

# Southern Africa Quaker News

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## Southern African Quaker News

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... and a book launch

# Editorial

Twenty eighteen was a year of centenaries. We celebrated the centenary of the birth of Madiba, the founding father of democracy in South Africa. We remembered the birth of Albertina Sisulu, who first met activist Walter Sisulu in 1941 while working at Johannesburg General Hospital. The Sisulus married in 1944 at a ceremony in which Nelson Mandela was the best man.

Another momentous centennial celebration was remembering the end of the First World War, on 11 November 1918. No one believed that such a conflict could ever be repeated — but the seeds of World War II and of the current conflict in the Middle East were sown then.

But, closer to home — the Editor's home, Grahamstown — we remembered the birth of Guy Butler in 1918, in Cradock, to a Quaker family. Guy Butler spent most of his life in Grahamstown, at Rhodes University, and had enormous impact on this small city and the university, driving the establishment of the departments of Drama, Journalism and Linguistics at Rhodes. He became deeply involved in the preservation and

restoration of buildings of historical interest. On a wider front he drove the establishment of the National Festival of the Arts, of the National English Literary Museum and Institute for the Study of English in Africa. Malvern van Wyk Smith, Guy Butler's successor as Head of the Department of English at Rhodes, writes of the Guy Butler he knew.

Colin Bartlett of the Milton Keynes Meeting reports on his and David Jones' visit to South Africa and Zimbabwe, and there is much to read on the work several Friends are involved in.

And, only a few weeks ago we said farewell to Rosemary Elliot, for many years an Eastern Cape Friend to many. She was a regular contributor of thought-provoking articles to the SAQN in the 1970s and 1980s. In time there will be a testimony to the life of Rosemary; we include a poem by her that encapsulates her life and service to others.

Finally, many of the key portfolios of SAYM have 'shadows' — there is a Co-Clerk and a Co-Treasurer. At YM I will propose the appointment of a Co-Editor for SAQN. If anyone has an interest in this, please make it known.

*Wouter Holleman, Editor*

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## The Guy Butler that I knew

*Malvern van Wyk Smith*

*– Talk given at the National Arts Festival, Grahamstown, 2 July 2018*

*Guy Butler, who grew up in Cradock, came from an old Quaker family, and was a member of Eastern Cape Quakers for many years. He was Head of the English Department at Rhodes University where Malvern van Wyk Smith was a colleague.*

I met Guy Butler for the first time on a very hot day in February 1966. Arriving back in South Africa that morning after an absence of six years, I was picked up in Port Elizabeth by my parents, and we set off for Grahamstown. We had never been in the Eastern Cape. The further we drove, the dustier the road and the emptier the landscape became, until my mother turned to me and said "My hartjie, is daar 'n universiteit aan die end van die pad?" – a question,

some might say, that is being asked with increased anxiety these days. But we continued on our way and arrived at Rhodes, where we were directed to an ancient stone building, the Drostdy Lodge, home of the English Department in those days. Here we met Guy, who immediately invited us to High Corner for tea. This was my first encounter with Guy and Jean's legendary hospitality. All went well and I think my parents felt they had delivered their son into safe hands. Guy, however, noticed that they called me "Melvin", the South African pronunciation, not "Molvern" as I had become accustomed to be called in Britain and the United States. And "Melvin" I remained for Guy for the next forty years. It was, for me, a first demonstration of what over the years

would become the theme of much of Guy's polemics and poetry: how to do justice to the business of being English in South Africa, not just superficially and in terms of domicile, but in one's rootedness in two different yet complementary cultures.

"Stranger to Europe" he called himself, yet a more passionate student and admirer of Shakespeare it would be hard to imagine. He loved his sabbaticals in Oxford and Cambridge, from where he would write me delightful letters, not all of them very complimentary to their subject matter. Here is an extract of one, about a Shakespeare conference in Stratford: "The papers varied in quality, from inaudible Orientals to inarticulate Poles, to pontificating Teutons, to voluble Americans, to ironic Englishmen; from brief and final attacks on the entire universe to interminable niggings on the ongoing debates about Hamlet's madness" (August 1980). "In all of us two continents contend" he wrote famously, but rather than make this a cause for heartache and homesickness, the dichotomy inspired him to memorable creativity and enterprise. The very building in which we are meeting today [The Monument] is just one of the many productive outcomes of Guy's conviction that our dual heritage is not a handicap but a challenge that might lead from the ordinary to the remarkable.

The debates around Guy's convictions in this regard were not always easy, as the following incident will illustrate. While always a champion for the achievements of metropolitan English literature, Guy became convinced in the early 1970s that our Department should start introducing courses in South African and African writing. An idea that might now seem blindingly obvious was then regarded as preposterous. No other major English Department in the country would contemplate such an option for several years to come, and I well remember conferences in those times where Guy's plans were simply ridiculed. Here at Rhodes negotiations were no easier, and on one occasion a colleague argued that South African literature was largely about drought, miscegenation, and racial violence. Students, he argued, needed something more positive, challenging, different, and perhaps something that held out the prospects of happiness. The meeting fell silent. Guy took off his glasses, swirled them around for a few seconds, then said: "Happiness is for the pigs!" There was no further debate. He once said in an interview: "My whole life has been one long self-indulgence of my major intellectual and emotional passion... Literature

presents the human imagination in its profoundly primal, creative exploration of the human condition" (Maclennan and van Wyk Smith 1986: 2-4). He had no doubt that the writing of this continent was part of that exploration and deserved to be studied.

He was a man of many contradictions and contrasts. He was deeply religious yet had deep doubts about his own faith. I think he could have been happy in a monastery, attracted as he was to a high Anglo-Catholic mysticism (he admired the contemplative traditions of the Community of the Resurrection), yet he remained faithful to the simple near-agnostic and practical verities of Quakerism, especially towards the end of his life. He was a man of ideas – plenty of them – but he was also an artist and craftsman of considerable skill. He came to Rhodes just before the Second World War in order to study art, but he ended up in North Africa and Italy with the South African forces, where his own poetry flourished and he became so entranced with the art and architecture of the Italian Renaissance – witness his collection *On First Seeing Florence* (1968) – that by the time he returned to Rhodes in 1945 he wanted to study poetry. And poetry and poetic drama, notably that of Shakespeare, remained his great literary loves. In all the years that I knew him he never taught novelistic fiction, and the cinema he regarded as a mechanical manipulation of the worst elements of the human psyche.

Once married to Jean and back in Grahamstown (where he became Professor of English in 1952, aged 34) his thoughts turned to other and more practical aspects of being English in Africa. The Butlers bought High Corner and thus began a whole new venture in his life, the restoration of the city's 1820 Settler homes. He did much of the restoration work himself (and lost a thumb in the process) and persuaded others like myself to enter into the restoration business, if somewhat more cautiously. The lost thumb was not the only casualty in Guy's urban renewal activities. As he bought more houses to restore, he had to let the ones already done to finance the new projects. Soon Guy and Jean were the owners of quite a number of student digs and when at one point in the mid-1970s the SRC mounted a campaign against high student rentals, Guy became its most prominent target. Guy Rackrent was one of the more repeatable sobriquets he had to contend with.

This was a depressing experience, only to be exceeded a few years later by the more virulent polemics of the so-called WESSA controversy.

WESSA stood for White English-Speaking South Africans, and Guy's pronouncements on what it meant to be English in South Africa had been misread, misquoted, and mis-applied by this very right-wing group as a kind of revanchist call to arms for South African Brits who were nevertheless unwilling to give up apartheid. Guy weathered the storm, but it was probably the trigger for a deep bout of depression that on more than one occasion (one only has to read the poetry) brought him very low. A letter to me of 11 October 1984 concluded "I see no reason to be hopeful or cheerful about anything that is going on anywhere", and a few years later in *A Local Habitation* he describes himself as "eaten up by introspection, white-anted with guilts and dreads" (149). But one has to turn to the poetry to get the full blast of Guy when in this mood:

*And I have failed, am lost, must blindly grope  
through slums and deserts of my heart, and fall  
into the shame of impossible hope;  
drowning in myself, must cry and call  
across the seas and continents and skies  
for One who walks the waves of burial.*  
("Elegy for a South African Tank Commander")

Yet in the very worst years of his own depression and of South Africa in the final throes of apartheid and state terrorism, he could also muster the courage to write:

*Through rotting days,  
beaten, broken  
some stayed pure;  
others learnt how  
to grin and endure;  
and here and there  
a heart stayed warm, a head grew clearer.*  
("A Prayer for All my Countrymen")

But I must end, and it is time to sound a more cheerful note. Guy had a great sense of fun, and my most lasting memory of this will remain an occasion during the general election of 1974 when I stood as a candidate for the Progressive Party here in Albany. One member of our team had the brilliant idea of organizing a whistle-stop tour from Grahamstown to Port Alfred – yes, the railway line still functioned in those days. So one Saturday morning about 40 of us – plus two Special Branch members – set off from Grahamstown station with much hilarity all round. Guy was part of the team. At each station we would all bundle out, I would make a brief speech to a wholly absent audience, and Guy would take off his Panama hat and shout from the back of the group: "What about the pineapple farmers?" Well, the train is gone, the station is gone, the pineapple farmers are mostly gone; Guy is gone, but thank you for inviting me today to share some of our memories of him.

