

*Quaker Earthcare Witness is a network of Friends (Quakers) and other like-minded people who are taking spirit-led action to address the ecological and social crises of the world, emphasizing Quaker process and testimonies.*



# QUAKER EARTH CARE WITNESS

Ruah Swennerfelt

## Remembering Bill Howenstine:

**William Lester Howenstine "Bill"  
Born June 20, 1925**

Bill Howenstine was a gentle force of nature and led a life of great impact. He passed away on January 23, 2026, at the age of 100, at home on the farm where he and Alice, his wife of 72 years, had lived since 1970.

Bill was thoughtful, kind, and caring. He was honest and, consistently and without exception, lived his values; love was his driving force.

He and Alice met at a summer camp near Cleveland, Ohio, where Bill was a high school counselor. Throughout their lives they shared a deep commitment to peace, protection of the natural environment, and recognition of the interconnectivity of all things. In 1951, they joined the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) and were married in an outdoor Quaker wedding in Hiram, Ohio.

Bill's life included a rich mix of formal and experiential education. While completing a PhD in Conservation at the University of Michigan, he built and directed an outdoor education program for the Cleveland Heights Public Schools.

With Alice and their children (Chuck, Debra, and Erick), Bill moved to Chicago for a position with a new and innovative teachers' college, now Northeastern Illinois University, where he taught Environmental Studies and served in the administration for nearly forty years.



# BEFRIENDING CREATION

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Image Above: Alice & Bill Howenstine

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## Hope is Work: Support Grassroots Earthcare Projects

### What do the following all have in common?

- » Indigenous potato farmers in the Bolivian Altiplano;
- » Young women studying environmental sciences at a Friends school in Costa Rica;
- » Pollinator gardens at Friends Meetings in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Iowa;
- » Teaching gardening skills and sharing food in Cape Cod, Massachusetts and Handidi Green, Kenya;
- » School children from Indonesia to Pennsylvania learning peace while planting gardens;
- » A dedicated environmental advocate in Kenya planting trees and introducing nutrition-enhancing permagardens to impoverished families in Mbasia;
- » Tree-planters in Burundi, Rwanda, Uganda and the cloud forests of Vera Cruz, Mexico;
- » A young man in Rwanda who now seeks to repay an old debt by protecting the rain forest that once sheltered him and his mother during the human insanity of genocide?

**Answer:** Like you, like me, like the Harrier gliding over the prairie, or the mother Robin with her beak full of worms, they all belong to the Earth, and depend on it minute to minute and season to season for their survival and well-being. More than that, however, they also seek to protect and restore and give back to the planet that gave us all birth and that nurtures and sustains us, still.

**Additionally, all the above were supported with Quaker Earthcare Witness Mini-Grants within the past 5 years.**

If you have donated to QEW in the past, you, too, have been part of their work—just as, perhaps unrecognized, you have also been a beneficiary, for our Faith teaches us that we are all connected within this great web of Being. What lifts one, lifts all. What nurtures Earth and brings Her life, nurtures all Her children.

My greatest joy over the past five years has been to join myself to this work, and I would like to invite you to join yourself, as well. Because **Hope is not a wish. Hope is work.** Hope is the gift of looking down to realize that it is your hands that are plunged into the soil. It is your hands that nurture the Seed. Will you join me in transforming Hope into Action?

**Under the leading of Spirit, please give what you are able to help us reach our \$5,000 goal for QEW mini-grants. [Donate at QuakerEarthcare.org/Minigrants2026.](https://www.quakerearthcare.org/minigrants2026)**

With hopes for Peace on Earth, for Earth, and with Earth,

Allen McGrew, Co-convenor of the QEW Mini-Grants

## Our Vision & 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.

## BeFriending Creation

We publish *BeFriending Creation* to promote the work of Quaker Earthcare Witness, stimulate discussion and action, share insights, practical ideas, news of our actions, and encourage 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. The editor is responsible for unsigned items. Please share our work widely and broadly, always attributing it to Quaker Earthcare Witness.

Quaker Earthcare Witness is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization; contributions are tax-deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Donate at [QuakerEarthcare.org](https://www.quakerearthcare.org).

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

During the mid-1960s, the family spent over a year in Latin America. Bill and Alice worked with a Quaker community service organization in a small village in Mexico and in a desert community outside Lima, Peru.

In 1968, in the mountains of eastern Kentucky, Bill developed and led a residential program for students in conjunction with Pikeville College.

