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Self portrait of little known Quaker, William Ledbetter

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Book reviews

Editorial

YM this year was held at Good Shepherd Centre at Hartebeespoort Dam for the second time, from 2-8 January, and was attended by about 120 Friends from all the meetings in Southern Africa, with the exception of our very Distant Friend, Ann Pirie in Zambia. It was the last YM for Clerk Helen Vale and she and Co-Clerk Justine Limpitlaw developed a programme that was a radical departure from those of previous Yearly Meetings. At MYRM at Koinonia in Johannesburg there had been much discussion about the role of the Nominations Committee and of those nominated to fill particular portfolios. The general consensus was that there were too many portfolios, too many Friends were 'nominated' just because a portfolio 'had to be filled' and the incumbents often did not know what was expected of them, often because the responsibilities of many portfolios were ill-defined.

As a result YM focused on deciding which portfolios were necessary and what was expected of them, and this is explained in the article by Nancy Fee.

Rob Thomson's Richard Gush lecture on *Holding Organisations Accountable for an Environmentally, Socially and Economically Sustainable future* in many ways touched on the Quaker Testimony on Sustainability. This has suggested to the Editor that future Newsletters might focus on this and the other testimonies. The two articles about the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action investigation into food in Pietermaritzburg's communities on social grants and John Ingles and Marie Odendaal's article on trying to live on a social grant also speak to the matter of sustainable living.

I would thus encourage readers/Friends to make suggestions and/or further contributions about Sustainability for the next SAQN.

Another idea was inspired by Adrienne Whisson's 5-minute talk at YM on Richard Lidbetter, a Quaker we will get to know a little more about in this SAQN. Her talk suggested that there are probably other Quakers we know little about, and if you know of one, please write about him or her.

One of the issues that has recently occupied the headlines of South African newspapers, is the issue of xenophobia, and the attacks of South Africans on Africans from elsewhere on the continent. I need not remind you of the debates, and you will have seen the statement on xenophobia released by the

YM Co-Clerks, which is also available on the Quaker website at www.quakers.co.za. But, I do want to share with you a poem penned by Doreen Bekker of CERM a few years ago.

The convenient other

It is always
against the other,
the other,
who?

Who is this other?
Anyone who is
conveniently other,
and who is not
strong enough.
Who can conveniently
become the target
of our frustrations
and guilt.

Instead of owning
our weakness,
we blame the other,
instead of looking
into the mirror.

So we blame the other,
it is easier
for now.
Why should we
take responsibility.
It is the other
that stands in our way.
Always the other,
the convenient other,
who is not strong enough
to fight back
and force us
to face
our lack of
humanity
towards the other,
our sister or brother.

Doreen Bekker, May 2008

Richard Gush Memorial Lecture 2015

Human economic activity: holding organisations accountable for an environmentally, socially and economically sustainable future

Rob Thomson

In his lecture, Rob Thompson outlined the need for a new approach to economics which is becoming necessary as a result of world population growth, that human impact on the carrying capacity of the Earth is **larger** than its carrying capacity, the limits to growth as we currently understand it in economic terms, and the effects of human-induced climate change. This work is largely based on the doctoral studies by Mrs Taryn Reddy, a student of Rob's.

The dominant neo-classical school of economics views the world's economy as a closed system in which nature is treated as a free gift. This is increasingly untrue. The inputs from the environment into the economy and the outputs from the economy into the environment are becoming critical. Growth, expressed as gross domestic product (GDP), has become the dominant policy objective of all the world's economies. But GDP measures the wrong thing. It fails to measure the environmental sustainability of the system; it fails to measure the excesses of the rich countries; it fails to measure the inequality between the rich and the poor; it fails to measure human well-being; it fails to distinguish between wants and needs, and it even fails to measure the economy. In fact, any measure expressed in terms of monetary currency is reductionist: the state of the environment cannot be measured in terms of money, nor can human well-being.

Public activism about the economy tends to be directed towards governments. However, Rob Thomson pointed out that for several decades power has been shifting away from democratic processes and into company boardrooms. This means that both corporate organisations and governments must be held accountable for the effects of their activities on the environment, on society and on the economy. (We can call these three entities, 'domains'.) Just as we use a financial 'bottom line' to hold a company accountable to its shareholders for its finances, so we need an environmental 'bottom line' to hold it accountable

for the effects of its activities on the environment, a social 'bottom line' to hold them accountable for the effects of its activities on society and an economic 'bottom line' to hold it accountable for the effects of its activities on the economy — a 'triple 'bottom line', with one figure for each of these domains. Rob outlined how the idea of a triple bottom line was currently being implemented and explained some of the problems experienced in developing these various domain indicators.

There are three major problems with methods of environmental and social reporting. First, unlike the financial bottom line, they are practice-based, not outcomes-based. In other words, they do not measure the ultimate effects of an organisation's activities on the environment and on society. Second, there is a plethora of measures available for reporting the *financial bottom line*, and organisations can choose which ones they want to use to report a company's activities and financial state. And third, unlike the financial bottom line, one cannot add up the effects of a commercial organisation's impact on the environment and on society.

Rob outlined a way in which a single-figure outcomes-based measure could be developed for each domain and how it could be used for holding organisations accountable for the effects of their activities on each of the domains, and for determining whether those activities would be environmentally, socially and economically sustainable in the future. He explained how these measures would overcome the problems of current reporting system.

He emphasised that the work was not being developed to pass judgement on an organisation for incurring environmental, social or economic costs, but to determine the scale of the costs. Just as an organisation will inevitably incur financial costs that can be deducted from its income, so it will inevitably incur environmental, social and economic costs that will become deductible from the positive effects of its activities on those

domains. Thus, just as an organisation needs to account to shareholders for its profits, so it needs to account to all its stakeholders for the effects of its activities on all three domains.

Other than showing how an organisation could be held accountable for the effects of its own activities on the three domains, Rob also showed how brandholders could be held accountable for the effects of the production of their products. This could be done by analysing the value chain of each product from the extraction of its raw materials, through the value added (or subtracted) in production, distribution, consumption and disposal in each domain. He suggested that, besides the price, a supermarket price tag could also show the value added (or subtracted) in each domain.

He further explained how investors could be held accountable in each domain for their investments in organisations. He suggested that the principle of holding organisations accountable year by year for the effects of their activities on the environment, on society and on the economy lies at the heart of Quaker testimony. So does the principle of holding organisations responsible for the environmental, social and economic sustainability of their activities in the future. Thus

- because human well-being would be measured in terms of the meeting of *needs* instead of the satisfaction of *wants*, we would be fostering our testimonies on equality and simplicity;
- because we would be calling for accountability and responsibility in terms of outcomes in the three domains we would be fostering our testimony on truth, and
- because we would be treating human society and its economy as stewards of the environment we would be promoting the more recently established testimony on the environment.

Central to the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth was the kingdom of God. He did not have a gospel of salvation from sin or a gospel of personal purity, he had a gospel of the kingdom of God. In Quaker usage we might express this as the 'right ordering' of society. We usually use 'right ordering' in relation to our own affairs, but Rob suggested that we need to extend it to society as a whole. Jesus did not expect everyone to become Jews in order to establish the kingdom of God. He set the kingdom of God in contrast to the world's kingdoms which are characterised by domination, oppression

and exploitation. Similarly we should not expect everyone to become Quakers so as to foster the right-ordering of society.