## Celebration of life

### *Memorial for John Schmid, held on 17 November 2018 in Bulawayo*

Our dear Friend, John Schmid died on 5 November 2017. A memorial in celebration of John's life was organised by Kelitha Schmid on 17 November 2018 in Bulawayo. A large number of people, including Friends from Bulawayo and Johannesburg, attended the memorial, made speeches and gave testimonials about John. Below is the tribute prepared by SAYM's co-clerks, John Inglis and Sipho Nsimbi, which was read at the memorial by Alex Kuhn of the Quaker Community in Johannesburg. This is followed by tributes from Justine Limpitlaw of the Quaker Community in Johannesburg, and Bruce Caddick from Bulawayo.

#### **Tribute by SAYM Co-Clerks**

Dear Friends

On behalf of all in SAYM who knew John, we send this message as a way of contributing to the celebration of his life at this memorial gathering, a year after his death. John Inglis is sorry not to be there in person, but he is very happy that Justine and Alex are with you, and that Sipho is clerk of BQM, so that they can offer this tribute from SAYM.

We are thinking especially about Kelitha today, as she relives so many memories of the years that she and John worked together, serving the poorest rural communities in Matabeleland South. They did so out of pure compassion, and for no financial return.



John and Kelitha shared something very special with each other, and with everyone they connected with.

You in Bulawayo Quaker Meeting know how special John was, and how fortunate you are to have had him among you, with his inspiring integrity and care, and working so hard to contribute to the building of your meeting.

John was very special to so many of us across SAYM. He was a rock-steady example to us of what binds us together as Quakers: he was unassuming; he rejoiced in a simple lifestyle; he showed unwavering integrity in all his dealings with others. He loved and cared for everyone as equals, especially those who had to endure hardship, poverty and marginalisation. He was a man of peace, who understood that to achieve peace you have to work for justice. And he had the courage to do that, which at times meant speaking truth to power.

Now, a year after his passing, his example remains strong and inspiring, because it made such a solid and enduring impression on so many. I believe his memory will live on in us who knew him in life and continue to strengthen us in our Quaker faith.

#### **Tribute by Justine Limpitlaw**

I wasn't an intimate friend of John's.

I never went to his house.

When I met him he was already seventy-six.

I remember the first time I heard him speak. His voice and his tone were gentle, loving. I never heard him speak any other way.

I admired the way he loved: open heartedly, practically, with warmth and zeal but never in an uncritical way.



*Khelitha Schmid*

He was a light to us Friends and to the world: helping where he could, teaching whom he could, laughing with everyone.

I think his great loves were Zimbabwe and its people, Beethoven's music, and his beloved Kelitha.

Hamba kahle John, go in the Light.

#### **Tribute by Bruce Caddick**

I wasn't an intimate friend of John's; I met him and Kelitha many years ago as a friend of my parents, and a Friend with my mother.

I worked with John on the business of feeding people in Matabeleland for whom he had great compassion. John went out of his way for "His People" often at great risk, and always with discomfort, travelling on the awful rural roads.

He was gentle, quiet, unassuming and I cannot ever remember him being really angry, even when what was happening around him deserved it. One specific matter in this regard is the enormous amount of effort it was to get permission from all the authorities to be permitted to import maize meal that was then going to be given away free to families in Matopos South area who were in dire need. This even stretched to the point at which we had to "smuggle" maize meal into Bulawayo late at night, sometimes with the police following to ensure that it was actually being delivered to a church. We worked together on this on a number of occasions.

His great loves were Zimbabwe and its people, especially the people of Matabeleland, and his beloved Kelitha.

Hamba kahle John. Go well and may you rest in peace with your God.



*Bulawayo Friends*

# CORRESPONDENCE

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## Botswana Meeting

Dear Friends,

We have received good news about Quakers in Botswana. I had a phone call from Sebastian Okello-Wengi, who is in the Ugandan Consulate in Gaborone. He is a member of the Botswana Meeting and a member of the Kagisano Society, which owns the Kagisong Centre where Friends meet twice a month.

The Clerk is Matshidiso Mary Hutton, widow of Ted Hutton who died in 2017, and mother of two daughters, Joanna and Annemarie. Though this has been a hard time for them and for the Meeting since Ted died, and following the death of Shelagh Willet, they now have about eight people attending meetings.

The Women's Shelter at Kagisong is now registered as an independent NGO with its own constitution, board and buildings, and it is raising funds in its own right under its new name: The Botswana Gender-based Violence Prevention and Support Centre.

The Kagisano Society is in the process of amending its own constitution to reflect these changes. Its purposes and ways of operating remain closely aligned with Quaker principles and practices. They have renamed their premises a Peace Sanctuary. Some former refugees, who knew and were supported by Shelagh, have promised to raise funds in the US towards developing the Peace Sanctuary and promoting peace through peace education.

Sebastian was happy to receive news of our YM in April. He hopes to attend the first part of YM, and will also let Mary and the meeting know the dates. I will send the information and registration form to Mary and we hope that she and some other members of BMM will be able to attend YM 2019.

It is a great joy to renew the connection with BMM. They will let us know the dates for their planned retreat, and we hope that a few of us will be able to join them.

John Inglis  
SAYM Co-clerk

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## A letter from New Zealand

Dear Wouter Holleman

Recently the news of the death of Jim McCloy travelled swiftly round the world.

I heard from Rosemary Mattingley in Tasmania and then from Helen Vale in Namibia. I sent the news on to friends in England and Lesotho — so that Anne Ncheke heard from me here in NZ before she heard from others in Lesotho, such is the speed of electronic messages.

This news suddenly woke me up to realising I had not kept in touch with my old Meeting at all since 2007, nor with the broader community of Southern African Quakers, so I began to reconnect.

Jim McCloy allowed Lesotho Meeting to gather at his house on Sundays, and he also provided a guiding hand to the Meeting as it went through changes. He had a natural sympathy for Quakers, an empathy and wisdom that kept the group together.

Anne Ncheke, widow of the artist Paul Ncheke, wrote to me regularly during the days before his funeral and finally wrote this simple account of the occasion:

*"Dear Christabel,  
Yesterday was Jim's funeral. We had a lovely service with his friends speaking about their relationship with him. The Quakers were represented by members from Lesotho, Johannesburg, and even Southern Africa. There were a few minutes silence where we were asked to each pray silently. To my amazement when I shut my eyes words came to me and I prayed. I have always said I cannot pray. This was the first time I was able to. Afterwards a number of people remarked that they would like to attend a Quakers' meeting because they too felt something for the first time.  
Fond regards – Anne"*

I forward this to everyone in Lesotho and Southern Africa with my own fond regards and hope to re-establish contact again.

Christabel Jackson  
Kapiti Meeting  
New Zealand

## Southern Africa Intervisitation 2018

We feel that it is important to give a brief outline of the process of discernment we undertook before setting off on our journey. As part of our application for funding, we were asked to read relevant portions of Section 13, *Quaker Faith & Practice*. We found this to be an immensely enriching experience. We brought our leading to a Meeting for Clearness hosted by a small group of Elders. It was a wonderful opportunity to explore intervisitation at a deep level. Our leading was received and supported by both our local Business and Area Meetings. We thank both Clerks for the work they did to ensure our leading was brought before each Meeting. The process has been a vital part of our journey. It has informed our Quaker Faith.

In October 2017 our application for funding was accepted by Pollard & Dickson Trust. We wish to acknowledge the positive part they have played. Their open approach to applying for funding allowed us to explore our reasons for doing so in a far richer way than confining responses in a set of closed questions.

