

# Southern Africa Quaker News

September 2022



**UBUNTU — A SOUTHERN AFRICAN THING**

Journal of the Religious Society of Friends in Southern Africa

Issue 250

## Southern African Quaker News

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**Cover photograph: 1988 Rietvlei Village, Transkei, A man has taken his neighbour to hospital for treatment by Susan Winters, Eastern Cape Quakers. Of this, and her other photographs in this issue, Susan says, "I documented ubuntu for 30 years without having a word for it. In preparation for my first trip to South Africa in 1988 I expected to find helpless victims and violent savages. Then, I found this. Over and over, from Cape Town to Kokstad. I didn't know what to do with it. It was often misunderstood by others. I didn't have a word for it."**

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# Editorial

The Quakers of Southern Africa are a mixed bag of people from many different walks of life, and this issue reflects this, with Quaker reactions to what is happening in the world around us, such as the ongoing poverty in Zimbabwe and reaction to the repeal of Roe vs Wade in the US.

We also draw attention to Ubuntu with The Friends World Consultative Conference (FWCC) is to be held in South Africa in 2024, with that very theme. This was discussed at some length at the last Reps Meeting at the end of July, and incoming YM Co-Clerk, Gregory Mthemu-Salter has written about this.

With the state the world is in, the extreme in weather conditions in the Northern Hemisphere, the ongoing conflict in the Ukraine, the staggering and growing inequality in the world, it is long overdue to consider that there are other – and better – ways of addressing the problems humanity is facing. To this end the next issue of the SAQN will focus on such issues, and we ask Friends to share their concerns with us and what they see as ways of addressing these very complex issues.

Please submit your contributions to a new SAQN email address: [editorsaqn@gmail.com](mailto:editorsaqn@gmail.com) by the end of September.

*Wouter Holleman and  
Bronwen Ellis*



*Above: 1990 Khayelitsha Township, Cape Town, Women work together to collect scrap. Photo by Susan Winters.*



*Above: 2014 Grahamstown, Eastern Cape, A member of the audience joins traditional dancer in their presentation to the annual arts festival.*

*Below: 1988 A Crossroads resident uses a single text to teach children in a school built by the community. Photos by Susan Winters.*



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# ON UBUNTU

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## Southern Africa's Gift to the World

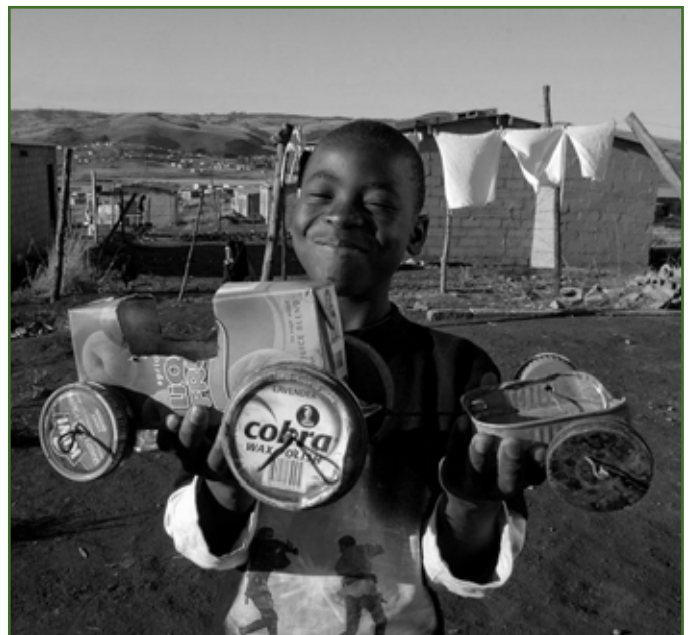
*Gregory Mthembu-Salter, Quaker Community of the Western Cape*

Participating in a SAYM Representatives' Meeting in late July helped me to realise what an extraordinary gift to the world ubuntu is. Despite Southern Africa's long, brutal and bloody exposure to political and economic systems imposed from outside, systems that have forcibly asserted the supremacy of military power and the exploitation of the labour of the many by the few, and have proclaimed the inevitable triumph of individualism and the zero sum game - where I only win when you lose – this region's peoples have stubbornly and lovingly held on to the belief that *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, roughly translating as 'a person is a person through other people'.