In her Richard Gush lecture in 2006, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge reminded us that we need to speak truth to power. Success is nice, and we should try and succeed, but we are not called to be successful. We are called to be true. The real question, Rob suggested, is not whether this teaching is true or that belief system is true, but **am I true?** We are called to be true to our experience with the ground of our being, and to speak that truth. To the extent that this truth resonates in the hearts and minds of people — especially in the hearts and minds of the oppressed — it will succeed in changing the world. But in the mean time we are called to be true. The truth that Taryn Reddy and Rob Thomson want to tell from this research is that it is conceptually feasible to formulate measures that can be used to hold organisations accountable for the ultimate effects of their activities on the environment, on society and on the economy from year to year, and in the future to hold them responsible for the local and global sustainability of their activities. Much work will still have to be done to make these measures implementable. That would be beyond Taryn and Rob's capability. There would be opposition to the implementation of such measures, both from organisations whose interests are threatened and from genuine critics. But they could show that it is conceptually feasible.

C&SA Yearly Meeting Offices

Organizing ourselves into clusters, to better support each other

Nancy Fee, Co-Clerk, Pretoria Worship Group

An old joke is that a camel is a horse designed by a committee. As the C&SA Yearly Meeting, we have work which needs to be developed, followed up, implemented and managed. This work happens at and between our Yearly Meetings – and is undertaken by Officers and through Committees.

The C&SA offices and nominations process was a focus area for the January 2015 Yearly Meeting. Through historical factors, we had a plethora of offices – over 80 different offices. These many offices have not been overhauled and evaluated for many years.

Moving our Work into Clusters:

The Pretoria Worship Group (PWG) suggested that we could organize ourselves into six “Clusters” of related work:

- Clerks and Administration
- Young Friends and Children
- Financial Oversight
- Resources and Communication
- Strengthening Local Meetings
- Advocacy and Activism

We thought this would give us a way of organizing our work, and officers in a Cluster could communicate and support each other.

The Yearly Meeting eagerly agreed with the idea, and approved these six Clusters. The YM also approved the idea that no person could hold more than three offices at one time, in order to avoid overburdening anyone, and burn out. There are also strong Quaker traditions about sharing out the burdens of service.

Our Outcome:

By laying down some offices, and moving into Clusters, the YM was able to reduce:

- the number of the YM offices from 27 to 19, and
- the number of individuals involved in these offices from 83 to about 32.

What Next?

The work of each Cluster is likely to be different,

and also depends on the initiatives undertaken by each group of Friends. For example, the Clerks and Administration Cluster already works closely together through the YM Clerks and their office support, and the MM Clerk networks.

In the Resource and Communication Cluster, Justin and Wendy, Wouter and I are already communicating quite a bit, and sometimes moving information and articles between our Facebook page, the C&SA YM website, and the SAQN.

And maybe in the future, the Friends in a Cluster might want to communicate about their joint work, and what they would like to achieve – for example, our C&SAYM advocacy work and activism, our support for work with Young Friends and Children.....and many possibilities!

Quaker Problems



<http://quakerprobs.tumblr.com/>

How do poor South Africans feed themselves?

PACSA Food Price Barometer and the impact of hunger

Compiled by John Inglis, KZNMM, from PACSA research publications

Since 2006 PACSA (the Pietermaritzburg Agency for Community Social Action) has been tracking the prices of food bought by poor households in the Pietermaritzburg region. T AgencPACSA researched and compiled a “basket” of basic food items typically bought each month by a household, and these are listed in the table below.

The price of this basket of food is calculated monthly, based on the prices at six different retail stores which supply the lower-income market in Pietermaritzburg. The PACSA Food Basket shows the impact of food price inflation for poor households, and the inflation figures for foods bought by poor households, as tracked by PACSA, accords with the trends shown by STATSSA’s CPI-Food index, which has been consistently higher than the national headline inflation figure. This translates into a declining ability, year by year, of working-class households to be able to buy a range of nutritious food that is both affordable and sufficient for their needs of the people dependent on a particular income.

The PACSA Food Basket is based on what a typical household of seven said that they actually buy, when they can afford it, and was priced at R1640 in September 2014. Working-class poor households cannot afford to buy this basket every month. In fact, some households only spend between R600

and R1 000 a month, and that on food which is very deficient in nutrients. It should be kept in mind that the PACSA Food Basket is not nutritionally complete – it represents what people actually buy, not what they need for adequate nutrition. A basket of foods which a household of seven would require for basic nutrition, health, well-being and productivity would actually cost more than twice the price of the food basket.

The PACSA analysis has gone further, revealing some of the dilemmas faced by poor households in managing their limited incomes. Various non-food commitments, such as transport, electricity and household debt, have to be paid for **before** any money can be spent on food. What is left over after these other payments have been made can then be spent on food, and for many households the amount that remains is less than the cost of the basic food basket.

The link between low incomes, hunger, health and nutrition is stark. The statistics on hunger and stunting bear this out. The South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES-1), 2012¹ revealed that one of every four South Africans experiences hunger, while

1 Human Sciences Research Council (2014). South African National Health and Nutrition Examination Survey (SANHANES-1), 2013. 2014 Edition. The Health and Nutritional Status of the Nation. HSRC Press. Cape Town, South Africa.

PACSA Monthly Food Basket

Maize meal	25kg	Rooibos tea bags	200g
Rice	10kg	Coffee	100g
Sugar Beans	5kg	Margarine	1kg
Samp	5kg	Fresh Milk	2l
Pasta (Macaroni)	1kg	Maas	2l
Cooking Oil	4l	Chicken feet	4kg
Cake Flour	10kg	Chicken necks	6kg
White sugar	10kg	Eggs	30 eggs
Soup	600g	Frozen chicken portions	6kg
Salt	1kg	Polony	2,5kg
White bread	8 loaves	Beef	1kg
Brown bread	4 loaves	Carrots	2kg
Cremora	1kg	Spinach	4 bunches
Canned fish	4 cans	Cabbage	2 heads
Canned beans	3 cans	Apples	1,5kg
Yeast	4 × 7g pkts	Onions	10kg
Beef Stock	240g	Tomatoes	3kg
Curry Powder	200g	Potatoes	10kg

a further 28.3% is at risk of hunger because of healthcare costs, through loss of employment or other factors. Nearly one in every four South African children is stunted, which means that more than a fifth of South Africa's children are severely undernourished (HSRC, 2014: 211).

That half of our population is unable to afford enough nutritious food has other serious implications. Energy and productivity levels decline in the workplace, in schools and in homes. Resistance to common illnesses is reduced. Children whose cognitive and physical capacities are underdeveloped struggle to succeed at school; and people lack feelings of general wellbeing and vitality. The unaffordability of food exacerbates cycles of hunger, poverty and low productivity, with serious implications for health and well-being which undermine the country's economic, social, education and health outcomes. This is the theme of the video *UNA-FOOD-ABLE*, which was produced by PACSA and shown as part of the PACSA Film and Arts Festival in 2014 to publicise more widely the severe effects of widespread hunger in our society.

South Africa invests billions of rands in education and health care, but a large proportion of this money is going to waste because our children are being deprived of food and cannot learn properly. Our clinics and hospitals continue to be overwhelmed by children whose common ailments could have been avoided through nutritious plates of food. Our economic and development trajectory remains weak because all of our economic, social, education and health outcomes hinge on the ability of households to have enough to eat.

If we continue to overlook food as an essential component of our developmental state, we will

be structuring our economy to entrench poverty and inequality. Putting money into instruments which help to ensure enough money at household level for all to access sufficient and nutritious food is the most effective pathway out of poverty and inequality, and the most effective and sensible investment in our economy.

South Africa's policies have so far not acknowledged the logic that economic growth is founded on the social base – that developing our people provides the foundation for a society and economy that thrives. To correct this foundation requires a new social compact about the type of South Africa we want. It necessitates investing in a long-term view and a reprioritisation of how money is spent to ensure that everyone has enough good food on the table.