Our arrival at the Good Shepherd Retreat Centre had the feel of a long-awaited homecoming. We were overwhelmed by the joy and the love shown to us by Southern African Friends who welcomed us back. Conversations that had begun in May 2016 at the last SAYM quickly and effortlessly resumed from where they had left off.

We had often heard how valued and supported Friends felt when visited by other Friends around the world. It had been said that such visits have enriched those being visited. And yet, in visiting SAYM in 2016, David and I felt that it worked in the opposite direction – that Southern African Friends had given us a gift. Their love and friendship have led us both into Membership. Our intervisitation leading has come directly out of our experience of our time with them.

Our surroundings provided the perfect place for worship and contemplation, overlooking the vast Hartebeespoort Dam and surrounded by the foothills of the great Magaliesberg Mountain range. Memories flooded back of happy times spent hiking these mountains in my younger days.

Worship sharing is central to the start of each day during SAYM and once again we were able to experience a deep sense of connection with others during this special time. The sharing is unlike anything we have experienced anywhere else.

The first evening's activities centred on Southern

African links with Quakers around the World, from the early whalers from Nantucket that first visited the Cape to the more recent connections with Israel-Palestine Friends. Young Friends helped map out these links on a large World Map using different coloured wools. The rest of us explored milestone events in the history of Quakers from Lesotho, Namibia, Zimbabwe and South Africa.

We explored the meaning of "diversity" in an evening workshop and groups were invited to act out or illustrate its meaning. It was a topic that came up many times throughout the week especially during Business Meetings and the Richard Gush lecture. Whilst much was said about diversity of cultures, languages, race and gender, we could not help but notice the diversity of other life forms around us, from the cry of the wild jackals and owls at night, to the lizards and spiders on the walls and in the thatch of the huts, and the rich bird life in the trees during the long, hot days. We were reminded during the workshop that although we are diverse people, we all originate from the same ancient cradle in Africa, that our "home" is "down the road" at the Cradle of Humankind, a place where some of the earliest human remains have been found.

Four of us took a trip during the afternoon set aside for free activity to visit the Cradle of Humankind and to see for ourselves the 2013 discovery of *Homo naledi*, the remains of which are thought to be of the earliest human.

The 2018 Richard Gush Lecture "Inward Journey / Outward Journey" was given by Nancy Fee from Pretoria Meeting. Nancy shared her rich and extensive work, in particular, her time spent with the UNAIDS organisation.

We were blessed to have Gretchen Castle, the General Secretary of the FWCC, with us for the duration of the week. She told us that FWCC were considering holding the next World Plenary in 2023 in either South Africa or India. She outlined the practical arrangements to be undertaken by the host country and invited SAYM to consider the possibility.

The last evening of SAYM is always a time of celebration and we were treated to some wonderful performances by the adults and young friends alike. In fact, it was an example of diversity in action. From live music on bagpipes and a piano accordion, a Zimbabwean community choir and Young Friends' karaoke performances, to storytelling and a send-up of Hamlet - it was all there.

And then it was time to say our goodbyes.



## Zimbabwe

On Monday morning 8th Jan, David and I headed off to Harare by road while Lee and Jessica flew to Bulawayo. The road journey would take us two days with an overnight stop just short of the SA-Zimbabwe border.

Safely across the Limpopo River, which forms the natural border, we drove through Matabeleland and reached Great Zimbabwe, a site I had wanted to visit since childhood. The mystery and majesty of the site was worth the four-hour guided tour of the site. It was truly spectacular, and the highest point afforded a breath-taking view of the surrounding countryside.

## Harare

We wanted our visit to be open to the leading of the Spirit. We chose not to travel there with an agenda. If anything was to come out of the visit, we wanted it to be from the Meeting.

Harare Friends kindly offered us guest accommodation in the Warden's House. We found it touching that Friends had repainted the inside of the house to welcome us, given their limited resources. James Kadungure, a Harare Friend who we had helped a year before with funding for an irrigation system for his market garden, met us on the first day. We later visited his property and met his family. His pride in his achievements was visible.

During our meeting with Benonia Nyakunikwa, clerk of Harare Meeting, we were shown the work that has been started on securing the borehole, pump and water tank. Funds collected by Lee Taylor would be used to complete this work. They would also like to replace the curtains in the Meeting House, carry out repairs to the roof, and paint the outside walls of the Warden's House.



Benonia arranged for us to visit American Friends Service Committee and to meet Nthabiseng Nkomo, the country representative. During our meeting we heard about their work dating from 2008 with displaced people in a shanty town on the outskirts of Harare known as Hatliffe Extension. The project aimed to provide emergency relief and livelihood skills training. AFSC extended their training programme to Hopley Farm in 2011. We heard about the Dialogue and Exchange Programme (DEP) used to bring together grassroots, civil society and government leaders so that they can learn, exchange ideas and collectively solve problems.

It was a blessing to join Meeting for Worship with Harare Friends on the Sunday and to share the silence with them. After Meeting we provided a lunch in thanks for their hospitality.

We were asked to help re-arrange their Library during our last two days in Harare. After explaining the system of organising books used at Milton Keynes Meeting, Harare Elders decided that this is something they would like us to do for them. We formed a working party made up of local Friends and ourselves. Between us we agreed the categories that would be used and trained James and Andrew how to re-label and arrange the books by category. Thanks to David and Deporis, the wooden shelves in the book cases were beautifully cleaned and restored using wax polish and elbow grease.

We left Zimbabwe and South Africa with hearts that were full. We have shared deeply with so many Friends' on each of their journeys. These memories will stay with us.

Colin Bartlett & David Jones,  
Milton Keynes Meeting, UK



## Stop the Rot

THERE IS growing anger over corruption in Namibia. Transparency International defines corruption as “the abuse of entrusted power for private gain”.

In Namibia, however, it seems corruption is not just about personal greed. Addressing the Swapo Party’s Women’s Council in November 2017, First Lady Monica Geingos, a prominent business leader, said: “In Namibia, we do not hate corruption because it is wrong. We hate it because we are not also ‘eating’.” (*The Namibian* 2017.11.06.)

This statement suggests that unaddressed inequalities of the past are subtly manifesting themselves in corrupt individual behaviour, and the collective tolerance of it. There may be conflicting value systems in the background.

To whom or to what does a leader owe loyalty, and are leaders equipped and supported enough to properly navigate their roles, responsibilities and values, and resist possible pressure from the extended family? And may previous suffering unconsciously be seen as justification for corrupt action, as a way of correcting economic and social imbalances?

The problem of corruption also goes beyond officials accepting bribes: it includes individuals and businesses that offer bribes to obtain advantages over others.

Impatient as we may be to stop the theft from the poor that results from corruption, we must recognise that corruption is not easy to eliminate. Drawing on the values of the Quaker Community (otherwise known as the Religious Society of Friends) we believe that living the following values could help us do this.

### *Equality*

We have made some progress in reducing inequality since independence, according to the Namibia Statistics Agency. However, the truth is that gross and very visible inequality still exists. We need to intensify measures to achieve a higher standard of equality, including efficient and progressive tax collection to fund innovative social and economic programmes, such as the basic income grant (BIG).

Equitable land redistribution also needs to be implemented. In terms of social equality, we need to abolish the feudal ‘master and servant’ relationships. We must understand the impact of decades of division along racial and ethnic lines and of inherited economic privileges.

For instance, does every white person know the meaning of ‘black tax’? And of course, we must

address patriarchy in gender relations. We also need to welcome criticism – especially as leaders – as a sign of our healthy democratic state. To promote greater equity, those of us who are better-off could adopt simpler, more sustainable lifestyles, and pay more than the minimum wage, which often is ‘too much to die, yet too little to live’.

### *Stewardship*

Whether or not we are privileged ‘owners’ of resources, material or intangible, we need to regard ourselves as responsible servants, as custodians who conserve and wisely utilise the resources in our care – not squander them – so that investments grow for the benefit of the common good.

We should consider ourselves accountable for how we use what has been entrusted to us. In the corporate world this is known as good governance, exemplified in the Namcode published by the Namibia Stock Exchange. Such principles, including risk management and managing conflict of interest, need to become embedded in society.

### *Integrity*

Integrity is the quality of acting on strong, consistent moral principles. People of integrity welcome openness and accountability, unlike those who plot dishonestly in secret.

