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Southern African Quaker News

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Editorial

For number of reasons the publication of Issue 245 had become delayed, and now the Covid-19 epidemic is upon us. The lock down is having far-reaching consequences in the lives of all, and we can only guess how affairs will play out in the long run after the restrictions have been lifted. We can be rest assured that for many of us it will not be 'back to normal'. And, in some ways Issue 245 is now 'out of date'.

I thus decided to combined issues 245 and 246, and to give Friends the opportunity to share their thoughts of the pandemic and experiences of the lock down. For some people the enforced incarceration has wakened long-dormant creativity and for others it has been a very trying time. In the Eastern Cape we have held Meetings, each in our own home.

Issue 245 opens with the second part of Helen Vale's Richard Gust Lecture, in which she explores the Testimonies. It is followed by a piece on James Backhouse, an Australian Quaker, after whom the Australian equivalent of the Richard Gush Lecture is named. The links are interesting: Backhouse travelled to Australia in 1838, arrived in Cape Town on June that year, and travelled to the Eastern Cape, arriving in Salem in April 1839, where he spent time with Richard Gush. In 2001 HW van der Merwe, a prominent South African Quaker travelled to

Australia to deliver the James Backhouse Lecture, "Reconciling opposites: reflections on peace-making in South Africa". To continue this tradition. Nosizwe Madlala-Routledge has been invited to deliver the Salter Lecture at the Yearly Meeting in Bath his year.

Linked in a way to HW van der Merwe's James Backhouse Lecture is a contribution by Jennifer Kinghorn on the "South African Quaker Community in Apartheid Years", written for *Friends Journal*, with an invitation to South African Quakers to write further pieces.

Under 'Quakers in Action' we learn about a long-standing initiative helping pre-school teachers at the Centocow Preschool, contributed by Jane Habermehl of the Exmouth Local Meeting. This is followed by the first steps in resuscitating a dying river that runs through Makhanda/Grahamstown, piloted by a local Friend. Another initiative is related by Snoeks Desmond of Durban, who writes about a group of women who for the past six years have been providing knitted goods for new babies in Durban. Jennifer Kinghorn writes of the past, how Friends were involved in 'the bad old days'.

Rory Short is the sole 'thinker' featured in this issue, and explores the matter of our intentions and the will of God.

Wouter Holleman



Volunteers in Philippi, Cape Town packing food parcels for the needy during the COVID 19 pandemic lockdown.

By Discott - Own work, CC BY-SA 4.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=89076544>

Re-envisioning the Quaker testimonies in turbulent times: Seeking from the silence

Helen Vale, Namibia Quaker Community

4.1 What are the Testimonies?

You are probably familiar with the two useful acronyms, SPICES and STEP, which are simple way to remember the Testimonies. The former stands for Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Stewardship while the latter is shorter and refers to Simplicity, Truth, Equality and Peace. Of course, you do not have to use either of them.

"Quakers declare to themselves and to the world those things that they choose to say 'yes' to: the values to which their lives bear witness. These are the Quaker testimonies."

Geoffrey Durham (2011:88)

'The testimonies arise out of a deep, inner conviction and challenge our normal ways of living. They do not exist in any rigid, written form; nor are they imposed in any way. All Quakers have to search for the ways in which the testimonies can become true for themselves.'

From: *The Quaker Testimonies*
- Newcastle Quaker Meeting (2014)

'Testimonies' are what Quakers call ways we have found to live and act based on our beliefs and as a group we find that listening to and following leadings of the Spirit leads to them (www.quakercloud.org).

These beliefs spring from a sense of equality, compassion and seeing the sacred in all life. The testimonies are about Quakers' commitment to those beliefs. Naturally, our day-to-day practice of them faces us with many dilemmas and compromises. Indeed, the testimonies are often out of step with the way that many other people think and act and so may seem idealistic. As the testimonies come from 'leadings of the Spirit', this may mean taking a stand against common social practices (Newcastle Quakers, 2014)

The section on Quaker Teaching on the SAYM website explains that testimonies are not rules or laws with punishments for not following them. Each individual must decide for themselves how far they can follow a particular testimony, and respect the position taken by others.

It is fascinating to note that 'faith, hope and charity' in Paul's letter to the Corinthians, (I Corinthians 13.13) are

not specifically taken up as testimonies, nor is justice, but perhaps that is because these four concepts are already implicit in the existing testimonies. For example, if we redefine 'charity' as love or compassion (in the sense of 'agape') then it is there as 'love of others' (in peace and integrity and community) and love of the planet (in sustainability and simplicity).

It is important to be clear at the outset is that Quakers don't claim any kind of monopoly or exclusivity in these testimonies since they are shared by many other organisations and individuals, religious or not. What makes them work in the lives of Quakers is their blending, the acknowledgement of the way in which they overlap, their affirmation that religion is indistinguishable from everyday life (Durham, 2011:91).

4.2 How and why testimonies have changed over time

Isn't it natural that they should have altered over 350 years?

The testimonies reflect the society we live in, and so have changed over time. Early Quakers had testimonies against outward symbols, taking oaths and the payment of tithes, and about peace, temperance, moderation and forms of address. Later, testimonies evolved with regard to slavery, integrity in business dealings, capital punishment and prison reform, nonviolence and conscientious objection to military service (www.quakers-in-newcastle.org.uk/pdf_2014/AllQuakerTestimonies.pdf). Then, more recently in the 20th century, the concepts of sustainable development and sustainability have emerged, which link to stewardship with its idea of responsibility for our planet and environment.

4.3 Can they be added to, depending on geography/regional factors?

The answer is Yes. We can see from our own Southern and Central African region that three additional testimonies have been formulated to deal with our particular challenges. We all need to re-read the sections of 'Our Experience of Faith in Africa', 'African Values that shape us as African Quakers' and 'Quakers and Social Justice in Africa' in our own Quaker Faith and Practice entitled *Living Adventurously* (2009), which is a hugely rich resource.

The first new testimony on **Democracy in Africa** (2009: 95-97) was developed at YM in Grahamstown in 2008 and set out our vision for democracy in the continent. Basic human rights must be respected in order for the political environment to be democratic. These rights include freedoms of speech, of association, of movement, and of thought and conscience.

Moreover, there can be no real democracy unless the basic needs of people, such as food, shelter, water, health and education, are met. Twenty guidelines were given for Quakers to nurture democratic practices, three of which speak to me, namely: 'Have the courage to speak truth to power', 'Draw strength through the practice of our own testimonies to peace-making, simplicity, truth-seeking and social equality' and 'Offer AVP Programmes'.

The second testimony that we as a YM added was in 2000 at Modderpoort and relates to **HIV/Aids**. It states that the Religious Society of Friends in Central and Southern Africa supports all people infected and affected by HIV/Aids and sees the infection as a worldwide tragedy and not a curse or sin. Everyone has the right to a full, joyful sexual experience, within the context of a caring, responsible relationship founded on love and respect (2009:99)

A third testimony that was expanded by demonstrating its importance for Southern Africa is Equality, which makes it especially relevant for this YM because of its theme. In 2007, in Hlekweni, Zimbabwe, I think in response to Martin Wilkinson's powerful Richard Gush lecture entitled 'Prophets of Equality', we updated our testimony and called it '**Equality for the 21st century: making a start in Southern Africa**'. A key extract reads:

Southern Africa, like the rest of the world, needs a new vision of equality. We believe that the foundational Quaker notion of 'seeing that of God in every person' could be a guide for developing such a new vision of economic equality for our region and the world...

So, Friends, we have some wonderful testimonies, especially relevant for us in southern Africa, as I hope I have demonstrated. The crucial question, however, is, do we live them? Do we implement them in our relationships with others in our communities and societies? If not, why not and what more can we do?

Surely, as Jonathan Dale in his essay in *Searching the Depths* (1996: 62) states:

The importance of testimony is that it encourages us to work on putting our faith into practice in such a way that it is tested and strengthened. It may lead us into new situations where our social concern is tested almost to breaking point, and, in the process, our faith may be deepened.

4.4 Is Quaker belief more than the testimonies?

The Meeting for Worship is central to Quaker belief as Advice 10 (little red book) shows:

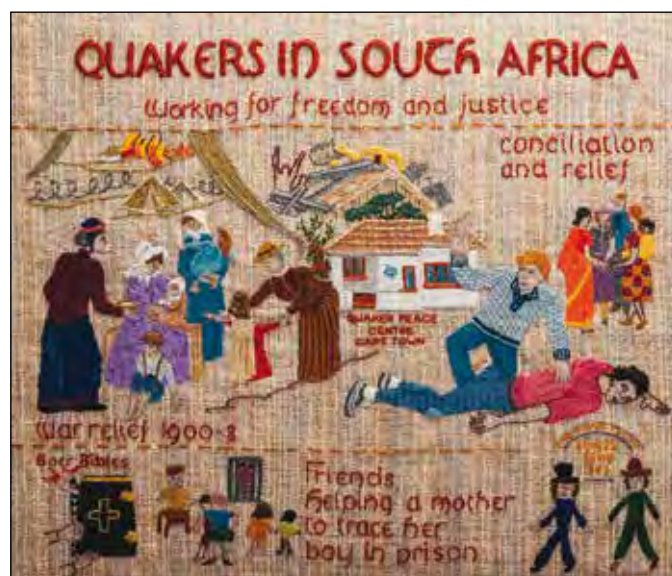
'Prayer springing from a deep place in the heart may bring health and unity as nothing else can. Let Meeting for worship nourish your whole life.'

It is vital to remember that Quakerism has its roots in Christianity as Advice 4 reminds us:

The Religious Society of Friends is rooted in Christianity and has always found inspiration in the life and teachings of Jesus.

However, this should not detract from respect for and inclusion in the Society of those Friends who do not see Jesus as their personal Saviour, but see spirit as being found in all world religions, and wish to be seen as universalists rather than Christians.

I think Quaker belief encompasses the centrality of faith in action, 'the inner light' or 'that of God in everyone', as well as silence and stillness. I discuss these pivotal concepts below.



5. Faith in action

Is your relationship with God real and personal? Is that relationship the driving force behind your social concerns and witness? Put simply, do you have a faith worth living?

Simon Lamb, 'A faith worth living', Richard Gush Lecture, 2002 (quoted in *Living Adventurously*, 2008:37)

The interaction between faith and action, as expressed in the testimonies, is at the heart of Quaker spiritual experience and living. As Friends we talk about faith in action and Quakers have been known over the years for

their social witness. This reminds me of the Bible verse about faith and action going together:

¹⁴ What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, “Depart in peace, be warmed and filled,” but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? ¹⁷ Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead (James 2:14–26 New King James Version).

On the point of taking responsibility for ‘how to be in the world’ which to me is faith in action, Jennifer Kavanagh in her Richard Gust Lecture ‘No other; a journey into oneness’ in 2016, puts it brilliantly:

Because we have no separate priesthood but are ‘the priesthood of all believers’ we have to take responsibility for our faith, our organisation and by extension for what goes on in the world. We do not rely on politicians or ‘experts’. For us, the only approach is ‘If not me, when who?’ In our worship we are silently waiting on God. We are waiting for guidance. For how to be in the world.

Interestingly, Sheldon Weeks in his 2004 Richard Gush Lecture ‘My life as a Friend and Fellow Traveller’ (Living Adventurously, 2008:70) also spoke of living in the world, developing a social consciousness and finding purpose in our lives:

Each of us in our own lives must make decisions on how we relate to others, to tensions and conflicts in our lives, those around us, wherever we live in the world. A social consciousness is something that each individual must strive to develop on his or her own. It is found by being involved. Without engagement it is difficult to learn and grow. To me it is still necessary to work with others, to be a traveller on the road less travelled. To see what Quakers have called ‘the cutting edge’. To try and do what others are not doing, while seeking those who will join you in doing it... Life does not have to be a process of trial and error, a stumbling, though that may always be there as part of the unexpected or the serendipity as we develop and change. I believe it is possible to find a purpose to each of our lives.

On a personal note, when I was diagnosed with breast cancer in January 2014, it certainly jolted me out of my complacency and made me consider the purpose in my life, and I decided that ‘to serve with love and light, which includes fun’ would be my aim. Fortunately, I had Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) Namibia in particular through which I endeavour to achieve that.



6. The concepts of ‘the inner light’ and ‘that of God in everyone’

Central to Quaker belief are these two concepts which are intrinsic to the testimonies, in that if we believe that each individual has ‘the inner light’ or ‘that of God’, then you would wish to treat them equally, not to be in conflict with them, to share the planet’s resources with them, and so on.

The following are key quotations taken from *Advices and Queries* or from previous Richard Gush lectures:

Take heed, dear Friends, to the promptings of love and truth in your hearts. Trust them as the leadings of God whose Light shows us our darkness and brings us to new life.
(Advice 1)

Our inheritance as Friends is to wait on God, tune into the Light within, to our Inner Guide and seek God’s will for us.

Rosemary Elliot, ‘The Inner Light’, RGL 1998 (*Living Adventurously*, 2008:40)

Take time to learn about other people’s experience of the Light ... Appreciate that doubt and questioning can also lead to spiritual growth and to greater awareness of the Light that is in us all
(Advice 5)

And I particularly like this one:

Are you open to new light, from whatever source, it may come?
(Advice 7)

7. Silence and stillness

I start this section with a brief extract adapted from *The Power of Stillness* written by John Edward Southall (1855–1928), a lifelong Quaker. He was a printer who used his press from time to time for the spread of Quaker Principles. He describes his experience of silence

as the vital element in his approach to religion and life as follows:

...as the dew never falls on a stormy night, so the dew of His grace never comes to the restless soul. We cannot go through life strong and fresh on constant express trains; but we must have quiet hours, secret places of the Most High, times of waiting upon the lord when we renew our strength, and learn to mount up on wings as eagles, and then come back to run and not be weary, and to walk and not faint.

Though we may find some of this language archaic we can relate to Southall's reference to going through life on 'constant express trains' and the need to have 'quiet hours.'

The world has become increasingly noisy, particularly in public spaces, whether a shopping mall or a gym. Noise of one sort or the other batters us constantly, especially in urban centres. Many young people are even going deaf through the use of headphones to play music. So, silence in the 21st century needs to be nurtured and protected.

Absolute silence doesn't exist but quiet spaces are essential because they *"can inject us with a fertile unknown: a space in which to focus and absorb experience."* (Prochnik, 2010)

There are many different kinds of silence – including boring, scary, sorrowful, embarrassed, dramatic – but the silence in Meeting for Worship is none of these.

The silence around us may contain a lot, but the most interesting kind of silence is the one that lies within; a silence which each of us must create. I no longer try to create absolute silence around me. The silence that I am after is the silence within.

Erling Kagge, Norwegian explorer, in *Silence* (2017)

Silence can be 'a key to unlocking new ways of thinking' and also 'a practical resource for living a richer life' (2017:35).

For me silence and stillness are at the heart of Quakerism and at the centre of our Meetings for Worship. But the two are not the same. Silence does not necessarily imply stillness. But stillness, which is a deep calm and centring, can be found in the silence if we are able to examine and then let go of our scattered thoughts. Advice 3 expresses it well:

All of us need to find a way into silence which allows us to deepen our awareness of the divine and to find the inward source of our strength... seek to know an inward stillness, even amidst the activities of daily life.

All the major religious traditions recognise that silence is a very effective tool for spiritual development but Friends are unusual in that for them silence is central:

Quakers gather together and sit in collective silence seeking to become 'gathered' — it is a gathered meeting, where hearts and minds are united beyond words, that can discern the fullness of truth.

Sarah Maitland, *A Book of Silence – a journey in search of the pleasure and powers of silence* (2009:142)

It is fascinating to recall that Pascal, the French philosopher, reflected over 350 years ago that 'All of humanity's problems stem from man's inability to sit quietly in a room alone' (Pensées, 1670). I think that most Friends can sit in a room alone, quietly but we prefer to sit with others in Meeting for Worship, where we are all seekers.

As Advice 8 explains:

Worship is our response to an awareness of God. We can worship alone, but when we join with others in expectant waiting we may discover a deeper sense of God's presence. We seek a gathered stillness in our Meetings for Worship so that all may feel the power of God's love drawing us together and leading us. (Advice 8, little red book — my emphasis)

But that experience of silence does not cause us to withdraw from the world but rather enriches us to go out into the world more empowered. As Richard Knottenbelt in his Richard Gush lecture 'Recognition, Identity and Belonging' in 2000 explained it: *The silence in which we meet and the ministry which comes out of it are not separate from 'the rest of life'. There is a continuum which embraces the whole of life.*

In the next part I reflect on our individual Quaker testimonies. We should remember that Quakers do not impose their testimonies on anyone and that whilst a particular testimony may be very critical to many Friends, it may not necessarily be so for all Friends.

Richard Gush and James Backhouse

Brian Harlech Jones

Australia Yearly Meeting (AYM) has the Backhouse Lecture and Southern African Yearly Meeting has the Richard Gush Memorial Lecture. Apart from Yearly Meeting lectures, there is another connection, namely that James Backhouse and Richard Gush met each other and spent fruitful time together.

Regarding James Backhouse and his place in the history of Australian Friends, the Quakers Australia web site (<https://www.quakersaustralia.info/about-us/our-history>) says this about him: 'It was not until 1832 that the Society first took root in Australia, as a result of a visit by two English Friends, James Backhouse and George Washington Walker. They were sent by British Friends on a six-year journey around south-east Australia to enquire into the condition of the penal settlements and the welfare of the Aborigines and free settlers. They also drew together the few members of the Society in Van Diemen's Land and New South Wales in regular Meetings for Worship.'

After their extensive visit to the Australian colonies, which Backhouse recorded in his book, *A Narrative of a Visit to the Australian Colonies* (1843), Backhouse and Walker visited Mauritius and South Africa (this included both the Cape Colony and the regions east of the Great Fish and Kei Rivers). Backhouse published the record of this journey as *A Narrative of a Visit to the Mauritius and South Africa* (1844). In the preface he explains the purpose of the visit as follows: 'The object of these visits was purely the discharge of a religious duty, to which they [Backhouse and Walker] believed themselves to be specially called; but in passing along, their attention was alive to a variety of secondary objects, which appeared worthy of notice.'

Their visit was arduous and far-ranging. After arriving

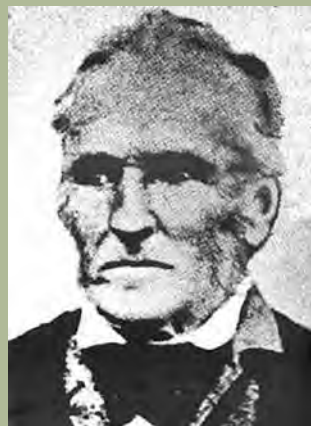
in Cape Town during June 1838, they travelled more than 9000 kms in a wagon and visited eighty mission stations, along with many other places such as towns, farms, military posts, and African settlements. They first met Richard Gush when they passed through Grahamstown on their outward course and then, on their return from the eastern regions beyond the Great Fish and Kei Rivers, they arrived in Salem in April 1839.

