



# BeFriending Creation

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QUAKER EARTHCARE WITNESS

Affirming our essential unity with nature • Vol.33 Number 4 • OCT-NOV-DEC 2020

## Redwood Renewal

By Shelley Tanenbaum

THE STORY OF redwood renewal through fire gives me hope in a world gone mad with doom and gloom. What can we learn from one of nature's most elegant ecological systems that evolved to not just cope with adversity, but to turn adversity into rebirth?

The few redwood forests that remain on earth are among the oldest and most complex ecosystems that we know. Coast redwoods (*Sequoia Sempervirens*: long-living) thrive in northern California, capturing fog during the dry summer months, rain in the winter. They have evolved as part of an ecosystem that is mutually supportive of a large number of species. Some old-growth redwoods even harbor entire mini-ecosystems in their canopies, including other tree species. Fire is naturally occurring in these forests, and generally encourages new growth without destroying established trees. There are only two other regions where redwoods thrive, in the Sierra Nevada (*Sequoia Gigantium*, Giant Sequoia) and in central China (*Metasequoia*, Dawn Redwood).

Early this fall, forests all over the western United States and Canada burned. I live in coastal northern



California, where fire broke out with a vengeance in August, in the aftermath of a freakish and massive thunderstorm.

In California alone, more than 4 million acres burned. Much more land has burned this year than in any previous year. Part of the cause of this massive burn is linked to climate change—weird weather, long-term drought, increasing intensity of hurricanes. The other cause is linked to forest management. For most of the west, fires have been suppressed for more than 100 years. In earlier times, fire would have run through these forests about every 25 years, clearing the land while preserving most of the trees. With such a long build-up of ground cover exacerbated by drought, these fires burned especially hot and fierce.

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The CZU Lightning Complex fire was stopped here, along the Fawn trail at Ben Lomond Quaker Center. Photo: Bob Fisher.

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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. Please share our work widely and broadly, always attributing it to Quaker Earthcare Witness.

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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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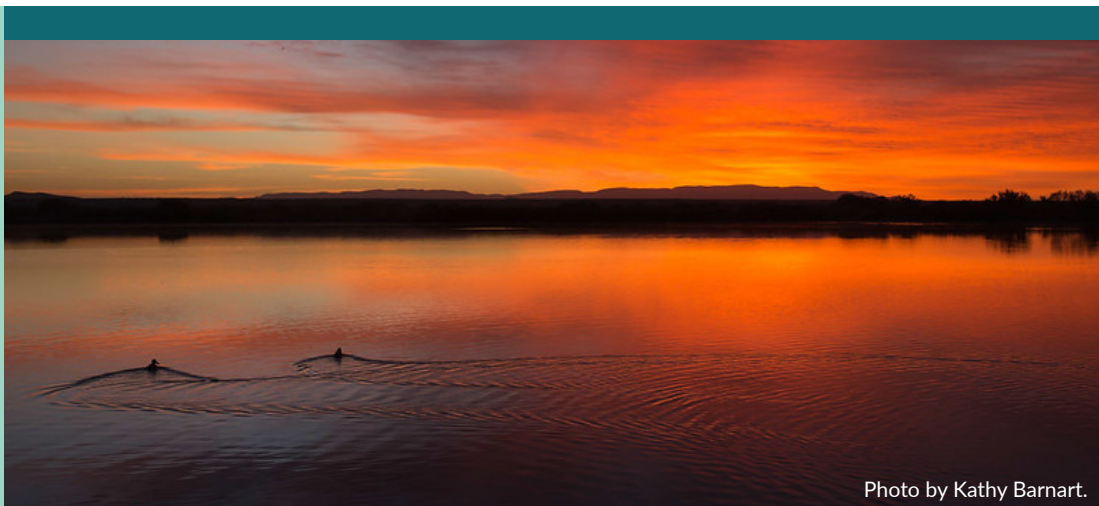


Photo by Kathy Barnart.

## From the Editor's Desk

Dear Friends,

A friend lamented on social media, "Why can't we be living in 'precedented' times?" Everyone is talking about how unprecedented 2020 has been—and we're not going back to normal anytime soon. I feel energized about the changes we are making to create a more just and loving world. A lot of the time I also feel worried, angry, ineffective, and tired.

That's why I'm so grateful to have the Quaker Earthcare Witness network to help me feel connected and grounded. When I feel overwhelmed by the wildfires in the West and the hurricanes in Central America and the southern coast, I feel stronger knowing that there are people across North America who share my concern, and are taking action in creative and positive ways.