Social structures that are vital for the promotion of an open society are a free press, the Ombudsman, and independent law courts. Also important is implementation of the Whistle-blower Protection Act 2017, without further delay, and the promulgation of a long-promised Access to Information Act. Integrity in leadership is critical.

Leaders in government, the private sector, civil society, churches, any institution, need to accept personal responsibility for stopping the spread of corruption in society. We encourage authorities in both the government and the private sector to intensify processes to support integrity, including counselling in ethics for leaders. We also encourage all citizens to become more aware of how one can somehow be caught in corrupt behaviour, and how to put a stop to it.

There is a danger that corruption could become part of the culture in Namibia. That is because we collectively have allowed it to happen. Taking collective action is therefore also how corruption can be overcome.

Justin Ellis, Namibia Quakers

*This letter was published in The Namibian on 21 September 2018*

## One of the saddest lessons....

*“One of the saddest lessons of history is this: if we have been bamboozled long enough, we tend to reject any evidence of the bamboozle. We’re no longer interested in finding out the truth. The bamboozle has captured us. It’s simply too painful to acknowledge, even to ourselves, that we’ve been taken. One you give a charlatan power over you, you almost never get it back.”*

Carl Sagan (1934–1996), American astronomer, cosmologist, astrophysicist, astrobiologist, author, science populariser, and science communicator in astronomy and other natural sciences

## QUAKERS AT WORK

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### Report on the Alternatives to Violence (AVP) Basic Workshop

*Conducted for Phoenix Zululand at Ncome Prison, KwaZulu-Natal on 21–23 August 2018 by the AVP-KZN Facilitator Network.*

*Buyile Mpungose, Lead facilitator and AVP-KZN Coordinator*

**Note from the Editor:** *The Alternatives to Violence Project has its origins in 1975 when inmates at Green Haven Prison in New York State asked local Quakers to help them teach incarcerated youth how to resolve conflicts non-violently. The success of the workshops quickly spread by word of mouth, and the programme took root in many State and Federal prisons throughout the country. Workshops are now offered in communities, businesses, churches, neighbourhood centres, community associations, women’s shelters and other locales. AVP is widely supported and applied by Quakers in many parts of the world.*

#### **The programme**

The Alternatives to Violence Project is a worldwide network of volunteers offering experiential workshops in conflict resolution, creative responses to violence, and personal growth.

AVP is dedicated to reducing the level of violence in society, by introducing people to ways of resolving conflict that reduce the need to resort to violence as a solution. It does this by offering workshops that empower people to lead non-violent lives, based on respect and caring for others. AVP philosophy

recognises the power for peace and good in everyone. Our two-day process-based workshops focus on personal growth through building affirmation, respect for all, community, cooperation and trust, thereby helping people to tap into their own power to transform their everyday relationships in highly positive ways.

AVP’s experiential and participatory methodology allows participants and facilitators to share their life experiences and understanding of handling conflict. They deepen everyone’s capacity to create successful personal interactions and find ways of transforming violent or potentially violent conflict situations into non-violent outcomes.

A team of four facilitators (two men and two women) facilitated the AVP Basic workshop at Ncome Prison, using the above approach to cover the following topics: Affirmation and Listening; Communication; Cooperation; Community/Trust Building, and Conflict Resolution through Transforming Power. The activities included: gatherings, boundary agreements, ‘light and livelies’ (games), brainstorming, group sharing, reflection on experiences, role play, and evaluations after each session. The workshop was run over three consecutive days and participants

received a certificate at the end.

### **The group and the conditions**

The group, many of whom are serving life sentences, consisted of male inmates between the ages of 29–39, and a few older men. Ms Themba Nhlebela, the Phoenix Zululand facilitator, also participated in the workshop, and correctional officers were present throughout. The participants seemed to be anxious and eager to know what we were there for. They thought they had been singled out as violent people. They said that the people who are violent are their Correctional Services Officers who treat them (inmates) violently. We responded that we were not there for violent people; we were there for all of us to share our experiences of life, so that they would gain from us and we would gain from them. This made them feel more at ease. The place we were in was very clean and the participants were also very clean.

### **How did participants respond to the group processes?**

At first the participants were not at ease, but after the first session they were comfortable, participated fully, and became very free with us. Some of them shared personal information, telling us why they were there. When the group made ground rules or boundary agreements, we made it clear that, “What is said here, ends here.” Knowing that what they shared was confidential, made them feel free about sharing. Some asked how they could keep this information to themselves and not share it with fellow inmates who need AVP because they cannot control their tempers. We explained that they can share the learnings without identifying individuals whose stories had been shared.

Our seating arrangements in the workshop were not top-down, as in a classroom; we sat in a circle or horseshoe to show that we are all equal, there is no seniority, and we share our experiences. In each session facilitators moved their seating position to sit among the inmates. This made them feel even freer as we were not isolating them; they commented that we were not treating them as prisoners, just as one of us. Some confessed they had thought they would leave after the first session if it did not interest them, but everyone stayed to the end.

### **What feedback did you get from them and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) members?**

The participants said that they had almost missed a good programme which had built their lives for the better, and they had no regrets about coming to this workshop. Some of the quotes from the inmates were:

- “This was an eye opener as the history of AVP started in prison; it means it was meant for us and it is very good.”
- The game we had was an affirming adjective that starts with the same letter of the alphabet as your name: “This [game] makes me feel accepted and makes me proud of my name instead of being called prisoner.”
- “I feel so good and comfortable that I have even forgotten that I am in prison.”
- “Please spread AVP all over the world. People need it. Maybe if we had this earlier we would not be in here.”
- “I feel good about myself; I can even talk about my kids.”
- “The mixing /sitting of the facilitators shows love.”
- “We should never undermine other people.”
- “We can avoid violence and be good people.”
- “Thanks a lot. We did not know some of the things, like abuse that can cause violence.”
- “We hope this is not the last time you come because we need such programmes to shape ourselves when we leave prison.”

The DCS members were kind to the inmates and treated them as human beings, though they always cautioned us not to be too friendly with them. Those who attended the second and third day said this programme was very good; they also need to go through it as they deal with a lot of conflict in their own lives. They also said it is very good for the inmates.

### **How do you feel about the programme just completed?**

The facilitation team was very excited and happy that the participants responded so positively and the workshop went so well. It confirmed our belief that AVP can make a positive difference in the prisoners’ lives. The looks on the inmates’ faces in the following two days made it clear that they were as eager as young children to get as much knowledge as possible. There is always something good in every person; our task is to see that good thing. As one of my facilitators said, “We are like diamonds that have layers and layers of mud on them. It is for us to remove all the mud until we see the beauty of



the diamond.” We are grateful for the efforts of Jane Argall and Themba Nhlebele from Phoenix Zululand, and Marlene Naidoo, the DCS Spiritual Care Manager, for making this workshop a reality.

#### **Any pressing concerns?**

I think that the inmates must continue to receive support in changing their lives, so that they don't feel isolated and the benefits of this workshop are not lost.

#### **Any recommendations going forward?**

As the inmates responded positively to the AVP Basic, they will benefit further if they have the opportunity to do the 2nd level (Advanced) and 3rd level Training for Facilitation (T4F) AVP workshops. The inmates requested the next stages after we told

them that the workshop they had done was the 1st level. Once they are trained as facilitators, they can facilitate workshops in the prison with the support of experienced outside facilitators.

Starting a Peace Club would also support them. There are five Peace Club manuals covering the following themes: Conflict, Violence, Gender-based Violence, The Journey to Reconciliation, and Trauma Awareness. A Peace Club will strengthen them in choosing a non-violent lifestyle and building positive relationships. It will also enable them to spread the message of peace in the prison. Those who leave or are pardoned can open Peace Clubs in their own communities to help others learn how to solve conflict non-violently within their organizations and communities.

## Getting in touch with your roots: 'Forest Walks'

*Helen Holleman, Eastern Cape Quakers*

Grahamstown/Makhanda is blessed with a wide range of experts in many fields, all of whom are very willing to share their knowledge. Grahamstown Friends enlisted the goodwill of two of them in an outreach programme involving Grade 10 and 11 students at one of the local high schools. Juggling with the commitments of those involved – experts, students, teachers, taxi drivers – has been tricky, but worthwhile.

