own actions accord with our principles of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, and Equality? Can there be peace without justice, or community without sustainability, or sustainability without simplicity?
- Do we respect that of God in everything that lives? Do we recognize the utter dependence of human society on the intricate web of life in this sacred place, our Earth? Can we search out the seeds of war and destruction in ourselves and in our way of life? Can we teach our children right relationship, to live in harmony with each other and all living beings in the earth, waters and sky of our Creator?
- Do we live in that life and power which takes away the occasion for all war? Can we love our neighbor as ourselves, aid the widow and orphan, comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable, appeal to consciences and bind the wounds?
- Are we actively reducing our ecological footprints? Do we promote earth's healing, not just for our use, but for future generations and the survival of other species? Do we dispose of waste in regenerative ways? Do we avoid spending and investing money in ways that result in others doing things to the world that we would not do ourselves? Are we aware how our use of energy connects us directly to the greenhouse effect and to world food supplies? Are we aware how our bank interest rates link us to the debt burdens of the poor? Are we willing to consume less ourselves in order to promote rightful sharing of the world's limited resources?



Hopeful dialogue among delegates and experts hints at growing convergence

By Mary Gilbert, QEW Representative to the UN

I have never seen the like, not at the UN! The countries are taking seriously the threats human activity has brought to Earth's ability to host us and other species. They get it! Best of all, they get that it is really one problem of stunning complexity. The word *nexus* (meaning "interactive connections within a complex system") was in frequent use, and the phrases *silo thinking* and *sectoral approach*--in which, say, the agricultural, water, and financial sectors are considered separately--were disparaged.

The occasion was the 3rd meeting of the Open Working Group (OWG) on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), May 29-31, and the reason the delegates' shared understanding was apparent is that they were in learning and discussing mode, and not yet negotiating. If bad decisions are made later, they will be made with awareness, with nations ignoring input from their own delegates.

Here is some context for this meeting. World human population is expected to reach nine billion by 2050. The UN is reorganizing to meet global challenges by developing a "Post 2015 Agenda." UNEP has been upgraded and there is talk about reorganizing ECOSOC. In 2015, the second phase of the Kyoto Protocol and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) will both end.

The Commission on Sustainable Development

(CSD), which I have been attending for 13 years, has been scrapped, to be replaced by a High Level Political Forum (HLPF). An OWG is struggling with the HLPF's composition, frequency of meetings and how it will connect to the rest of the UN system. It's not clear how civil society (that's us) will be allowed to interact with the HLPF. When I was present, the co-chairs of the OWG gave verbal assurance that we will have at least as much opportunity to engage as we did in the CSD, but what will happen remains to be seen. I'm following the efforts of several civil society meta-groups that are trying to hold onto and expand opportunities for us to be heard within (and outside of) the UN system.

The SDG OWG session I'm reporting on here addressed food security and nutrition; desertification, sustainable agriculture, land degradation and drought; and water. This list of separately clustered topics obscures the hopeful way everything was discussed as part of everything else. A delegate from the Netherlands remarked, "We have come a very long way in 15 years! I was there in 2000 when the MDGs were being formed," she said, "and we were only talking about drinking water." Now the following issues are all part of the water discussion: agriculture, irrigation methods, industrial use, pricing, indirect subsidies, "virtual water" (for example, fruit grown in Africa for export to Europe), changing patterns of precipitation, floods, drought, inter-boundary water bodies, sanitation, and more.

The following ideas appeared to be widely accepted:

- We need to live within planetary limits.
- The SDGs should have an inclusive, rights-based approach with wide participation.
- Food security includes good nutrition, not just tonnage.
- The empowerment of women is correlated with improved nutrition, higher yield per acre, social cohesion, and better health overall.
- The concept of “resilience” should be implicit in every goal.
- Changes in agricultural methods should be science-based and also include local knowledge.
- We should aim for zero-balance land degradation; soil regeneration is a high priority.
- Food price volatility is disastrous; speculation should be eliminated or tightly regulated.

This meeting was a three-day emotional roller-coaster ride for me. They used a format of having expert panelists speak, followed by a question-and-answer period, so the delegates were not directly addressing each other. The panelists together said everything I hoped for, so delegates’ questions were well informed, letting us know what they would bring back to their capitals. I truly felt hopeful! I know, however, that there appeared to be a similarly sophisticated understanding at the Rio Earth Summit in 1992, after which peoples’ high hopes were dashed. Much actual power is held by transnational corporations and the finance industry, and they were not participants in this dialogue. Not that they won’t hear about it, but their interests and values are mostly incongruent with the interests and values in the room and they may not take in what was said.

Delegates asked the co-chairs to draw up a summary of what seemed to be commonly accepted ideas. You can read the co-chairs’ one-page bullet point summary here: <http://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/1825bullet3.pdf>. Immediately the US and several other states made a big point of insisting that nothing has yet been negotiated. Any conclusions about agreement would be premature. Nation-states will study every detail and firm up the positions that we will see when it’s time to negotiate.

Sometimes I wish the delegates could actually make decisions, but they can only report back to their capitals and try to be persuasive with superiors who were not present to take in the information and hear what others said. No matter what we end up with, putting it in place and getting compliance will be a major challenge because the UN has no way of compelling any member states to do, or not do, anything. Our



UN delegates in the Open Working Group meet on the Sustainable Development goals.

work here in our own countries is crucially important. We should be about whatever we can do to create receptivity at home to these encouraging messages from the UN.