This year, our QEW network is going beyond "normal" activism or contemplative practices—in addition, we are asking big questions: How can I serve most faithfully in this moment? What needs to shift? What can I be learning or unlearning right now?

Some of the answers I've seen include gaining more spiritual sustenance to hold the immense grief and anger of this moment, learning new skills to become active dismantlers of systemic racism, seeing the deep connections represented in the environmental justice movement, and finding ways to be more strategic in how we organize for change as the stakes get higher. These answers are part of our most basic call: "to live in right relationship with all Creation, recognizing that the entire world is interconnected and is a manifestation of God."

I'm curious about what 2021 will bring, and I'm glad to be in this good work with all of you. Please help us build and strengthen our community this year with a donation by visiting [QuakerEarthcare.org/donate](http://QuakerEarthcare.org/donate) or sending a check to Quaker Earthcare Witness, P.O. Box 6787, Albany, CA 94706 USA.

In peace and friendship,  
Hayley Hathaway



## Continued from Front Page

Indigenous Californians adapted to naturally occurring fire and they deliberately burned undergrowth annually to keep down tinder and to stimulate tree growth. For many decades, those who were aware of Indigenous fire practices encouraged forestry managers to practice more extensive controlled burns. In recent years, some of these practices have been adopted; however, forestry management hadn't caught up with decades of fire suppression practices, leaving our forests overgrown while long-term drought left behind enormous amounts of dry undergrowth and diseased trees.

When the fires broke out in the Santa Cruz mountains, I was checking on fire location and acreage burned several times a day. I know people who live in those mountains. I love that land—these redwood forests have an ecological harmony that sings to my soul. Drop me into a redwood forest, with trees towering way over head almost blocking out the sun, surrounded by several kinds of ferns, my feet cushioned by a carpet of redwood fronds, and I can feel spirit deep in my bones. Every breath of forest air feels like taking in ancient wisdom, going back to dinosaur times. My heart broke to think of losing this forest.

Then I remembered, redwoods love fire (as long as it isn't too extreme). The larger trees survive fire and seedlings sprout from those that do not make it. At Big Basin Redwoods State Park near Boulder Creek, CA, fire completely destroyed all the man-made structures, including the oldest visitor center in the state. But most of the trees survived, even with all of the undergrowth burned out. Already new shoots are inches tall, poking through the ash.

Ben Lomond Quaker Center (BLQC) is a near-neighbor to Big Basin. It has been a Quaker retreat center for over fifty years, much

beloved by west-coast Friends. For the past 28 years, my Quaker spiritual life grew thanks to time spent in reflection and prayer with Friends at BLQC.

How close was the fire? The CZU Lightening Complex fire was stopped in the middle of BLQC, burning through half of their forested land, completely devastating the area around the Marshall Creek trail, the Waterfall trail, burning up to the edge of the Fawn trail, where the fire was stopped. Their main water supply system was destroyed, two years of cut firewood was lost, and all of the undergrowth and smaller trees are now ash in the fire zone. Many medium-sized and large trees survived. All of the structures (other than the woodshed) remain intact.

Because this fire occurred after such a long period of sustained growth in this mixed redwood/evergreen forest, it burned especially hot. It is not yet clear how well these areas will recover on their own. The natural ecosystem can rebound from more frequent and less intense fires, with the help of seeds and roots stored in the soil. Additional sunlight and fertilizer from ash might actually produce a healthier understory. However, the forest may need some help in recovery with mulching and seed planting, because in many places the hot fire burned most of the duff layer of soil. The biggest concern right now is erosion when



Young Redwoods sprouting out of a burned-out tree. Photo: Jesse Keesaw.

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the rains start this winter. Plans are being made to shore-up hillsides and screen out debris in creeks.

Just weeks after the fires roared through BLQC, ferns are growing out of the ash and redwoods shoots have sprouted. Co-director Bob Fisher observes that "there is lots of life in the ash-covered soil" and he is amazed to see young redwoods growing out of burned-out trunks.

I am heartened by how many of the coastal redwood forests' trees survived. Yet damage was much more severe at the inland fires in and around Sequoia National Park in the Sierra Nevada. There fires burned so hot due to drought and fire-suppression that many monarchs (trees over 500 years old) were lost. It isn't clear yet if redwoods will ever return to these burned areas. I am chastened to learn of how both climate change and abandoning traditional forestry practices created such devastating fires.

I am hopeful that we will learn from this devastation and re-imagine both how we manage forests and how we are contributing to climate change. I am looking forward to visiting BLQC in the late spring, to see newly-grown ferns and baby redwood trees joining their much older brothers and sisters, making their way into the sunlight.

Shelley is QEW's General Secretary.