This is how Backhouse recorded their arrival: '(we) descended into the vale of the Assagai Bush River, in which the neat cottages and houses of Salem are scattered, so as to present a very pleasing and picturesque appearance. On arriving at the dwelling of Richard Gush, we received a hearty welcome. This individual objected to take up arms in the late Caffer war. He also refused to leave his own house, and go to Grahams Town for protection, as most of the other inhabitants of Salem had done; their conduct appearing to him, to imply a want of trust in God, and an undue leaning upon human help.' The reference to the 'late war' reminds us that Backhouse and Walker were touring the frontier districts of the Cape Colony at a fraught time. The Sixth Frontier War (1834-36) between the colony and Xhosa-speaking tribes was traumatic on all sides. Numerous lives were lost; huge numbers of livestock were stolen from the colony, and then retaken with interest; more than 400 farmhouses were destroyed; and the tribes were forced to concede large areas of land. To add to the tumult, many Boers—about 6000 eventually—were so dissatisfied that they decided to trek away from British control, in a movement that became known as the Great Trek. Most of these 'Voortrekkers' departed from the eastern districts of the colony and, in fact, were vacating their farms and homes at the time that Backhouse and Walker were visiting. As was common at the time, Backhouse termed them the 'Emigrant Boers' and noted, 'Many of these people went from this neighbourhood, where they possessed considerable property...'

A lot of our information about Richard Gush comes from Backhouse's narrative. From him, we have the well-known account of Gush meeting an African warrior band, unarmed and parleying with them in a peaceful manner. We also learn that Gush abhorred the 'patrol system' which (in Backhouse's words) Gush considered to be 'one of petty reprisal, utterly repugnant to justice, and to the peaceable spirit of the Gospel'. Backhouse commented approvingly, 'Few persons take properly into account, the peaceable nature of the Gospel, even



James Backhouse



Richard Gush

among those who know much of its power, in many other important respects.'

Throughout both of his published 'narratives', Backhouse was certainly 'alive to a variety of secondary objects, which appeared worthy of notice'. Accompanied by Richard Gush and one of his sons, the two travelers made the short journey to Grahamstown. There, Backhouse learned more about the recent war and commented sagely, 'the settlers lost more through the professed protection of the Government than by the Caffers...It seems to have been a time of general spoliation, except to the military and the merchants'. Going against the grain of 'received' colonial historiography, he added that 'some who long for a possession in the better land inhabited by the Caffers, appear at all times ready to fan any little spark of disturbance, between these people and the neighbouring colonists, into a flame of discord.' He lamented the fact that there were 'still persons to be found...who would revert to a military occupancy of Caffraria; and among them it is to be lamented, there are some who profess to be disciples of the Prince of Peace!' Although it is not so stated, we sense that these were also Richard Gush's sentiments.

From Backhouse, we also know how Richard Gush came to have Quaker convictions. Backhouse wrote, 'At one time his [Gush's] prejudice against the principles of our Society was great, but observing that Friends were the steady advocates of the cause of the oppressed, he was led to the conclusion, that good principles must lie at the root of such practical results; he therefore examined these principles, carefully comparing them with the Scriptures; and he adopted them, under the conviction, that they were those of Christianity in its simplicity and fullness.'

Guided by Gush, the two travelers visited nearby farms, hamlets, and mission stations, where they met many settlers, as well as people from other backgrounds. Then, on 22 April 1839, wrote Backhouse,



'We parted from our kind friends at Salem, commending them to the Lord.'

NOTE: Brian Harlech Jones was Prof. of Language in English Dept at UNAM. He was Dean of the Humanities Faculty for 2 terms and then first director of UNAM northern campus. He and his wife Marie, originally from South Africa, lived in Namibia for about 20 years. They joined Society of Friends in 1990s and served as clerks. He has written extensively: journal articles and books, both fiction and non-fiction. They left Namibia and went to Pakistan where Brian served as director of Aga Khan University for about 2 years and then moved to Australia where his son and family live. They served as wardens for Sydney friends. He and Marie went to Vietnam for a year to work at Na Trang University on academic development for the Australia volunteer service. In late January 2020 they arrived in Myanmar to work on education issues for one year, again as volunteers.

Some friends will remember Brian and Marie as they attended YM twice.

Helen Vale

Anti-Apartheid activist to give Salter Lecture

from the Friend, 10 October 2019

South African activist Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge will give the Salter Lecture 2020 at Yearly Meeting gathering in Bath. The announcement was made on World Quaker Day by the Quaker Socialist Society (QSS) which arranges the lecture.

A QSS member said that after years of campaigning against apartheid, Nozizwe Madlala-Routledge was a delegate to the convention that negotiated the

transition from apartheid in 1991 and helped draft the new constitution. As a long-standing feminist, through the Women's Charter for Effective Equality, women's needs were represented in the constitution.

After being elected to parliament in 1994, when South Africa held its first democratic and non-racial elections, the activist was appointed deputy minister of defence in 1999 and went on to challenge the attitude among the military that 'if you want to achieve peace, you must prepare for war'. The campaigner was later appointed deputy minister of health in 2004 and pushed for a more forceful approach to South Africa's HIV crisis, which led to her dismissal. More recently she has campaigned to end sex-trafficking of women in South Africa.

QUAKERS AT WORK

The Devon – Centocow Link

Jane Habermehl, Exmouth Local Meeting, Devon

The aim of my original trip to Centocow in 2001 was to work alongside pre-school teachers, helping them to set up an association which would unite them and give them mutual support and become a force for group training. The project has expanded during recent years and we are grateful for the support of the Exmouth Quaker Meeting, Devon, for ongoing support and charitable giving and for the Quaker Simmons grant which funded the successful work with teens described below. Each time I visit I learn more about the country and its culture. Zimbili Dlamini works for one of our partner organisations, The Family Literacy Project and since April, Devon Centocow Link has employed her on a casual basis to keep track on the many rural pre-schools and monitor their training and resources.

Between us we co-led three meetings of the pre-school teachers in the area. It was wonderful to work with her and her facilitation was lively and spirited. We put our heads together over numerous cups of tea to make plans for the pre-school teachers and we relaxed into leading and translating workshops with large numbers of teachers coming in at various times during the morning because they had travelled so far to reach us.

Workshop one was attended by 48 teachers. I gave them some ideas of activities working with nature or discarded objects such as plastic bottles. Each teacher received a folder with some starter ideas and a few basic essentials such as pencils, sharpeners, string, glue and scissors. Most pre-schools still have very few

resources. In a group sharing time teachers took it in turns to demonstrate games, songs or stories they used in their pre-schools.

Workshop two was a Persona Doll workshop which was attended by over fifty teachers. We had six dolls so had to divide into six groups. When each group had developed a family story and 'persona' for their doll they practised presenting it to their group before individuals volunteered to present them to the whole group with the audience posing as children responding to the doll.

In the third workshop attended by fifty-eight teachers, we looked at the organisation of the pre-schools. There are now sixty pre-schools covering a wide rural area. Zimbili suggested dividing the pre-schools into clusters by area to make management easier. Each cluster chose a co-ordinator who will arrange a meeting every six to eight weeks to share resources and support each other, helping each other with funding applications. They will have a smaller transport bill and Zimbili will be a nominal co-ordinator but twice a year calling whole Association meetings for training purposes. The first of these will be in December when a social worker will visit them to advise them on the lengthy and complex bureaucratic process of registration.

Registration does not give the teachers other than a nominal quarterly payment but it does ensure that their provision is adequate in a basic sense and the big bonus is that they receive good food for the children they care for on a daily basis.





The pre-school teachers do not have a salary and I provided some example letters and advice on fundraising and encouraged them to look at local companies as well as larger companies. It has become

more to common for companies support rural education in South Africa as it has become recognised that the government is failing to provide for them.

Pre-school visits

Unfortunately, time and transport made it impossible to visit all these sixty pre-schools but I did go out on two mornings with my friend Bev to visit thirteen of them. She regularly delivers fruit and vegetables and reads stories to them. She knew them well and we were greeted enthusiastically. We visited the new mud brick and painted pre-school run by two enthusiastic young women. Two years ago we came across them making the bricks a week after their pre-school building had been completely washed away by storms.

One teacher has requested a set of traffic lights for activities which Bev had made and painted on pieces of pallet wood.

In several there was a separate building where a woman funded by the Department of Social Welfare was cooking a substantial meat stew. We heard many songs and I had remembered a story about a rabbit and an elephant which I acted out for the children. One or two had very good resources but it appeared that the teachers were reluctant to use them fully as they had not been given adequate training in managing group



or free choice activities. This is an area which we have plans to address within the new organisational structure of the cluster groups.

After the workshops I visited Asifunde Sonke an excellent Pre-School and Early Child Development Training College run by Felicity Champkin in Himeville. I explained to her that the pre-school teachers in the

rural areas would benefit from spending time in her nursery to learn how to set up and manage multiple activities and group work with young children and she has agreed a programme to allow the teachers in small groups to spend six days each at her pre-school. This is excellent news but we need the funding for this and funding for the transport for the teachers' meetings.

Women's Leadership training Programme

Centocow Teenagers Group

Teenagers from four schools in the Centocow area set off after end of school on Friday, piling into a minibus with anticipation and excitement. The girls aged 13 to 16 had been hand-picked for their leadership potential but they had little idea what the weekend would offer. The singing, harmonious but at typically adolescent volume was kept up throughout the two-hour journey. This group of young teenagers from poor rural backgrounds are like teenagers the world over, the cell phone, selfies, downloads of music and other media messages were a must have to go along with that other teen preoccupation, self-image and fashion. They are vulnerable and the glamour portrayed to them is alluring

One of the aims of the course is to empower the girls to avoid the practice of abduction and early marriage so prevalent in their communities.

Topics explored during the weekend were issues of women's health, knowledge of Climate Change, gender and sexuality, how to change a culture of domestic and gender violence, how to overcome prejudice and how to become leaders as young women.

The material for the workshop is taken directly from Ethmonjeni 1, the handbook written by Marilyn Aitken, developed by the WLTP team and published in 2005. This innovative training was developed from the Catholic women's group The Grail, and is based on the vision of transformative educational work of the Brazilian Paulo Freire who worked with communities of unschooled adults in the 1960's empowering them to

think for themselves and create their own pathway to knowledge and understanding. The workshop material allows opportunity for familiar scenarios to be viewed, discussed in groups and analysed afresh using role play and presentations shared with the group.

After self-reflection and the writing of their own stories, the girls were divided into groups, so that a period of courageous collaboration generated harmonies of deep symbolism of self, expressed richly and powerfully in their pictorial representation of the Tree of Life.

The overall focus on leadership was crystallised in their individual short summary and presentations. The girls themselves were so keen to have a follow up session that one was arranged at short notice two weeks after the first. They were also eager to invite some of their peers to experience the workshop material and this too has been arranged for a date in December.

See <https://www.devon-centocow-link.org.uk>
or Devon Centocow Link Facebook page

Note. I met Jane Habermehl in 2001 on her first visit to South Africa. We have been friends since then, meeting each time she visits South Africa. We were both surprised when a few months ago we discovered we were not only friends but Friends. So I asked her to write something for SA Quaker News.

Snoeks Desmond

RIVERS OF LIFE

*Helen Holleman,
Eastern Cape Quakers*

No blood in our bodies – and we're dead. No water in our rivers – and we're dead. It's no exaggeration to talk about water as the 'lifeblood of a country'. Without it we're in deep trouble.

The blood that flows through our veins carries all the nutrients we need to every part that needs them; then it carries all the waste products back to the places where they can be disposed of. Clogged blood vessels mean a heart attack, a stroke, or gangrene.

Lifeblood of people ...



... lifeblood of our home, our planet:



Used with permission: Sukhmani Mantel

There's a little river in our town that was clearly having a heart attack.



I was inspired by the story of a young lawyer, Afroz Shah, who looked at the beach in front of his home in Mumbai – 2.5 kms long, and almost 2 metres deep in plastic. He and a neighbour started picking it up ...



Versova Beach, Mumbai: August 2016

May 2017

"Well," I said to myself, "our river's not as big as Mumbai Beach." So, on January 6, feeling rather foolish, I donned my gumboots, industrial-strength gloves, loaded up black bags, jumped onto my scooter and headed for the river. And started picking up trash. Plastic, plastic, plastic, and more plastic.

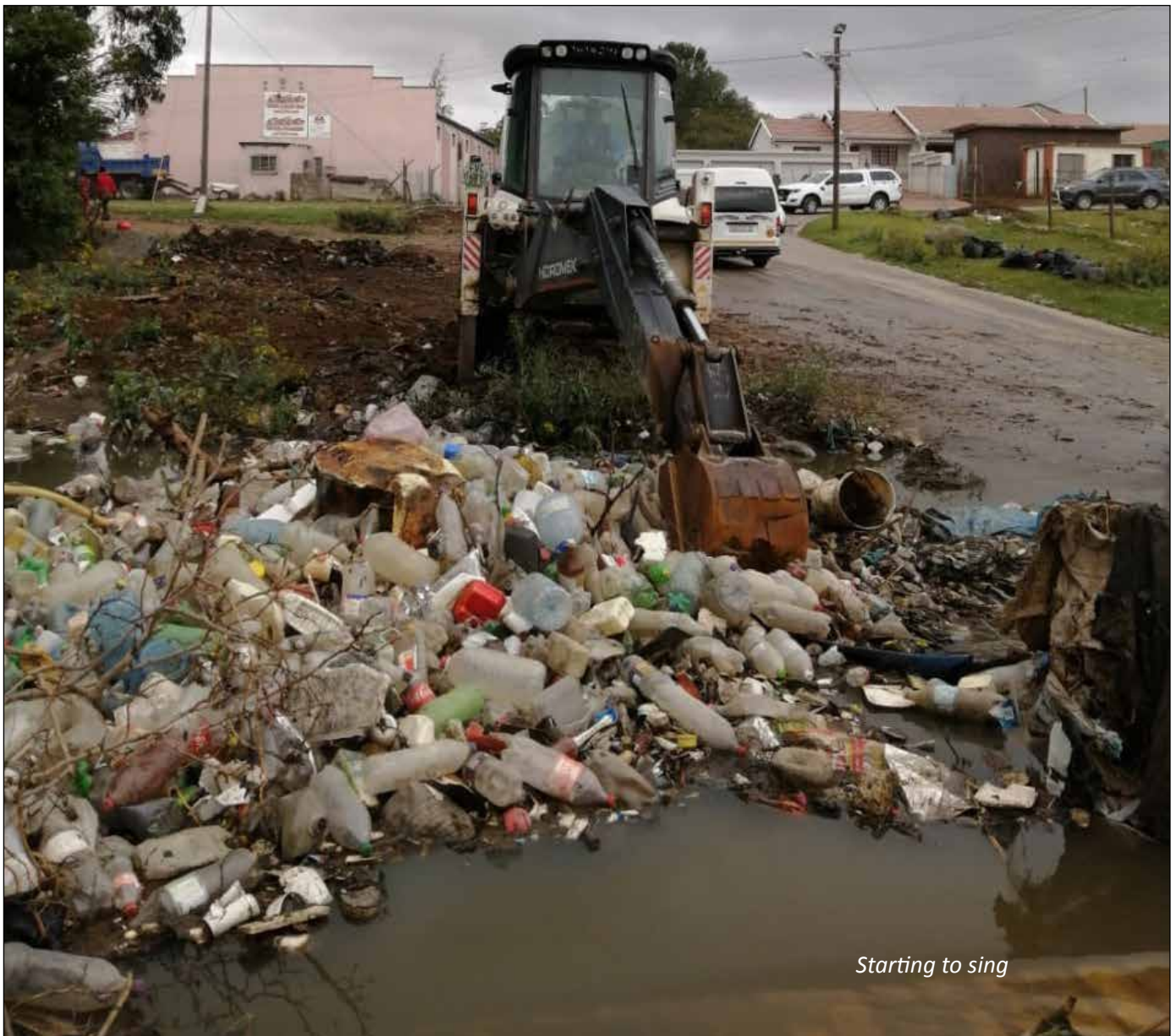
"Molo, sisi," a woman shouted from her house. "What are you doing?" And so I met Gloria Papu and we shared our dreams of a river clean enough for children to paddle in, grass verges tempting enough to sit on ... and then Zumzi Manakoli joined us and we were three.

The road over the little bridge is busy. It runs through a semi-industrial area, and links the township with the day hospital and the town. Moral and audible support came from taxi drivers hooting encouragement, passengers shouting "Enkosi" from the windows. Reactions from pedestrians varied, but many stopped to ask, "Why are you doing this?" It's surprisingly difficult to give the same answer every time, so we said things like: because the only thing we can really leave our children is a habitable planet, and THIS (point to the

garbage) isn't it; I want to hear the river sing again – it's dying at the moment; when God finished creating the world, he looked at it and saw that it was good ... and what did we do? ... what does the mess we have made of His gift say about our relationship with God?

It rained for the first week we worked there. With nowhere to go under the bridge, the water flowed over it, carrying its load of decaying plastic, floating plastic bottles, broken Styrofoam containers, soggy 'disposable' nappies, discarded shoes. I estimate that about 98% of what we pick up is plastic of one kind or another. Each one of us tried to fill 10 black bags a day, deeply aware of the irony of using plastic to dispose of plastic. Friendly folk offered to take the bags to the landfill for us – there's only so much you can fit on a scooter.

Four days of rain; four days of bending, picking up, pushing into a bag, bending, picking up, pushing into a bag, when – out of the blue, like a fairy godmother – a huge machine arrived and pulled out tons and tons of old tyres, mattresses, plastic bags and bottles, broken Styrofoam containers, 'disposable nappies' ... you know



Starting to sing

the rest. The machine had come from the Municipality: don't know who ordered it, don't know why it came, and didn't ask. We just did a little dance of delight on the river bank as the water began to flow under the bridge. I heard the river sing for the first time that day, and it brought tears to my eyes (picture on page 15).

But ... around the bend in the river an abandoned recycling site had turned into an informal dump which spilled rubbish into the river faster than we could pick it up.



Really supportive coverage in Grocotts, our local newspaper, probably had something to do with the sudden appearance of another big machine with serious appendages back and front for lifting, scooping and generally cleaning up stuff. We welcomed the driver enthusiastically and offered to hug him. "You might not want to do that," he said. "I made the mess in the first place." Well, now he was cleaning it up, so we hugged him anyway.