On their first outing, Tony Dold (from the Herbarium at the Albany Museum) and Michelle Cocks (from the Anthropology Department at Rhodes) took twelve Grade 10 students from Nombulelo High School, together with their teacher, Ms Depi, on a 'Forest Walk', exploring the remaining indigenous forest at Dassiokrantz. The trip was postponed several times because of the weather – the path is too slippery and dangerous when it's wet, and in spite of our drought, rain the day before the planned outing meant postponement.

The students learn about the cultural and historical significance of the flora for the amaXhosa and have the opportunity to experience the peace and quiet for themselves. One of the exercises Tony leads them through is getting them to sit in silence with their eyes closed for about 10 minutes and then eat an apple. Feedback from the students revealed

just what a profound experience this was. For many people in the townships, silence is non-existent, day or night. As Quakers, we know how deeply moving silence can be and what opportunities it creates for insights and 'gentling down'.

When I interviewed three of the students about a week later, their comments showed that they had all learned something from it – both 'head learning' (names of plants and their uses), and 'heart learning' (a previously unexperienced connection with the natural world). The fact that the walk lasted two hours rather than the scheduled one because the students wanted to continue with the longer walk, is evidence of the success of the event.

Tony and Michelle, too, enjoyed it. In Tony's words: "Today we both realised that we miss these activities so if you're willing to arrange logistics and transport we'll happily buy the apples."

We have been able to arrange two further outings, and hope to continue with them next year, if possible.

The outings are possible thanks to the regular and generous contribution to Quakers by the Mullins family. We are also deeply grateful to Tony and Michelle for their enthusiasm and willingness to share their knowledge, and to Nicci Hayes (Principal of Nombulelo Senior School) whose vision of learning is not confined to what happens within the

walls of a classroom. I paraphrase her response to my anxiety about infringing teaching time: It's not so much about whether teaching is happening, as whether learning is happening.

### What we experienced

*What I experienced on our forest walk was that nature is very important to us, and in order for us to live, we depend on it a lot.*

*It was fun and, as an individual, I felt different. For example, I felt so happy because I was in an environment with fresh air, with no sin. I could feel my body relax. I was communicating with nature. I also experienced how traditional medicines are important to us, and we should use our plants in a way that will not make them extinct by overusing them.*

*I also saw our national flower – a protea.*

Mbanguli Thulisa

*What I experienced on the forest walk is that our environment and the forest are very different. In the forest, it's quiet and the air is very moist, even the ground is moist.*

*Mr Tony asked us to meditate and when we*

*were meditating, all we heard were bird sounds and trees cracking and my mind was relaxed. I didn't think about anything.*

*After we meditated, we walked around the forest and learned about different plants. As we walked around, we went to the fynbos biome where we saw our national plant, the protea.*

*We also learned about alien invasive plants and their effect on our environment.*

Azola Jezile

*When we arrived [at the forest] the teachers told us to switch off our cellphones and they told us to be careful of our steps because the grass and the soil was wet. When we arrived at the sitting place, they told us to sit and close our eyes. I heard birds, trees, and [felt the] air. It was refreshing over there. I think it's best to go there and refresh your mind. The teachers taught us about trees and asked questions about trees and birds. Some of it applied to some of the things that we know. Then we walked out of the forest and went to the other side of the mountain and walked through fynbos and we went home.*

Ayabonga Xanise



# The Philakade Care Home

*Snoeks Desmond, KZN Quaker Meeting*

The name 'Valley of a Thousand Hills' conjures up for many a faraway, somewhat romantic place, stretching seemingly endlessly to the horizon. And many parts of this place in KwaZulu-Natal are that. But don't for one moment forget there are people living there and the living for many is very hard. On one of those 1000 hills is a place that has already brought hope and helps many, and now, with the building of the Philakade Care Home, individuals with disabilities and their families will benefit.

What is this Philakade Care Home and how did it begin? Those attending the November 2018 KZN Quaker Retreat paid a visit to and saw and heard all about it. The 88-bed, long-term care facility for people with disabilities both physical and/or mental is taking shape in the grounds of the Embo Community Church. It is now at foundation level, but it will rise to two floors, with a large veranda that will allow residents to feel the air and see life going on in the valley below.

The need for a centre like this is obvious to those who work in the area, as Government hospitals in the Durban area frequently have frail elderly folk or patients who are physically and mentally disabled, who are abandoned by families that don't have the space, time, or resources to care for them. Community caregivers frequently encounter frail elderly people being exploited or abandoned by family members.

Very few step-down or frail care facilities exist in KwaZulu-Natal for the poor; the few Government-run old age homes and chronic care hospital wards have long waiting lists.

In the part of the Valley known as Embo, vulnerable people who manage to access a pension or disability grant are also sometimes exploited by unscrupulous, unregistered NGOs or 'carers'. An unregistered chronic care facility close by was recently closed down by the Department of Social Development because the 71 patients were found to be neglected



*Mary Ann Carpenter (right, Durban Quaker Meeting) is describing the project to John Inglis (left) and Dudu Dlamini (2nd from right, Pietermaritzburg Quaker Meeting), with Bandile Dlamini and Owethu Khumalo*



and starving. Another such organisation is in the process of being closed down because patients were being kept in cages.

The Embo Community Church has worked in Embo and surrounding areas for the past 29 years and has continued to expand to meet growing needs in the area: a crèche providing care and education for 118 children; an orphanage providing a home for 15 children; and Philakade Clinic, which provides a comprehensive primary health care service, together with an outreach home-based care programme, and sees an average of just over 3000 patients a month.

The Philakade Care Home will be an example of the best practice: a patient-centred, nursing care model in a safe environment; a daily activities programme; good nutrition, and rehabilitation and support for the family of the patient. An outreach team will run

workshops on disabilities in Embo and surrounding communities to promote understanding, to work with eliminating prejudice and fear (especially around psychiatric conditions), and to re-establish a culture of care and compassion for people who may appear “different” or helpless.

When we visited the site in November, we saw the foundations and we felt the enthusiasm and drive of the men working on the site, and the building manager’s pride in the project. We were left in no doubt as to the quiet determination of a fellow Quaker — the fundraiser and one of the driving forces behind the project, Mary Anne Carpenter — that this project will happen and that it will be a place of hope, and that it will be one of the centres of support for the people living here in the Valley of a Thousand Hills.



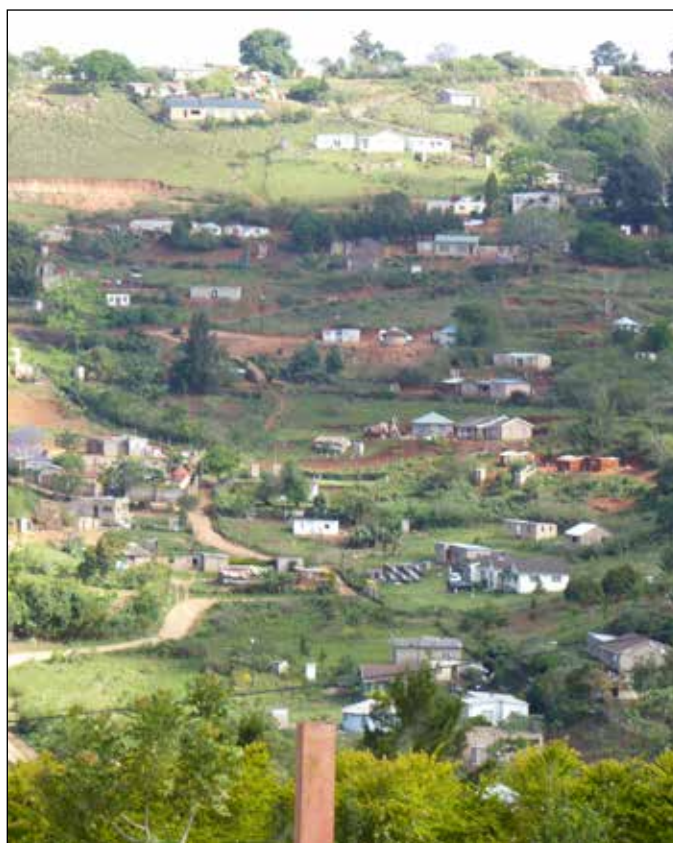
*A 3D view of the proposed Philakade Care Home*



*The site as it is now*



*Digging the foundations*



*Embo area of the Valley of a 1000 Hills*



# LILLY FASHIONS – a growing business

*Lungile Mlotshwa, Bulawayo Quaker Meeting, Compassion Fund Beneficiary*

I am a beneficiary of a Compassion Fund grant and I would like to share with other Friends how my project has been running.