# From the Clerk's Table

What astonishing times these are—taking to the street and quarantining at home. Perhaps we are finally seeing the depth of American willfulness, avarice, and arrogance as we are stopped cold by a pandemic. Perhaps we can finally understand that both blame and victimization are toxins as we look at American treatment of the “other,” of Black people, of other racial and ethnic groups, of gender diverse people, of women and, perhaps most tragically for our future, the treatment of our Earth.

It is OK to feel angry and betrayed. It is OK to feel sad and to grieve. It is OK to feel lonely and resentful. It is most OK to need comfort and to ask what brings you comfort.

It is OK to love the small things. The new leaf on my Christmas cactus on the kitchen window sill brings a little beam of joy every morning even on days when I cannot imagine joy at all.

Even now, there is poetry and there is music. This morning I have been humming the chorus to a song by Gordon Bok called “Turning Toward the Morning.” Today it is my gift to you.

*Oh, my Joanie, don't you know that the stars are swingin' slow  
And the seas are rollin' easy as they did so long ago.  
If I had a thing to give you I would tell you one more time  
That the world is always turnin' toward the morning.*

Mary Jo Klingel  
Clerk, Quaker Earthcare Witness

# Grateful for Your Bequest

Every year since 2007, Quaker Earthcare Witness has received an anonymous gift from a foundation in Michigan. Someone set up an annual donation, probably as a bequest. They saw great value in us as a Quaker organization that inspires and empowers Friends to live in ecological integrity with the living world. This kind of annual giving is a blessing that lives on year after year.

When you are planning your bequests and how you would like your money to support a livable future for all the children of the world, consider making a gift to QEW. Our work is far from done.

For more information, please contact our General Secretary, Shelley Tanenbaum, at [shelley@quakerearthcare.org](mailto:shelley@quakerearthcare.org).



QEW hosted our Fall Steering Committee meeting on Zoom with 60 people attending across five time zones. We focused our attention on racial justice.

Our 50-member Steering Committee includes 30 representatives from 20 Yearly Meetings plus 20 at-large members.



Invite QEW to “visit” your monthly meeting or church. We offer workshops on a range of Earthcare concerns that help make sense of these times.

Visit <[QuakerEarthcare.org/qewpresents](http://QuakerEarthcare.org/qewpresents)>.





# Durham Friends Install Solar Panels

By Lauri Langham and Don Oulman

IN AUGUST 2019, following a spiritual leading to live in harmony with Creation by harnessing the energy of the sun to power our meetinghouse, Durham Friends Meeting (DFM), a member of the North Carolina Yearly Meeting Conservative, began generating electricity from solar panels installed that summer. After a year of operation, the total electricity generated for the three buildings on our campus has been almost 30 megawatt hours, representing a savings on our annual electricity bill of over \$3,300 and a reduction of 47,000 lbs of carbon dioxide! This success was the result of almost a year of planning and deliberation by the DFM community and coordination with the on-site Carolina Friends School's pre-school.

DFM began exploring solar energy for its three-building campus several years ago, but it wasn't until 2018 that solar panel cost reductions and efficiency improvements, along with a substantial rebate from our utility, made the project feasible. This coincided with the Meeting becoming more aware and concerned about the climate crisis.

## Our Process and Goals

We established an Ad-Hoc Solar Committee under the care of the Business Meeting and created goals for the project. The committee evaluated estimates from solar installers based on a number of criteria, including: experience working with non-profit institutions; ability to assist with rebate applications; summer installation timing; coordinating hook-up with the utility; overall project cost; and solar generation performance guarantee. We brought decisions to the Business Meeting

regularly, and communicated progress to the entire community to enable informed decisions on the project by the entire community at each step of the process.

## Fundraising

Once the Meeting gave the tentative go-ahead for the project, we established a Fundraising Committee to determine how to pay for it. Many members expressed interest in this tangible effort to address the climate crisis, but we were concerned that the fundraising might impact regular contributions to our operating budget (even knowing that installed panels would reduce our utility costs). So we asked members to consider their pledges to be over and above their regular annual gift.

With a total projected cost of \$77,000 dollars, we proposed that about one-third of the cost could be covered by the utility rebates; one-third could be a grant from DFM "legacy funds" left to us by a former member; and one-third could come from member donations (based on feedback from members).

Our Junior Meeting pledged \$2,000 and challenged adults to contribute, saying, "In our lifetime many Quakers have worked to help the environment; we find it imperative for us to continue this work." The month-long campaign raised the needed funds to enable DFM to contract for the system to be installed during the school's summer break. We started harnessing the power of the sun in August!