Many people stop to ask for a job, but we don't have any funding, and only one young man took us up on our explanation that, "There's work, but no money". Vuyoethu arrived almost daily; his quiet determination and muscle power made a profound difference. It's been a month now, and the site looks like this:



Or, it did until – there was rain! Wonderful, longed-for, blessed rain – enough to make some of the rivers start flowing into our dry dams. And to wash down the next load of rubbish, block the bridge once more, and bring us back on site. Not unexpected – we know this will be a long-term task – but a little disheartening.



In two days, we filled two skips to bursting point:



We called ourselves "The River Protectors", and celebrated by singing "We are the champions!"



So, there's been progress, there are lots of plans to change hearts and minds, but there's still a long way to go.

Don't despair – it's not as big as Mumbai Beach!



BEANIES AND BLANKETS FOR BABIES

Snoeks Desmond, KwaZulu-Natal Quaker Meeting

In 2013 a request for help for moms and babies born in King Dinuzulu Hospital appeared in the Berea Mail, the local newspaper. A small group of mainly retired women got together to knit, crochet and sew items for newborn babies. We soon realised that we needed more people to help out so that more babies could receive gifts of blankets, jackets, beanies, booties and the like. The group started to grow and **Beanies and Blankets for Babies** was formed.

Since then the group has expanded, but as it is completely informal there is no record of the numbers of women and some men who help out. Three wool shops in the Durban area have containers where the baby items can be dropped off.

Other knitters from as far away as New Zealand, Australia, England, Northern Ireland and Scotland regularly send parcels of things they have made. Some people who do not knit have bought wool, but mostly it is the knitters themselves who buy the wool and fabric needed.

The group tries to visit at least once a week to hand out gifts. On special days such as Christmas, Easter, Heritage and Mandela Day there is always a delivery of baby items as well as gifts of toiletries for the mothers.



In 2017, 1802 gifts were given to babies, in 2018, 2372 and 2019 we handed out 3302 gifts.

If a mother has lost a baby, she is given a handmade sympathy card, a crochet heart and some hand cream. This is so that she does not feel left out when she sees others getting gifts and it is hoped the little card and heart bring her some comfort.

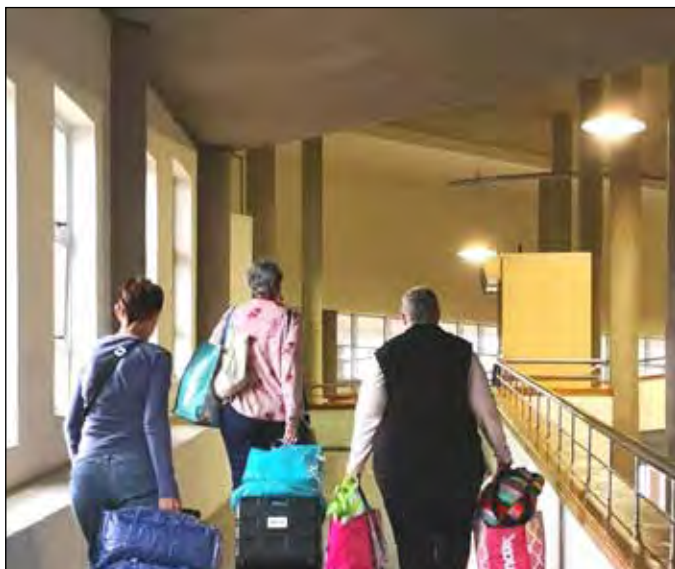
We think that one reason people have been so generous and given so willingly of their time and skill

is because this group hands gifts directly to mothers so everyone knows the gifts reach those they are made for. We hope that by receiving a gift, each mother feels special and knows that her baby is welcomed into the world by kind strangers.

Not everyone wants to knit for babies so anything made for older children or adults goes to a project in Creighton in the Southern Drakensberg or to Philakade Care Home in Embo (Valley of 1000 Hills). Donations of toys go to creches in Creighton or to the long-stay children at King Dinuzulu Hospital. Everything finds a home.

There are many within Quakers who support the project with us; we even had helping hands from Enid Ellis, a Friend from Namibia. Other support has been donations from the PJDF, and of course we could not get anything to Creighton without the help of Mark Povall who regularly fills up his vehicle with oddly shaped bags and bundles. Mary Anne Carpenter is one of the driving forces behind Philakade Care Home so that link is there as well. And when Geoff Harris travels to Australia he dare not return without something in his case from knitters there. And individual Friends have made cash donations which we use to buy wool.

Follow the group on their Facebook page: **Beanies and Blankets for Babies**



THE SOUTHERN AFRICA QUAKER COMMUNITY IN APARTHEID YEARS

Jennifer Kinghorn. Quaker Community of Johannesburg



Apartheid – the separation of humans on the basis of colour - was legalised and enforced in South Africa from 1947 to 1990. Structural and physical violence inflicted terrible pain and trauma on women, men and children of every colour. Friends worked incessantly, often at personal risk, to remove the law and to heal physical, personal and organisational wounds. Central and Southern Africa Yearly meeting nurtured and gave us all a wider perspective. Still few in numbers, we continue the work of healing.

Quaker Service was established In Johannesburg, with powerful and effective branches in Western and Eastern Cape. Later the Quaker Peace Centre was set up in Cape Town. Witness through Quaker Service and through personal individual action included

- visits and representations to Apartheid enforcers
- relief work and protests in neglected and impoverished townships where Africans were corralled, help for black schools, financial relief for political prisoners' families and visits to political exiles
- illegal visiting for worship and friendship in each other's areas
- support for conscientious objectors and gay people
- participation on committees and as members of other organisations
- developmental work – building a just society in the future,
- many local Alternatives to Violence workshops in recent years, which have in return influenced us and our outreach.

Work (personal and on behalf of the Meetings) with a multitude of organisations promoted our testimonies – including the South African Council of Churches, Baragwaneth Hospital Nurses Training College, Business Against Crime, End Conscription Campaign, Gun Free South Africa, Centre for Conflict Resolution at the University of Cape Town, Conscientious Objector Support Groups, Ecolink Environmental Education, Executive Women's Club, Gay Christians, Phaphama Initiatives, Themba HIV and AIDS Organisation (which provided AIDS training and life skills and employment for black youth), Safe Schools Project, Wilgespruit Fellowship Centre, United States Leadership Exchange

Program, Women's National Coalition (which worked for equality for Women in our new Constitution), Zamani Soweto Sisters, Teaching in black schools, and hundreds more activities.

In Zambia extraordinarily successful community development in Zambia for thousands of rural people, was undertaken by the Goodfellows. In Zimbabwe Hlekweni was established for agricultural training

In South Africa it was easy to despair when faced with imprisonment and pain. Although often tired and despondent, we were boosted by Yearly Meetings when our members from the "free" countries joined us, and by many visiting Friends from around the world, including Kenya, the deep strength and guidance we received in our Silent Meetings for Worship, and how we enjoyed each other where "colour" was irrelevant.

We remember occasions such as when on a raining evening in Harare on a World Council of Churches seminar, one of our members was jumping over the rain puddles with a laughing Desmond Tutu, and when we met for deep prayer and friendship at Friend's houses in Soweto, where there were unpaved roads and no electricity or telephones.

We met for Sunday worship at a vandalised Soweto School at the time when the youth "necklaced" suspicious people with burning tyres. A group of youths appeared at the windows and gazed at us. We continued with silent worship and then one Friend went out and asked them what they were wanting. They replied "We are hungry". So they were invited inside to share vocal prayer as we stood in a circle holding hands, and offered them tea and biscuits.

We endorse the Truth described by Isaiah so many years ago:

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak ... Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary they will walk and not be faint.

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you. And when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you ...

It is the will of God – is it?

Rory Short, Quaker Community of Johannesburg

No, it isn't. It is God's intention. Will and Intention are different. Intention belongs to the Spiritual realm whereas Will only exists in the Material realm. There are two realms to existence, the Spiritual, which subsumes the Material which is a physical manifestation of the Spiritual. They are inter-connected however in that Intention if translated into action, i.e. Will, manifests in the Material realm as consequences, or material results.

Intention is generated through consciousness. The creator consciousness is God and we, as children of God, are conscious too, with the freedom to choose how we intend to respond to life.

The creator's intentions without exception are benign so their willed manifestations in the Material realm are benign. The trouble, in our case, is that we are the manifesting agents of God's Intention and, as we are conscious beings, manifesting his Intention, i.e. willing it, is our choice, not something automatic.

As we are placed here in order to evolve spiritually, we have to learn whether our intentions are in line with God's intentions or not. We learn this from the consequences of our intentions once they are translated into actions. A benign intention is one that God would be comfortable with, so when translated into action will yield positive results. A resentful intention on the other hand is not one that God would be comfortable with so as resentful intentions are not in line with God's intentions their results when translated into actions will be negative.

In the light of the above understanding how can the current, very difficult, i.e. not benign, conditions in South Africa be understood? These conditions must surely signify that the intentions which have given rise to them are not in line with God's intentions. I am guessing that there is in fact only one single intention which underlies all the adverse conditions, a widespread feeling of resentment.

Where does this resentment come from?

Resentment arises from our survival instinct which automatically becomes activated in a search for ways to counter any threat to our survival. This is all very well if the threat is immediate and tangible and the person can take direct action to counter it. But what if it is systemic, abstract and intangible like Apartheid and the person feels helpless to do anything to counter it? Then, if we



feel unable to take any meaningful measures to counter the perceived threat, the instinct becomes automatically transformed into resentment, i.e. an enduring bitter indignation at having been treated unfairly as we take up the status of victim. In our situation Apartheid created the ideal conditions for people, treated unfairly because of it, to lapse into victimhood and thence into resentment.

The objective truth however is that there are no victims. The reality is that people are born into and experience an infinite variety of circumstances so objectively there can be no special category of victims. Anyway because we are conscious beings it is up to us how we choose to respond to our circumstances.

Paul, in 1 Thessalonians Ch. 5 Vs. 18, recognises this truth when he says, 'Give thanks in all circumstances: For it is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.'

By giving thanks for our circumstances just as they are we are emotionally freed to get on with our lives as best we can. This is the pro-life, victor's choice.

Or if we say to ourselves, I'm a victim. Some evil being imposed these circumstances on me. We are rejecting life. By taking the life rejecting choice we are contributing nothing of value to ourselves or to anybody else.

On their own nobody would make a life rejecting choice. Why then would anyone make such a choice? They have to be encouraged to do so by others. Some of these others are incentivised to do so because they personally profit from those who make the victim choice. These others are usually politicians who are seeking to gain the victims' electoral support. They do so by promising the victims policies that will compensate them for their believed victimhood and, even better from the victim's point of view, will punish those whom they are told are responsible for making them into victims.

Our current political dispensation is founded on resentment. We should not be surprised therefore at the parlous conditions in our country.

What can we do about it? The first thing to do is to puncture anybody's belief in victimhood as an objective reality. Only then will people be free to set to work to put matters to rights for themselves and for everybody else. Paul's statement quoted above is a good place to start especially with avowed Christians.



John Hunt Publishing

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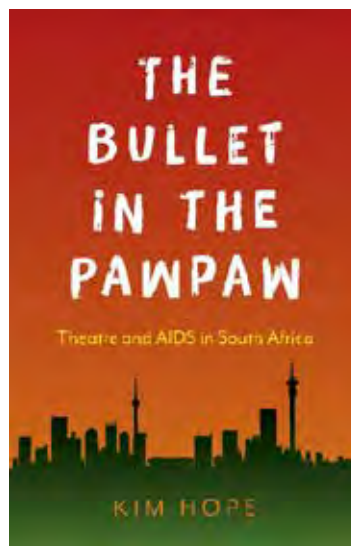
IFF Books

Are proud to present

Bullet in the Pawpaw

Kim Hope- Publishing 28th February

**A woman's daring attempt to prevent the spread of HIV in South Africa,
through theatre.**



The Bullet in the Pawpaw is a compelling page-turner that traces Kim Hope's ground-breaking years as a theatre professional in South Africa. But this is no star-struck memoir. It begins in the years of apartheid and follows the author's growing belief in the power of drama to change lives, her struggle against the odds to found the brilliantly innovative Themba project, and her realisation, during the HIV/AIDS epidemic, that her skills as a director could help break the silence surrounding that terrible disease. Beautifully and atmospherically written, her book shines with optimism, courage and an irrepressible sense of adventure. As it drew to a close, I found myself so moved that I went straight back to the beginning and read it again.

Geoffrey Durham, Quaker, and author of *The Spirit of the Quakers*

BULLET IN THE PAWPAW

Kim, a naïve, poorly educated English girl, is enjoying the delights of London in the 'Swinging Sixties' when a chance encounter takes her on a journey to South Africa. Travelling as an actor with a touring Shakespeare company, Kim is irrevocably drawn to the 'beloved country', but her abhorrence of the oppressive system of apartheid forces her to return home.

This experience changes the direction of her life, and now, having achieved a longed-for education, she is on a mission: to stop the spread of HIV. She creates the Themba HIV&AIDS Organisation in Johannesburg and recruits and trains young people from the townships to deliver a unique programme of interactive theatre workshops.

About the Author



Kim Hope B.Ed., M.A. is a freelance theatre practitioner and drama teacher, a theatre director and voice coach. She is also a non-violence and conflict resolution trainer. She has been engaged in 'theatre-for-change' for three decades, and in South Africa she founded and led the Themba HIV&AIDS Organisation where she was the first Executive Director. The NGO trains young people to become 'actor-educators' and to use experiential theatre practices for HIV prevention and human rights. Themba works in schools, colleges, hospitals and prisons, and has helped well over 500,000 people make informed choices about their lives, their relationships and their sexual health. Themba created a unique 'up-front' interactive theatre presentation which is effective in persuading people to stay safe and get tested for HIV.

Advanced praise for BULLET IN THE PAWPAW

This frank and compassionate account of the apartheid years and the AIDS epidemic in Southern Africa brings back many memories for me. It is a most valuable record of a project that without question has been of immense value to so many people. Kim Hope writes directly and frankly and in so doing demonstrates how individuals with dedication and purpose utilised their own skills to help create a better quality of life for all regardless of creed or colour. This is not only a compelling story it is also a valuable historical record.

Terry Waite CBE, Anglican and a Quaker and author of several books including Out of the Silence

The Bullet In The Pawpaw – Theatre and AIDS in South Africa, by Kim Hope.

Published by John Hunt Publishing, 2020

Helen Holleman – Eastern Cape Quakers

The fear, stigmatisation, anger, hopelessness, bewilderment and rampaging rumour voiced during this COVID-19 pandemic recalls the 1990s when HIV/Aids stalked through South Africa and the world, producing the same terrified, confused responses. How timely then, is this account of individual and collective action in the face of hopelessness. Kim Hope's book resonates with courage, optimism, and positive action – qualities as necessary now as they were then.

Kim's tour in the 1960s with the Cambridge Shakespeare Tour of South Africa, which played to mixed audiences (in spite of apartheid), whet her appetite to use drama to drive change. She returned in the 1990s to run conflict-resolution workshops in deprived communities. Convinced that interactive theatre was the way to break the silence and fear surrounding HIV/Aids, Kim's AVP workshops eventually developed into the Themba (hope) HIV and Aids Project, bringing hope

for young people, and overcoming fear and ignorance.

The book is a page-turner that captures Kim's love of the country as well as its darker side. Many of us will recognise all too clearly Kim's vivid evocation of the apartheid years, and marvel afresh at the courage, sense of adventure, and compassion that inspired her action.

There has never been a better time for a read like this one.

Available from: Exclusive Books, Amazon or possibly Goodreads

Helen: *I have checked the Exclusive Books website and see that it is listed there, though there would be a delay in getting hold of the book. (It looks as if it's v. expensive.) If a number of Friends want to buy it, maybe a group order would be useful? I don't know if that's possible – but maybe each meeting could put in an order? If anyone buys it from Amazon (I'm assuming that is possible in SA?) it would be marvellous if they then write a (good) review on the Amazon website. I gather Amazon tends not to use reviews from people unless they've bought the book from them. Once Amazon get 25 good reviews then the book moves up their list (I gather).*



The AIDs monument at the centre of Kubos, Namaqualand

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Death, Detention and Disappearance – a lawyer's battle to hold power to account in 1980s Namibia, by David Smuts. Tafelberg, Cape Town, 2019. 355 pp

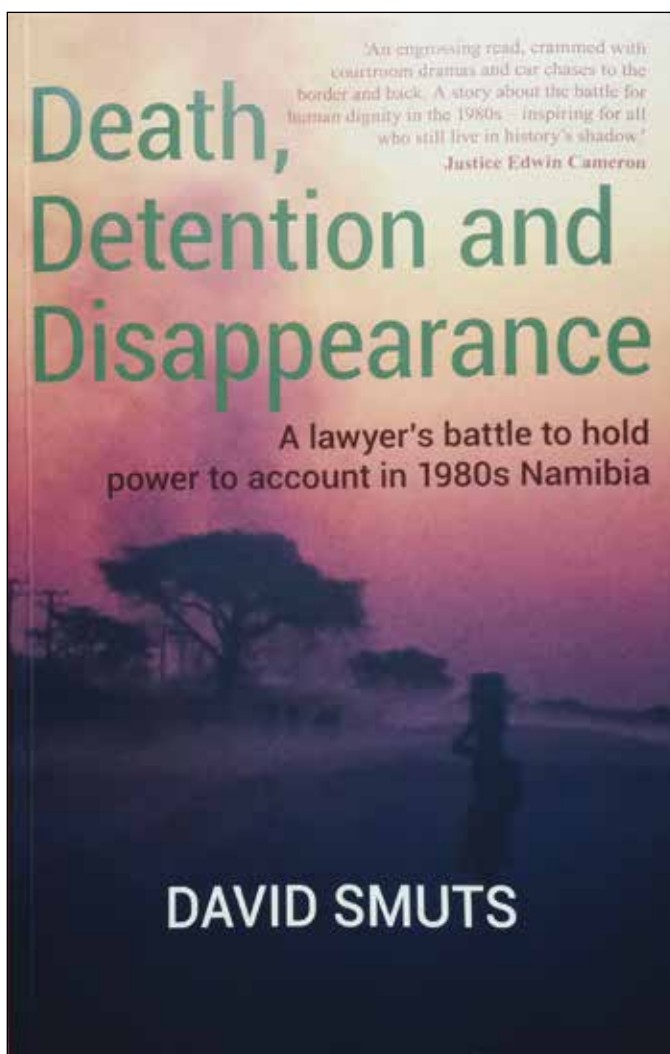
Justin Ellis, Namibia Quaker Community

This book has a rather gloomy title. That is not surprising, considering that in the 1980s South Africa was trying, by force and subterfuge, to avoid its obligation to make Namibia independent, or at least to install a government other than SWAPO that would be sympathetic to South Africa's apartheid government. The South African military were becoming more and more brutal and unaccountable. Those giant Casspir armoured vehicles roamed about causing mayhem. The Death, Detention and Disappearance that Smuts speaks of were indeed everyday realities.