I am a trained Early Childhood Development, Peace Practitioner, and a seamstress. After having some difficulty getting employment in Zimbabwe, I opted to use my professional skills to produce schoolwear. Early this year [2018], I applied to the Compassion Fund for a grant. My application was successful; I got the funds at the beginning of June, and started my small project making school uniforms. The Compassion Fund grant helped me to rent a small shop in Bulawayo's Central Business Centre. Although the economic environment in Zimbabwe is hard now, it won't stop me from achieving my intended goals.

Recently I visited five primary schools and one secondary school in the Nkayi rural area in Matebeleland North Province where I come from. I discovered that there are no shops in my home area and that gave me the opportunity to take with me some samples of the uniforms I make to showcase them there. I was glad to see the schools accepting my products, and I managed to get orders to produce more schoolwear for all six schools. Since I do not have a shop at Nkayi where I can sell my products, I wrote a letter to the secondary school administrator seeking permission to have my schoolwear sold in the school tuck-shop. I got a positive response from the her, and she also took her time to notify the students from all the schools that they could come and buy my schoolwear from their secondary school. This school enrolls about 250 students every year from the five surrounding primary schools.

I negotiated a commission for the school for the clothing they sell. As I write, I have managed to supply the secondary school with some schoolwear, and the tuck-shop has my schoolwear on display, ready to sell. I also managed to develop some proper books for financial management, and some business cards to give to potential customers. I was able to design the receipt books, invoice books, business cards and flyers for easy marketing.

I deeply appreciate the support I am getting from BQM Friends. Whenever they have anything to do with tailoring, they all come straight to me. Other



*Lungile Mlotshwa at the shop making uniforms*

BQM friends have visited me at work. Our YM/BQM Co-Clerk, Siphon Nsimbi, introduced me to an organisation that empowers Young Women in Business, which helped me to become a member of the Zimbabwe Young Women in Zimbabwe Forum.

On 28 October I got a message from another organisation that works with women. They wanted to come and interview me at my workshop in order to understand how I made it from the start-up to the level where I am now. I feel that my dream is coming to fruition and I welcomed them warmly. After the interview, I wanted to share the story with the Quaker Funds Committee.

The Nkayi Community Council also called me to express their appreciation for the development I had brought to the community and wished to assist me to get a business stand in the future. Unfortunately,

my business is unregistered, so I have to have a concrete discussion with the Community Council. I am now looking forward to getting my business registered soon.

My message to other friends, especially the Young Friends, is: "Let us look for the inner skills which we have and start our own small businesses". This will help us to empower the communities where we live. To our SAYM Funds Committee, I salute all your hard work. The questions you ask the beneficiaries help us to realise what exactly we really wish to do.



School hat and trousers made by LILLY FASHIONS

## FLEAT Bulawayo – Faith communities engaged in recycling projects

### The Njube workshop on waste management

*Solomon Makadzange (Bulawayo Quaker Meeting) and Beauty Macheka*

The workshop was held on Monday 10 September 2018, from 09:30 to 11:30 at Njube B Square, House 187, the home of Winnie Muthethwa, who offered it as the venue.

This was the first successful gathering to advocate *waste management* in Bulawayo after the FLEAT ZIMBABWE workshop in Harare July 2018. We successfully mobilised a group of women leaders from twenty organisations, who make wonderful bags from waste magazine paper. These women worship in different churches, but most are from the Assemblies of God churches in Bulawayo. They are called 'moving mothers' and include quite elderly grandmothers. The women work from their homes and we anticipate we will attract a bigger crowd next time we invite them. They are appealing for more waste magazine paper and even waste bond paper. The group was encouraged to spread waste management awareness to their families, neighbours and other Church congregants. The participants showed a lot of interest and passion for this call of waste management awareness.

The success of this workshop/gathering was revealed by their contributions, comments, enthusiastic questions and some testimonies. The 'moving mothers' have been so successful that several of them have bought valuable equipment for the home, and one member has even bought a commuter omnibus that is registered with the City

Council so it can operate as a taxi. Pictures show the bags made from waste magazine papers.

The gathering/workshop was facilitated by Beauty Macheka and Solomon Makadzange. One of the women, Esnath Dube-Moyo, an interested FLEAT Bulawayo group volunteer, coordinated the facilitators of the group. The facilitation team worked well together, with each member displaying their unique presentation skills and assisting each other where necessary. The third member of FLEAT BULAWAYO, Rev. Cele, was not present because of other church commitments. We have so far identified two volunteers whom we are working with.

Beauty Macheka brought a bottle of drink concentrate and some biscuits for refreshment after the workshop/gathering.

**Challenges:** The main challenges faced by the groups are funding volunteers, reimbursing them for transport, finding (and hiring, if necessary) a venue, and providing refreshments and a light meal.

*FLEAT (Faith Leaders Environment Advocacy Training) is a product of SAFCEI (Southern Africa Faith Communities Environment Institute). SAFCEI carries out advocacy trainings on environmental issues to be Earth Keepers to Faith Leaders in Southern African countries so that they pass this knowledge / wisdom to their congregants who represent more than 60% of the population in these countries.*

## A poem by Rosemary Elliott

Rosemary Elliott, who died on 30 December 2018, was many things, among them a writer and a poet. Below is one of her poems which was used at the celebration of her life held a few weeks ago.

I choose Peace as a way of life –  
Just as my life was a gift – so I give it back in service to others.  
Just as I have been nourished by the creativity of others -  
    so I offer my own creativity for the enrichment of others.  
When I see my brother or sister sick, hungry or suffering;  
    I will see myself in their place and seek to help them.  
May the Spirit of Christ in me reach out to cherish the Christ in others.  
I affirm that I am part of a life chain of love, trust and service  
    which is mutually supporting and enriching,  
    and I will use the resources of the world reverently,  
    as gifts to be shared.  
I choose Life in all its abundance for myself and all others.  
And in dying I pray my death will also be a gift which opens doors for myself and others.

Rosemary Monica Elliott, 1931–2018

## QUAKERS IN THOUGHT

### Children and technology – How are the tech gurus raising their kids?

*Justine Limpitlaw, Quaker Community of Johannesburg*

In my work as an electronic communications lawyer and academic, I have become increasingly concerned at our online behaviour, and particularly, of children's online lives.

The latest stats show that children and teens (aged 8–18) from affluent families are, on average, spending over five hours a day on social media. And this is on top of other screen-related activities, such as working on the Internet and watching television.

This is leading to online social problems that have not been a feature of previous generations as they were, quite simply, not online. These problems include: an inability to form relationships with peers, online bullying, health problems related to being sedentary and over-exposed to blue-light (the kind of light from a cell phone or tablet), porn addiction, the physical dangers of "stranger danger"

from having an always-on locator setting, online chat rooms, and the like.

Parents understandably want their children to be up to date with technology and don't want to deprive them of valuable skills for the 21st Century, but are increasingly concerned by the resultant bullying, depression, health problems, gaming addictions, etc.

Perhaps it would be instructive to take a look at how leading technology entrepreneurs are raising their children?

John Hennessy, the new Chairman of Alphabet (Google's holding company) and former President of Stanford University, recently said in an interview that we have to have strict limitations "on children and their devices" – "absolutely no TV [or devices] during the week, and only limited viewing time on weekends".

Similarly, both Bill Gates (founder of Microsoft) the late Steve Jobs (founder of Apple) raised their kids with strict caps on screen time. Bill Gates' teenagers got phones only at 14 and Steve Job's kids weren't allowed iPads at all. Most interesting to me, and what ought to be reassuring to Michael Oak parents battling to deal with technology, are recent news

reports that many Silicon Valley executives send their children to the Waldorf School of the Peninsula, a private school in Los Altos, California, where kids use chalkboards and No. 2 pencils. The school doesn't introduce kids to screen-based devices until they reach the eighth grade. Makes you think, no?

## A Quaker's view of Wisdom Jesus

Rory Short, Quaker Community of Johannesburg

We humans are not the centre of the Universe. We are just part of a much greater whole which we call the Universe, a whole that has form and order not determined by us. Thus, the logical thing for us to do in our efforts to ensure our continued existence is to act only in ways that are in tune with surviving and thriving within this greater whole. The greater whole is, however, beyond our intellectual comprehension. So, how are we to remain in tune with it? It seems an impossible task.