Despite all the history and all the pain, children all across Southern Africa are still raised to believe in ubuntu, to believe that our humanity is tied up with the humanity of others, ensuring that successive

generations here have continued to find ways to give meaning to this belief in their daily, social, work and (admittedly more rarely these days) their political lives. This dogged adherence to ubuntu in the face of so much pressure and violence that asserts the contrary is an achievement of spirit, and one that can enrich the world, encouraging others too to dig deep into their cultural reserves and find antidotes to the remorseless and deadly logic of Anthropocene era capitalism.

I used to worry that ubuntu was a bit too human-centered and did not seem adequately to address humanity's relationship to other living things, and, indeed, to Earth itself. In the contribution of Eastern Cape Quakers to discussions on Ubuntu, however, Friend Kholekile Tshanga has shared that in his upbringing, the term applied "towards all humans and the environment, plants, animals, the rocks, the water, the air...".



*Above: 2007 EASTERN CAPE, A Transkei youngster, Azola Ngcaweni, shows off his talents at building toys out of discarded items in a recently built community near Umzimkulu.*

*Above left: 2003 EASTERN CAPE, AIDS activist Nozuko Ngcwani, right, and a friend teach her friend's baby how to walk, in a dwelling they shared in rural Transkei village.*

*Left: 1993 EASTERN CAPE, Members of a Catholic Church in a village outside Qonce (King Williams Town) greet each other with joy during the service.*



*Above: 2006 EASTERN CAPE, A newly married couple dreams of the day they will have their own home in this new community near Umzimlulu.*

This is reassuring.

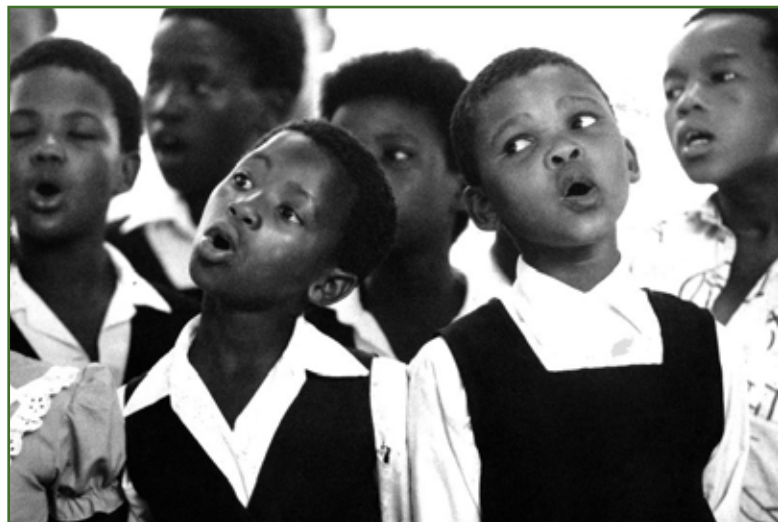
It remains highly challenging, of course, for us to figure out quite what ubuntu means today for our relationship with our much-desecrated planet, where we have, for example, increasingly come to rely for our basic needs on goods and services made possible by the output of industrialised mining, a sector which notoriously takes the decidedly old-school approach of dominion in its relationship to the natural world.

I was inspired in pondering this by the fine suggestion during the RM that we begin as SAYM to reflect on not only possible Advices, but also possible Queries about ubuntu. I hope we can as Meetings lend our collective insights to this task and penetrate to the heart of the matter, producing between us a choice few succinct and wise Advices and Queries.

Reflecting on it now, a rush of questions suggest themselves. How do I express ubuntu in my family relationships? In my relationships with neighbours?



*Above: 2000 EASTERN CAPE Transkei Health Educator Philippina Mabuntana comforts a young village girl whose family has lost a newborn baby.*



*Above: 1990 KHAYELITSHA TOWNSHIP, CAPE TOWN, School children sing during a weekend celebration held for Christmas.*

With other neighbourhoods? With victims of abuse, exploitation and crime? With rivers and the sea? In my relationship to the air? To livestock? To the soil?

These are searching questions. When I think about my answers, I am embarrassed. Perhaps you are too. These questions make me see that I am enmeshed in a system that results in my habitually failing to respect, honour and care for this diversity of relationship. They make me see that I still have work to do in enlarging the spaces in my life, our lives, where ubuntu reigns. And they give me a sense of what this respect, honour and care might look like. And for that, I am grateful.