In October 2014, PACSA revised its food basket. This needs to be done from time to time to ensure that the foods and the volumes tracked are reflective of changing food expenditure patterns of working class poor households. The new weights are based on data gathered from women in Pietermaritzburg. The revised basket reflects the following shifts: increase in starchy foods; purchase of cheaper forms of animal protein; reduction in the range of vegetable types; and the reduction or elimination of more expensive foods such as red meat, cheese and eggs.

For more information about PACSA's Food Price research, go to: www.pacsa.org.za/publications/research-reports/food-price-barometer.

The video UNA-FOOD-ABLE can be accessed online at <http://youtu.be/YqFm3dJPCr0>.

Living a month on the PACSA Food Basket – a personal experience

Marie Odendaal and John Inglis, KZNMM

In September 2014 PACSA hosted a public forum about the prevalence of hunger in poor communities, and the findings of PACSA's food price research. We were shocked to learn that:

- one in 4 South Africans regularly goes hungry;
- another 25% of South Africa's population is constantly at risk of hunger;

- more than 20% of South Africa's children are stunted because of food deprivation;
- yet South Africa produces enough food to adequately feed ALL its people.

As well-off, middle-class people we wondered, "If things are as bad as this, why don't we know about it?" Yes, we knew there were many poor people, but we hadn't realised how widespread

and severe hunger is, and how poverty traps people in wretchedness and destroys their dignity.

According to PACSA's research many households have to survive on food costing less than R1 640 per month. In a typical household of seven, that allows for an average food spend per person of R232 per month. And many households have much less to spend on food. How do they manage? We looked at what our own household had spent on groceries over the previous year: it came to about R1 140 per person per month.

So we decided to try, at least, to manage on the value of the PACSA Food Basket – R1 640 for food for our household for the month of October to record our experience and share it with others. and to donate the money saved – when compared with our “normal” expenditure – to an organisation that is working to ease the plight of food-insecure people in the Pietermaritzburg area..

The extent of our challenge was limited. Our household has only 4 people, which meant we would spend more money per person than a household of 7; and we already had some basic supplies. But at least the experience would give us a better idea of what poor households have to cope with.

What follows are notes we made during the month. They start with observations and anecdotes from our experience, and lead later to some insights and reflections about the ways that chronic poverty and food deprivation may affect people.

3 October 2014

We have quite a lot of spices, herbs and other seasonings that enable us to make otherwise bland foods more tasty. The PACSA food basket includes only salt and curry powder as seasonings, so if poor households buy other seasonings they have less to spend on actual food.

4 October

We keep track of our purchases by filling in a table. It reflects what we buy and spend, with a column to show the reducing balance as we go along.

5 October

Marie has drawn up a menu for the month. For

each day she's tried to include a carbohydrate, some vegetables including greens, and some form of protein. The idea is to maintain variety and a balanced diet as much as possible with a limited range of ingredients.

The menu is not set in stone – whatever becomes available at a good price will lead to a change of fare.

We are very happy to have some vegetables becoming ready for harvest in the garden – spring onions, beetroot, spinach, cherry tomatoes. The pawpaw tree is producing quite a steady supply of fruit at present, despite having its leaves shredded by voracious mousebirds who are desperate at the end of a very dry winter.

6 October

Bread remains a staple. We've discovered we can buy Kara Nichha's brown bread – locally baked – at the corner shop for about two-thirds of what Albany bread costs – R7.70 instead of R11.20 for a 700 gram loaf. We're happy to be able to buy local and reduce the market grip of one of the big bread cartel members!

We are supporting local vendors as much as possible. In a small way this sustains small businesses and helps to secure local jobs. It resists the expansion of the huge monopolistic chain stores which force small enterprises out of business.

7 October

We went for a walk in Bisley Nature Reserve. It's been a hot day, and very dry. We came home wishing for a beer before supper, but alas, can't afford it on our Food Basket budget! At least we can drink cool water with ice from the fridge – another advantage, being able to save money by storing food.

12 October

We have realised how much our sense of security relies on the support of friends and family – visitors bring gifts, e.g. a contribution to a meal. We usually have the means to do the same in return when we visit. This practice means that we are all more secure. If one of our circle is in need, others provide support, including food, to ensure our welfare.

In poor communities, people also share; but if they do not have much to spare then those in worst need have less or no security.

27 October

This evening we had a real encounter with the

problem of a limited food supply. Marie first tried to make popcorn with some old popcorn seeds from the cupboard, but they just burned instead of popping and the smell took hours to disperse. Her idea had been to provide a nice snack for Samukelisiwe, who is preparing for tests at college. Next Marie tried a recipe which uses deep frying to make lentil fritters. To save oil she tried shallow frying, but the runny lentil mixture fell apart, stuck to the bottom of the pan, and used a lot of our small oil supply – especially when even more oil was needed to redeem the failed first attempt!

This meal gave us an inkling of the way food shortage can affect one's emotional state. Marie felt frustrated and guilty about not being able to provide good food to meet the family's needs. I felt powerless to ease her sense of failure. At table, the eventual product of the experiment caused quite a lot of mirth, but also revealed how relieved everyone is that this month of sacrifice is nearing its end. I can only imagine that, in a family with more mouths to feed, no extra supplies in the cupboard, and no prospect of any end to the privation, the emotional strains must become intolerable, and relationships may become strained beyond the limit.

Thinking ahead – we look forward to the end of the month, when we will return to a more generous diet than we have had this month. But we are sure that we will not return to the level of expenditure on food that we took for granted before. And that means we can afford to contribute to the budgets of some food-insecure families every month thereafter.

31 October

We have saved about R3 000, which we will donate to the Food Justice Collective – a local women's community organisation which runs a collective food gardening project. By working together they support each other and increase the food security of households in their community.

Our experiences triggered further thoughts on many issues, including the following:

At the personal level, we have a better understanding of food insecurity, and can place ourselves in the shoes of those for whom food insecurity is a daily lived reality.

A positive element was that we experienced

increased enjoyment of the food we ate, eating less but relishing it more. This included greater appreciation of vegetables. Our meat intake, which is usually limited to fish and chicken, was reduced. We became more creative about our recipes and cooking.

Constant food deprivation guarantees high levels of ill health for the poor – poor diet leads to severe health problems, and good health care is unaffordable.

Inequality is bad for everyone, as research by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett demonstrates.^{1*} The problem of one quarter of our population living permanently in hunger highlights the massive inequality of wealth in our society. This inequality, and the mechanisms by which it is maintained, constitute a form of structural violence – *Food Violence*. The scale of the problem, and the growing anger of poor communities, indicate that South Africa is facing a *Food Crisis*. The so-called “service delivery protests” are really *Food Riots* – the response of desperate communities to wretchedness and constant hunger, with little prospect of improvement.

It's bad economics to starve our own population. If resources were more equitably distributed, most people would have enough to enable them to access adequate and healthy food, and become happier, more productive citizens. Crime, which is chiefly the product of severe inequality, would decline. The country would be more stable and the economy would improve.

We hope that this article will motivate others who share these concerns to reflect on their lifestyles; to share their ideas about the effect of hunger on very many people in our country; and to plan and implement actions to reduce this crippling inequality.

1 * *The Spirit Level: Why Equality is Better for Everyone*, Penguin, 2010

Spiritual literacy in schools and moral regeneration

Alleyn Diesel

Throughout South Africa, and many countries, there is a longing for more justice, peace and harmony in our world torn apart by violence, suffering and spiritual deprivation. A great spiritual hunger exists to change the world for the better, expressed by those within, and outside, traditional religion.