As I understand this task, that of remaining in tune with the whole, has three aspects, all of which need to be clearly articulated as part of the execution of this task.

*I must make it quite clear at this point that my experience as a practising Quaker leaves me in absolutely no doubt that one aspect of this greater whole is that it is filled with consciousness that wants to communicate with our little consciousnesses. I have difficulty, however, in attaching the label 'God' to the whole when communicating with others about it, only because of the historical, psycho-emotional baggage that is attached to the 'God word' in most of our minds.*

First, we need to accept the concept of evolution as an attribute, or all-pervasive characteristic, of our Universe. Evolution is the process by which different kinds of living organism are believed to have developed from earlier forms during the history of the earth. Evolution could not happen if the Universe was not open to change. About 2500 years ago, the Buddha recognised the constant change aspect of the Universe and termed it *impermanence*. Impermanence is just mindless change, it has no apparent direction.

Second, as we are not apart from the Universe, but part of it, we too are involved in constant change.

One aspect of this constant change is our changing understanding of everything to do with life and the Universe, which we transmit to future generations.

It needed the passage of close on 2500 years after the Buddha's passing before the development of the scientific method was accepted as an effective means for understanding of life and the world. This method enabled Charles Darwin to put forward the idea of evolution, at least as a debatable issue. If you accept it as a scientifically proven fact (sadly some people don't), evolution gives a definite sense of direction to impermanence. And there is no need to replace impermanence with evolution in our conceptual warehouse because evolution cannot happen without impermanence, so impermanence is subsumed into evolution.

Third, evolution's direction, at least as far as we humans are concerned, would seem to be towards greater and greater degrees of consciousness. In the view of Cynthia Bourgeault, [*Wisdom Jesus*, ISBN 978-1-59030-580-5] Jesus, despite what has been taught to us over the centuries about him, is a product of the evolution of his consciousness, and that, in her view, is really how we need to understand him and his teachings. Christian history shows that it is very difficult for us to do this, however, and for a number of reasons:

- One, because we human beings, at least in the West, have, up until now, generally not recognised that there are different levels of consciousness that human beings can manifest.
- Two, because different levels of consciousness require physical changes in the brain before they can become manifest.
- Three, because we recognise only one level of consciousness, the level we are currently on. Thus, we naturally try to understand teachings



coming from a higher level, the level Jesus was on, as if they came from someone at our level of consciousness.

- Four, because we feel more comfortable if we attribute the very existence of the person teaching from this higher level, to the fiat of a higher power, distinct from the Universe, usually called God, rather than to actions undertaken by the person themselves, to evolve their consciousness.

Fortunately, at our level of consciousness, we have the capacity to at least conceive of the possibility that other levels of consciousness exist, even if we are not as yet capable of directly experiencing them.

What is our level of consciousness? It is one where we automatically put a subject/object interpretive frame on our experience. We see the world dichotomously as 'me' and 'not me'. In evolutionary terms, this interpretive frame was necessary for our physical survival, otherwise we would have died out long ago because our ancestors would have been, for example, unable to distinguish food from not-food.

In spite of the limiting subject/object interpretative frame which we automatically apply to our life experience, life is still there in its entirety. It would be great, therefore, if we could consciously decide whether or not our subject/object interpretive frame is applied or not, but at the moment this cannot happen. Our nervous systems have to evolve to enable it.

Evolution has shown us that our present level of consciousness, which is above that of non-mammals, came about over time, through the changes wrought in the physiological structure of our brains. For example, the neocortex, a part of the cerebral cortex concerned with sight and hearing in mammals, is regarded as the most recently evolved part of the brain.

Modern research into the brain has also shown that neurons and their inter-connections do change throughout our lives. It would seem therefore that the changes in our brain needed to increase in our level of consciousness are possible, but they take time and, it would seem historically, that conscious effort on our part is necessary because we do not want just any changes, we want changes that will facilitate the emergence of an increased level of consciousness in ourselves.

How is this to be achieved? It is clearly not something that can be done by just pulling a switch; it involves changing the very infrastructure, i.e. our nerves, from which our consciousness emerges. In

other words, a knife cannot cut itself. What we can do, is to consciously create the conditions for the necessary physiological changes in our brains to take place.

Traditional spiritual practices have just that purpose, setting the conditions for the physiological changes to take place in our brains. This is true, even though these practices were developed long before people had the level of scientific knowledge which we now have. Consequently, spiritual practice has traditionally always had to be justified by injunctions from an unseen God, rather than, as I am arguing now, because of scientifically discovered facts.

Quaker Meeting for Worship [MfW] is just such a spiritual practice. Let us look at the practice from a neurological perspective.

MfW is based on collective silence. Why?

Our default subject/object interpretive frame is automatically activated whenever a stimulus is received by the brain, and it is this frame which gets in the way of us experiencing life just as it is, or holistically. Clearly, we would like this frame to remain inactive and for this to happen, we need to eliminate sources of brain stimulation. Silence eliminates auditory stimulation of the brain.

But auditory stimuli are not the only stimuli that the brain receives. Stimuli are also generated by the brain itself in the form of thoughts. Unfortunately, we cannot stop our thoughts because that intention in itself would be a thought. So, what is to be done about this problem?

Jesus found an answer to it. In Matthew's Gospel [Matt, ch.18, vs.20] of the King James version of the Bible he says,

*'For where two or three are gathered together in my name there am I in the midst of them.'*

My guess is that this is exactly what Jesus did, gathering together with his disciples on a daily basis in God's name. But why in God's name rather than in Jesus's name?

Again, I surmise.

Jesus would have used God's name for the following reasons:

- a) because the disciples, being Jews, were familiar with the God concept;
- b) because he was still physically present with the disciples;
- c) even though he knew from his own holistic experience that he and everybody else were one with the Father, he knew that the disciples were still subject to their subject/object interpretive frames and thus saw God and himself as distinct

from each other and distinct from everything else.

But who knows. I can only surmise based on my own intuition.

George Fox and early Friends re-discovered this spiritual practice, either through their reading of the bible, or perhaps they stumbled upon it afresh. By whatever means they discovered it, they put it into practice in their Meetings for Worship [MfW].

While sitting in MfW, people are encouraged to adopt a mental/emotional attitude of openness, an expectant waiting, directed towards the highest or best that they know, whatever name they give it. This collective, intentional openness provides an energetically supported direction for all the participants in the MfW. Consequently, it is much easier for the individual not to be distracted by randomly occurring thoughts that trigger off their subject/object interpretive frame.

An effective MfW enters a distinct state, or condition, the atmosphere of which is quite palpable to anybody who enters it after it has settled. Friends call this state of the Meeting centred or 'gathered'. The experience itself is primary, and labelling it with anything at all can only be done as an afterthought.

At my first MfW, I knew experientially that I had

inwardly been in contact with something far greater than my little self and it was totally benign. The beliefs and expectations of MfW that I had at the time were actually irrelevant. I was atheist in belief, and my prior expectations could only have come from what little I had read about Quakers and what seemed, from my readings, to be their realistic but benign attitude towards others.

After this first MfW I did not distinguish the source of my experience from the people who were present, but now, after more than 50 years of Quaker involvement, I know with certainty that we Friends are but imperfect transmitters of the benign energy that enlivens MfW and this energy is always there for anyone who immerses themselves in the appropriate context for it to be experienced.

From a neurological perspective, persistent, regular immersion in the MfW experience provides the right context for the neural circuitry in the brain to evolve to where holistic consciousness becomes possible and ultimately permanent. Evidence for this is to be seen in the growth in holistic consciousness of individuals who have been steeped in MfW over many years. This is recognised by Quakers in the term 'weighty Friend' which is used to refer in general terms to their contributions to the community.

## How African universities can easily make a positive difference to the environment

*Geoff Harris, KZN Quaker Meeting*

*This article was prepared to encourage universities to give up the use of single-use plastics. Readers are welcome to use it without acknowledgement in other contexts.*

### **The problem**

Single-use plastics – including PET soft drink bottles, water bottles, styrofoam cups, plates and containers, cutlery, straws, and plastic bags – are a major environmental problem worldwide. They contaminate waterways and oceans, take up space in landfills, and take hundreds, even thousands of years to decompose. In addition, their chemical composition means that their manufacture itself results in other environmental problems.

### **Possible solutions**

All of these products can be recycled, but only some are worth recycling in monetary terms. Since the advent of plastic in the 1950s, less than 10 per cent has been recycled; almost 80 per cent has gone to landfills, or the wider environment.