Contact Lauri Langham at [laurilangham@gmail.com](mailto:laurilangham@gmail.com) or Don Oulman at [doulman@gmail.com](mailto:doulman@gmail.com) for more information.

# A Prayer for the New Year

By Pamela Haines

As we head toward 2021, let us:

Take in the environment around us with relaxed awareness—appreciating beauty and opportunity, noticing threats, staying grounded in the midst of both;

Cultivate gratitude, for spaces that have opened in our society, for all the forces of goodness around us;

Continue to discern what belongs on our plate and commit to doing no less and no more; do what belongs whole-heartedly, with all the power and vision we can muster; let go of the rest, trusting that it will be taken care of by others;

Dare to imagine a new thing: call others to a vision of what is possible; call our institutions to their divine vocation, call each other to our shared humanity;

Tend to small joys in the midst of a pandemic;

Know what we love and love it with all our hearts;

Be willing to have our hearts break—to grieve openly and with each other;

Do the work of a spider, strengthening the web of relationships around us, and throwing out threads to enlarge it and pull ever more people in.

*Pamela is a member of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting and the author of the book Money and Soul.*

## Queries for Us

QEW is hosting monthly online worship sharing in partnership with Friends General Conference. Visit <QuakerEarthcare.org/Upcoming> to join us. In October, we asked:

*“Art thou in the Darkness? Mind it not, for if thou dost it will fill thee more, but stand still and act not, and wait in patience till Light arises out of Darkness to lead thee.” - James Naylor*

Since the pandemic has swept into this country, how has your life changed? What have you let go of? What have you welcomed in or re-gained?

Many of us have elders or wisdom teachers in our lives. What messages of challenge or comfort have they brought to you?

## The News from White Oak

By Harold Branam

During Monday’s “Morning Edition,” full of the world’s sound and fury,

my ninety-five-year-old Appalachian mother called:

“The news from White Oak is we had two inches of snow over the weekend, and my jonquils are blooming.”

*Harold is a member of Savannah (GA) Monthly Meeting whose poems have been published in Friends Journal, Appalachian Journal, and read by Garrison Keillor on NPR’s Writer’s Almanac.*

## Fund your Earthcare Project with a QEW Mini-Grant

Earthcare Witness offers matching grants (Mini-Grants) of up to \$500 each to support projects consistent with QEW values.

Mini-Grants are a great way to turn your spiritual inclination to protect Earth into on-the-ground action.

Past projects have included: bicycle racks, low water toilets, water catchment,

water filtration, water storage, gardens, land and springs restoration, solar installations, birth control information, tree planting, species survey, carbon calculator, educational materials, and more.

Visit <QuakerEarthcare.org/MiniGrants> to apply and to see more examples. We have an easy application process and welcome new ideas.



# Caring About Population

By Richard Grossman

MOST FRIENDS are careful stewards of our environment. Indeed, more than half of Yearly Meetings have added “Stewardship” (or the equivalent) to their short list of Testimonies. However, sometimes we don’t make the connection between our stewardship of Earth and human population.

I became interested in population as a senior at Germantown Friends School in Philadelphia. I had already made the commitment to work for peace, but realized that politics is not my forte. Then I read an advertisement in *Scientific American* that said, in part: “We believe that widespread, effective and voluntary use of medically sound and individually acceptable birth control is an essential factor in any humane design to raise world living standards and achieve international peace....” Aha! I could use my scientific aptitude to work for peace as a physician!

This ad, paid for by the Planned Parenthood Federation of America, went on to say: “...we urge that the United Nations take the lead in establishing and implementing a policy designed to limit population growth the world over—in order that human beings everywhere may develop their highest capacities, enjoy individual freedom, health, privacy, security, and the beauty and wonder of the world.”

The UN did not act on this request, even though it was signed by 34 Nobel Laureates. Fortunately, that torch has been carried by people of good will. There are demographers in every country who study their people’s statistics. I chose medicine as my profession, and the spe-

cialty of obstetrics and gynecology. For more than 40 years I was able to help people plan their families. It was an incomparable privilege to get to know people in Durango, Colorado so well.

My concern about human population started as an intellectual concern: How can one member of the Religious Society of Friends promote world peace? It took living in Monteverde, Costa Rica to find what has touched my heart the most. While in Monteverde, I discovered the discipline of conservation biology. These are scientists whose goal is to prevent the extinction of species.

I learned that there are several causes that make species of plants and animals extinct. They include: destruction of habitat, climate chaos, pollution, introduction of exotic species, overharvesting, and infection. Other than a rare natural event such as a volcano spewing lava over a flower’s habitat, these causes are all human. Extinctions have been going on for eons. However, it is estimated that the current rate of extinction is 1000 times normal—and that it (like climate chaos) is anthropogenic.