*Photographs and cover photographs by Susan Winters, Eastern Cape Quakers.*



*Above: 1988 BETANI VILLAGE, TRANSKEI HOMELAND, The women of Betani sing as they make bricks to make a pumphouse that will hold a pump donated by a concerned corporation. The pump was sent to pump clean water from a river to the village at the top of the hill.*



*Above: 2010 EASTERN CAPE: Men use their donkey cart to move around and collect items near Peelton Village.*



*Above: 2011 NATAL PROVINCE: the body of a 17 year old girl who died of AIDS is carried to the family home in the village Singisi. Neighbours mourned her death as she passed their home.*

*Right: 1995 EASTERN CAPE: Health Educator Philippina Mabuntana carries a young man with AIDS the last steps to get to his home. That was the beginning stages of the epidemic that swept through the country.*



*Above: 2011 KWAZULU-NATAL: Dr. Clare Hoffman watches over Nqobile Ngcaweni, 17, who has struggled with HIV and AIDS since birth, during church services in Kokstad.*



*Left: 2011 EASTERN CAPE: Nurses at a rural hospital sing to a young woman who is hospitalised with AIDS. She died a few days later.*



*Above: 2000 EASTERN CAPE: In Mdanstane Township Neighbours care for a man who is dying of AIDS. Their help was voluntary and included giving him food and medications, and keeping the home clean, washing clothing and bedding.*



*Above: 2011 EASTERN CAPE: The children of rural Transkei village grieve for a member of their family who died of AIDS at age 17. They had all grown up together.*

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# TESTIMONY

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## Sheldon Griswold Weeks

1931 – 2022

He was born on November 18th, 1931 in Manhattan and grew up in Brooklyn, New York. He graduated from Brooklyn Friends High School in 1949 where he was active in art, writing and photography.

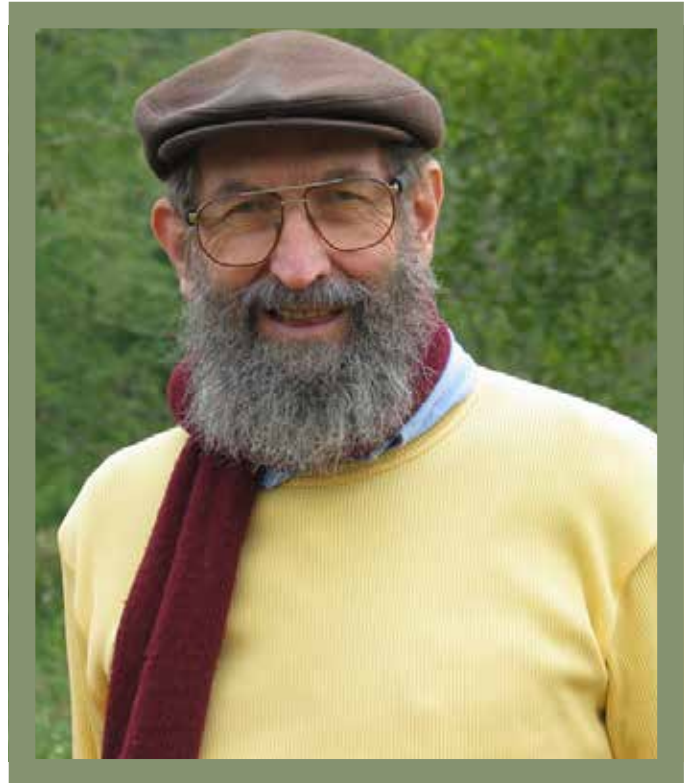
His love of traveling began in 1948, when he was 16 years old and the family drove to Fairbanks, Alaska and back. He got a job in Fairbanks as a carpenter's assistant building staff houses at the University of Alaska. They had many adventures in the outback of Alaska, experiences that helped endear him to travel and the wilderness. In 1949, he spent the summer in Europe cycling around England, Scotland, Germany, and Italy. He returned to Europe as a seaman in 1950, spending most of the summer at a World Council of Churches workcamp in Napoli, Italy where they were building the foundations of a hospital, as 90% of the city was still in ruins from World War II.