I have 22 tightly written pages of notes and would be happy to discuss any questions that arise from reading this report. Contact me at: mary@gilbert-white.com. ☞

ACRONYMS

- ECOSOC—The UN Economic and Social Council, to which we are recently accredited: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Nations_Economic_and_Social_Council
- CSD—The now defunct Commission on Sustainable Development
- HLPF—High Level Political Forum which is replacing the CSD
- MDGs—Millennial Development Goals—a 15-year program to address specific problems in poor countries: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Millennium_Development_Goals
- OWG—Open Working Group. Nations participate, civil society may observe.
- SDGs—Sustainable Development Goals—Comprehensive global goals to be ready by 2015
- UNEP—UN Environmental Programme, based in Nairobi, to which QEW is accredited.



Steering Committee Stills

photos courtesy of David Millar



The beautiful view from Boulder Friends Meeting.



From left: Anne Mitchell, Rod Zwirner, Mary Gilbert, Maia Wolf, Sophie Quest, Ruth Zwirner, Roger Hansen, Gail Fletcher, Mary Coelho, John Fletcher



From left: Roger Hansen, Ruth Zwirner, Gail and John Fletcher, Mary Coelho, unidentified, Judy Lumb, Mary Jo Klingel, Boulder MM's liaison Lorna Jacobson (in doorway), Tom and Ruth Small, eric maya joy. At clerks' table: Roy Taylor, Shelley Tanenbaum, (out of frame) recorder John Payton.

QEW at the Gathering

In keeping with Friends General Conference's theme of "Our Growing Edge," we explored the query, *What is your Monthly or Yearly Meeting's growing edge on environmental concerns?* The query and responses were one of the 14 sessions we hosted in this year's Earthcare center.

The Earthcare Center provided informal meeting space to make connections with each other and for Friends to learn more about QEW and other Friends organizations with a focus on Earthcare. We also hosted talks by several organizations and individuals. I had the pleasure of hearing all of the talks—where I learned about:

- permaculture from QEW Steering Committee member, Carol Barta
- economics and resource scarcity from Geoff Garver and Judy Lumb of Quaker Institute for the Future (QIF at www.quakerinstitute.org)
- young adult Friends' leadership workshops from Mary Craudereuff and Madeline Schaefer (www.pendlehill.org/yald)
- repudiating the Doctrine of Discovery through the heartfelt blanket program sponsored by the Indigenous Peoples Concerns committee of Boulder MM with Paula Palmer (www.boulderfriendsmeeting.org/ipc-right-relationship)
- direct action against mountain top removal from Amy Ward Brimmer of EQAT (www.eqat.org)
- how to be part of a QIF Circle of Discernment with Judy Lumb, Geoff Garver and myself (www.quakerinstitute.org)
- backyard solar with Paul Klinkman (www.klinkmansolar.com)
- deepening our spiritual connections with the natural world with QEW Steering Committee members eric joy, Mary Jo Klingel, Mary Coehlo, Mary Gilbert, and Boulder MM member Paula Palmer
- finding GMO- and pesticide-free food with Liberty Goodwin (www.toxicsinfo.org)
- Quaker Earthcare Witness, where I led a discussion with the query described above and below.

Responses to the query, *What is your Monthly or Yearly Meeting's growing edge on environmental concerns?* were mostly along the lines of greening meetinghouses and building community gardens. Our deeper reflections in this worship-sharing session and in the weeklong QEW-sponsored morning workshop on deepening our spiritual connection to the natural world made it clear that we are called to do so much more. We can see energy-efficient homes and meetinghouses, organic gardens, and supporting local agriculture and business as important first steps in widespread, far-reaching changes that are needed to create a resilient and friendly world amidst our changing climate.

It was inspiring and a pleasure to join hands with Friends from throughout North America (and a few beyond) at the Gathering. These connections allow us all to carry out our Earthcare witness in our personal lives, and through our monthly and yearly meetings. Next year's Gathering will be held at California University in the Pittsburgh, PA area—see you there!

Shelley Tanenbaum, Clerk

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Thanks for a Productive Gathering!

by Anne Mitchell, General Secretary

QEW held its Steering Committee meeting, June 27 - 30 at Boulder, Colorado. We were warmly welcomed and hosted by Boulder Monthly Meeting. Boulder Friends provided housing, transport, and their beautiful Meeting House in a wonderful location with views of the mountains. Some of the highlights from the meeting include:

- Approval of a letter to be sent to President Obama, following his recent speech on climate change and encouraging him to go further;
- A statement to send to the United Nations Nongovernmental Liaison Service on sustainable development;
- The FCNL Working Group has agreed to prepare a draft response to the AFSC/FCNL report on Towards a New Foreign Policy;
- Discussion about exciting panels on climate change and its impacts at the QEW annual gathering in October 2013;
- And confirmation that QEW will meet face-to-face twice in 2014: at the Cenacle in Chicago in April and at Pendle Hill in October.

In addition, we had a session on visioning. The ad hoc Long Range Planning committee will continue its work during the summer and report back to us at the October gathering.

We also enjoyed a Saturday evening pot luck with Boulder Friends and an evening presentation on, "This Land Was Your Land," in which we spread blankets on the floor and subsequently rolled them up simulate the way that native peoples were removed from their lands.

The Development Committee also discussed plans to find resources for QEW as it grows its outreach and voice. These plans include focusing on QEW projects (such as Mini-Grants), our work at the UN, our work in supporting Young Friends; using our electronic capabilities; and more effectively telling the stories about our work.

We also have news to report: QEW has appointed a new General Secretary to begin when my contract ends in December 2013. Shelley Tanenbaum, outgoing clerk, will take up this position at the beginning of 2014.

Congratulations, Shelley!