Moreover, there seems to be a direct relationship between the number of people on the planet and the number of species that we annihilate. Very crudely calculated, one species is sent into oblivion for every

increase in population of approximately 40,000 people.

Thus, there are two reasons to slow population growth, and they both pertain to Quaker Testimonies—Peace and Stewardship.

For various reasons, people are choosing to have smaller families. Perhaps most often it is because they realize that with fewer children, each child has greater opportunity. Other reasons include decreased child mortality, availability of safe contraception and abortion, and now concerns about the climate, environment and extinction of species.

What about consumption? Isn’t overconsumption the real reason that the planet is suffering? Yes; consumption is an important factor. Although I didn’t think of this back at Germantown Friends School, it is as important as the number of people, according to the formula **Impact = Population x Affluence x Technology**. Recently I have realized that Population is the “low hanging fruit.” People want smaller families. On the other hand, there is huge pressure to consume more.

What can we do to help the environment? As a community of high integrity, we must advocate for reproductive rights for all people. This means voting for candidates who support reproductive health—including access to safe abortion services. Although not perfect, Planned Parenthood is the largest provider of reproductive health services in the USA, so I encourage Friends to support them.

Finally, if so moved, please join the Population Working Group of Quaker Earthcare Witness—we’d love to have you!

*Richard (Dick) is a member of Durango (CO) Friends Meeting and writes a monthly column called “Population Matters.” Write to him at [richard@population-matters.org](mailto:richard@population-matters.org).*

*My concern about human population started as an intellectual concern: How can one member of the Religious Society of Friends promote world peace?*

# In the School of the Shipwreck

By Noah Merrill

*Editor's Note: Noah wrote this piece in spring 2020 and his reflections speak to us still.*

These are the only genuine ideas;  
the ideas of the shipwrecked.  
All the rest is rhetoric, posturing, farce.  
—José Ortega y Gasset

JUST OFF THE shore in Gibara, a sun-soaked town on the northeastern coast of Cuba where Quakers from what would become Friends United Meeting first arrived on the island, there is a shipwreck. Rusted and broken, its hulking ruin stands as a testament to the unpredictable power that shatters what once seemed would endure.

For more than a hundred years, Cuban Quakers have known what it means to cultivate a living faith through seemingly unending crisis, sanctions, persecution, and impoverishment. Since my first encounter with Cuban Friends, I've been blessed by the profound humility and witness of these Friends who have so much to share about steadfastness, resilience, and enduring hope.

In these relationships, I've been given a glimpse of an expression of Quaker faith grounded in a profoundly different context from my own. I've found it instructive to see such different ways of responding as Quaker spiritual communities to the legacies and present impacts of oppression, colonialism, supremacy, and exploitation in which Cubans and North Americans share.

Last year, I was asked to return to Cuba. I spent that time trying to listen, to in some small way encourage those called to ministry there. I was encouraged and challenged. And I was given a message that has remained with me:

There is no other refuge—only faithfulness.

I'm told that years ago, as a hurricane approached, Friends in Gibara opened their meetinghouse as a refuge for people throughout the community. Communists and people of faith, soldiers and Quakers gathered together, sheltering in one another's care against the storm.

These last months I've been keenly aware of the waves of anxiety, grief, and anger which threaten to overtake the society in which we live.

I hear from many Quakers about their heartbreak at the splintering of communities, the erosion of the social fabric, and the politics of separation, othering, and relational dismemberment that seems to permeate these times.

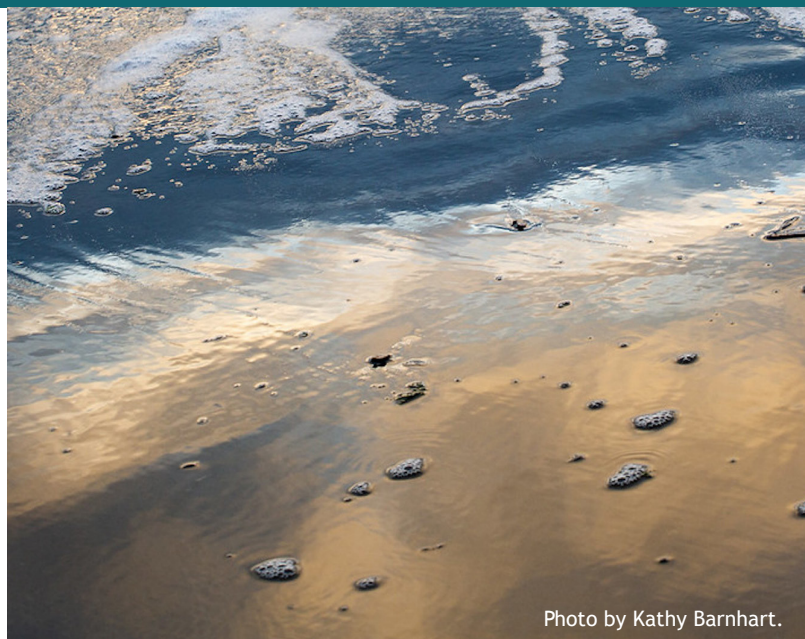


Photo by Kathy Barnhart.