With more people of conscience expressing concern about rising levels of violence, often demonstrated in sexual abuse of women and children, increasing evidence of sexism, racism, intolerance of difference, and cruelty to fellow humans as well as other living creatures, is there any hope of implementing some consistent plan to capture public imagination and overcome our loss of moral compass? Many South Africans claim to be “religious”, believing that some religious faith is necessary for commitment to morality. However, apart from disturbing news of various “prophets” and “pastors” with Bibles and flashy cars attracting huge congregations of adoring devotees clamouring for miracles and better material lifestyles, there is little evidence of any upswing in moral integrity – promoting values which enhance the wellbeing of all.

We need to recover appreciation for things beyond the simply material; things of the spirit – compassion, generosity, wisdom – which lift us above the daily self-absorption of getting and spending, to wider, life-affirming interests, making us more humane. We are reaping the results of a moral and spiritual deficiency.

Education in schools should be urged to address this crisis. The cultivation of a “spiritual literacy” in pupils could cultivate a will to reclaim our full humanity, smothered by our obsession with self-enrichment.

British feminist theologian Ursula King has explored women mystics of the past, particularly the thought of Julian of Norwich, in an attempt to develop a feminine mystical-inspired concern for the twenty-first century.¹

History records many women mystics, in most religious traditions – Hildegard of Bingen,

Mechthild of Magdeburg, Catherine of Siena, Julian of Norwich, Teresa of Avila; in the Islamic Sufi tradition, Rabiya of Basra; Mirabai in the Hindu Bhakti tradition; Ines of Herrera in the Jewish tradition.

An extensive mystical literature exists – poetry, prose, and visual art – but most male commentators have tended to overlook specifically female insights or gender perspectives in women’s religious experiences.

Mysticism generally displays a direct awareness of and union with divine Reality, an intense love and communion with a personal Divinity, or regarded as a profoundly contemplative approach to the Absolute. Many mystics not only express communion with the divine, but with all of creation, too, as we are all essentially “of the same stardust.”

Most women mystics experienced some persecution for defying current expectations of female behaviour, such as refusing to marry, questioning or disregarding traditional religious expectations of women’s place in society, withdrawing from everyday society to concentrate on the study and exploration of religion.

Their alternative lifestyles reflect a protest and rejection of the narrow, unsatisfactory lives demanded by the dominant sex. Undoubtedly, they were some of the most spiritually and intellectually innovative and creative women of their time, engaged in religious, social and political spheres.

Pupils in schools (possibly in Life Orientation classes) could be encouraged to study the lives of selected mystic’s lives, beliefs and poetry, forming part of a stimulating, more open, non-judgemental examination of religion.

Beverly Lanzetta² an American mystical writer advocates developing a *via feminina*, a religious consciousness, to define a new way for women – and men – to engage with spirituality in today’s world. She speaks of “spiritual rights”, working towards planetary concern, a sense of reverence for all creation - “an ethic of ultimate concern”, assuming responsibility for the entire human family,

and the interdependence of all life.

Recognising ourselves as continually evolving, morally and spiritually, could promote spiritual resources as well as material ones.

Many mystics, theologians, artists, poets, writers have wrestled with the universal value and power of love – “love energy” comparable to the energy of light, heat, electricity – powerfully transformative, life-enhancing energy, generating a zest for life essential for human flourishing.

Today many others, human rights and political activists and institutions, are exploring a global ethic, based on love, promoting the life-enhancing “flourishing” of humanity, advocated by religious philosopher Grace Jantzen.

This fosters those qualities traditionally associated with the feminine – nurturing, compassion, healing, co-operation – as opposed to the power-seeking competitiveness of much masculinist thinking down the centuries.

The connection between beauty and ethics has potential to extend feminine values – explored by Elaine Scarry, Professor of Aesthetics, Harvard University³.

Scarry explains how viewing beauty inspires its replication, for example, by drawing, painting, describing it, taking photos so we can recall the feelings of joy evoked by it. It makes the spirit soar and the heart leap, elevating us above mundane material surroundings, to a more ethereal sphere, transcending the physical. Beauty is creative, encapsulating sacredness; animating, life-affirming, life-altering; truly transformative.

This offers exciting educational opportunities – in schools, tertiary institutions and gender-studies workshops – for exploring themes on sacred music and religious architecture from many traditions

(mosques, temples, churches and their exquisite artistic features). Discussing the effects of beauty on the human spirit could be integrated into poetry, literature and visual-art appreciation, encouraging pupils to make scrap books recording their own drawings, paintings or writings to produce their own images of beauty.

Contemporary women writers and artists, such as novelist and philosopher Iris Murdoch and American mystical artist Meinrad Craighead, explore women’s contribution to sustaining a spiritually flourishing environment, discovering in the wonder and vitality of the natural world a restorative, spiritual and ethical potency – which could prove stimulating to pupils.

One of Alice Walker’s characters in *The Color Purple* contemplates the interconnectedness and Oneness of all things: “God is inside you and inside everybody else. But only them that search for it inside find it. ... But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed.”

King urges the fostering of “spiritual education” for both children and adults as part of life-long learning – producing a “spiritual literacy” going beyond the basic requirement of reading and writing.

Reviewing our attitude to religion in education (Life Orientation) and the crucial contribution of a renewed reverence for all; encouraging a significant group of passionate, empathetic teachers to commit themselves to this quest, might quicken a deep spirituality in sufficient pupils to begin the process of regeneration and healing.

Alleyn Diesel writes, “I have written this article out of passionate concern for the present state of moral degeneration in South Africa, a concern which apparently many others share. But, in general, there appears to be far too little action on the part of people of conscience, possibly largely out of feelings of helplessness about what to do.

As someone with training and experience in the teaching of religion at both secondary and tertiary level – I taught at the Natal College of Education, and then in Religious Studies at the University of Natal – I feel I have something

to offer which just might stir some people to action. I have long advocated the open, non-judgemental, tolerant (Phenomenological) approach to teaching religion, and believe this has something of great value to offer in this present situation where we are experiencing, worldwide, both the positive and negative effects of the powerful influence of religion in the world.

At present I busy myself with writing articles for newspapers attempting to illustrate how the open, objective study of religions is able to assist in building understanding developing tolerance towards difference in our fractured world.”

Alleyn Diesel has a PhD in Religious Studies which she taught at UKZN.

If you would like more material on this subject to assist in teaching or discussing it, write to me at: almary@hawkmil.co.za

Further reading:

1. Ursula King: *Searching a Feminine Mystical Way for the twenty-First Century in Grace Jantzen: Redeeming the Present* edited by Elaine L. Graham (Ashgate Publishing, Surrey, 2009).
2. Beverly Lanzetta: *Radical Wisdom: A feminist Mystical Theology, and Emerging Heart: Global Spirituality and the Sacred*. (Minneapolis, 2005, 2007).
3. Elaine Scarry; *On Beauty and Being Just*. (Princeton University Press, 1999).



Mullica Hill and Thanksgiving

– a very long time ago

Susan Winters-Cook, CERM

Thanksgiving Day has always been my favourite holiday because it is the least commercial and is not tied to any particular faith, but a reminder to count our blessings and gather as families.

Mullica Hill Meeting is a very small country town meeting. Sadly the town is now being swallowed up by Philadelphia suburban development. But the meeting remains much the same. Every year, since the 1930's, the Meeting holds an ecumenical service of thanks and prayer at 8:00 on Thanksgiving Day morning. It was so popular that people ended up standing at the back of the room. It was courageous during the early years because it incorporated all races – and the choir of the black Baptist Church certainly livened up the service with their noisy hand clapping gospel music. We sang “America the Beautiful” and there were presentations from most of the religions – a prayer, or reading, and then a guest speaker, chosen by rotation from among the different faiths. That was the year – 1994, in November, that it fell to MHMM and that's why I was speaking.

Quakers don't have designated ministers, we are all considered to be ministers. We also do not have

a well defined doctrine, so this religion tends to be a collection of individual insights and actions, like metaphors, coming together to make a whole that over the years usually leads us to the same place. I feel honored to have the opportunity to share my own metaphor of faith with you.