But, once I began reading this book, the gloom lifted. I was soon enthralled. It is a thriller, instalment by instalment. We are told in plain language what a lawyer, a courageous one at that, committed to his profession and to human rights, can do. Contrary to what one expects when lawyers are involved, the chapters of this book are usually not about someone who has been charged in court with an offence and now needs a clever defence. With the powers they had at their disposal, the South Africans had little need of courts to deal with their opponents. Rather, in those times, it was Smuts and his clients who dragged the South African government to court to account for their wrongdoing, including torture. It seems this often came as a shock to those thus exposed, as they thought that they had passed enough laws to put themselves beyond the reach of the law. But Smuts and his learned colleagues found ways and means of putting them in the dock. It required clients as bold and ingenious as their lawyers, which Smuts readily acknowledges. Often he was instructed by bishops. It certainly brought relief and encouragement to Namibians to have the truth told in public, and perhaps also reinforced an appreciation of how courts can be utilised as a non-violent means of bringing about change.

The book also deals with critical events towards the end of the 1980's as South Africa's grip on Namibia failed, and the transition to independence began. The assassination of Anton Lubowski is covered in detail. Smuts also puts a spotlight for the calamitous start to the UN Peace Plan and the detention of hundreds of SWAPO members in exile as spies.

The author describes his work at that time as a battle. If so, it was a battle in the War of the Lamb, in that his methods were non-violent and ethical, although he was working in the midst of a war and confronting those not



fond of the rule of law. This approach does, however, create the opportunity of surprising dialogue. In one of the most revealing passages of this book (which feels like a scene in a story by Dostoevsky) Smuts describes an encounter with Hans Dreyer, the head of Koevoet, that most notorious 'counter-insurgency unit' of the Namibian war, that eventually spawned similar killing machines in South Africa. Strangely, Dreyer decided that he should give Smuts a briefing on his approach and methods. It's rather chilling to read.

After putting down this book I found myself wondering why we Namibians, especially in civil society, do not more often use our courts (and the rights enshrined in our Constitution largely because of the struggles of the 1980s) to put some backbone into those Namibian instances that are meant to be fighting corruption, but are so full of excuses for their inaction.

I recommend this book to anyone who would like to better understand Namibia's recent history.

(The views expressed here are personal ones. The author can be reached at justin@nawa.co.na)

UPHEAVAL: How Nations Cope with Crisis and Change,
by Jarred Diamond. Published by Allen Lane, May 2019

Wouter Holleman – Eastern Cape Quakers

Jared Diamond is one of those rare people referred to as a polymath. He originally trained as a physiologist and taught in that capacity at UCLA for many years; he has a lifelong passion for birds of paradise, and spent much time in the wilds of New Guinea observing them; he is a linguist who speaks half a dozen languages. And he is also an anthropologist, evolutionary biologist, ecologist and environmental historian.

I first came across Jarred Diamond when I was an undergraduate student. He had published a paper in which he challenged the view that 'primitive' societies had lived in harmony with their environments. Of the examples he explores are Easter Island where the inhabitants felled every tree on the island, and the extermination of some 18 species of Moa on the islands of Aotearoa (New Zealand) by the Maori colonists, in something like one hundred years.

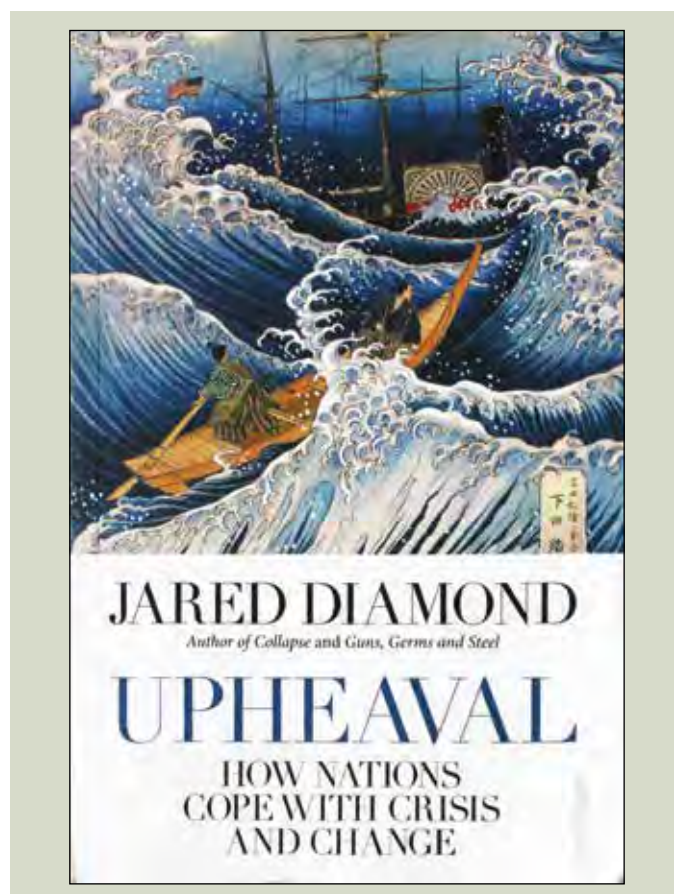
Many years later I read *Guns, Germs and Steel*. With sales of more than 1 million copies and now listed as one of Time magazine's best non-fiction books of all time. It has probably also been read by many of our readers. In it he explores, amongst other things, the origins and spread of technologies — agriculture, domesticating animals, smelting metals, the origins of writing and more, and the influence geography had on them. Or, as on the Amazon website: "... the biologist's answer (to) geography, demography, and ecological happenstance."

This book was followed in 2004 by *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed*, and last year by *Upheaval*.

In *Upheaval* Diamond identifies twelve factors that we as individuals need to take into account faced with a crisis. These include acknowledging that one is in crisis, accepting that it is our own responsibility to do something about it, delineating what is in crisis, obtaining help from others, looking at what one can learn from others, and so on.

In similar fashion he looks at twelve factors that nations should consider when faced with a crisis: that there is national consensus that a crisis exists, that it is a national responsibility to do something about it, delineating the national problem that need to be addressed, developing a national identity, using other nations as models of how to solve the problems, and so on.

He then presents case studies of how six particular nations dealt with crises: Finland and their war with the Soviet Union in 1939; the end of Japan's isolation brought about by the visit of the American fleet under Admiral Perry in 1853; Chile under Allende and



Pinochet; the melding of Indonesia into a nation by Suharto, its first President, after WW II and then coping with Suharto's massacres; rebuilding Germany after that war, and Australia's search for a post-colonial identity. The crises he deals with are primarily political crises, although he admits that he is not a 'political animal'.

He then looks at where Japan is now — again in crisis, and not admitting or dealing with it, brought about an aging population and hence a diminishing labour force, but will not countenance immigration of any kind.

Diamond then explores the crisis facing the United States, brought about by polarisation in politics, and what has driven it; the immigration issues, which he does not think are being realistically addressed; and that the US does not believe that it can learn anything from others.

Finally, he considers problems facing the world at large: climate and environmental issues; the threat of nuclear war; large scale migrations of people fleeing poverty, disease and violence. Blocking immigrants will never solve the problem, but rather aid directed at specific problem area in the countries the migrants come from ... but of course politics gets in the way all the time!

Of course, not everyone thinks Diamond is correct about everything. Some are critical of the book, citing many inaccuracies. He has been accused of "racism" and "environmental determinism". And, of course, he may be wrong about some things, but at issue for me is that he is a good read and he makes one think along different lines.

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Two books and *The Machine Stops*

Wouter Holleman, Eastern Cape Quakers

Editorial

The *second part* of this issue, Issue 246, starts with Part 3 of Helen Vale's Gush Lecture, in which she explores the Testimonies, appropriate in many ways to where we find ourselves with the lockdown, where we have in many ways to rely on our own resources — to live simply, be compassionate and be still.

Four contributors then explore this pandemic (and past ones), some of its effects and to what extent we are willing to make significant changes. Jen Stern's contribution reminds me of the opening lines of Bill Bryson's *A Short History of Nearly Everything*: "Welcome. And congratulations. I am delighted that you could make it. Getting here wasn't easy, I know. In fact, I suspect that it was a little tougher than you realize. To begin with, for you to be here now trillions of drifting atoms had somehow to assemble in an intricate and curiously obliging manner to create you."

Then follows shared reflections on, and experiences and perceptions of stillness born of the lockdown, contributed by a number of Friends.

And last, the Editor shares some reminiscences about books that have some relevance to the current situation, and review by Helen Holleman of Kim Hope's recently published *The Bullet and the Pawpaw*.

In the original Editorial to issue 245 I wrote "previous issues of SAQN have carried a request for contributions, and this is reiterated. Ideally an editor should have sufficient material 'in the pipeline' to be two issues in advance – in this instance – on Issue 247. Please think about contributing to your newsletter. There was a time when six issues of SAQN were published a year, in the days when it was roneo-ed and stapled. It would be good to be able to produce a regular four issues a year.

A challenge has been set by Helen Holleman's River Rescue campaign. **ISSUE 247 of SAQN** will then focus on our testimony to Sustainability. Sustainability is also the theme of the FWCC Meeting to be held in Durban in 2024. Friends (and others) are invited to submit contributions on this matter ... **by the end of September**.

Attendant to the above is that Friends should consider succession, as there with other offices, and seek an 'understudy' who could, in time, take over from the current Editor.

Wouter Holleman

2019 GUSH LECTURE, PART 3

Re-envisioning the Quaker testimonies in turbulent times: Seeking from the silence

Helen Vale, Namibia Quaker Community

8. TESTIMONIES

I will look at these in the order of Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality and Sustainability/Stewardship. I will focus more on Equality since that is the theme for our YM.

8.1 Simplicity

Live simply so that others may simply live.
(Mahatma Gandhi).

Try to live simply. A simple lifestyle freely chosen is a source of strength.

(Advice 41).

For me simplicity links to simplification, particularly in these times of distractions brought about by social media, overwhelmingly negative news, and multiple commitments. Anne Morrow Lindbergh, in her wonderful reflective book, *Gift from the Sea*, saw simplification as a technique for living and even as a technique in the search for grace, by which she meant an inner harmony, especially spiritual, which can be translated into outward harmony. And surely, we all want that balance between inner and outer harmony, and maybe we find it sometimes in Meeting for Worship.

But how difficult this is for most of us to do, to achieve a balance in the midst of multiplicity and contradictory tensions, especially when one is a parent and a spouse, yet how necessary it is.
(Lindbergh, 1955: 24).

She goes on to talk about the art of shedding (which we could now think of as de-cluttering, and as a form of sustainability) as we realise how little one can get along with, not how much. For her, there is both physical shedding and emotional shedding – of anxiety, pride, hypocrisy and insincerity (1955: 32). So simplicity and its corollary simplification cover both the outward and the inward life.

8.2 Peace (inner and outer)

*Drop thy still dews of quietness,
Till all our striving cease;
Take from our souls*

*The strain and stress
And let our ordered lives confess
The beauty of thy peace.
From my favourite hymn, Dear Lord and Father of
Mankind. Words by John Greenleaf Whittier, 1872.*

*A useful definition of peace is, a way of life
committed to the non-violent resolution of conflict
and to personal and social justice.*

Geoff Harris in 'Is Peace Possible?'
Richard Gush Lecture, 2003.

Many of us know of the Declaration of Friends to King Charles II in 1660:

We utterly deny all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever; and this is our testimony to the whole world. The spirit of Christ, by which we are guided, is not changeable, so as once to command us from a thing as evil and again to move unto it; and we do certainly know, and so testify to the world, that the spirit of Christ, which leads us into all Truth, will never move us to fight and war against any man with outward weapons, neither for the kingdom of Christ, nor for the kingdoms of this world.

As Advice 31 declares, *We are called to live in the virtue of that life and power that takes away the occasion of all wars*, and that Friends should search out whatever in their own way of life may contain the seeds of war.

Some of you may remember that in 2000 at Modderpoort, near Lesotho, we deliberated and produced a Quaker Statement on Peace in Africa. A key passage reads:

Peace is not brought about by preparation for war. Peace is achieved by ensuring democracy, good governance, and justice, and upholding the rule of law and human rights. It is achieved by addressing the basic needs of people, such as provision of adequate health care, fighting the scourges of HIV/AIDS, eliminating inequality and poverty and providing education, including Early Childhood Education, adult literacy, and peace education.

Living Adventurously, 2008: 75

We committed ourselves, and called on all citizens and governments to work towards democracy, good governance, human rights, equality and meeting the basic needs of all people in the region. This commitment is needed now more than ever.

Inner Peace: I have already spoken of silence and stillness, and their centrality for Friends, specifically in the Meeting for Worship. Isn't our attempt to find that inner silence the reason we come to Meeting?

8.3 Integrity

Richard Gush was noted for his strict honesty and truthfulness. Though often placed in circumstances in which these qualities were closely tested he would not yield in any degree to the temptation to falsehood; and he often urged on those around him, the necessity of not only keeping from direct falsehood, but from indirect untruth, saying 'to convey an untruth in any way is equal to telling a lie.'
(Life of Richard Gush, 1860, p.6)

Early Quakers called themselves 'Publishers of Truth'. According to the Quaker author Geoffrey Durham (2011: 95) the word 'truth' in the 1650s had associations with what we might call 'reality' today, and for him it had connotations of authenticity and a power outside ourselves. For some Friends, including me, this testimony to integrity includes truth.

Listen patiently and seek the truth which other people's opinions may contain for you... Do not allow the strength of your convictions to betray you into making statements or allegations that are unfair or untrue.

— and the brilliant final sting in the tail from this Advice 17: *Think it possible that you may be mistaken.*

Two other relevant Quaker queries that link to this testimony are:

Advice 37: *Are you honest and truthful in all you say and do? Do you maintain strict integrity in business transactions and in your dealings with individuals and organisations?*

and Advice 38: *If pressure is brought upon you to lower your standard of integrity, are you prepared to resist it?*

I now move on to look at the testimony to community.

8.4 Community

Rather than talk a lot about this testimony I am just going to give three insightful quotations which I think



captures its essence:

Umntu ugumuntu ngabantu'- A person is human through the humanity of others.

Dudu Mtshazo, Quakers in Johannesburg, 2007
(Living Adventurously 2008: 60)

How can we make the meeting a community in which each person is accepted and nurtured, and strangers are welcome? Seek to know one another in the things that are eternal, bear the burden of each other's failings and pray for one another. Advice 18.

Unlike solitary meditation, our spiritual practice is communal. I like thinking of Meeting for Worship as a triangle – of self, the Divine and the others in the room. Guidance can come directly or through others. And as in worship, so in the world. We take that dynamic out in the world, with a profound consciousness of our fellow human beings and God in them.

Jennifer Kavanagh, 2016 Richard Gush Lecture.

8.5 Equality

Greater equality is at the heart of creating a better society because it is fundamental to the quality of social relations at large.

Wilkinson and Pickett (2018: 261).

We must work together to ensure the equitable distribution of wealth, opportunity and power in our society. Nelson Mandela (1996).

The concept of equality is wide ranging. It covers economic, social, cultural and spiritual aspects. It links to the fulfilment of basic needs and granting of human rights. Such basic needs would include access to shelter (housing), to water and to sanitation. It includes equality of opportunities of access to and provision of education, health care, and employment. Equality also links to ideas of equity, meaning fairness and justice.

I first want to look at Quakerism and equality and make four points. First, the nature of Quakerism is fundamentally egalitarian in that access to the spirit is open to all regardless of any differences in gender, race, class or religion. Second, the lack of hierarchy and paid pastors (in unprogrammed meetings like ours in Southern Africa Yearly Meeting) promote equality. Third, all ministry is of equal importance; and last, women have been accorded equal value to men from the beginnings of the Society.

You may recall that Martin Wilkinson, in his 2007 Richard Gush lecture, 'Prophets of Equality', spoke on the topic of equality and particularly of the main thesis of the book *The Spirit Level* by Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, published in 2009. This book showed that people in societies with bigger income gaps between rich and poor are much more likely to suffer from a wider range of health and social problems than those living in more equal societies. Such problems include lower life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality, mental illness, illicit drug use and obesity. More unequal societies also experience more violence (as measured by homicide rates), higher rates of imprisonment and lower levels of child well-being and educational attainment, more teenage births, and less social mobility.

If we apply this to our countries in Southern Africa, we can see, particularly in the case of Namibia, where the gap in income between rich and poor is huge and one of the highest in the world (as measured by the Gini co-efficient), that levels of gender-based and other violence, of murder, of suicide, of death on the roads, of teenage pregnancy, of baby dumping, of school drop outs, of alcoholism, of unemployment, of indebtedness, are all very high in relation to the size of the small population of 2.5 million. Why is this so and what can be done? It does appear to be directly related to the vast disparity of wealth in the country?

Oxfam in their recent report 'Reward Work, Not Wealth' (January 2019), highlight the increase in inequality throughout the world, where 82% of the wealth generated last year went to the richest 1% of the global population while the 3.7 billion who make up the poorest half of the world saw no increase in their wealth. The wealthiest 42 people in the world own as much as the poorest 50%. This report outlines the factors driving up rewards for shareholders and corporate bosses at the expense of workers' pay and conditions. It reveals how the global economy enables a wealthy elite to accumulate vast fortunes whilst millions of people struggle to survive on poverty pay (<https://www.oxfam.org/en/tags/inequality>).

In their new book, *The Inner Level* (2018), Wilkinson and Pickett concentrate on the individual rather than the society and explore the psychological effects and social stresses of inequality. They investigate levels of mental illness and emotional disorder and how living in

a more unequal society changes how we think and feel and relate to each other. They set out overwhelming evidence that material inequalities have powerful psychological effects. They show from a vast amount of data and analyses by themselves and others from around the world, that when the gap between rich and poor increases so does the tendency to define and value ourselves and others in terms of superiority and inferiority, and that low social status is associated with elevated levels of stress and increased rates of anxiety and depression. They conclude that societies based on fundamental equalities, sharing and reciprocity generate much higher levels of well-being (xvii).

However, all is not lost, and the authors argue that though inequality may be entrenched in many of the societies examined, its current levels are neither inevitable nor irreversible and, despite the many challenges of the past decade, a better world is possible (xxii). I discuss this way to a better world in the final section of this lecture headed 'Turbulent Times'.

I now move on to consider briefly the final testimony.

8.6 Sustainability or stewardship of the Earth and of the environment

In the past 50 years or so, there has been a growing awareness and interest in 'green' issues, including the move away from fossil fuels to renewable energy; conservation and protection of our natural environment and wildlife, both flora and fauna; concern about global warming and climate change; and our responsibility to care for our planet. With this came the concept of sustainability and hence 'sustainable development' with the idea that there are limits to economic growth. The concept of stewardship which links to sustainability has a long history with 'a sense of the unity of creation' being part of the testimonies.