We're living in a moment when so many are seeking refuge—both physically and spiritually. The storms, both inward and outward, can leave us desperately searching for protection and safety.

As Friends, whether we ourselves face physical threats to life and safety or not, we're called to the extent we're able to accompany and enter into solidarity with those who do. I'm convinced we're also called to cultivate an inward refuge—a shelter within—that can withstand the tempest of these times. And that shelter is not for us alone.

In recent months, I've been reflecting on times in my life when the things I'd relied on for security were ripped away. It happened again this week—some people I love and rely on did something I didn't expect, and I found myself shaken, questioning where I'd put my trust.

Maybe you've had a similar experience of having your foundations shaken—with a family member, a partner, a political movement, a trusted leader, a part of your spiritual community.

Maybe it was a dream job, a hoped-for career, a sense of accomplishment or recognition or self-image—whatever you had invested your heart and hope in, whatever you'd come to believe would save you.

These shipwrecks don't just change our circumstances, they can alter our understanding of our own identity and relationship to others. Sometimes they threaten to undermine our sense of sacred connectedness, and shift the underlying story of our life journey.

In the shipwrecks of my life, I've felt betrayed, lost, confused, and terrified. Suddenly, I've become aware that in some way the world would not—could not, ever again—be the way I had understood it to be, or so longed for.

*Continued on next page*





On so many occasions, I've found the ship I'd built as a refuge crashing on the rocks.

In each of these losses, something in me has died. I've felt angry, resentful, depressed, reactive. At times I've lashed out, or wished that I could. I've isolated myself. Sometimes it's felt like grief might overwhelm me—and sometimes it has.

And so it took me a long time to realize that in these moments, if I allow it, something new is waiting to be revealed.

What rises from the depths in those moments, in my experience, is a new and profound freedom to embrace the reality of my life as it is, not as I might have wished it would be. I've been liberated from my clinging to what might have been true, what I wish I'd done, or who I wish that I or someone else had been.

Letting go of trying to make it different through the force of my own will unbinds my heart and hands, to welcome, here and now, both what's present and what's possible.

Surrendering to reality, I wash up on the shore of Truth.

While it can at first seem strange—with time, as my spiritual senses adjust—I discover that this new ground on which I'm standing can hold more weight, can offer more resilience, more refuge, than the broken ship to which I'd clung before. And when the storms come again, this sense of what remains, when I've let go of what I was clinging to, offers a new kind of shelter.

There's an ancient—and perhaps off-putting—word for placing our hope in what can't hold us. For those of us with an oar in the stream of the Abrahamic traditions, that word is idolatry.

In the most important sense, idolatry isn't about arguing over who's worshipping the right—or wrong—statue. It's not about pitting one spiritual tradition against another, or using religion to justify violence or oppression.

At its heart, this spiritual principle is about the harm that is caused to ourselves and others when we allow our profound attention, commitment, and reliance to rest on something that won't endure—whatever form that may take.

In my experience, the most dangerous idols are within us.

Our tradition as Friends challenges us to be always tearing down the idols we encounter. We're reminded again and again, through the testimony of generations of Quakers, to be watchful to keep from falling into lifeless forms—in religion and society—that keep us from being open to the Life, that oppress the fundamental belovedness of all. We're exhorted to not be bound by the letter of the law, but the spirit of the law, “for the letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life.”

While these are reminders many of us give each other, I know that sometimes I don't live them—and I imagine I'm not the only one.

As Quakers, we often see ourselves as being free from these kinds of idolatry, because of our flexible theology, or our radical political commitments, or our rejection of the ritual and hierarchy we can criticize so harshly in other traditions.

And yet I need to confess that at times I see us making idols out of the very things we claim make us different. What might happen, I wonder, if each of us—myself surely included—could more fully practice letting go of the idols of our own uniqueness, our own superiority, our own sense of being “on the right side”, our own separateness and purity and perfectionism?