He had a gift for helping disparate groups find common ground and reach consensus. He did this in heated classroom discussions, in casual conversation, within community organizations, and as Dean of Students at Northeastern Illinois University during the turbulent 1960s.

In 1970, the Howenstines moved to their farm near McHenry, where the family still owns and operates an organic cut-your-own Christmas tree farm. The farm has served as a location for people of varied backgrounds to come together to enjoy outdoor experiences and learn environmental skills.

Bill and Alice were instrumental in the early years of the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County. While Alice was considered the driving force and inspiration behind McHenry County's recycling efforts, Bill played key roles in a number of regional groups focused on land conservation. He was among the founders of the McHenry County Conservation District (MCCD) and filled a number of leadership positions, twice serving as Board President. To date, MCCD has preserved over 25,000 acres of open space. Bill was deeply involved in opposition to a controversial proposed highway expansion slated to destroy an important glacial geologic formation. These efforts resulted in the requirement that all future highway public works projects go through an environmental assessment

process. Bill also helped form the Illinois Association of Conservation Districts and was a founding Board Member of what is now the Land Conservancy of McHenry County.

In 2009, he received the George and Barbara Fell Award from the National Land Institute for his lifelong dedication to the protection of natural areas; in 2010, Bill and Alice jointly received a Lifetime Achievement Award from the Environmental Defenders of McHenry County; and in 2019, Bill was one of the first two recipients of the McHenry County Conservation District's Conservation Champion Award.

Active Quakers for 70 years, Bill and Alice helped start the McHenry County Quaker Meeting and often hosted meetings for worship at their farm. They were founding members of Quaker Earthcare Witness, an international network of Quakers working toward ecological integrity and environmental justice. They helped launch and support a collective farm in Costa Rica that pioneered ecological land use. In recognition of their environmental and Quaker peace activities, they were joint recipients of a 2007 Peace and Justice Award.

Bill was a dear friend, inspiration, and mentor to many. He will be remembered, loved, missed, and carried forward in the hearts and lives of his family, friends, and those he impacted during his extraordinary life.

**Donations in recognition of Bill Howenstine can be made to the Alice and Bill Howenstine Environmental Education Scholarship Fund, Environmental Defenders of McHenry County, 114 S. Jefferson St, Woodstock, IL 60098, 815-338-0393, [mcdef.org](http://mcdef.org).**

## Need Some Funding to Kick Off an Earthcare Vision?

*The QEW Mini-grants program could support your initiative! Our Mini-Grants Working Group works to support Friends Earthcare projects. Our current capacity to fund proposals is up to \$500.*

*ANY proposals and visions related to Earthcare are invited, but we especially welcome proposals focusing on one or more of these priority areas:*

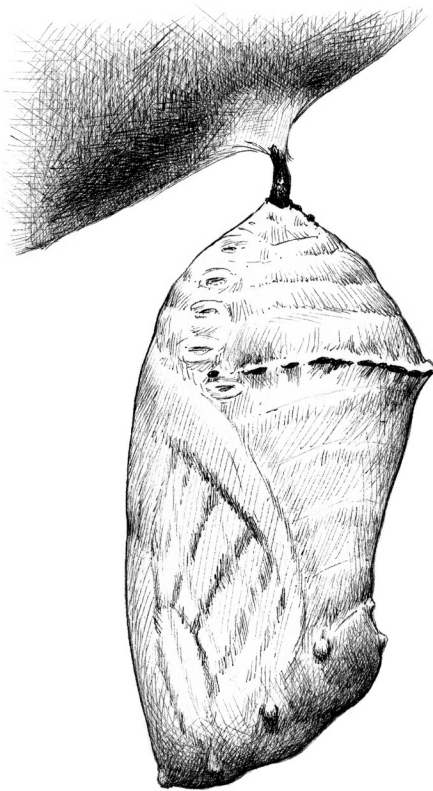
1. Responding to or preparing to meet the Climate change crisis.
2. Supporting regional and/or global biodiversity.

3. Redressing issues of environmental injustice that impact underserved or disempowered communities (especially communities of color) preferably in North America, but other locations will also be considered.
4. Involving and engaging youth in responding to the above issues and/or transforming the consciousness of the rising generation to act in unity with the Earth as caregivers for our planet.

Find funding criteria and procedures at:  
[QuakerEarthcare.org/Mini-Grants](http://QuakerEarthcare.org/Mini-Grants).

Tom Small

## Freeing Ourselves From Possessions



For some time now, my house has been becoming more transparent. I can see across it, sometimes almost through it. There's a little more clarity. More space.