'We do not own the world, and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will. Show a loving consideration

for all creatures, and seek to maintain the beauty and variety of the world. Work to ensure that our increasing power over nature is used responsibly, with reverence for life. Rejoice in the splendour of God's continuing creation. (Advice 42)

I think this advice says it all and cannot be bettered. You will recall that our Friend Shelagh Willet entitled her 2013 Richard Gush lecture *Reverence for Life*, asserting the following:

How infinitely precious is the living world in its myriad forms and how greatly it is to be revered.

9. NEW SUGGESTIONS

I am sure that each of us could have a suggestion for a new testimony. I realised only when I came to the end of drafting this lecture that the two new testimonies that I am suggesting now are not so much societal, like all the others, but personal, to do with ourselves. But, for me, if we have gratitude and creativity, our lives are enriched and we can relate to family, friends and our wider community, feeling more empowered and enriched and, therefore, be more effective, so these personal testimonies do have a ripple effect on the wider society.

9.1 Gratitude

When we do a mental and spiritual inventory of all that we have, we realise that we are very rich indeed
(Daybook, January 3).

In her book *Simple Abundance, A Daybook of Comfort and Joy*, Sarah Ban Breathnach gives women six principles to create and sustain an authentic life and encourages them to incorporate these gradually into their daily lives. These six were gratitude, simplicity, order, harmony, beauty and joy. She argues that weaving these six together in one's life will lead to feeling of serenity and inner peace, and I agree with her. I would like to commend all six but as a suggested new testimony for Friends I will focus briefly on the first, Gratitude.

Gratitude unlocks the fullness of life. It turns what we have into enough, and more. It turns denial into acceptance, chaos to order, confusion to clarity. It turns a meal into a feast, a house into a home, a stranger into a friend, gratitude makes sense of our past, brings peace for today, and creates a vision for tomorrow.

Melody Beattie (1992)

One tool that can help you bring this feeling of gratitude into your life is to make yourself a daily gratitude journal and before you go to bed write down

five things that you can be grateful for about that day. This practice is also recommended by others. I think of Julia Cameron in her book, *The Artist's Way* (1992).

Important here is to realise that appreciation and gratitude, if you do not already have them, will give a life-affirming shift to your mind set. As Karen Powell, a lifestyle mentor based in Windhoek, recommends, '*To truly transform your life, try to use gratitude not only as a reaction to an event, but more as a constant state of being.*'

I now move on to my second suggestion.

9.2 The arts – creativity

All too often, we think of art as a luxury, or something that should be left to 'artists', but the distinction between artists and the rest of us is false. Everyone belongs somewhere on a spectrum of creativity.

(Flintoff, 2012:76)



Life would be poorer without the arts, and the potential of each person to express him or herself through them would be lost. Arts and creativity enrich our lives and our societies. The communication of our ideas and feelings through the arts, in whatever genre, is healing and of huge value. So I propose that our commitment to the arts, particularly through our own personal expression as much as support for arts in our community, be seen as a key principle, if not sometimes as a form of ministry.

As Gudrun eloquently expressed it in her 2012 Richard Gush lecture *Art as testimony: in praise of music*:

*Music we need in times of stress, to take us out of ourselves into the common human spirit where we feel profoundly free, blissful. There is a huge hunger for rhythm and melody, and the people around us in Tlokweg, who have so little, still thrive on music and dance. **Through art we witness to our concern for a better world. Quakers need to fully embrace art as one of their living testimonies.*** (my emphasis in bold).



PANDEMICS AND CHANGE

Pandemics, then and now

Helen Holleman, Eastern Cape Quakers

Epidemics, pandemics ... they've been around ever since people started living in bigger groups — and that's the key: more people living together, more closely — especially with domesticated animals — share a lot more than space! They share diseases, too, and most of those diseases are caused by viruses.

Viruses are the most numerous biological entities on earth, and millions of them live on and in our bodies. Not only do viruses mutate, but they cause mutations in our genes and so change our immune systems. David Enard, evolutionary biologist from the University of Arizona, estimates that 30% of the adapted mutations on the human genome have been in response to viruses. The earliest evidence he has uncovered comes from a site near the River Dyje in the Czech Republic where, about 20 000 years ago, people made ceramics, built fires, spun thread, caught fish on hooks, carved and moulded clay — and suffered shared viral diseases. The evidence is in their genes — and ours.

Moving closer in time and space: Arokrowa, Ghana between BCE 950-1300. Like many other ancient sites in Ghana, this settlement was surrounded by trenches and banks of earth — earthworks that suggest an investment in labour and time. Yet, after being occupied for several centuries, this site was suddenly abandoned at a time that seems to coincide with the Black Death in Europe. Whether the population died or fled is not clear — but there is no evidence of later occupation.

Between about BCE 1000 and 1200, the K2 site at Mapungubwe was part of a thriving trade route that

stretched from the Arabian Peninsula as far as Delagoa Bay. Archaeologists unearthed an unusual number of burials (94), 76 of which were infants between the age of 0–4 years. The site had evidently been rapidly abandoned at about the same time as the deaths and archaeologists believe that disease drove the people from the site.

The written history of the northern hemisphere bears testimony to wave after wave of epidemics and pandemics that swept across the land mass from Mongolia, through Asia, through Europe, to the far reaches of Britain and Scandinavia. People coped by praying, by dancing (yes! really!), burning herbs, burning infected clothes and belongings, moving away from areas of infection, preventing others who were infected from moving from their place of infection. The doors and windows of a house where people were infected were nailed shut, a white cross was painted on the door, and no one was allowed near the place. Death by starvation was often the result.

The legend of the little village of Eyam in England is held up as an example of self-sacrifice for the greater good. The entire village self-isolated; a remarkable decision since the villagers were fully aware that they were signing their own death warrants.

Some things about our reactions don't seem to change: those who have getaway holiday homes tried to flee ahead of the lockdown; those who have been in contact with infection are told to self-isolate; the rest of us are told to just STAY HOME! At least there's no one



painting white crosses on our doors, but starvation is an all-too-real nightmare for many living in South Africa.

Pandemics are normal. Both archaeological and written records show that they appear at fairly regular intervals. What is not normal is our lack of preparation; our belief that ‘it won’t happen again’, or — more foolishly — ‘it won’t happen to me’. In little more than the last 100 years we’ve had: the 1918 flu which killed more people in 24 months than HIV (another pandemic) killed in 24 years; there’s been HIV, of course; SARS in 2003; MERS, which stretched from 2012-2019 (with a fatality rate of 34%), and now COVID19. We live, work, and pursue our leisure activities in increasingly crowded conditions; naturally we’re going to share our diseases!

C.S. Lewis had this to say about the atomic bomb in 1948; it is as relevant today. For ‘atomic bomb’ read ‘COVID19’:

“.... do not let us begin by exaggerating the novelty of our situation. Believe me, dear sir or madam, you and all whom you love were already sentenced to

death before the atomic bomb was invented: and quite a high percentage of us were going to die in unpleasant ways. We had, indeed, one very great advantage over our ancestors — anaesthetics; but we have that still. It is perfectly ridiculous to go about whimpering and drawing long faces because [there is] one more chance of painful and premature death to a world which already bristled with such chances and in which death itself was not a chance at all, but a certainty.

“This is the first point to be made: and the first action to be taken is to pull ourselves together. If we are all going to be destroyed by an atomic bomb, let that bomb when it comes find us doing sensible and human things — praying, working, ... reading, listening to music, bathing the children...not huddled together like frightened sheep and thinking about bombs. They may break our bodies (a microbe can do that) but they need not dominate our minds.”

Pandemics bring out the worst and the best in us: fear, inequality and exclusion, or hope, determination and love. You choose!

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SAPIENS SCHMAPIENS — We’re not as smart as we think we are

Jennifer Stern, Cape Western Monthly Meeting

The COVID-19 pandemic is a terrifying wake-up call for humanity. But, will we heed it, or will we ‘overcome’ it as best we can so that we can continue on the self-destructive course that led to it? Certainly, the measures taken by governments, organisations and individuals over the last few weeks show that we can change our behaviour and expectations — if we are convincingly threatened. And, right now, we are threatened and, thanks to the hard decisions taken by our government, we are convinced, and we are taking action. While this is, obviously, a good thing, it raises the question:

‘Why couldn’t we mobilise like this to deal with climate change, poverty, crime, violence and unemployment?’

A gun to our heads

More than 10 years ago, I heard a speaker at a conference say: ‘If we dedicated the same money, time, energy and resources into fighting global climate change as we did fighting the Second World War, we could stop it in five years, and significantly reverse it in ten.’ Or words to that effect.

That stuck with me. Climate change is a very real risk — not to the planet, as the marketers like to tell us — but

to humans. The planet will survive; there have been extinctions before, and there will be extinctions again. In fact, if it weren't for the extinction of millions of life forms — some small and seemingly insignificant, and some huge and magnificent — we humans would not have evolved into the planet-altering mutants we are. And, if we continue in the vein we have been for the last century or so, we may well become extinct. Or, perhaps, like so many sci-fi novels portend, and exactly like what almost certainly happened on the southern tip of Africa about 100 000 years ago, a small group of us may survive in isolation to slowly repopulate the earth. And that would be a good thing. Right?

Sapient is as sapient does

We call ourselves *Homo sapiens* (sometimes even *Homo sapiens sapiens*) because, we like to think, we are the cleverest darn species that ever lived, and we have not gotten over the Victorian notion that — if God didn't create us directly from a rib and a bit of mud — He (yes, *He*) designed evolution with the sole purpose of ultimately creating humans to, you know, have dominion and all that.

Anyhow, it's this mentality that has had us continually evolving — from foraging for our own food, to growing our own food, to buying our groceries online and raising children who don't even know what kind of tree eggs grow on. We are dependent on such an interconnected web of technology that we would not know how to fend for ourselves without it. Many of us can't even open our garage doors if the power goes out. Seriously, as we drive to the office in rush-hour traffic to sit behind a computer for eight hours, we somehow believe we are smarter than dolphins who spend all their waking hours surfing, fishing and having sex. There's a reason they're always smiling.

It's time for the Millennials and the Born-frees to take action

The Second World War defined our grandparents and, for some of us, our parents. It was a time of insanity and unbelievable hardship, but it also, strangely, brought out the best in many people. We learned to value the needs of the herd — of our tribes and nations — above our own needs. Not of *all* humanity, of course. There was still the dastardly 'them' against whom we focused all that jingoistic, self-sacrificing patriotism and heroism. It gave what has become known as the Greatest (or in the USA, the GI) Generation a focus, a purpose and a common enemy. And, closer to home, the Struggle Generation showed, again, that people can make immense sacrifices if sufficiently motivated. Let's face it, nothing unites humans more than the opportunity/need to gather together to fight something or someone that is 'different', and that threatens our survival and/or wellbeing.

For the Millennials and the Born-frees, or Zs, it seemed that it would be global climate change both

locally and internationally, but — despite its undeniable ability to forever change the way we live in the world — that failed to sufficiently ignite us. Perhaps because, while the Zs and Millennials are set up to 'inherit' the Earth, it's still being run by their parents and grandparents, many of whom have successfully turned a denialist eye. And also, probably, because there was no-one, or no-thing, to blame except ourselves. No scapegoat.

That's what makes COVID-19 'easier' to deal with than climate change: we have something outside of ourselves to blame. This incredibly tiny, invisible little virus is the only thing since the Second World War that has been able to significantly change human behaviour on a global scale. Perhaps we should call it the Hitler Virus.

Symptoms vs causes – the Gaia Principle

We are united because we have a common enemy, SARS-CoV-2. But, really, how true is that? Let's assume the Gaia Principle is valid because, quite honestly, it seems pretty credible. In a nutshell, the Gaia Principle states that the earth is a living entity, and that the atmosphere, all the rocks, the sand, the water, the plants, the bugs and the humans are a part of it in the same way our hair, teeth, organs and associated microscopic life forms (gut flora, etc.) are a part of us as humans. Of course, no-one has proved this, which is why it's also called the Gaia Hypothesis, but it holds up as a thought experiment.

So, if the earth is a living entity, and all the rocks, plants animals, etc. have a counterpart in the various components of the human body, then — perhaps — we are the earth's Coronavirus. If we compare the lifespan of the planet to the lifespan of a long-lived human (one of those bicycle-riding, wine-slugging centenarian farmers of the Blue Zones), we humans arrived on the planet a year or two after the Blue Zoner's 100th birthday. And perhaps global climate change is the fever Gaia is employing to finally rid itself of this pernicious pathogen — and SARS-CoV-2 is one more weapon in the earth's immune system. Perhaps, like other unsuccessful pathogens that kill their victims so quickly that they don't have time to pass on the disease, we humans are so irreparably harming our host that we are accelerating our own demise.

But are we addressing the real risks?

Let's face it, we are taking note of the virus. We're taking it seriously, and we are implementing pretty darn extreme measures to combat it. But that's just it. We are still in WWII mode. If guns don't work, use tanks; if tanks don't work, use bombs; if bombs don't work, use nukes. If we extend that to the First World War, we can start with horses and swords, and, if we extend it to the Freedom Struggle, we can end with necklaces. Are you seeing a pattern here?

And, as we have done in every war or resistance in

history, we are all making sacrifices – well, most of us. We’ve changed the way we do things – we gave up our Pilates classes and coffee klatches, for goodness’ sake! And even walking the dog!

Not without whingeing, of course, but we’re putting a brave face on it, and we’re trying to come up with creative ways of dealing with three – oops, eight – weeks of lockdown. Because we believe that, with some discipline, some sacrifices, and a bit of luck, this is all going to blow over, and life will go back to normal in a few months. Does the term ‘Home before Christmas’ ring any bells? It was said about WWI, and it was said about WWII, but Reagan said it ‘best’ in October 1965: ‘It’s silly talking about how many years we will have to spend in the jungles of Vietnam when we could pave the whole country and put parking stripes on it, and still be home by Christmas.’

So, what is the real risk of COVID-19? Yes, the risk of becoming infected, and the risk of dying from that infection, is serious. But possibly more serious is the unintended fallout from the actions many people have taken, and are still taking — the stockpiling, the price gouging, the xenophobia, the fear of ‘the other’ when we should be standing together.

But, whatever happens, the pandemic will end — certainly not this month, probably not next month. Maybe this year, maybe next year, but it will end.

And when it’s all over?

To continue the metaphor of COVID-19 being the Millennials’ and Zs’ WWII, what will be the aftermath? What did our grandparents and parents do after WWII?

World War II stimulated and fuelled a technological acceleration rivalled only by the harnessing of fire, the invention of the wheel, and the First Industrial Revolution. And, once the war was over, all those technological ‘swords’ were beaten into ‘ploughshares’ that transformed the lives and lifestyles of a few people, and — more importantly — irrevocably changed the expectations of much of the human race. In South Africa, apartheid blossomed and fuelled a lifestyle for white people that was remarkably like the one (mostly white) returning veterans built in the USA; they came back from the horror of war determined to build a ‘better’ world, and they could only imagine one with more stuff, more labour-saving devices, and more energy consumption. Never mind — to quote a well-worn US election campaign slogan — a chicken in every pot; that pot was on a brand-new electric stove in a newly built house with a fridge to store the extra chickens, and a garage to house the car to fetch the chickens from the supermarket.

In the USA, the Boomer generation that was born out of that prosperity rebelled against the materialism of it, but most of them are now very comfortably retiring from a life in the corporate world. Closer to home, the Struggle Generation, many of whom missed out on an education, a childhood, or even seeing their 20th

birthday, laid the foundation for the freedom we enjoy today — but it’s not the ‘better’ they had hoped for.

It is better, it’s just not the best ‘better’.

So, will we learn our lesson?

When the virus has run its course, and is beaten into submission by herd immunity, or even — unlikely but possible — is completely annihilated by our superior technology, will we go back to business as usual? Crowded trains, traffic-snarled streets, and intensive factory farming with its associated regular (but rarely reported on) outbreaks of novel pathogens?

Sadly, the evidence points to that happening.

In 2008, we were a nation of switchers-off of lights, we learned to read by the dim flicker of a 4-watt fluorescent bulb, and to find furniture in the dark with our shins; in 2017 we all bathed in teacups, and started sniffing our clothes when we took them off to see if they could be worn again before they needed washing. But, as soon as the dams started filling, we started showering for longer, and when it looked as if there was no load shedding on the horizon, we left the hot water geyser on all day, and stopped turning off the lights when we leave a room. We forget so easily.

But the big difference is that, unlike the ongoing Eskom fiasco, and the 2017 water crisis, COVID-19 is not confined to one country or one city. It is a global issue and, while it will be played out in different ways in different places, how it plays out will affect us all — regardless of race, creed or social status — and we know it. This is where it differs from climate change; there are people, governments and pseudo-scientists who have been, and are still, gambling on the fact that climate change (if it exists) may well affect subsistence farmers, and even some commercial farmers, and will probably be the end of some small, not-particularly-well-developed nations, but it will not affect them, because they have the resources to survive it.

Unlike global climate change, however, our present crisis has a face. Okay, maybe ‘face’ is too strong a word, but it is something to blame, something outside of ourselves, something we can fight, and even something we can kill, or try to kill, a convenient ‘other’. So, as we’ve done throughout history, we humans are working together to collectively combat the threat facing us — the ‘other’. But — and here is where it gets exciting — we are starting to realise that, as long as some of us are at risk, none of us is safe. Princes and paupers, actors and athletes, soccer moms and celebrity criminals — and even politicians and prime ministers — have all fallen victim.

So, the big question is: Will we learn from this, and find a better ‘better’ — a ‘better’ that is better for all of us, and an ‘us’ that does not exclude ‘them’? Because, as we are starting to realise, there is no ‘them’: it’s just us!

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Changing the system in a post-Corona virus world

Geoff Harris, KwaZulu-Natal Monthly Meeting

Over the last two decades, there have been much effort to 'change the system', based on an understanding that the current way of doing things is not working for the majority of people. Major examples include the push for greater democracy in a number of Middle Eastern countries, which became known as the Arab Spring, and pressure for countries to adopt measures to halt greenhouse gas emissions and climate change.

The resistance to such changes has proven immensely strong. Much of this is motivated by the desire of the rich and powerful — both individuals and countries — to maintain and expand their privileges, based on free market economics. As the economist J K Galbraith stated in his discussion of conventional wisdom, 'Ideas are inherently conservative. They yield not to the attack of other ideas but [only] to the massive onslaught of circumstances with which they cannot contend.'

The Corona virus may be this massive onslaught, especially when it is understood that the virus will not be once off affair. It, and associated viruses, are certain to return in waves. The effects of the virus will be so massive that any return to a pre-virus normality is pie in the sky thinking. Many businesses will not survive the economic shutdown; huge numbers of wage jobs will be permanently lost and casual jobs by a factor of many times more. Significant economic growth won't happen and, even if it did, the number of jobs it would bring in a fourth industrial world would be miniscule.