Imagine what it could be like: To behold the fullness of another person for who they are, rather than for who I want or expect them to be? To encounter the tender wholeness of a situation in all its messiness, nuance, and complexity? Could we allow our whole lives to come into right relationship, recognizing the gifts of God we are to one another, rather than being bound in the illusions and fears that separate us?

The Irish poet and theologian Padraig O'Tuama, from his deep experience of brokenness, reconciliation, and resilience, prays, “Let us pick up the stones over which we stumble, friends, and build altars.” As we release our clinging, we are freed for relationship, for service, for ministry.

From the ground of this freedom, maybe our lives together could grow more fully into the kind of refuge that the world needs—shelters in the storm, built with the gifts of all we are.

When we allow ourselves to practice letting go—when we release our clinging, dying into Life again and again—we can come to rest in a place of resilience and profound joy. Around this Center, Creation turns. Living from that ground is the only refuge: faithfulness.

When we're freed from clinging to our shipwrecked idols—every time this happens—it's then that we can love, and serve, and live most deeply. I've only glimpsed it, but for me, that glimpse is enough to anchor my faith.

So I wonder:

- As Friends, what idols are we clinging to, as individuals, and as communities?
- What habits of heart and mind might we need to let go of, to be more free to love, live, and serve?
- Where have we placed our deepest hopes in what does not endure?
- Is there something in us that might need to die, so that Truth can blossom?

Noah is Secretary for New England Yearly Meeting of Friends.

# Black Butterfly: Interview with Artist Damita Hicks

*Damita Hicks is a Bahai artist living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Her paintings center on Mama A'free'ca, Nature, and racial unity. Kirsten Bohl of Durham (North Carolina) Friends Meeting speaks with Damita here.*

**You have a painting called Black Butterfly. Please tell me about it.**

There's a song called "Black Butterfly." I really connected with it. It's by Denise Williams. It's talking about bringing out the awareness of people, the beauty of who we are. It says so many things. Coming out of slavery or the slave mentality, feeling less than, inferior. Showing people the true beauty of who we are, as the Black Butterfly.

Black Butterfly in my painting represents the people; in the diaspora, people were taken forcibly from their land to be enslaved. Also, people who are marginalized and who feel the oppression of white supremacist ideas. In my painting of Mama A'free'ca, I saw how the shape of Madagascar, looked like a butterfly. So I painted it as a butterfly. Coming out of the chrysalis, showing the beauty of our people, showing a new way. People are made to feel not beautiful, ugly, for having color—how God made us. To come out of that, emerge, feel proud and noble. Feel freedom of the butterfly. Having wings to fly.

**How is Madagascar significant for you?**

I found out [that] one of my great-great [grandmothers] (how many greats?) was taken over there in the time of the slave trade. I don't know if it's called the Gate of No Return. They took them over there, to demoralize them, get them ready to be taken away and become slaves. It was a place where, sort of like a dungeon, jail, or prison. Dark, cold, and damp. Harsh conditions, awaiting to be chained in the very unhealthy state of being enslaved. People would go to purchase slaves. Having the connection of my maternal ancestor going through that—I don't know the full history of every one of my ancestors, but she is one that I do know about.

**How does your faith inform your art?**

I just feel like God is my friend. I just feel that love. That just really gives me a love for all people. The hope I desire for all people, is that we do unite, that we do have that understanding of our connectedness. I want peace for the world. I know it's a little clichéd. We could easily



"Black Butterfly" by Damita Hicks.

go down another road. In many ways, we are in such a negative trajectory. I just want that to be reversed. I just want people to understand we're all one.

**How do you see evidence of God's hand in Creation?**

I usually go back to Mama A'free'ca and my presentation. When I did the painting, I started in about 2013, finished in 2014. Some years later, in 2018 or 2019, I saw the image of the Hubble telescope of a cloud of gases and stars, where stars are being born. The image matches the face of Mama A'free'ca. I measured the proportions in the details. It was the same.

Just seeing, when I look at the stars, the universe, the nebula of space, I do see things. I see things that match, what I know on the earth. Just in everyday life, I see God's hand working. In me and my daughter...How God works things out so beautifully, when we pray together. In my family, the evidences of God are all around and I'm just so grateful.

**If you wished to move people to action by seeing your paintings, what actions might they take as a result?**

To see the nobility of all people, especially the most marginalized and oppressed people, which are Black people around the world, and just see that we are all connected. To stop racist discrimination and negative labels and violence, and to work together in a unified way. The racial construct was made up. To begin teaching the truth of history, who we all are and where we all came from. Not feeling ashamed, feeling like it's something shameful to be Black or from Africa, to see the beauty in all people.