Every few days I walk through it, very slowly. It's a kind of spiritual exercise. I try to see more clearly a few of the things that are in it, without the veil of custom that ordinarily obscures them. I ask them a few nosy questions: What are you? What do you mean? Who do you belong to? Perhaps I move something away, into some other space; then I check a few days later to see how much of a shadow it left behind. Perhaps the space it occupied has now become clear, transparent.

I am discovering that many objects in my house have become accidental. They no longer belong here or to me (perhaps they never did). They are images of a self that I dreamed, a self that never fully emerged from

the shadows. Once I know this, I'm free to give the image away, as a gift for the person it really belongs to: my stepdaughter; my neighbor; the poor person on the street. Or I can exchange it for something I need.

### SUCH STUFF AS DREAMS

We dream many selves during our lives. We accumulate objects, images which make these dream-selves visible; thereby we gain status, a kind of false identity. It's difficult, then, to part with the image, even if the self for which it stands has always been only a dream. "We are such stuff as dreams are made on," says Shakespeare's Prospero; and our "stuff" is made from dreams. When the dream, however, becomes only an object filling space, then it stands in our way.

Gifts, too, are embodiments of dream—somebody else's dream of who we are. Perhaps we keep the gift in recognition of the giver and her dream. But the ancients were wiser. For the receiver of a gift to retain it for his own aggrandizement is to invite misfortune. The gift is in the giving, the action, not the thing itself, which must move. Or else lose its identity as gift. A gifted person must pass the gift on to others.

An object is static; a relationship grows. Not to change is to falsify and atrophy. And yet the images that we dream or that dream us are so potent that we are charmed by them, transfixed. We are addicted. "All change is a miracle to contemplate," says Thoreau; "but it is a miracle which is taking place every instant." How shall we participate in this miracle? How shall we escape our addictions? Possibly the same way that I stopped smoking many years ago: I changed my image of myself and so changed my behavior. Can we re-imagine our status, our identity, as depending not on things but on space, open to action and possibility?

We are close to waking up when we dream that we are dreaming.

Norvalis (1799)

What then shall we do with our surplus of images?

### THE ART OF TRANSPARANCY

- » Try a spiritual journey through your home, just for the exercise. Meditate on your space as an ecosystem, a complex entity that consists entirely in relationships and endures by changing.
- » Look past the shadows. Try to see through the object, into the space it displaces. Possibly the walls will seem farther away, clearer, even transparent. Perhaps you will breathe more easily. Perhaps you will be free to act. Simplicity is not a noun; it's an active verb.
- » Discover where these things that stand in your way really belong. The extra coat that rarely leaves the closet: it belongs to the poor. The antique too precious to use: that's for the museum, for everyone. The boxes you never unpacked: straight to the fund-raising rummage sale.
- » Or hold your own fundraiser, the way a friend of ours does. Bring out that stored-away surplus of nice things you'll never use, and have a benefit sale. Don't bother pricing everything; let your friends and neighbors make voluntary contributions to your favorite environmental organization in exchange for each item. You'll do well; the buyers will be doubly pleased; the land and its creatures will benefit.

It's not as easy as it sounds, though, is it—this changing of our ways? It takes a shock to make us see. A dozen years ago a visiting Episcopalian abbot, admiring my house, commented on how many "icons" I possessed. Startled to hear them so described, I worried, for a long time, over what he meant. Should a Quaker have icons?

It was a much greater shock when, a few years ago, I returned from travel in Africa to find that my ex-wife had moved out half the contents of the house. I was stunned. I made up lists of things I *had* to have back. Three weeks later I tore up all the lists—I realized I didn't need any of those things.

Such shocks seem extraordinary, but I think they come to us often: an unexpected word; a sudden change, loss, or separation; a flash of insight. If we open ourselves to its ministry, the shock releases energy, a new possibility. Suddenly we see things in a new light. Your icon has become a doodad.

In the Preface to *No Nature: New and Selected Poems*, Gary Snyder asks for "An open space to move in, with the whole body, the whole mind." In the final poem of the volume, "Ripples on the Surface," he invokes "The little house in the wild, the wild in the house." The little house, the wild—both of them are ecosystems. They are what we live in, the habitation of both body and mind; and they live in us. But they are, Snyder warns, "Both forgotten." We strive to control and enclose them. Only in remembering that they are both of them, together, our true home—only in that recognition will we find wholeness, restoration, the sudden freedom of "an open space to move in."