And if the virus itself is not enough to make us change our ways as individuals, countries and a planet, then add the increasingly obvious links between climate change and natural disasters across the world in the last few years and the dramatic increase in food insecurity for hundreds of millions of people due to droughts resulting from climate change. 'Famines of biblical proportions' are confidently predicted.

What might a reflection on these challenges based on Quaker principles suggest? One is a greater willingness to share what we have, as individuals and as a Yearly

Meeting. One way of sharing is to provide a universal or basic income grant for all adults, to with the main source of insecurity facing most South Africans — economic uncertainty. Many reviews of the experience of similar programmes worldwide have been carried out. In summary, they show that cash transfers result in improved health and education, lead to higher incomes in the long term and are not used on wasteful 'temptation' expenditures.

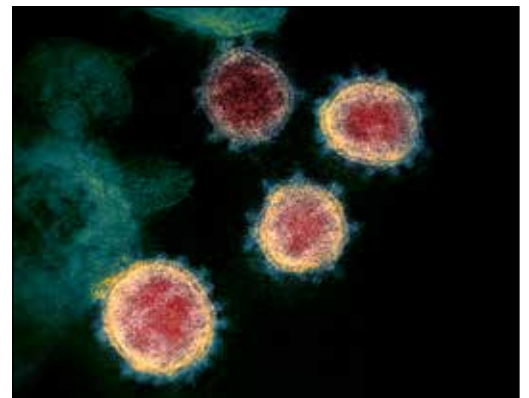
A key book is Guy Standing's *Basic income: and how we can make it happen* (London: Pelican, 2017). It addresses all the questions and reservations which some people have.

Two significant African BIG programmes, one completed, one ongoing, provide useful insights. The first basic income pilot in a developing country was in a Namibian village of around 1000 people in 2008-2009. All village members, including children, but not those over 60 already receiving a pension, received a monthly payment of some \$US12, around a third of the poverty line. Before versus after comparisons indicated better nutrition and health, especially among children, higher school attendance, a substantial decrease in petty economic crime, increased economic activity, lower expenditure on alcohol and an enhanced status for women. Village members, on their own initiative, set up a committee to advise people on spending and saving matters. In 2017, the NGO GiveDirectly began a long-term experiment in 120 Kenyan villages. Initial results of this experiment are expected this year.

No country, to my knowledge, has operated a fully-fledged BIG, although many countries operate versions of it in the form of cash transfers as part of their welfare systems. There is absolutely no reason why a country in southern Africa could not lead the world by setting up its own BIG. If South Africa had a BIG, much of the suffering of the poor which has resulted from the lockdown would have been avoided.

This transmission electron microscope image shows SARS-CoV-2 — also known as 2019-nCoV, the virus that causes COVID-19 — isolated from a patient in the U.S. Virus particles are shown emerging from the surface of cells cultured in the lab. The spikes on the outer edge of the virus particles give coronaviruses their name, crown-like.

By NIAID - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/niaid/49534865371/>, CC BY 2.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=92612457>



Women's 'Essential Services' during Covid 19 lock down in Zimbabwe

Sipho Nsimbi, Bulawayo Quaker Meeting

Context

The Covid-19 pandemic that has affected 215 countries worldwide and forced nations to 'self-isolate' has and will have devastating effects for generations to come. It has even tampered with the notion of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. Much of the progress made so far with regard to women and girl children may be reversed or lost in this fight against Covid-19. Economists have stressed the point that unemployment levels will rocket when the pandemic ends — if it ever does. Income levels in most families will be reduced, and may result in most girl children in Africa not re-enrolling for school, forcing them into early arranged marriages. Women empowerment programmes in a struggling economy will be the last priority. This is not an assumption, but a reality, proven by the fact that, so far, women's essential services such as maternal health, family planning services, menstrual hygiene services and even psychological support have not been prioritized by the Covid-19 response task forces.

Maternal health in Zimbabwe

Before the lockdown, maternal health was already compromised, with free maternal services having stopped, and most women struggled to afford services. They have consequently opted for home deliveries, risking HIV/AIDS mother to child transmission, as well as the well-being of the baby and the mother. When the lockdown was announced at the end of March, commodity prices sky-rocketed, putting even more strain on expectant and nursing mothers. For those in rural areas who depended on private transport to reach clinics and hospitals, the lockdown meant they could not travel to access free maternal services. With regular post-natal care visits, a woman who recently delivered cannot walk more than 5 km alone, let alone with a 7-day old baby.

A study by Amnesty International this year featured the story of a woman who delivered when the lockdown had begun and her baby fell ill two weeks later. The woman's mother advised her that the baby needed stomach medicine which she had to walk to Norton to buy from the pharmacy, only to find the pharmacy closed, so she had to go back again the following day. Upon her arrival, the medication she required was out of stock and she had to go to Harare, which was mission impossible with the numerous road blocks; she had no documents to justify her business in Harare, neither could she risk going with a two-week old baby as proof.

She is among many new mothers who have to make hard decisions when their babies fall ill. Moreover, clinics and hospitals are more focused on Covid-19 cases and too short-staffed to attend to prenatal, post-natal, and the under-fives. Women are discouraged from taking the under-fives for immunization as they have to spend the whole day at the clinics, increasing their and the child's chances of Covid-19 infection.

Family planning and menstrual health management

One of our female doctors, a parliamentarian, lamented poor access to family planning services in Zimbabwe during this lockdown for women most at risk of unwanted pregnancies because health facilities are short staffed. Women fear contracting the Covid-19 by going to the health facilities to access services, and hence stay at home. If left unattended, the shortage of contraceptives in the long term will prove to be a burden to all sectors.

The other side of the coin is the lack of access to affordable and hygienic sanitary wear for women and girls. An 'affordable' pack of sanitary pads in March was pegged at around ZW\$ 32 which changed overnight to ZW\$ 55, to ZW \$ 65 or US\$ 2.00. At a time when the nation is food insecure, sanitary wear is not a priority, leaving women with little option other than to resort to unhygienic alternatives that put them at risk of contracting disease. Their plight is exacerbated by water outages, where people in Bulawayo are without water for four days to two weeks. As available borehole water cannot meet demand for water in the communities, many have resorted to unsafe water sources that bring the increased risk of waterborne diseases. On 24 April 2020, women in Epworth, on the outskirts of the capital Harare, appealed to the government for free sanitary wear during the lock-down.

Psychological support

The lack of the above services coupled with economic stresses, compromised the mental well-being of women. Reported recently on a social media group, a young woman wanted to commit suicide and kill her children because she could not take care of them because of the lockdown. She is among many who have reached this level of despair and depression. Others are abused by their husbands, while others see their children abused daily by relatives, but fear reporting as authorities have a history of not taking abuse issues seriously. Zimbabwe's situation response report on the

protection cluster (14 May 2020) noted that Musasa (an organization that deals with issues of gender-based violence) recorded 1494 cases of gender-based violence between 30 March and 5 May 2020; 94% of these cases are against women. The figure below illustrated the most frequent forms of violence as noted by the report. The lock-down leaves victims and perpetrators with no one to talk to but themselves, resulting in mental breakdown, even in children.

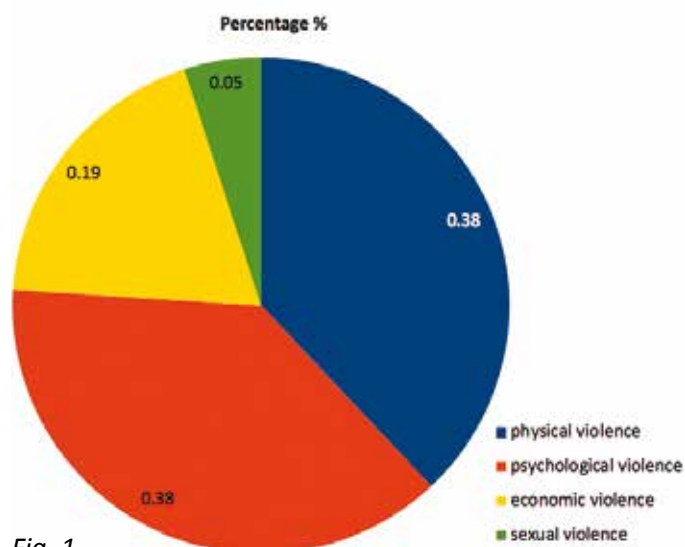


Fig. 1

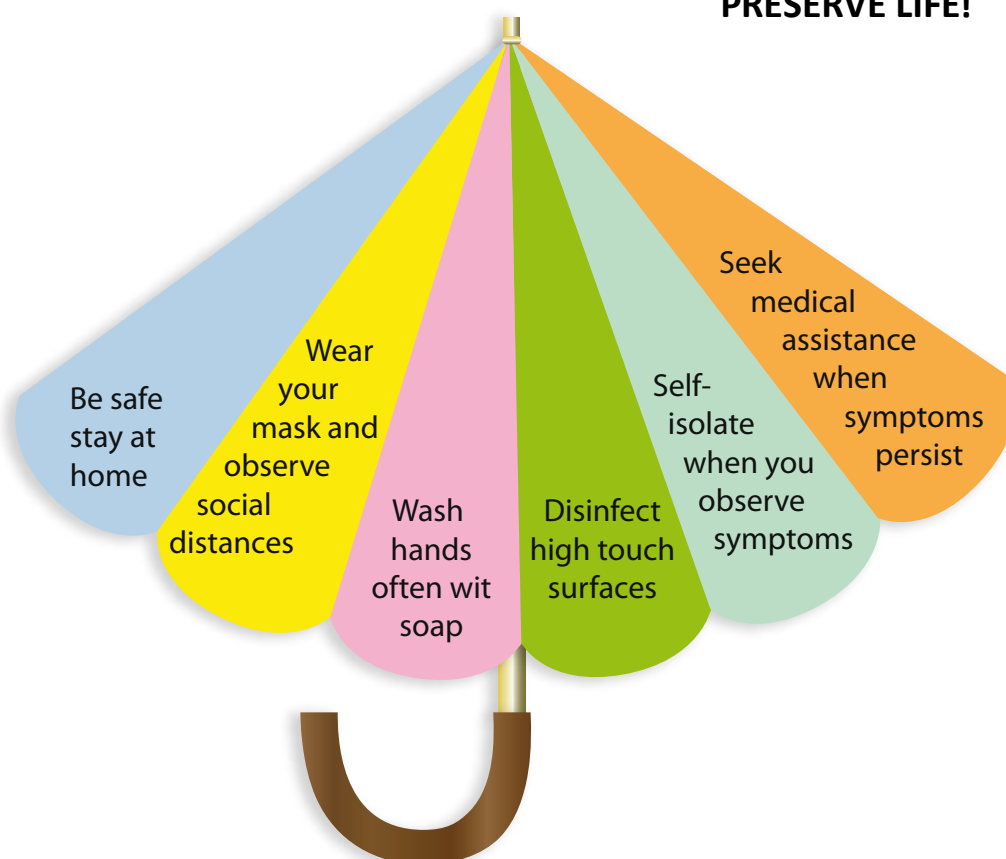
What can be done?

There is great need to address and prioritise women's essential services while dealing with the pandemic. In

a bid to prevent high child mortality rates and preserve gains that have been made so far in immunization of under-5s, the government needs to source PPEs for medical personnel and finance mobile clinics in rural areas. Possible ways of reducing maternity fees by engaging the private sector could also be considered.

- Provision of family planning services needs to be prioritised to avoid further social and economic turmoil; as the lock-down has been relaxed, contraceptives can be sourced from nearby countries, as was the case before lock-down.
- Mobile and online platforms for reporting gender-based violence and psychological support need to be upscaled.
- Community-based organisations also need to facilitate mobile/ online support groups for victims of GBV, as well as ordinary women.
- Government could subsidise products, such as sanitary wear, to make them affordable, and non-governmental organisations that were providing sanitary wear for girls in school, need to re-strategize and provide free sanitary wear for girls and women in communities.
- A multi-sectoral response is required to effectively address and curb the effects of the pandemic on the lives of urban, peri-urban and rural women in Zimbabwe.

**ABOVE ALL, LIFT THE UMBRELLA!
PROTECT SELF! PROTECT OTHERS!
PRESERVE LIFE!**



Reflections on a celebrated text from the Bible: Elijah's rebellion and "the still small voice"

Justin Ellis, Namibia Quaker Community

Then Elijah commanded them, "Seize the prophets of Baal. Don't let anyone get away!" They seized them, and Elijah had them brought down to the Kishon Valley and slaughtered them there...

Now Ahab told Jezebel everything Elijah had done and how he had killed all the prophets with the sword. So Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah to say, "May the gods deal with me, be it ever so severely, if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like that of one of them."

Elijah was afraid and ran for his life... Strengthened by that food he travelled for forty days until he reached Horeb, the mountain of God. There he went into a cave and spent the night.

And the word of the Lord came to him: "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

He replied, "I have been very zealous for the Lord God Almighty. The Israelites have rejected your covenant, broken down your altars, and put your prophets to death with the sword. I am the only one left, and now they are trying to kill me too."

The Lord said, "Go out and stand on the mountain in the presence of the Lord, for the Lord is about to pass by."

Then a great and powerful wind tore the mountains apart and shattered the rocks before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind. After the wind there was an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper. When Elijah heard it, he pulled his cloak over his face and went out and stood at the mouth of the cave.

Then a voice said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"

(Quoted from the Holy Bible, *New International Version*, Hodder and Stoughton, 1978: 1 Kings 18, v 40 and 19, v 1-3 & v 8-13)

To my mind, this poetic story sounds like a rebellion gone wrong.

Elijah has dramatically shown that the prophets of

Baal are charlatans. But he doesn't stop there. He presses his advantage and has them butchered. Now he has launched a holy war, a jihad. Like many zealots before him, however, he has not thought it all through very well. Queen Jezebel, sponsor of the prophets of Baal, is not amused. She is after him, so Elijah must flee, eventually into exile, where he is holed up alone in a cave.

It may be that that cave was subject to every kind of calamity in quick succession. But it seems to me that the writer is trying to tell us about Elijah's state of mind, that Elijah is in a rage, full of righteous indignation, convinced that he has done the right thing. Now he wishes for every kind of calamity to befall the regime of Queen Jezebel. A hurricane, an earthquake, and a raging fire are hardly enough to assuage his anger. He wishes for destruction and terror.

Elijah struggles to hear the voice of God, asking repeatedly, "What are you doing here?" One might add, "What have you done, and what are you planning to do now?"

To his great credit, however, Elijah apparently does eventually come to hear that questioning voice, and realize that he has been mistaken. God, he comes to understand, is not going to bring about change by violence and brute force, but by whispering in the ears of men and women, those same questions. In other words, one might say, by means of conscience, by God's Spirit working in the hearts of men and women, causing them to walk a different path, of their own free will.

Jesus must have known this text of the Old Testament, and perhaps was influenced by it, in the way that he chose to challenge the misguided rulers of his time, at the cost of his life.

For us Quakers it is a reminder to think deeply about "that of God in everyone" and how to appeal to that in people whom we believe are misguided in what they are doing.

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Enjoying the lockdown – simple living

Jennifer Kinghorn, Quaker Community of Johannesburg

I have enjoyed six weeks of silence more than I would have expected. I hear the wind and the birds, and I do not smell car exhaust fumes. I am so relaxed; not making arrangements and appointments and driving to them. I have avoided things that I should have left out of my life anyway. It has been a happy experience of Simple Living.

Because I am in the endangered age category, I am properly locked down in my village. I have made better friends with my neighbours. I can send quick and easy WhatsApp messages to my family and friends that are almost like chatting. I try and keep up with the news. I can make donations to help the suffering. I am very, very fortunate to have good digital equipment and to have learnt how to use it for many years. But I am enjoying being forced to act my age and stop being a constantly busy bee! The only things I really miss are the opportunity to hug my grandchildren and enjoy good conversation over a dinner table. Instead I have been tidying the house and garden, sorting, clearing, reading and even cooking. All a huge job but I have enjoyed every minute.

These are also spiritual activities. “Good ordering” is a Quaker witness. The simplest things like ironing and cleaning are a form of meditation – like using a rosary, or “telling ones beads”. I keep on thinking of Brother

Lawrence in France in 1666 who discovered that he was so close to God while he peeled potatoes. Bishops and Cardinals were amazed and came to meet him. His conversations and letters are in a little book called “the Practice of the Presence of God”.

The highlight of the week is by far, Meeting for Worship at 9.30 on Sunday — by Zoom. It is an amazing experience. I find that the Silence at 9.30 is immediately profound — deep and gathered. I love gazing at the faces: their silence and serious appearance is powerful ministry. Usually there is very little spoken ministry. I think the silent ministry was spiritual food enough. Perhaps we have all come together a bit more prepared in heart and mind than usual?

We have five minutes for “Afterwords” as usual. And then we “unmute” in turn, and go round to see and hear each person, to find out how they were, anything they need, any news to share, any compliments to pass on. No one has to rush off to do something else. This provides delightful, leisurely, unpressured friendship of the best quality I have ever experienced in any meeting in my life. We see and speak to friends and attenders from other meetings, new faces and people I have not seen for years.

What a blessing.

“In the stillness, is the dancing”: a reflection on the Eastern Cape Quaker group’s Easter Sunday Meeting, 12 April 2020

Fiona de Villiers, Eastern Cape Quakers

On Easter Sunday 2020, some members of the Eastern Cape Quaker group participated in a special experience. Due to lockdown, we were not together in the usual sense. Instead, each of us went into our gardens, or sat in a sunny or sheltered, quiet space and held silent worship. Afterwards, we recorded our experiences with the rest of the group. Doreen Bekker wrote, “*I found myself drawn to the outdoors.*”

For many religious people, Easter is the most profound time of the year. For myself, it is a time when my daily practices, such as prayer and mindfulness, are enhanced. This Easter, lockdown was somewhat new to us all, and the global spread of a virus was a startling

phenomenon. These two things — lockdown and its cause — were bound up in my thinking.

Perhaps this was true for you also. Then, I thought, I shall miss the rest of the group and the deep breathing and contemplation that occurs when we are together. Doreen had an answer for me, a way of bringing us all “into the light”, saying,

I had this picture of all of us connected by streams of light. Given where we each were, this created an impressive (for me) pattern of connected light beams. The beams of light from afar were as strong as those from close by.



always feel it necessary to fill up each moment, to achieve as many tasks as possible. Rosie Smith expressed it thus:

For me, this period of isolation is a learning experience, although tinged with anxiety and fear it is a time of being still. Stillness does not come to me naturally, as I love being energetic and involved, so I am reminded again of John Southall's words [Quaker 1855-1928]:

"We cannot go through life strong and fresh on constant express trains, but we must have quiet hours, secret places of the most high times of waiting upon the Lord, when we renew our strength and learn to mount up on wings as Eagles, and then come back to run and not be weary and to walk fast and not faint."