Effective recycling by institutions like universities requires a well-planned and coordinated range of actions involving the university itself, recycling companies, and local authorities. In the absence of such actions, the profit motive ensures that virtually all of the waste from universities is dumped in landfills; this is the case for the vast majority of African universities. Recycling, then, is not a solution to the damage which single-use plastics emanating

from universities are inflicting on the world.

By far the most cost-effective solution is not to use these products in the first place. The simple fact is that *there are alternatives to single-use plastics* which have much smaller negative effects. Many countries, cities and universities have acted to ban various plastic products:

- A number of *African countries*, among others, have banned the import, production, sale and use of plastic bags and packaging, including Rwanda (2008) and Kenya (2017). Zimbabwe has banned expanded polystyrene, as used in food containers (2017) and the Seychelles banned plastic bags, plates and cups in the same year.
- A number of major *cities* have banned the production and sale of single-use plastics. San Francisco banned single-use bags in 2007 and Los Angeles in 2010. Seattle banned plastic straws and single-use plastic cutlery (2018) and similar ban applies in Malibu, California (2018). Montreal banned single-use plastic bags (2018). A number of other cities are set to follow. The Indian state of Maharashtra has banned almost all single-use plastic items (2018).
- A number of *universities* have banned the sale of bottled water on their campuses, including the Universities of Leeds (2008), Winnipeg (2009), Canberra (2011), Vermont (2013) and Hong Kong (2017). The University of Plymouth banned plastic straws (2017). A number of other universities are set to follow.

### **The proposal**

That individual African universities ban the provision or sale of the following items on their campuses by any university entity, employee or commercial enterprise operating on university property or contractor engaged by the university.

- Single-use plastic bags

- Takeaway plastic, polystyrene and styrofoam food containers, cups, plates, cutlery and straws
- Beverages in plastic containers, including bottled water

University departments, employees, and the commercial enterprises operating on campus or contracted to the university are expected to abide by the spirit, as well as the letter, of the ban.

University finance departments will not approve requisitions for the purchase of plastics or reimburse staff or departments which use them.

### **The benefits**

- Cleaner waterways and oceans; reduced pressure on landfills
- A public relations benefit for universities, at virtually no cost. Other institutions will almost certainly follow, and perhaps municipalities, thus multiplying the societal benefits. It will help re-establish the principle that universities act as leaders of desired social change
- It will encourage wider consideration of environmentally-sensitive attitudes and behaviour.

### **Additional comments**

- A two-month phase-in period is suggested.
- Exemptions can be made, e.g. plastic bags used for some medicines or chemicals.
- Individuals can bring their own plastics onto campus if they wish, but will not be able to source them on campus.
- Empty re-useable bottles and food containers can be sold on campuses.
- Water fountains on campuses can be refurbished and increased in number.

For further information, contact Geoff Harris at [geoffreyh@dut.ac.za](mailto:geoffreyh@dut.ac.za)

# The Womb of Silence

Not in the whirlwind,  
Not in the lightning,  
Not in the strife of tongues,  
Or in the jangling of subtle reasoning  
Is the Light to be found,  
But in the still small voice  
Speaking in the womb of silence.  
Therefore be silent.

Let the past be silent.  
Let there be no vain regrets,  
No brooding on past failures,  
No bitterness,  
No judgement of oneself or of others.  
Let all be silent.

Be still and know. Be still and look.  
Let the eyes of the mind be closed,  
That you may hear  
What otherwise you would not hear,  
That you may know what otherwise you would not know.

Abandon yourself to the Light  
In longing love, simply,  
Holding on to nothing but that Light.  
So you may enter the eternity of silence  
And know the union of yourself with it.  
And if in the silence the Light does not answer,  
It is still there.  
Its silence is the silence of love.  
Wait then in patience and in submission.  
It is good.  
Wait in silence for its coming.

*Author unknown. Quoted by Begnignus O'Rourke  
In 'Finding your Hidden Treasure.'*



# BOOK REVIEWS

## The Dancing Wu Li Masters ...

*Doreen Bekker, Eastern Cape Quakers*

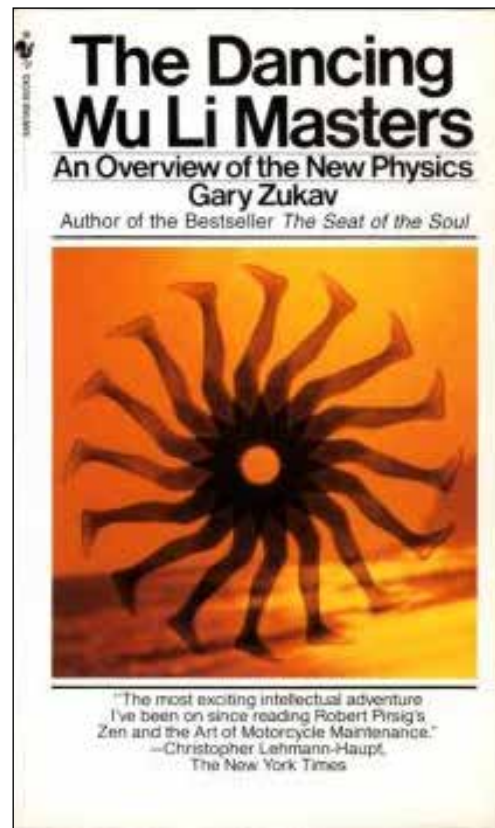
*The Dancing Wu Li masters: an overview of the new physics*, by Gary Zukav Gary (1991, Rider (Random House) publishers, London)

Gary Zukav points out that it is difficult to ignore similarities between what mystics who claim to have beheld “the face of God” say about their experiences, and the amazing descriptions of the results of quantum physics mind experiments. He suggests that “stripped of mathematics, physics becomes pure enchantment.” In fact, according to him, (quantum) physicists are really just trying to figure out what the universe is and does, and what our place as humans in the universe could be. So, physicists are essentially asking the same type of questions that many mystics ask, or even what you and I may ask when gazing awestruck at the beauty and vastness of a night sky.

A problem is that physicists usually speak (and write) in a way which makes it difficult for the ordinary person to understand them! This is where *The Dancing Wu Li Masters* comes into its own. Zukav very gently leads one into what slowly but surely becomes a mind blowing, yet awesome experience. I don't think I will ever look at “stuff”, or experience media like water or air in the same way again. In other words, “Things do not seem to be, as they seemed to be!”

Zukav exhibits a lovely sense of humour when he discusses Einstein's theories of relativity. For example, he calls the chapter on Einstein's Theory of Specific Relativity “Special nonsense”, and the chapter on The General Theory of Relativity “General nonsense.” Zukav argues that Einstein's brilliance was partly fed by his “beginner's mind”; that Einstein was able to step “boldly into the unknown” and the “unimaginable”. Furthermore, he was able to ignore “common sense” (i.e. the conventional norms of Newtonian classical mechanics). For example, he could not accept that the velocity of light was or had to be always exactly constant (in a vacuum).

I have to admit though, that reading though the chapter on Einstein's General Theory of Relativity



(i.e. General nonsense) stretched my brain almost to breaking point. While the discussion in a later chapter called “The Dance” tantalized my imagination, creating a world of fantasy which Zukav explains is not necessarily “reality”, but which does successfully explain (mathematically) the results that have been observed (by physicists) at the sub-atomic level. To quote Zukav (p. 253), “Although these highly abstract theories, such as quantum theory and relativity, are unaccountably accurate to an awesome degree, they truly are ‘free creations’ of the human mind. Their primary link with ordinary experience is not the abstract content of their formalisms, but the fact that, somehow, they work!”

Zukav (assisted by five physicists who proofread his book for accuracy) tried to make extremely complex mind experiments accessible to those of us who have very little or no physics (or quantum mechanics) background. He largely succeeded in his self-appointed task. Be prepared though, to come across some concepts that may go right over your head! This is a book that will benefit from more than one read — there is a lot to digest. It is certainly worth the effort though. Just be prepared to have your mind boggled and your soul enchanted.

## ... and a book launch



*Dr Nelsom Mlambo, contributor, Helen Vale and Sarala Kishnamurthy, editors of Writing Namibia, at book launch UNAM on 18 April*



*Audience at the book launch*



*Sarala and Helen signing books at the book launch, 18 April*