This little house in the wild—our home. Awakened, we must remember that we do not possess it. It is a gift. Long before we die, we are called on to pass it along to our heirs—even to the seventh generation.



Ruah Swennerfelt

## Deck Review The Sacred Biodiversity Oracle

By Angela Manno. 36 cards & 160 pages.  
Bear & Company, 2026. \$30/set.

This amazing resource of 36 cards and a guidebook reveals how the loss of biodiversity is leading to the warming of the planet. Angela Manna, the world-renowned artist, says she spent decades devoting her art to celebrating the Cosmos, the Earth, the Natural World, and humanity's place within it. She is an iconographer who has used that art to depict endangered species as sacred. They are each a masterpiece in love.

I've known Angela for many years, meeting her in the early years of Quaker Earthcare Witness (then named Friends Committee in Unity with Nature), where she supported the mission. She attended worship at 15th Street Meeting in NYC. Her artwork has been exhibited around the world, including the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum and the National Museum of Women in the Arts.

According to the publisher:

*Rich with insights from geologist Thomas Berry and other ecological elders, the guidebook reveals the preciousness of each organism, specific challenges to its existence, and its effect on the great biological community and human health.*

The cards include mammals, birds, fish reptiles and amphibians, invertebrates, and plants. Each comes alive, filled with Spirit. On the front of the card is the painting with a QR code that leads to the websites of organizations working to protect that species.

The guidebook provides background to the language of biodiversity, the origin of Angela's artwork with photos of the steps of creating an icon, and instructions for each icon. Each individual icon chapter has four subheadings of Wisdom, Contemplation, Reflection, and Action. The Wisdom section allows the species to speak in the first person, and includes some information about what is causing their endangerment. Contemplation leads us to a 3-step practice with the image. Reflection suggests finding ways to deepen understanding. And Action suggests ways we can help. The original icons are sold with half of the proceeds contributed to an appropriate organization. There are prints available, as well as greeting cards.

I am in awe of Angela's work. I've been privileged to view the early icons, and followed along as new ones were created. She always amazes me with each creation, knowing they come from her heart and her connection to Spirit.





Jonny Costello

## Potatoes, Prayers, and Prisons: A Quaker Study Tour of Bolivian Resilience

For two weeks at the beginning of January, I was lucky enough to have the opportunity to accompany the “Quaker Study Tour” on a trip to Bolivia. The trip is organized by the Bolivian Quaker Education Fund, and it would not have been possible without the diligent hard work of Rebecca Day Cutter. On the trip, I got to meet a host of Bolivian Quakers, not to mention the wonderful cohort of Quakers, volunteers, and translators that I traveled with.

It is hard to discern what is most important to write about in that time spent there, but since I went as a representative of Quaker Earthcare Witness, I will focus on some of the inspiring Earthcare initiatives I observed in Bolivia.

First, let me tell you about Emma Condori’s work with Friends International Bilingual Center. Emma Condori, who may be familiar to some, is the author of *Quakers in Bolivia*. As part of her work, she oversees a program that provides food relief to Aymara highland villages whose potato crop has been destroyed by drought and other shifts and escalations in climatic conditions. The Aymara people rely heavily on potatoes, both culturally and for survival. In 2022, after planting in October, a prolonged drought in November and December meant that the January rainfall was insufficient to save the crop. Entering 2023, hundreds of families were facing starvation, left with virtually no food except what was preserved from previous years. In March and April, Emma and volunteers drove out to the communities with potatoes, having raised enough money to feed 150 families. Many of the volunteers were Quaker youth, especially women.



Having lost their potato crop, the farmers also lost the seeds for the next season. Emma traveled to meetings at the New England Yearly Meeting to fundraise and successfully raised funds for potato seeds for 300 families.

The program continues to provide food relief and is now run by a young woman named Sara. She emphasized that there is something spiritual about delivering food to these communities. It’s not merely about dropping off food but is instead an act of fellowship, worship, and song. This approach deepens and strengthens the relationship between the volunteers and the communities.

Talking with Sara and Emma was a helpful reminder that Earthcare absolutely includes peopledcare. The work is not only about becoming more resilient to disasters, preventing them, and recovering from them. The work is also in caring for the people affected by them and building community with them. In building community, we build resilience. Especially now, it is easy to look at all that is happening and say, ‘I don’t have the energy for environmentalism, I’m more focused on the injustices happening to my neighbors.’ I’m not one for correcting people usually (or at least strangers), but I do really believe that caring for people and building more resilient communities is Earthcare. We are of the Earth after all.