Now I had made a conscious choice just to BE. I lay on my back and looked up at the sky. I have not done that in years. I saw the shapes of the clouds and felt the sun washing my own world in warmth. I thought of the garden itself: it is an old garden. In my own lifetime, Rosie Smith threw birthday parties here for my siblings and me when we were little. We scattered my mum's ashes there not too long ago.

Liz Gowans shared her experience:

The farmer's son plays the bagpipes and the sound carries through the valley bowl to the whole village. Earlier this morning, "Amazing Grace" floated on the air. He has played something every day so far during lockdown. It reminds me of so many small gestures and actions happening around the world by individuals, that add up to so much and the sense of solidarity they convey.

Helen Holleman said:

The breath we all share... in shared spaces I'm always aware of the connectedness each breath brings as we breathe in the air that others have breathed out. How ironic and sad that this pandemic is carried on that connectedness.

The stillness and the space

I took up a blanket and my Bible, and went into my garden.

My initial thoughts were about privilege: how lucky I am to have such a large space outside. I thought of the hundreds of thousands of people across the globe who, due to lockdowns, were squashed together into small spaces and terrible circumstances. I prayed for them. I prayed for those in impoverished and otherwise difficult situations in my hometown of Grahamstown.

My reflections turned inwards. I thought of how I

Umoya

There are many tall trees in my garden and surrounding it. The wind came up and suddenly I was a sailor on a galleon, rising and sinking, on a journey. What's the destination? I thought. I remembered reading that in a vision, the apostle John, "Saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding tight the four winds of the earth."

Many of us felt the power of the wind. Susan Cook recorded that:

Wind is a way of life here; it dictates many daily decisions. So, I contemplate it a lot. What we know as air, the air we breathe, the breath of life, and when it starts to move it becomes breeze and then wind.

I rarely discern the reason it does that, it just does. That moving air changes names as it changes form; a gale, storm, hurricane, tornado, or it stays wind for however long it chooses. Then it just stops. I recall going through a hurricane and how when the eye passed over how the wind abruptly stopped, the stillness was so eerie because we knew the powerful wind would follow, and it did.

We can't see the wind; we only know it by the things it touches.

It brings sounds and smells from other places, replacing the ones I had around me.

It brings relief from heat, dries the washing,

brings rain, makes the limbs, and grasses sway and sometimes brings danger.

Liz Gowans closed her eyes and *"Listened to the wind. It got very gusty and the sound of it buffeting the bushes grew in my ears, but in that sheltered spot I barely felt a breeze on me."* Doreen Bekker *"Stood outside feeling the wind, at first it was gentle, then it grew stronger. Almost as if the wind was trying to convey a message?"* John Blair remarked that that in isiXhosa the word for wind and spirit is the same: *'Umoya'*.

The trees

In my garden, the trees themselves were, I noticed, as patient and beautiful as ever, even our incredibly old plum tree, which, gracefully, after the drought had gone on for some time, decided, as plum trees do, to 'sit down'. Rilke mentions trees often in connection with faith. For example,

*How surely gravity's law,
strong as an ocean current,
takes hold of even the smallest thing
and pulls it toward the heart of the world.*

*Each thing—
each stone, blossom, child—
is held in place.
Only we, in our arrogance,
push out beyond what we each belong to
for some empty freedom.*

*If we surrendered
to earth's intelligence
we could rise up rooted, like trees.*

*Instead we entangle ourselves
in knots of our own making
and struggle, lonely and confused.*

*So, like children, we begin again
to learn from the things,
because they are in God's heart;
they have never left [God].*

*This is what the things can teach us:
to fall,
patiently to trust our heaviness.
Even a bird has to do that
before he can fly.*

(Rilke's Book of Hours: Love Poems to God.)

One can also delight in Herman Hesse's love letter to trees which goes like this:

"For me, trees have always been the most

penetrating preachers. I revere them when they live in tribes and families, in forests and groves. And even more I revere them when they stand alone. They are like lonely persons. Not like hermits who have stolen away out of some weakness, but like great, solitary men, like Beethoven and Nietzsche. In their highest boughs the world rustles, their roots rest in infinity; but they do not lose themselves there, they struggle with all the force of their lives for one thing only: to fulfil themselves according to their own laws, to build up their own form, to represent themselves. Nothing is holier, nothing is more exemplary than a beautiful, strong tree. When a tree is cut down and reveals its naked death-wound to the sun, one can read its whole history in the luminous, inscribed disk of its trunk: in the rings of its years, its scars, all the struggle, all the suffering, all the sickness, all the happiness and prosperity stand truly written, the narrow years and the luxurious years, the attacks withstood, the storms endured. And every young farm boy knows that the hardest and noblest wood has the narrowest rings, that high on the mountains and in continuing danger the most indestructible, the strongest, the ideal trees grow.



"Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and

precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life.

"A tree says: A kernel is hidden in me, a spark, a thought, I am life from eternal life. The attempt and the risk that the eternal mother took with me is unique, unique the form and veins of my skin, unique the smallest play of leaves in my branches and the smallest scar on my bark. I was made to form and reveal the eternal in my smallest special detail.

"A tree says: My strength is trust. I know nothing about my fathers, I know nothing 'about the thousand children that every year spring out of me. I live out the secret of my seed to the very end, and I care for nothing else. I trust that God is in me. I trust that my labour is holy. Out of this trust I live.

"When we are stricken and cannot bear our lives any longer, then a tree has something to say to us: Be still! Be still! Look at me! Life is not easy; life is not difficult. Those are childish thoughts... Home is neither here nor there. Home is within you, or home is nowhere at all.

"A longing to wander tears my heart when I hear trees rustling in the wind at evening. If one listens to them silently for a long time, this longing reveals its kernel, its meaning. It is not so much a matter of escaping from one's suffering, though it may seem to be so. It is a longing for home, for a memory of the mother, for new metaphors for life. It leads home. Every path leads homeward, every step is birth, every step is death, every grave is mother.

"So the tree rustles in the evening, when we stand

uneasy before our own childish thoughts: Trees have long thoughts, long-breathing and restful, just as they have longer lives than ours. They are wiser than we are, as long as we do not listen to them. But when we have learned how to listen to trees, then the brevity and the quickness and the childlike hastiness of our thoughts achieve an incomparable joy. Whoever has learned how to listen to trees no longer wants to be a tree. He wants to be nothing except what he is. That is home. That is happiness."

I flipped over onto my tummy to get a new perspective. I haven't really ever looked at the garden that way, and certainly not since the drought took most of what I had planted. I was delighting in the dandelions and remembered this wonderful Marge Piercy poem:

The Seven Of Pentacles

*Under a sky the colour of pea soup
she is looking at her work growing away there
actively, thickly like grapevines or pole beans
as things grow in the real world, slowly enough.
If you tend them properly, if you mulch, if you water,
if you provide birds that eat insects a home and
winter food,
if the sun shines and you pick off caterpillars,
if the praying mantis comes and the ladybugs and
the bees,
then the plants flourish, but at their own internal
clock.*

*Connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow
underground.*

You cannot tell always by looking what is happening.



More than half the tree is spread out in the soil under your feet.

Penetrate quietly as the earthworm that blows no trumpet.

Fight persistently as the creeper that brings down the tree.

Spread like the squash plant that overruns the garden.

Gnaw in the dark and use the sun to make sugar.

Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses.

Live a life you can endure: Make love that is loving. Keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in, a thicket and bramble wilderness to the outside but to us interconnected with rabbit runs and burrows and lairs.

Live as if you liked yourself, and it may happen: reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in. This is how we are going to live for a long time: not always, for every gardener knows that after the digging, after the planting, after the long season of tending and growth, the harvest comes.

I love Piercy's colouring of the sky: "pea soup". For all of a sudden the sky became overcast, and a few drops of rain fell on my face. Then, as my granny liked to say when my siblings and I were growing up and contemplating adventures, "Is there enough blue to make a sailor a pair of trousers?"

Then out of nowhere, my little brown cat Nomsa, with green eyes, was with me. I said to her, "God is here. Can you feel him?" Being with her in 'her' space, reminded me that we were not ever meant to exploit animals. Unnecessary interference can cause global chaos. Let us respect and conserve all we can, each in its own natural habitat. Nomsa, glad she was to see me, was quickly alerted to the arrival of an insect: immediately she flattened and became single-minded. Here's Jane Hirshfield on the matter:

*When the cat waits in the path-hedge,
no cell of her body is not waiting.
This is how she is able so completely to disappear.*

I would like to enter the silence portion as she does.

*To live amid the great vanishing as a cat must live,
one shadow fully at ease inside another.*

– From 'Against Certainty'.

Many of us were overjoyed to hear birds on that Sunday morning. My favourite is always the 'piep piep' bird, which sends a Morse code message of peace to the world. It is a Redfronted Tinker Barbet and can manage 355 notes per song. What a small miracle!

Renee Holleman said: "One of the things I've become aware of... is how quickly people have become attuned to the needs of others, and how necessary it is. For me, up close, I've had to become more attuned to the needs of the animals I'm sharing a space with." Rosie Smith added: "[I was] sitting on our verandah, butterflies on the shrubs and a sun bird sipping nectar from the pink trumpet flowers above. I felt so at peace and conscious of the gathering Helen had brought together." From Liz Campbell: "I had the same sense my dogs Rumi and Homer express every morning when I greet them after the night - rolled on their backs, submissive legs up, tummy exposed in adoring trust! Because where else is there to go?"

Doug Bullis penned these lovely lines:

Our birdbath is a busy place at 09:30 in the morning. Today was no exception. When the morning sunshafts play through the trees, we see fleeting sprays of water droplets arc high in all directions, coloured splats the size of a beach ball. To the weavers and mousebirds there's not much symbolism, a bath is a bath. But to us watching this in binoculars, those fountains of spray are all the baptisms of the world all moved by optical magic to a stone basin in our back yard. Rainbows are everywhere if there's a bird and a puddle around. Miracles, too.

Amazing, grace is ...

Liz Gowans wrote in retrospect:

For those who don't know, I live on a smallholding and decided to walk up the hill to where my mother is buried on the property to spend the hour there. It seemed somehow fitting as it was mom's birthday earlier this week and she was in my thoughts. The dogs followed me excitedly, anticipating their usual walk and were a bit puzzled when I deviated from the route and sat down next to the grave overlooking the valley. They snuffled around in the bushes, wandered off and back again and looked at me quizzically. Dad's dog Reuben eventually got bored and disappeared from view. My Layla leaned up against me, nudged me with her muzzle, pawed at my leg and panted in my face, before finally settling down and lay patiently a short distance away... I watched the butterflies around me, the ants scurrying over the granite block and the small hardy plants pushing their way through the stony earth.

Faith and love

Rod Woollgar said of his Easter Sunday morning worship:

Dear Friends,

It has been good to be united with all of you in the Spirit this morning, despite the fact that we could not see the sunrise over the Bay as it was hidden by a cloudbank, rather true of the religious life for it is more frequent than infrequent the truth is hidden from us despite the fact that it is there.

I love his words because they suggest to me what faith is all about. Faith is a daily promise I make to believe in a Truth infinitely larger than myself; unknown and in many ways unknowable. Faith is the measure of peace I feel when I have prayed and I can say again, "Let not your heart be troubled." Faith is the joy I experience through understanding more about being a Quaker, that I can pray directly to God with no intercession.

For my brother Anthony and me, Easter is a time of great sorrow and then great joy. We read the accounts of the last days of Jesus, we ask questions, we wonder, ideas go back and forth. We pray. Inevitably we agree that it is the greatest miracle that a man, who was also the Son of God, lived upon the earth bringing with him the simplest piece of advice: "Love one another." We talk of his suffering and his own moments of wavering faith, that each time were overridden by his knowledge of what was to come: The Passion, indeed. We think of him as an activist, asking for nothing but belief, moving as he did in a country occupied by a dictatorial force. For us it is simultaneously a story of a death, and the greatest metaphor ever created. For how great the glory when the stone was rolled away! What stones can I roll away in my own life?

Susan Cook shared the following thoughts along those lines:

"[Our Easter Sunday meeting] brings me to those words by Colum McCaan, that Jesus did not give up on the world, which means he did not give up on mystery, or the resulting faith.

That [mystery] leads to faith is the key we need for survival right now. It's hard for many of us to do what science tells us we must do for the survival of ourselves and others. It is through science that we fight for our collective lives. The bigger picture is about faith, and that's the hard part because right now the result of this science/mystery has yet to be revealed to us. What are we learning from this?

After our garden worship, Rosie Smith continued this train of thoughts, writing:

Wondering now how this present surreal situation will end and when I look at the words of one of our Black Sashers which she wrote during some of the dark days of apartheid, and I try to BE: "Perhaps the only healthy attitude in life is to accept that we are where we are and to BE there with all the clarity of mind and courage of action that we can muster."

Surely, bravery is key to what a Quaker can be. John Blair also reminded us of this, saying after his Easter Sunday experience:

My first thoughts were that early Friends lived in even more abnormal times than we do now. Quakerism was founded at a time of both civil war and religious persecution and when these ended, Friends had to face the new reality, as we will have to do after the pandemic ends.

I was struck by how prophetic some of the sayings of early Friends were, and how they still relate to our present condition. I was reminded of Margaret Fell's words:

"The truth is one and the same always and though ages and generations pass away and one generation goes and another comes, yet the word and power of the living God endures for ever, and is the same and never changes."

There was power and love in the simplest of sharings after our experience. Wendy Nunn said, *"That was so moving – thank you. It felt so good to be with Friends in such a special way."* Adrienne Whisson summed it all up thus: *"It was an excellent idea and thank you for all the energy you expended."* Helen said, *"I'm so grateful for the green space of our garden."* Time melted away for Liz Gowans, who wrote: *"I don't wear a watch and realised I hadn't brought my phone with me so I had no sense of the time, but it didn't seem to matter. I looked out into the distance to the hills on the horizon and felt deeply thankful for all I could see."* For Sue Rionda, it *"was a special time."*

I was elated after coming in from the garden. It was a feeling that carried me into the next week and helped me to cope with all the confusing news and noise. I had originally included the text of Desiderata in my "After words", but here, I would like to feature Rilke again, and a short TS Eliot extract.

I'm looking forward to the next individual/together Quaker meeting!

Wait Without Hope

By T.S. Eliot

*I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without love,
For love would be love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and the hope are all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the dancing.
Whisper of running streams, and winter lightning.
The wild thyme unseen and the wild strawberry,
The laughter in the garden, echoed ecstasy
Not lost, but requiring, pointing to the agony
Of death and birth.*

From Rainer Maria Rilke's
Book of Hours: Love Poems to God.

*All will come again into its strength:
the fields undivided, the waters undammed,
the trees towering and the walls built low.
And in the valleys, people as strong and varied
as the land.*

*And no churches where God
is imprisoned and lamented
like a trapped and wounded animal.
The houses welcoming all who knock
and a sense of boundless offering
in all relations, and in you and me.*

*No yearning for an afterlife, no looking beyond,
no belittling of death,
but only longing for what belongs to us
and serving earth, lest we remain unused.*

Dense afro-montane forest. Newlands forest. Cape Town.

By S Molteno - Own work, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=13239967>

Airplane mode?

**Rory Short,
Quaker Community of Johannesburg**

My first Smartphone was an iPhone. Smart phones, have amongst other modes, Airplane Mode. Since buying my iPhone I've never been on an airplane so I've never had reason to use this mode.

What is it?

Airplane Mode closes down all of a smart phone's two-way microwave communication functions and thus isolates it from the world. It does this in order not to possibly disrupt an airplane's communication with the world outside.

For health reasons our Smart phones should actually be turned off, or kept in Airplane mode, unless we want to communicate with the outside world. Why? Because, unless we do this, the phone continuously generates microwave pulses to tell the world it is available to receive messages. Now these pulses also disrupt the signals that our bodily cells use to guide their division processes and are thus potentially cancerous, especially

if the phone is in close contact with your body like in your pocket or bra or being held close to your ear to communicate with another person.

It was while discovering the above very important physical health information that I was suddenly led to the realisation of some equally important spiritual health information. This is that Airplane Mode is human's default state, or unconscious, mode in spiritual matters. In our normal waking state we live with our two way channel for communication with the Spirit closed on our side.

On the other hand, just like a cell phone tower, the Spirit is continuously radiating, i.e. broad casting, to its creation. The Spirit's side of the channel is always open. However, because we are conscious beings, what happens on our side of the spiritual communication channel is actually open to us to choose whether our side of the channel is to remain closed or to be open.

Thus, as our default spiritual mode is Airplane mode, in a state of being closed, the purpose of spiritual practices like Centring Prayer, Meeting for Worship and other meditation practices is to give us practice in opening our side of the channel to the Spirit, with the ultimate aim of it always being open.

REFLECTIONS

“Consider the possibility that you may be mistaken” (Advices and Queries)

Betsy Coville, Quaker Community of Johannesburg

How often do most of us consider that possibility?

This has been brought home to me recently during the lockdown.

“A ZOOM Meeting for Worship? Crazy!! All of us sitting in front of our phones or computers, heads bowed, eyes closed . . . ?!!! What an idea! This will never work!”

This was my line of thought when the idea was first proposed. How mistaken I was!

Thanks to Wendy Landau and Chinezi Chijioke, QCJ has been meeting on ZOOM every Sunday morning for the past few weeks. Friends from Pretoria, Zimbabwe, and the UK join us regularly and it has been wonderful!

We’ve even had Friends from Australia from time

to time. Many local Friends who find it difficult to physically attend Meeting for Worship have been able to join us. We now generally have 25 people attending MfW — several more than we’ve had previously when we met at Wits.

After the formal part of MfW is over, we take time to listen to each other as we share our individual journey during this unprecedented time.

“Consider the possibility that you may be mistaken”. I’ll try to remember that more often in future.

Zooming Quakers

Gleanings from the Zoom meeting set up by Johannesburg and Pretoria friends

Jennifer Kinghorn, Quaker Community of Johannesburg

I love seeing all your faces on the screen.
I loved seeing you today.

I love hearing from everyone after Meeting. I love getting everyone’s news.
Somehow, we seem closer and communicate better.

I saw faces from all over the world: now I know we really are a family of friends.

Sitting in the silence one hears so much.
One hears what is said, and what is not said.

Each of us hears something different. A different message especially for the individual. Words mean something different for each person. We each have to look for the inner meaning of the message – like peeling layers of wrapping off a parcel, or off an onion, or peeling a fruit to find the good inside.