When Quakers develop a strong concern about something, frequently their meeting will support their efforts. The image of quiet, gentle Quakers can be a bit deceiving. Quakers acting on a concern can become very stubborn, digging their heels in, saying yes when others say no and no when others say yes. My family will tell you that I fit the profile well.

By profession I'm a photojournalist. I've worked for the Philadelphia Daily News for 14 years. I'm not a stranger to poverty, violence or tragedy, or racism.

But for some reason the story in South Africa really got my attention as it started to heat up in 1985. The South African government quickly put an end to my paper's plans to cover the story by denying our requests for journalists' visas. They did that to most American photojournalists. They

knew all too well what our photographs could accomplish. The paper cancelled plans for the trip but I didn't. By then I had become intrigued by the question, how does one respond to such a violent situation in a non-violent way?

There are only a handful of Quakers in South Africa. The ones I contacted told me they believed in empowerment, that the liberation of the whole would come through the liberation of the individual on the most basic level. They believed in reconciliation. They believed that South Africa had the potential to go through a transformation.

In 1985, this seemed to be a pretty impractical course to take. Most people brushed them off, including our own national Quaker organizations.

They said that it could never work there. I tended to agree. Imagine- talking peace in a country where human life was just one expendable ingredient in many twisted layers of oppression. Where the fine line between justice and retribution was frequently crossed, and to speak out against violence was to speak out against the only tool that many of the oppressed people believed they had. Talking peace, to some, was the equivalent of talking war.

But the South African peacemakers were so steadfast in their belief that I had to see for myself.

The South African government had different ideas. Over the next 3 years they turned down my requests for a visa 5 more times. I'm not sure who was being more stubborn, them or me.

In 1988 I finally was granted a visitor's visa for 4 weeks. I had to agree to refrain from publishing

anything I produced on the trip. I went anyway.

The Quaker Meeting in Cape Town had just opened the first Peace Center in South Africa. I conducted photography workshops for them. They gave me safe passage into the black townships and rural black homelands.

In 1988 apartheid was still firmly in place. Black South Africans lived in shameful poverty in segregated areas. Most whites lived in first world luxury. Some beaches and parks were still designated for whites only. A state of emergency was in effect. The police could detain anyone indefinitely for any reason – or for no reason – without ever pressing charges or holding a trial. The ANC and political gatherings were still banned. Black workers called the white men "Master." They called me "Lady" and would not look me in the eye.

As an American I was outraged. As a journalist I saw no way out. As a Quaker I witnessed an extraordinary spirit among the people. I had prepared myself for poverty and oppression so I thought I was prepared for South Africa. I wasn't.

South Africa was the last place I ever expected to find such hope, so much creativity, resilience. It was the last place I ever expected to find a strong spirit of peace and reconciliation.

I believe that the spirit goes where it is needed the most. This spirit was underground, like an undercurrent that showed itself in the people of all faiths that I met and worked with. I saw it in action over and over again. I made four more trips there to document that spirit.

At first I was frightened by the spirit that I saw in the squatter camps near Cape Town. I thought I was seeing acquiescence. Instead I was seeing the revolution at work, the people who carried on daily life in their tiny shacks they had built out of any material they could find in defiance of the laws that forbade them to live there. When the government bulldozed their shacks and removed them, they returned and rebuilt, and rebuilt again. This dance lasted over 15 years. In the end, the people prevailed

This was a spirit that refused to be defeated.

This spirit refused to lose its



Inspirational people: Philippina Mbuntana clinic – 1988

humanity.

The spirit danced and sang with the African women when they joined hands and sang to give themselves courage, to say hello and good-bye, to teach the children crammed into tiny one room school buildings that many communities built for themselves because the government would not provide education for their children.

The spirit was a windy, angry grief that swept over the rows of tiny children's graves in the township cemetery. At that time more children were dying from township conditions than adults.

The spirit responded by working through the hands of the volunteers in health clinics who healed tiny survivors.

The spirit wept when it saw a mother explain to her young daughter who was classified as "coloured" by the government that the "whites only" sign on the beach applied to her. This child had known only love and acceptance in her own community. How could she possibly understand how people - who did not even know her - could reject her like this?

This spirit protected a black South African woman when she refused to be humiliated by separate bathrooms at the gas station.

It forgave when she forgave.

The spirit waited while a white businessman who dearly loved his South Africa tore himself apart over the conflict between his own innate sense of decency telling him that he must accept dramatic change, and his fear of the consequences.

The spirit grew with every white South African who went through the painful transformation when they confronted apartheid honestly, realizing that their lives had been a lie and that their prosperity was at the expense of others. And that their very thoughts and feelings were against the law. They had to rewrite the truth for themselves.

In 1990 the spirit led thousands of black South Africans as they marched down the streets of Cape Town to Parliament while inside President DeKlerk announced that he would begin to dismantle apartheid. They waved the colors of the ANC freely for the first time and they sang in perfect harmony. The sound echoed off the walls of the tall buildings,



Schoolgirls in Cape Town – 1990

it enveloped us all in a single moment of pure joyous hope.

Then it turned over the leadership to a handful of very human leaders. It has been there, in the courage those leaders have needed to confront the bloodshed and the greed, to promote healing, instead of retribution, and I know that it has been in the patience they have needed to endure the endless tedious political meetings.

I had the honor of spending a lot of time with one of those leaders as he struggled to lead his region through a peaceful transition. During that time Smuts Nkonyama's life was threatened for over 3 years by homeland leaders who did not want to relinquish power to the ANC.

There was a time when he had to send his family away and abandon his township home when it was riddled with machine gun fire. I was with him in 1992 when the local homeland leaders ordered their troops to assassinate him immediately. I went to the homes and funerals of his ANC colleagues that they did manage to assassinate by throwing hand grenades into their homes in the middle of the night.

I watched him make the decision that despite the danger, he would not leave his community because he believed that a leader had an example to set, that he could not run. The hardest part was watching him struggle to maintain his own faith in peace. This was a man who had always offered the police a cup of coffee when they would arrive to take him to detention. But in the face of the relentless violence, he felt that he was running out

of options, and he came very close to giving up on peace.

But the spirit is tenacious. Just when he was at the point of giving up all hope, Smuts recognized a homeland official in a bank. He introduced himself and politely confronted the official on the issue of the violence. The two adversaries met secretly. They discovered that they liked each other and formed a plan that brought the 2 sides together to call a cease fire.

That tenuous peace lasted for six months until a popular ANC leader was assassinated by white radicals. The region's blood pressure went off the scale. Smuts responded by calling for a prayer for peace meeting in the local city hall. I was stunned to see thousands of people of all races come together on that day. Side by side white matrons and black maids sang and prayed. Many wept. Few touched.

That was in 1993, one year before the election. On that day I saw that despite all the conflict and bloodshed, when given the opportunity, many South Africans would still stand up for peace and reconciliation.

As the election approached, the bloodshed escalated. The spirit became hard to find during the weeks before the election. It was as though it was being shouted down by the voices of hate and greed and fear.

Then, when the campaigning ended, everywhere I went people were getting down on their knees and praying, as though that was all that was left to do.

The radical elements threw their tantrums with bombs and guns and the people continued to sing and pray...then, quietly, peacefully, they voted – and South Africa entered a new age.

An extraordinary event happened a few days before the election. The homeland leaders who had opposed Smuts and the ANC finally relinquished power and they would now be reincorporated into the new South Africa, The homeland flag was lowered in a ceremony held outside the government buildings. The homeland troops were there, standing at attention, with their guns and boots.