The summer of 1950, he also participated in the International Union of Students Congress in Prague, at a time when Americans were banned from going to Czechoslovakia. After being hospitalized in Prague and Hamburg for serous meningitis, he returned to Swarthmore College on a merchant vessel.

At Swarthmore, he was excited by English literature, intrigued by psychology, and history. He found his milieu in extra-curricular activities and in writing under the pen name, Thomas Paine. He began a lifelong habit of acquiring master passkeys.

The summer of 1951, he was a social group worker in West Harlem at the Manhattanville Neighborhood Center (MNC) working with troubled youth. In 1951-1952 he spent a year abroad at Edinburgh University, studying anthropology, sociology and furthering his interests in history and psychology. While there he organized a weekend workcamp in the Dumbiedykes, and helped host the first student delegation from the People's Republic of China.

In June 1952, he joined a merchant vessel in Genoa, Italy, as a seaman to Karachi, Pakistan, to spend the summer at workcamps with Service Civil International, first in Lalukhet helping Muslim refugees from India build homes. Then he walked across a closed border in the desert to get to the Simla Hills in India where they were building a hospital. His return to Swarthmore by merchant vessel from New Delhi was delayed by sandflies fever.



The summer of 1953 he returned to Alaska, this time working as a civil engineer ranked Government Service 4, working on the rebuilding of the Alaska Highway between Tok Junction and the Canadian border. With permission from the Tetlin Indian Reservation elders, he built in collaboration with Ricky Call from Williams College, a cabin above the Tanana River where they lived off the land while working 12 hours a day, seven days a week, employed by the Alaska Road Commission to inspect the contractor work.

After graduating from Swarthmore College in 1954 with a BA in Psychology. He chose to work during the summer of '54 as a social group organizer at the MNC and Morningside Community Center.

His next job was with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) in New York City for five years as Projects Secretary and then Youth Secretary. He was responsible for workcamps, and many other AFSC activities.

He volunteered in non-violent direct-action projects with the Fellowship of Reconciliation, War Resisters League, and the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy. He was arrested and imprisoned in Manhattan Municipal Jail for not taking shelter during an international air-raid drill. Other cases related to his life that went to the Supreme Court involved the right to travel, the right to not take a loyalty oath (when employed at Harvard), and the right to be a conscientious objector on non-religious grounds. He worked closely on a variety of peace marches and

local demonstrations on anti-nuclear and civil rights organizations.

Sheldon joined the Quakers, in 1956, as a member of the New York Monthly Meeting and Brooklyn Preparatory Meeting. In August 1957 he married Sara, a teacher, seamstress and interior designer. They welcomed their daughters, Sara (1958) and Abigail (1960).

From 1959-1960 he was a graduate student at the Putney Graduate School of Teacher Education, at Glen Maples, Vermont, which in 1964 became Antioch University New England. Highlights included studying "teaching practice" at the Ecole d'Humanite in Goldern, Switzerland, and a study tour with the graduate school director and Quaker, Morris Mitchell, to the UK, Sweden, Soviet Union, and Poland.

As a doctoral student at Harvard University Graduate School of Education in Boston, Massachusetts in the early 1960s, he

became involved in comparative education. A Ford Foundation Fellowship allowed him, Sally, and their two daughters to go to East Africa in 1962 and 1963 to research education practices in Kenya and Uganda. In Uganda he met his second wife Mary Kironde, a visual artist and educator, he remarried in

1964. They had two children, Harold (1964) and Edisa (1966), both born in Boston, where Sheldon completed a Doctorate of Education in Sociology and Anthropology from Harvard in 1968.

From 1969-72 Sheldon returned to Uganda where he taught at Makerere University, and then from 1972-74 he taught at the University of Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

From 1974-1991, he was research professor and Director of the Educational Research Unit, at the University of Papua New Guinea (PNG). He reunited with his sweetheart from the 50's, Gudrun Schulz Gay, a concert violinist and music teacher, who became his third wife and joined him in PNG in 1980. Their daughter, Kristina (1980) was born in Port Moresby, PNG. One of many projects he initiated was the innovative Secondary Schools Community Extension Project supporting rural youth in their transition from boarding schools back into their communities.