All through meeting my mind has been buzzing about the words Equality and Justice.
I think that Equality and Justice both really mean “Respect”.

Be still, rest and wait in the silence.
Be still and know that I am God.

Be mindful. Take notice of this.
See. Light reveals dirt. Do something about it.
Feel. Tension, stress, relaxation, love and hate, unhappiness
Hear. The birds, or a voice and message from the past; the silence underneath it all.
Discover. The meaning of something I read or heard a long time ago.

All week I felt the void, the emptiness of my friend's death.
In the silence I have seen that his Glory and Light has still been sustaining me through the week.

I have loved the silence of the lockdown. I have enjoyed 4 weeks of Silence. I have been free from having to make appointments and arrangements, sitting in the car, travelling far to see friends and family. I have had time to think of friends and send and read many short messages. I have been much more sociable than usual.

All week I have felt enraged about the hunger and suffering that is going on and the petty bureaucracy that stops us from helping. I feel so helpless. Today I think that I must just do whatever little thing is possible. Taking food to the sports field and handing it over the wall to be taken to the hungry is beautiful.

Compassion fatigue is real:
Touch your world as best you can. Trust that there are enough other compassionate people who will touch their world as best they can... and that the ripple will catch one person at a time. You cannot do it all.
Learn that sometimes being a compassionate witness is enough to mobilize the strength that someone needs to rescue themselves. Hold on in your sphere of influence. Others will hold on in theirs. Trust that.
Together we can do this.

We are drawn to be with people who respond to Love and Light and Truth. They feel like Friends.
They feel like people we can trust with our innermost experience.

I am grateful to Friends past and present, to writers, to Jesus of Nazareth, to so many people, for feeding my Spirit by sharing their innermost experience.

..... and I have felt
A presence that disturbs me with the joy
of something far more deeply interfused,
Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
And the round ocean and the living air
And the blue sky, and in the mind of man;
A motion and a spirit,
that impels all thinking things,
all objects of all thought,
and rolls through all things.

– From *Tintern Abbey* by William Wordsworth

Ministry in Meeting: While we share the same silence, we each get a different message, for each of us individually. A message comes for one's own personal circumstances, out of one's own personal experience, for the particular life one is living. It may be to relax and not worry. It may be to understand or to do something. Sometimes we may not understand it yet. Sometimes we have to live with the message a while. One may feel strongly called to share it with others. This is easier if we trust them enough to share our innermost experiences.

A meditation on the lockdown

Francis G Armitage, KwaZulu-Natal Monthly Meeting, Pietermaritzburg

This lockdown is a challenge on so many levels that it's hard to know where to start. It is the best of times and the worst of times, something no one could have prepared for and no one knows when or how it will end. At first when I watched the global response to Covid-19 I was hopeful, even euphoric: it seemed like the whole world was being united by a single idea, that each and every life is worth saving at any cost, and I could imagine future generations saying that this was one of humanity's finest hours. There is still a strong element of hope in my heart, though many misgivings are also making their presence felt, which shouldn't surprise me too much, I suppose, after all, we are only human.

My personal journey is self-orientated, though in a good way, mostly. I am at a juncture in my life, having just retired from teaching Mathematics in January 2020 at the ripe young age of 62, if you're interested. The South African lock-down has interrupted my three to six-month 'chilling' process, which was to include quite a lot of alcohol; it has forced me to curtail — but not quit — my use of tobacco; it has given me an opportunity to re-establish the practise of meditation, which has always been a part of my life, on and off (and sometimes very 'off', I must admit). So, it's good and bad, a point of view that I suspect everyone can agree on!

On the bad side, I summed it up in an email to a Friend in PMB — I'm an Attender, by the way. I don't think I have ever felt so much like a pawn in a game not of my choosing, played under hidden rules, by players who may well have a focus on the good of the country, but whom I also suspect of other agendas that are less pure. Yet again, we/they are only human. Wasn't it something Victor Frankl said, that the only true freedom we have is our attitude (to whatever befalls us)? This is an anxious, fearful time; as the number of infections and deaths increase our humanity, individually and collectively, is going to be tested in ways that we can only dimly perceive right now.

On the positive side, I am finding that the inward journey through meditation is good. Over the last few days, I have developed a catchphrase to begin the meditation: 'May anything I experience help me to become a better person.' I cannot quantify whether or

how much meditation is helping me. It isn't lessening my tobacco addiction, for example, nor my anxiety, distress, frustration and so on, and yet I think it probably is, if you'll forgive the obvious contradiction. It is a daily Meeting for Worship that is proving to be worth the effort, a solitary seeking of silence that helps to identify the sources of inner noise in a loving way that perhaps ameliorates their negative/destructive capacities in my daily life alone and with others.

Mind you, even though I might be striving for 'purity of heart', I'm still very prone to bitterness and frustration: my response to Dr Dlamini-Zuma is very colourful, along the lines of 'Thank you, thank you very much' except that I substitute the word 'thank' with another one beginning with the letter 'f'...

As an atheist, I am not entirely comfortable with the phrase 'Meeting for Worship' — sorry, but I had to get that out. My experiences with Quakers began way back in 1993 and it has been a treasured contact ever since; the strength of the contact has varied, sometimes close, sometimes distant, but always a thread that I have never cut completely. There are two things that I believe Quakers can especially offer as we navigate this crisis: the first is what I would call Quaker tolerance; it is not just the way I always feel welcomed among Quakers, it includes the respect, the offer of friendship and support, the recognition, and the attempt to live the ideal that we are 'not one, not two'. (The paragraph above is an example of trying for tolerance but not attaining it...) The second is 'finding that of God' in everyone and everything, and I know you'll forgive me if I substitute the word 'Good' for that other one! Local experts tell us that we are going to peak in September; I doubt that the peak will be pretty, and it will not be the end of the journey.

When I was in Durban I worked as a Peace Monitor for what became Diakonia Council of Churches. At that time Quakers had an influence and effect way beyond their numbers, and I think that Quakers — I would like to say 'we' but as an Attender I hesitate — have to gear up to respond in a similar way to the challenge that Covid-19 represents.

Lockdown Impressions — April And May

Benonia Nyakuwanikwa, Harare Monthly Meeting

Life is hard in a jobless and non- entrepreneurial environment. Life without disposable income has always been difficult. So, I adjusted to living with electricity at times, eating whatever little you can find, cut down on communication, using a car that is not in good condition, as little as possible. The list of hardships is endless.

The introduction of lockdown came abruptly, no notice and no contingency plan. It caught me unawares. I lived under restriction of freedom of movement, like in a cage. At this point in time, all hardships came to the fore. Basic commodities went up beyond the reach of many. Selfishness and profiteering in the markets became open practices and the order of the day.

I was pushed into thinking. I examined my Faith, having lost enough of my loved ones, in a short space of time, my faith was challenged big time. I thought about what is around me and beyond. Do I have a reason to live, and what is my role in all this? I personally looked into my life, and I asked, am I a difficult person to approach? I looked at family level relationships, have

I helped some/enough people along the way? Looked at society, is there anything I can do to improve the surroundings, or to improve a way of life? Looked at religion, how can I get people to like and understand Quakerism? The task is overwhelming.

My impressions are that, life is too short, and can change anytime, so live it to the fullest, humbly, with meaning, love and kindness. Fear can grip anyone and death happens anytime.

I have to start all over, re-arrange my thoughts. Charity begins at home. Whatever Good I can do, I have to start it at home. I now know that prayer is the oil that fuels my life. Praying about specifics that trouble me most allows God's light to enter the dark areas of my life. It is a wonderful experience when relief/ achievement comes along, and I just say All glory goes to God. I find solace in listening to meaningful music, and some gardening, work on a project that helps me learn IT and has the potential to sustain me. In conclusion, I seek to be closest to God by always being in the prayerful mode and give my life to Him every day.



A gathering of sacred ibis at a dam near eMseni Christian Centre where the last Yearly Meeting was held ... when will we again have a Yearly Meeting where we all gather?

Two Books And *The Machine Stops*

Wouter Holleman, Eastern Cape Quakers

A Distant Mirror: The Calamitous 14th Century,
by Barbara Tuchman. Published by Penguin, 2017

Wouter Holleman – Eastern Cape Quakers

The veritable flood of information about pandemics and the Covid-19 virus we are being inundated with had me recall two books in particular, and a short story (a novella).

The first, Barbara Tuchman's *A Distant Mirror*, about mediaeval Europe — from the bubonic plague, the hundred years' war and the Papal Schisms — I read many years ago. So, to refresh my memory I reverted to Google and found:

"The fourteenth century reflects two contradictory images: on the one hand, a glittering age of

crusades, cathedrals, and chivalry; on the other, a world plunged into chaos and spiritual agony. In this revelatory work, Barbara W. Tuchman examines not only the great rhythms of history but the grain and texture of domestic life: what childhood was like; what marriage meant; how money, taxes, and war dominated the lives of serf, noble, and clergy alike. Granting her subjects their loyalties, treacheries, and guilty passions, Tuchman re-creates the lives of proud cardinals, university scholars, grocers and clerks, saints and mystics, lawyers and mercenaries, and, dominating all, the knight—in all his valour and 'furious follies,' a 'terrible worm in an iron cocoon'."

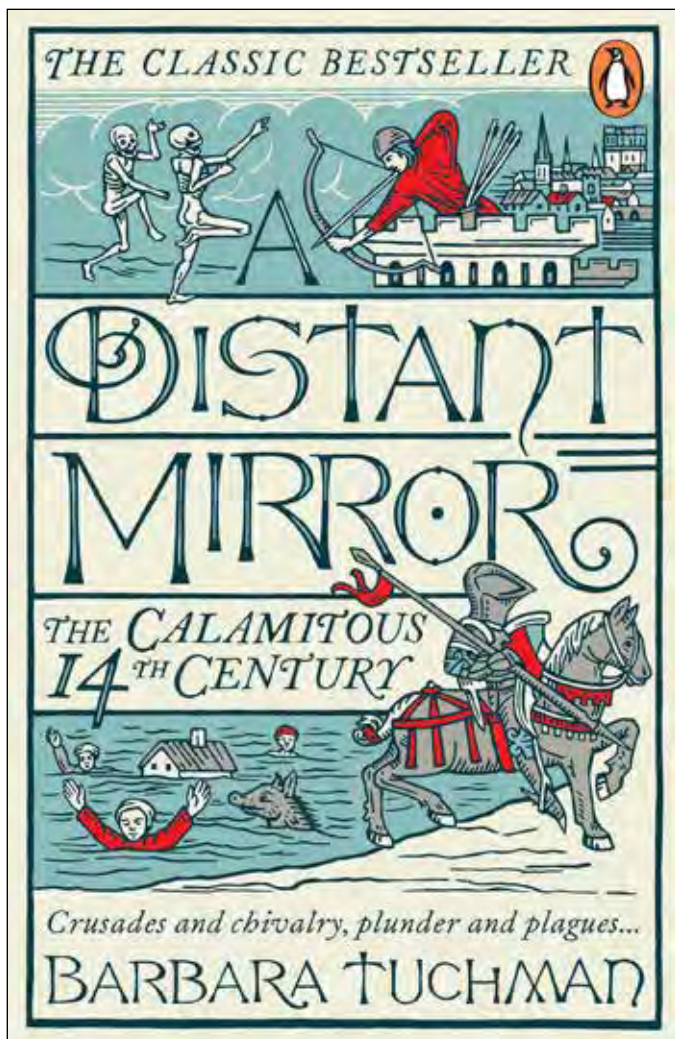
What I recalled was her graphic account of the Plague, which, because of the deaths of so many peasants (who had laboured for centuries for no reward) changed the economy of Europe: there was so little labour available after the plague that it henceforth had to be paid for.

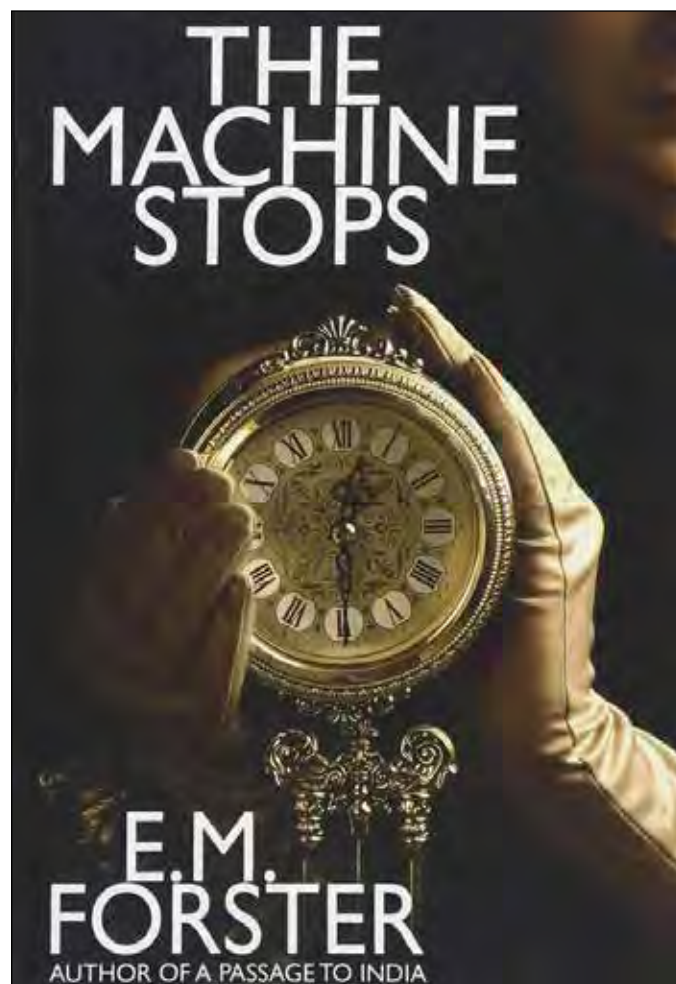
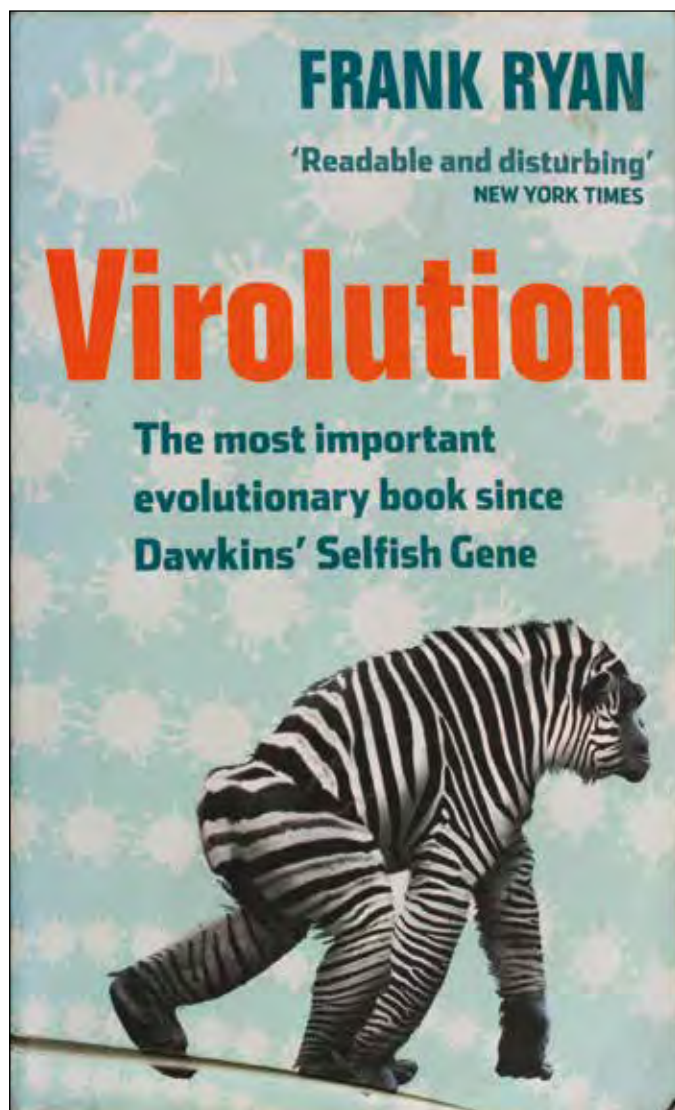
Virolution

by Frank Ryan. Published by Collins, 2009

The second book, which I read earlier in the year, is Frank Ryan's *Virolution*. This is a riveting account of the role of viruses in evolution. I will quote one of its reviews here:

Darwin's theory of evolution is still the greatest breakthrough in biological science. His explanation of the role of natural selection in driving the evolution of life on earth depended on steady variation of living things over time – but he was unable to explain how this variation occurred. In the 150 years since publication of the Origin of Species, we have discovered three main sources for this variation – mutation, hybridisation and epigenetics. Then on Sunday, 12th February, 2001 the evidence for perhaps the most extraordinary cause of variation was simultaneously released by two organisations – the code for the entire human genome. Not only was the human genome unbelievably simple (it is only ten times more complicated than a bacteria), but embedded in the code were large fragments that were derived from viruses – fragments that were vital to evolution of all organisms and the evidence for a fourth and vital source of variation – viruses.





Virovolution is the product of Dr Frank Ryan's decade of research at the frontiers of this new science – now called viral symbiosis – and the amazing revolution that it has had in these few years. As scientists begin to look for evidence of viral involvement in more and more processes, they have discovered that they are vital in nearly every case. And with this understanding comes the possibility of manipulating the role of the viruses to help fight a huge range of diseases.

The Machine Stops

by E.M. Forster

The novella, *The Machine Stops*, was written by E M Forster in 1909. Having last read it at school, my memory of it was rather vague, but I kept on thinking how much it in a way reflected where we are today.

What I recalled was that all people were living isolated, with **The Machine** that would provide them with sustenance and communication, entertainment,

diagnose ailments, and then deliver the necessary medication. And then it breaks down ... and of course there is a hero in the story. You can read the story online here: https://manybooks.net/titles/forstereother07machine_stops.html

However, there is a recent review of the tale by Will Gompertz, who writes. "*The Machine Stops* is not simply prescient; it is a jaw-droppingly, gob-smackingly, breath-takingly accurate literary description of lockdown life in 2020. If it had been written today it would be excellent, that it was written over a century ago is astonishing."

Here is one piece from the novella: "*But humanity, in its desire for comfort, had over-reached itself. It had exploited the riches of nature too far. Quietly and complacently, it was sinking into decadence, and progress had come to mean progress of the machine.*"

Read the entire review here: https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-52821993?CMP=share_btn_me&fbclid=IwAR3mXhMlteXGZtcc2_ec6s37fMi5AaWNN0vtmLpZZCE1fVgZcJzkrnnbRpk



*Indigenous South African woodland at Newlands Forest. Cape Town.
By S Molteno - Own work. Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=13185668>*