Their very young faces were hard. These were the troops who had conducted the reign of terror upon Smuts and his colleagues. They had assassinated many people. Just 18 months earlier they had fired upon unarmed marchers, killing 29 people.

A church official spoke, and surprised everyone by speaking the truth. He talked about the fraud of

the system, the violence, the lies. It was a brilliant, crisp, sunny day. The truth poured over the people just like the sunlight. The flag was lowered. There was a silence. The troops marched around the square for the last time in perfect formation.

The people – the very people they had terrorized for years – cheered them. I grabbed Smuts and asked, WHY??? Smuts said, “The people are showing their forgiveness and support for those troops.” I didn't go to South Africa to find the spirit of peace and reconciliation, but I found it there. It does still exist; it is strong and enduring under the worst of conditions.

The freedom seekers who settled in this country and celebrated the first Thanksgiving with the Native Americans did so in a spirit of peace and reconciliation. They could not have known how battered this nation's spirit would become, how it would be violated with bloodshed and oppression. They also did not know that it could endure, even during those times when it had to go underground.

Sometimes it is hard to believe that it is still with us, here. I know that I feel more vulnerable than ever before, my life is so fragile, I know that any of our lives can be shattered in a matter of seconds for no apparent reason at all by a complete stranger with a gun, or our personal property will be violated. Or, we may go to war again.

But I know for sure that this spirit lives on because you are here. Most of you got up before the sun this morning, and it is cold. And you have a million things to do today. But you are here.

And you will take some of the spirit we share here today out those doors with you, and hopefully it will help you get through the day with all those relatives, and perhaps will go with you when you return to work. It may even help you deal with that jerk on the expressway or the supermarket. It may be with you if you have to serve on a jury, see a friend through a crisis, or survive one of the many insults or disappointments we all must endure.

I have always felt a loving spirit here, in this tiny community of Quakers who never failed to support me as I created my own metaphor of faith. These Friends here stayed with me through the times when I felt so alone in this project. I alienated some of my editors and co-workers. I aggravated a bunch of Quakers in Philadelphia. Sometimes my family questioned my sanity, and resented the toll this project took on our family life. Sometimes I questioned my own sanity. I began to wonder if I enjoyed being scared to death. Sometimes my

insides felt like a battleground because I was so torn between my commitment to the people in South Africa that I had come to cherish and my commitment to my family and community here at home.

Sometimes when I have doubted the presence of this spirit, I have turned to the words of others in both past and present to remind me that during this extraordinary journey that I took for nearly 7 years, I'm really just part of a universal song, with a sound that is just like the sound of those voices singing on that perfect day in Cape Town.

South African writer Alan Paton captured the humanity of the conflict in South Africa in "Cry the Beloved Country" through the words of a white man who confronted the evils of apartheid and became an activist for the blacks. He wrote in his journal; "Therefore I shall devote myself, my time, my energy, my talents to the service of South Africa. I shall no longer ask myself if this or that is expedient, but only if it is right. I shall do this, not because I am noble or unselfish, but because life slips away, and because I need for the rest of my journey a star that will not play false to me, a compass that will not lie. I shall do this, not because I am a negrophile and a hater of my own, but because I cannot find it in me to do anything

else. I am lost when I ask if men, white men or black men, Englishmen or Afrikaners, Gentiles or Jews, will approve. Therefore, I shall try to do what is right, and to speak what is true."

Another piece comes from Quaker writer Jan deHartog in his book, "The Peaceable Kingdom". He describes the reaction that 17th century Quaker activist Margaret Fell had when she saw children hanging in an English prison. She tracked down Quaker founder George Fox and demanded to know where God's love was when such horrible things happened.

His reply to her was, "All He has is thee".

I frequently turn to Abraham Lincoln's words from his second inaugural address in 1865:

"With malice toward none, with charity for all with firmness in the right as God gives us to see the right

let us strive to finish the work we are in to bind up the nation's wounds to care for him who shall have borne the battle and for his widow and for his orphan to do that which may achieve and cherish a just and a lasting peace among ourselves and with all nations."



Waiting for the polling booths to open – 1994

William Walpole Lidbetter of Cradock

– a remarkable Quaker

Adrienne Whisson, CERM

In September last year, Liz de Wet of the Cory Library for Humanities Research, spoke to the Grahamstown branch of the University of the Third Age (U3A) on a collection of photographic negatives which the Library had been donated. The collection consists of about 186 glass negatives of different sizes made by the photographer William Lidbetter who had lived in Cradock from 1899 until his death in 1959. The Cory Library had subsequently “developed” these negatives and they were now available to be shown to interested people. Liz de Wet had showed and spoken about a some of photographs, on the initiative of Malcolm Hacksley, Chairman of the Grahamstown branch of the U3A.

I was spurred to attend largely because of a personal interest in the name. Liz not only showed us whole number of photographs on screen but also gave us a picture of the man himself. There were a few photographs of interiors but most of the them showed the countryside and the town of Cradock itself in its various aspects and seasons, including various buildings and military gatherings during The Boer War, WW1 and WW2. One of the photographs turned out to be very well-known

(and will be familiar to many) for it shows the reinternment of Olive Schreiner and her baby and their dog. We see Cronwright Schreiner standing on top of Buffelskop outside Cradock with the three coffins next to him.

But what caught my attention most of all was Liz’s report that Lidbetter had been a Quaker. This she got from information she had found with the help of freelance researcher for museums, Marianne Gertenbach. I learned that Lidbetter had been born on 16 June 1874. He attended a Quaker School at Wigton, Cumberland, England, where his father was headmaster. He qualified as a commercial printer but because of asthma, had emigrated to Tasmania where there were Lidbetters and where William came to meet another Quaker family, the Cottons, whose house “Kelvedon” also served as a Meeting House. (His house in Cradock subsequently carried this name.) However, in 1898-1899, he emigrated again, to Cradock, South Africa, where he became a cabinet-maker and subsequently developed his hobby of photography into his main occupation. He later married Helen Cotton who had left Tasmania to join him. “Together they built up a very sound reputation for conscientious artistic work.” (His

obituary, *The Midland News and Karoo Farmer*, Tuesday, 3 February 1959.)

He led a full life in the community, becoming a Town Councillor, secretary of the Rocklands School Committee and a member of the Public Library. After Helen died in 1937, he re-married. He himself died in 1959 aged 84.

If I had been surprised and pleased to learn of his Quakerism, I was intrigued at how he left his money. Liz de Wet read aloud from a copy of his will. He left a £1000 to his second wife, 200 pounds to sister Mary Haydock, £1000 to nephew Francis Cotton, £150 to former servant Edward Kerido and £1500 pounds “for the erection of a community hall in the Native Location, Cradock in trust of a



Cradock – Allan & Coleman, General Dealer.



Cradock – the Victoria Hotel after the fire in about 1920. The hotel was restored and is still a favourite place to stay in the town.

committee comprising the European and Native Ministers of the Anglican and Wesleyan churches, a representative of the municipal council of Cradock and a member of the Society of Friends. (The term “Native” to include Bantus, Africans and all persons usually referred to as Natives)”. Marianne Gertenbach had provided Liz de Wet with three documents, one of which was his obituary in the *Midland News* and another Canon Johnson’s address at Lidbetter’s funeral. She also made these three significant comments: “This obituary appeared on the front page of the newspaper (admittedly only a couple of sheets), and alongside it was an outpouring of objections from the Coloured readers against the Group Areas Act. In the next issue was a notice of a memorial service for DF Malan. Interestingly, no mention was made in the obituary of any work by Lidbetter amongst the Blacks.” We must all be impressed at the size of his gift and appalled at its coincidence with passage of The Group Areas Act – and also wonder about its eventual outcome. There is scope for further research.