*Sheldon and Gudrun*

In 1991 he moved to Botswana with his family to help found and be the Director and eventually the Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at the University of Botswana until 2002. He remained a sociologist interested in problems of development and change, including being President of the Southern African Comparative and History of Education Society (1998-2002); editor of Southern African Review of Education (1996-2004); and foundation Director of BEST: Evaluation Services Team Botswana (1997-2013). He was team leader in multiple studies investigating educational goals and outcomes in Botswana and other parts of Africa.

In Botswana, he remained an active Quaker, joining the Botswana Monthly Meeting, and served as clerk of the Central and Southern African Yearly Meeting and edited the Southern Africa Quaker News. He helped manage two organizations facilitated by the Quakers:

the Kagisano Society's Women's Shelter Project, the only women's shelter in the county, and the Kagisong Centre, a one-star hotel and conference center whose profits helped fund the Shelter.

Sheldon was a prolific writer. From 1961-2015 he wrote under three pen names, Moto Wanachi, Sasa Majuma and Sheridan Griswold,

for several newspapers, including the Christian Science Monitor, Africa and a local daily newspaper in Botswana.

In June 2013, Sheldon experienced double pneumonia with complications to the heart.

As a consequence, in November 2013, Sheldon and Gudrun moved to Vermont to live with their daughter Kristina. They were members of the West Brattleboro Quaker Worship Group, and Sheldon focused on writing short stories about his life. In June 2021, Sheldon was diagnosed with esophageal cancer and he passed away peacefully at home on May 4th, 2022. Sheldon is survived by his younger sister Elinor Weeks, his five children, two stepchildren, one unofficially adopted child, fourteen grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

*This is a shortened version of that compiled by Sheldon Weeks himself.*



## Caring For Creation: An Introduction to Meeting for Worship at RM Held on 27 March 2022

*Amanda Gibberd, Quaker Community of Johannesburg*

Caring for creation is a theme that has run through Quaker ministry for hundreds of years, starting with John Woolman (1772), “The produce of the earth is a gift from our gracious creator to the inhabitants, and to impoverish the earth now to support outward greatness appears to be an injury to the succeeding age.” (*Quaker Faith and Practice*, 25.01)

About 200 years later, London YM (1988) wrote, “Our planet is seriously ill and we can feel the pain ... we [are] reminded of the many ways in which the future health of the earth is under threat as a result of our selfishness, ignorance and greed. Our earth needs attention, respect, love, care and prayer.” (*Quaker Faith and Practice*, 25.02)

And in 1994, Audrey Urry is recorded in *Quaker Faith and Practice* (25.04) as saying, “All species and the Earth itself have interdependent roles within Creation.... the web of creation [is] a three-ply thread; wherever we touch it we affect justice and peace, and the health of all everywhere.”

Our interdependence has been made manifest by a war thousands of miles away: as oil prices soar, we recognise that everything that has to be transported will increase in cost. At the same time, the countries that supply 15% of the world’s wheat are being devastated by war; and the planting season cannot happen. Russia supplies significant amounts of the nitrogen, phosphate and potassium for fertilizers. As it becomes more expensive to grow crops, smaller farmers will pull out of production. Rich countries will buy up stocks of grain, making it difficult, if not impossible for poorer countries to feed their people. Famine is a real possibility, and the connection between peace and sustainability is clearer than ever. Friends, let us prepare ourselves to extend help and practical compassion to all those of our Quaker family – and beyond – who are and will be facing increasing hardship.

As we go into the silence let us focus on letting the Light show us the way to prepare for difficult times ahead and to provide us with the courage and love we need to see that of God in everyone, and everything.

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and right doing  
There is a field. Meet me there.*

*Rumi [1207–1273]*

### **Amanda’s witness during MfW**

This contribution made me think about Joseph and the situation of famine in the Middle East, thousands of years ago. I wondered if I should remind myself of it at a deeper level rather than my memory of a certain musical, based on the account of the historical event in the Bible. Reading it again made me admire the logistics and careful planning that had taken place through Joseph’s foresight, to avoid the most negative effects of the famine.

Reading further, I realised the importance of the events that took place just after the famine ended. Joseph’s brothers were worried that Joseph would be angry with them because of what they had done, and that he would take his revenge against them. After travelling to talk to Joseph to ask for forgiveness, this is the account of Joseph’s response in the Bible: Genesis 50 v15-21.