Read the full interview at <QuakerEarthcare.org>. Please contact Damita at damitajhicks@gmail.com if you would like to purchase her artwork, host an exhibit, or schedule a workshop.



# Territory Acknowledgment

By the Canadian Friends Service Committee



HAVE YOU EVER been to an event that began with an acknowledgment that it was taking place on the traditional territory of particular Indigenous peoples? Have you wondered what goes into such an acknowledgment or how to make one? Canadian Friends Service Committee has released this guidance to help with thinking through and making territory acknowledgments.

**Acknowledge: to accept or admit the existence or truth of.**

## TO REMEMBER

To properly acknowledge Indigenous territory, the speech must reflect intent, purpose, and a commitment to action, explicitly describe the historical and existing power dynamics between settlers and Indigenous people on this land, as well as the obligation of settlers to redress it. It must be personal to the speaker, and relevant to the organizers.

The speaker should also address how the land acknowledgement speaks to the event in question and how the organizer of the event intends to better serve—in concrete terms—the Indigenous people and the land that they acknowledge.<sup>1</sup>

Moving beyond territorial acknowledgments means asking hard questions about what needs to be done once we're "aware of Indigenous presence." It requires that we remain uncomfortable, and it means making concrete, disruptive change. How can you be in good relationship with Indigenous peoples, with non-human beings, with the land and water?<sup>2</sup>

## TO DO

- Use words like acknowledge, honor, traditional territory, land, treaty, First Nation name(s), commitment
- Learn which traditional territory you are on: <Native-Land.ca>.

## TO AVOID

- Using words like gratitude, thanks, play, Canada, citizen, guest
- Having/Asking Indigenous people to draft the acknowledgment
- Doing it as a token
- Repeating it automatically
- Drafting a superficial/generic one without learning the history. Repeating the same phrase across events, groups and time.

## ASK YOURSELF

- How can I make this land acknowledgment personal?
- What will be my contribution to righting historical harms? What commitment am I making?
- What are my reasons for making this land acknowledgment?

*“[This] requires that we remain uncomfortable, and it means making concrete, disruptive change.”*

## EXAMPLES

“We acknowledge with respect the Lekwungen-speaking peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and WSÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.”  
– University of Victoria

“I want to begin my remarks by recognizing the traditional keepers of this land, the Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg First Nation and Pikwakanagan First Nation, as we meet on their unceded territory.” – Senator Murray Sinclair in the Senate

“We acknowledge that Camp NeeKauNis is situated on the ancestral lands of the Wendat and Anishnaabeg and, more recently, Haudenosaunee peoples, in Upper Canada treaties territory that has seen thousands of years of rich Indigenous history and is home to many Indigenous people from across Turtle Island today. We honour the covenants of the Dish with One Spoon and Two Row Wampum Belts. As we gather, we remind ourselves to respect and nurture our sacred relationship to this land as well as to its First Peoples both past and present.”  
– Camp NeeKauNis

To learn more visit Canadian Friends Service Committee at <QuakerService.ca>

1. C. Vowel, 2016. Beyond territorial acknowledgments. <apihtawikosisan.com/2016/09/beyond-territorial-acknowledgments>

2. The Varsity Editorial Board, 2019. To properly acknowledge Indigenous territory, go off script. <thevarsity.ca/2019/03/16/to-properly-acknowledge-indigenous-territory-go-off-script>

# BeFriending Creation October•November•December 2020

**Quaker Earthcare Witness**

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## QEW Looking Forward

HOW DO WE build a sustainable and life-enhancing future in these challenging times? QEW grew out of a strong leading that our future depends on a spiritual transformation in our relationships with each other and the natural world.

This year (2020-21) we are facing serious environmental threats to our oceans, our food supplies and fresh water and our climate, a global pandemic, a racial justice uprising and backlash, plus threats to U.S. democracy. The potential for a spiritual transformation to embrace a new way of relating to our environment and each other is needed more than ever. In 2021, we will reach out to Friends and beyond to:

- Broaden our connections and more widely distribute our resources with an all new website;
- Expand our reach with an ambitious plan to connect with Friends meetings: we will be offering workshops and forums that encourage Friends to act boldly, grounded spiritually in care for our Earth;
- Speak out publicly to support Friends and allies' actions on Earthcare;
- Sponsor an international forum on water in the African diaspora, building on the success of our four previous forums in 2017-2020;
- Offer mini-grants for hands-on local Earthcare projects.

Thank you for being part of our growing network.



“I saw the image of the Hubble telescope of a cloud of gases and stars, where stars are being born. The image matches the face of Mama A'free'ca.” - Damita Hicks

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