In East London in December last year, I saw Brian Wilmot at a South African Museums Association Conference social occasion and said that I regretted I had not been free to attend a Literary Conference on Olive Schreiner, which had been held in Cradock in that July. Brian is Curator of the Schreiner House Museum in Cradock. He said that a recent additional attraction in Cradock were tours of the sites associated with Lidbetter’s photographs. I was

able to tell him about Liz de Wet’s talk.

Because I was curious for more information about this remarkable man, I consulted Betty Tonsing’s “The Quakers in SA: A Social Witness”, and two books lent to me by Paul Walters, an expert on literary matters relating to Cradock and the Eastern Cape. The first was *Jim’s Journal – The Diary of James Butler* (Witwatersrand University Press, 1996). James Butler had been Cradock’s first Quaker. The other book was *Olive Schreiner: Her re-interment on Buffelskop* by Cronwright Schreiner (This has been edited. Guy Butler, grandson of James Butler, and re-edited by Paul Walters and Jeremy Fogg). Paul Walters believed that Lidbetter arrived in

Cradock “in 1896 possibly to work for James Butler, as a cabinet maker” (Walters & Fogg, p. 147). James Butler had been calling for Quakers to join him in Cradock and Lidbetter’s arrival would have been an answer to a prayer. James Butler had also had health problems and discovered that the climate in Cradock had made him feel much better. This would have been greatly appealing to Lidbetter with his asthmatic condition.

Note. When I went to that U3A lecture, I took with me a photograph of two little girls, taken during WW2, about 1941-2. The girls were my sister and me, taken in Cradock, and the photographer was William W. Lidbetter.



Adrienne Whisson (on the right) and her sister, Elaine, photographed by William Lidbetter in about 1940 or 1941.

Shelagh Marjorie Willet

– a life of service to others

Sheldon G Weeks and Gudrun H. Weeks

A Brief Testimony to the Grace of God as shown in the Life of Shelagh Marjorie Willet (1 December 1931 – 10 June 2015)

Shelagh Willet grew up in South Africa on a farm near Pietersburg, South Africa, where she felt close to nature and formed a love of all life, which gave her the great strength she had in all her doings. After she trained she taught in Lesotho for a few years, becoming the librarian at the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland.

Shelagh first met Quakers, including David Richie, from Philadelphia, at a work camp at Wilgespruit in Gauteng (one of a very few places where multiracial groups met during apartheid). She became a Quaker of spiritual substance, carrying out the testimonies of peace and simplicity in her life, guiding the refugees in her counselling role at the Kagisong Centre, always even in her relationships, living a message of non-violence. She travelled in

Africa and to England and the United States for international meetings of Quakers. She participated fully with Quakers in Southern Africa and gave the Richard Gush Memorial Lecture at the 2013 Central and Southern Africa Yearly Meetings on a deep personal concern of hers — a reverence for all life.

When she moved to Botswana to develop the library at the Gaborone campus, she brought her mother with her. They soon began assisting refugees and started the first refugee centre in Gaborone. Eventually she ended her University of Botswana librarian job, a huge decision, giving up a comfortable lifestyle to care for others. With the assistance of British Quakers and many others, she helped to establish Kagisong Centre for refugees in Mogoditshane where she had a small rondavel set amongst the other shelters. In her long retirement she lived in a house in Gabane, with her garden, her cats and dogs, sometimes chickens, and those who accepted her loving care.

Writing the history of this Kagisong Centre was her last activity in a long fruitful life. *Voices of Kagisong* caps a number of other resource books she wrote, often with colleagues, on Lesotho (1980) and Botswana (1992), including two volumes of *The Khoe and San: An Annotated Bibliography*, Volume 1 (2002) Shelagh Willet with Janet Hermans, Stella Monageng and Sidsel Saugestad and *The Khoe and San: An Annotated Bibliography*, Volume 2 (2004). She also wrote for *Southern Africa Quaker News* (SAQN). Shelagh assisted local scholars with great humility by reading and editing drafts of their work, without expecting remuneration or recognition. For many years she collected materials for the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, USA. Shelagh lived a long life in the spirit of love and kindness, a belief in the inner light in each person and in all living creatures. She would help others before herself, often give away resources when little was left to meet her own needs. Her beliefs and humanity made her trust people, sometimes with unexpected consequences, but these never caused her to waiver in her convictions and way of life. In recent years, faced with declining health, a loss in hearing, and other problems, Shelagh stayed steadfast. Among her final words she said to those helping her, "I am such a trouble to everyone."

Shelagh Willet left us as she lived — thinking of others. May she rest in peace.



Obituary from the *Botswana Midweek Sun*,
17 June 2015

SHELAGH WILLET: BOTSWANA'S GREATEST QUAKER OF ALL TIMES

One of the world's greatest Quakers of all time, Shelagh Marjory Willet, has died. Known best of the founder of the Quaker Refugee Programme in Botswana – the Kagisong Centre, Willet was held, understandable, in high esteem by refugees, especially those from South Africa.

The bespectacled, tall and slender Willet gave her life to serving the needy in Botswana for more than four decades beginning in 1971 where she did work that put her on a footing with the inestimable "Mother Teresa", although she had no medical background.

Ask any refugee from Angola, Burundi, Cameroun, Congo, Eritrea, Lesotho, Mozambique, Namibia, Rwanda, Somalia, South Africa, Uganda, Yugoslavia and Zimbabwe who passed through the place of peace best known as Kagisong, and you will hear how Willet was there at their time of need.

But the dramatic irony is that meeting with her for the first time, many of these refugees regarded her with circumspection, thinking that she being a white qualified her to be a spy. But the big-hearted Willet proved them wrong by applying herself to the best of her ability, and won their hearts.

Helping those in need, including stray animals, gained her and embrace as a remarkable fighter for social justice and human rights in southern Africa where the Cold War was very hot. What perhaps is the most poignant about her death is not how she dies on Monday at Bambere Lutheran Hospital in Ramotswa, but that she had taken critically ill on Saturday, the very day in which her book, "Voices of Kagisong: the History of the Refugee Programme in Botswana", was launched.

It was a memorable event that would become an early memorial service where the handful invited guests, mostly Willet's friends, celebrated her success stories and wished her a speedy recover. Professor Jain Priti read a review of her book penned by the Director of Ditshwando – the Botswana Centre for Human Rights, Alice Mogwe, who could not be present owing to duty elsewhere.

One of the Quakers, Edward Hutton, spoke with passion about Willet, saying in order to earn a living she trained as a primary school teacher, later earning a BA in Library Studies from South Africa's renowned Wits University. While a Wits student, she was involved with the Liberal Party and the Congress [of] Democrats, and helped at the night school for African support staff.

While working in Johannesburg, Willet was questioned by the feared South Africa Special Branch, resulting in her departure from the apartheid country because of her political views.

Quaker Involvement

Hutton said Willet became an attendee at the Johannesburg Monthly Meeting and applied for membership but was advised that there were no Quakers in Lesotho where she was just going. But, of course, this was no deterrent to Shelagh. While she was deputy Librarian of the University of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland at Roma, she and three other attendees began a worship group, a step that proved critical to her admittance to Membership of Quakers.

In 1971, Willet moved to Botswana's Librarian and soon started the Botswana Monthly Meeting by joining with some attendees. A very serious Quaker, she attended events of the Friends World Committee and attended short courses at Woodbrook, the Quaker College.

At the time of her death, Willet was the Clerk of the Botswana Monthly Meeting. Those close to her say her house is itself a library. Later she resigned as Chief Librarian at the University of Botswana to start the Botswana Refugee Project as a Quaker Peace and Service Volunteer.