Many Quakers in the United States are familiar with the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP). In Bolivia, it is referred to as PAV, short for El Proyecto Alternativas a la Violencia.

If you are familiar with AVP, you probably know that many workshops take place inside prisons, and the same is true for PAV. Our group accompanied Magalie Quispe Yujra into a maximum security prison called San Pedro de Chonchocoro. There, we met block leaders who had completed PAV workshops. I especially liked hearing the adjectives that went with their names, and celebrating each other after sharing with a Quakerly, silent, sparkly hands.

While in Chonchocoro, we witnessed the grand opening of two new greenhouses where prisoners could grow food. These greenhouses were constructed entirely from naturally occurring materials, primarily clay and dirt from the surrounding area. The funds for this project were provided by Quaker Bolivia Link (QBL), with support from the German

Quaker charity Quaker Hilfe and the prison governor. This was one of QBL's final acts, as its Trustees recently decided to lay down the charity.

Speaking of peoplecare and QBL brings me to my next story. One of the things I felt luckiest about was getting to visit Aymara communities in the highlands around El Alto and La Paz. Two of these communities had recently received support from QBL to filter and pump water to their communities, rather than having to carry it from the spring.



From the 2025 QBL newsletter: Starting ceremony for the building of the first greenhouse

The two pumps are completely solar powered. More than that, though, they allow Aymaran culture to persist in these communities. Many children of the communities end up moving to cities for school and work, leaving the communities increasingly older. The accessible fresh water makes life and day-to-day tasks significantly easier for older community members, and it also makes it easier for children to stay in the communities if they so choose.

The work in Bolivia reminded me that we do not face the climate crisis in isolation. When we deliver food or pump water, we are also delivering hope and strengthening our global Quaker family.

**Query: How can we move beyond fixing problems to a place of true fellowship and mutual accompaniment with those impacted by environmental change?**

*Jonny Costello is our QuakerEarth Organizing Fellow, working to expand our Action Map through our connection with Quakers globally.*



# BQEF

## Bolivian Quaker Education Fund

**Join the Journey:** This trip was part of the annual Quaker Connections Study Tour organized by the Bolivian Quaker Education Fund. BQEF provides scholarships for higher education, and access to non-formal education, through training in non-violence. If you feel led to witness this work in person, BQEF offers these tours to build solidarity between North and South American Friends. [Visit BQEG.org](http://BQEG.org).

**Support the Work:** You can learn more about Emma Condori's vital work with the Friends International Bilingual Center and their efforts in climate education and food relief. [Visit CentrobilinguelInternacionalAmigos.org](http://CentrobilinguelInternacionalAmigos.org)

**Continuing the Legacy:** While Quaker Bolivia Link (QBL) has recently laid down its formal charity status, its impact lives on through the solar-powered systems and greenhouses now maintained by local communities. You can read their final newsletter at [QBL.org](http://QBL.org).

**Stay Connected:** To learn more about how QEW is engaging with environmental justice globally learn about our Mini-Grants program at [QuakerEarthcare.org/Mini-Grants](http://QuakerEarthcare.org/Mini-Grants).



Handidi Junior School has transformed its grounds into the Handidi Green Patch with the help of a QEW mini-grant.



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## Join QEW in Person to Tend the Seed of Hope!



**QEW Fall Gathering**

**October 15th-18th, 2026 in Hiawatha, Iowa**

QEW will be gathering for our annual Fall Gathering this October at the Prairiewoods Franciscan Spirituality Center just outside Cedar Rapids, Iowa. This Gathering is one of the few times each year when our full Steering Committee, staff, and wider community come together in person for worship, discernment, learning, and strengthening our witness for Earthcare.

Whether you are looking to recharge your spirit or find new tools for climate activism, you are welcome here.

Registration details and full program information coming soon at [QuakerEarthcare.org](https://www.QuakerEarthcare.org).



**FGC** 2026  
**GATHERING**

**July 7th-12th, 2026 in Burlington, Vermont**

Heading to the FGC Summer Gathering this July? We invite you to find your way to the Earthcare Center, hosted by Quaker Earthcare Witness. The Center is a hub for Friends to explore the link between Quakerism and the planet. Join us for worship sharing, engaging workshops, and fellowship that honors the interconnectedness of all life. Whether you are a long-time advocate or a curious seeker, your presence helps us weave a more compassionate and sustainable future.

Registration for the Gathering opened on April 1st! Register at [FGCQuaker.org](https://www.FGCQuaker.org)