Social Concerns

In Botswana, Willet – with the help of the Botswana Monthly Meeting – assisted the government-run Lobatse Mental Hospital, now the Sbrana Psychiatric Hospital, in the early days of independence where things were difficult because of funding and personnel were in short supply. Nevertheless, blankets, clothing, repairs to buildings and Christmas parties were thanks to the dedication of the small staff. Willet has also worked with a hospice run by the Anglican Church and counselled AIDS patients.

cont.

cont. from page 21

Refugee Programme

In 1979, a refugee programme was inaugurated under the auspices of QPS London (Quaker Peace and Service) that was supported by the small Botswana Monthly Meeting. Willet left her position at the University of Botswana to become the QPS volunteer to run the new project. The first centre was a small house in Gaborone, helped by Emily Muba as cook and housekeeper.

She and Willet accommodated many refugees from surrounding countries over the next few years, offering counselling and some financial assistance. However, a better centre was needed. The Meeting got a plot in Mogodishane, and more volunteers joined the project, offering support to the local people.

The refugee programme was supported by the United Nations High Commission for Refugees, known for short as UNHCR, through the Botswana Council of Refugees. Short-term accommodation was given, as well as education and social counselling. From 1979 to 1996, several thousand refugees from all over Africa were housed there.

In 1998, Shelagh returned to the University of Botswana but later went back to Kagisong as Emergency Counsellor and later as Manager. The Kagisano Society emerged out of the social concerns of the Botswana Monthly Meeting, other NGOs and the Botswana Christian Council, now the Botswana Council of Churches. Today, the Kagisano Society is where is to be found the Woman's Shelter Project.

Book reviews



This is Who I Am: Listening with Older Friends.

Volume 9 of the Eldership and Oversight Handbooks, Quaker Books, London, 2004

Review by Rory Short,

Johannesburg Monthly Meeting

The book is aimed at helping older Friends grapple with the fact that they are aging, that they are drawing steadily closer to death, and what this means for them in terms of changes both as physical and spiritual beings. These changes are not catalogued as such but are touched on throughout

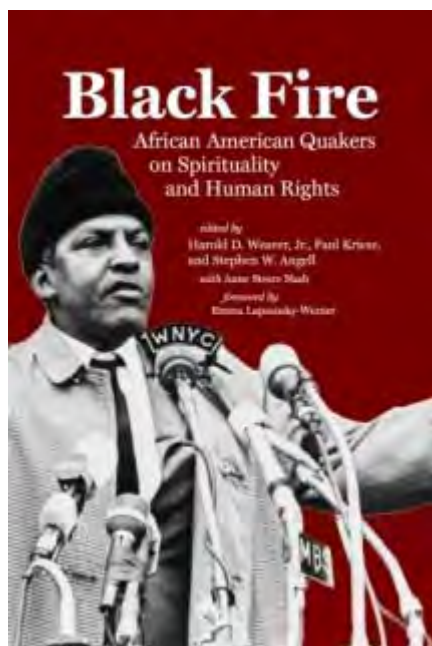
the text as the difficulties and rewards of actively listening to an older person are covered.

Its central tenet seems to be that older persons need people to share their experience with in order to help them to ingest these experiences both past and present. To this end the last section of the pamphlet is devoted to sensitively exploring the conditions that are necessary for creating a good one-on-one listening environment for the older person as the person being listened to.

The book focuses on the idea of establishing a Meeting for Listening within our worshiping communities as a context within which older Friends will experience the material and spiritual companionship that they might otherwise feel that they lack.

The book seems to be written from the perspective of the members of larger Meetings in Britain where the Meeting as a whole rolls along on the crest of the standing wave of generations. In Johannesburg this is not the case. JMM is sliding down the generational slope as the majority of our worshiping members are in our 70's. It is thus difficult for us to lay down the mechanical logistical roles in the Meeting as there are just too few younger people able to step into them. This is not to say that Meetings for Listening would not be appropriate but that the listeners would inevitably have to be ourselves, the older Friends. We are

facing a different situation compared to someone in a Meeting that embraces both young and old. It is nevertheless worth reading through this pamphlet if only to see that as an older Friend you are not alone in your experience.



Black Fire: African American Quakers on Spirituality and Human Rights

*Review by Sam Mugambe,
Johannesburg Monthly Meeting*

When I started reading this book “Black Fire: African American Quakers on Spirituality and Human Rights”, I expected to read about Quakers in America. But most of this book is about Human Rights, and this is what Quakers are advocating for.

So you cannot separate Quakers from Human Rights. This book explain how many learned Quakers are teaching us that oppressing one another is the mindset of both the oppressor and the oppressed. This needs to be corrected by educating one another, so that we can be liberated both physically and mentally.

In Chapter V, when I was reading about Barrington Dunbar on page 131, I was impressed by what Malcom X said about Christians, “You cannot call yourself a Christian when you are you are practicing segregation; you are a devil.”

This book “Black Fire” is a good source of information for everyone young and old, white and black who desires to educate a new generation about how to live as brothers and sisters, with no colour prejudice.

Hancock’s Drift

by F.W. Powell

*Review by Betsy Covill,
Johannesburg Monthly Meeting*

The experience of serendipity is always a joyful surprise.

A member of my book club recently shared something from her own family history with me. Her forbearers were among the 1820 Settlers, and one of them, Joseph Hancock, kept a journal.

This had come down to his descendants, one of whom took the time to type it out and share with other family members.

To my surprise and delight, among his journal entries are references to our oft-remembered hero, Richard Gush!

Apparently Gush had been in the same party with Joseph’s family that left England to sail for South Africa. Joseph was a young boy when the party set out, but Gush was already a well-respected adult. Gush was in fact elected to be the leader and spokesman for the 30 families that sailed on the “Brilliant”, one of the two ships that set out from England. It seemed that most of the travelers were “followers of Wesley” (Methodists).

Joseph described Gush as “a Quaker, and a man of great courage and perseverance as was to be proved on the Settlement.”

Later in his account, he records the incident at Salem with which we have become familiar. When it is placed in the context of the great tension and danger that surrounded the settlers at that time, Gush’s actions become even more astounding. Apparently after Gush’s actions, Salem remained a small oasis in what was otherwise a turbulent time and place.

So ... although my original intention was simply to share with a friend a bit of her family history, I was happy to discover these meaningful references to one of our most notable Quaker forefathers.

Images and Silence: the future of Quaker ministry

by Brenda C. Heales and Chris Cook

*Swarthmore Lecture 1992
Review by Betsy Coville,
Johannesburg Monthly Meeting*

Which two aspects of Quakerism have so much value for you that their loss would mean you could no longer be a Friend?

My answer came immediately: Meeting for Worship and being in a loving community. My Meeting is my extended family; it supports me, nurtures me, laughs at and with me, and accepts me with all my shortcomings. It is a community of love and a cell of strength.

This statement is from Brenda Heales, one of the co-authors of this book, a print version of their Swarthmore lecture.

Catherine Ambler gave me this lovely book years ago after she and her husband Rex had visited South Africa and shared “Experiment with Light” with us.

During my recent convalescence following surgery, I picked it up again to re-read.

What a treasure it is! Full of insights and ideas helpful for our spiritual journey. The focus is on ministry because

“If Friends do not experience true ministry in Meeting for Worship, they are not able to do God’s work, or to carry out God’s ministry in the world.”

The authors make a heartfelt plea for increased awareness that we meet for **WORSHIP** – that we remember that we meet to encounter “the presence of the Divine and eternal, to the God who first seeks us.” (from Church Government)

We forget this at times, focusing instead on ideas and opinions, hurts and brokenness. Anxiety about the ecological crisis or the arms trade leads to a state of arid guilt and fruitless frustration if we lose the sense of God’s presence which enables us to act in this damaged, beautiful world.

Their belief that Meeting for Worship is the soul of Quakerism and that the health of the soul determines the quality of our life together rings true to me.