*After the death of their father, Joseph’s brothers said, “What if Joseph still hates us and plans to pay us back for all the harm we did to him?”*

*But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid; I can’t put myself in the place of God. You plotted evil against me, but God turned it into good in order to preserve the lives of many people who are alive today because of what happened. You have nothing to fear. I will take care of you and your children”. So, he reassured them with kind words that touched their hearts.*

I had not realised that this famine story is a story of family reconciliation. We know that this went far beyond the decade or so of the effects of the famine on the people of the region. But reading it again, and relating it to now is very powerful. I believe that there is something more for us to learn in this story that can help is in our dealings with the current food shortage crises.



# Blessed Be The Fruit

## Bronwen Ellis, Quaker Community of the Western Cape

I read *The Handmaid's Tale* by Margaret Atwood in the early 2000s when I was a student. It was a gruesome story set in the fictional country of Gilead, a dystopian society that is born out of what used to be the United States of America. In this county women are dehumanised, second class citizens. Their roles are: be pleasurable to men as a Jezebel, raise children as a wife, cook and clean as a Martha or be a breeding vessel for childless families as a handmaid. In this extremist 'Christian' society, they are forbidden to read or write, may have no paid work. Those among them considered sinful, who are also believed to be fertile and forced into the position of Handmaids, to have sex with the wealthier men of society to bear children for his family and redeem themselves in the process. These characters lived what any woman, would consider a nightmare. I know I would. Margaret Atwood, made sure that everything she put in the novel was something that had been done to women at some point in History.

It is probably needless to say where I am going with this, with the recent changes of abortion laws in the United States, and the overturning of the Roe v. Wade ruling. It scared me and at the same time I felt so thankful to be in South Africa. Here we have crime and power outages and corruption in the government, but that government recognises that my body is my own and I make the choices about it. I understand that while the current situation in America is not as extreme as the fictional world of Gilead, it still has the potential to get worse.

This is always a sensitive and painful topic to discuss no matter who you are. It is seldom that it is talked about without someone getting very upset. I looked into what Quakers think about abortion rights before I even considered going to any meeting. From Quaker Faith and Practice Chapter 22.54-57 and 22.59, I feel it is safe to say the following. It is always a painful and unhappy choice to have to make for a woman and for those close to her, but ultimately, it is her choice to make, either way. One testimony touched me a lot, from a Nurse who did not wish to assist in an abortion, because to her it really was a human life and felt she had to say no to being part of ending it. Her choice to say no, was completely respected and she received no unpleasantness from it, she was simply moved to a different hospital. From this she concludes that if she was given the right to choose, then it was right and compassionate to respect another's choice and she should not interfere with whatever they do. I do not see how Quakers can say we believe in equality between men and women and not support a woman's right to

choose. Many may be upset with me as I say this, I can only ask you respect my right to say it.

In 2019 Margaret Atwood released a long-awaited sequel to *The Handmaid's Tale*, called *The Testaments*. Largely in response, I think, to the TV series of *The Handmaid's Tale* that has been so popular. I was not in the best state of mind at the time and decided to put reading it aside. Earlier this year, however I did read it. I should warn you I may spoil the story for you a little but I will try my best not to. It was not as heart breaking as I expected. It is set fifteen years later and is the stories of other women in the regime. Part of it takes place among the resistance in Neighbouring Canada. The Quakers are featured in the story, working with the resistance and helping to smuggler women out of Gilead in an underground rail road, to safety.

These are fictional Quakers. We are not. The next question is what are we going to do in response to what is starting to look like a dystopia across the Atlantic? What are we going to do to protect women's rights in our own country. Can we live up to the high expectations that Atwood has of us? I feel we need to be a little more than just talking in our living rooms.

In all situations like this when emotions run high, it is important to take care of ourselves first. This is a sad time and we need to make the time to be in silence, together or alone and support each other. Then we need to ask what we can do to help, and do it.

We may be limited due to distance but we can make a start. I have noticed in life, once we get going, we often find better things as we do. All I can think, for starters is donate to organisations that are doing their best over there to undo this terrible mistake and to organisation on the ground level who are helping women get the medical treatment they need. This may include travelling across the border to Mexico. These are organisations that I think are a very good places to start: <https://abortioncarenetwork.org/> and <https://www.wetestify.org/> They are by no means the last, if I can encourage you to search further and find something better please do.

Someone may have asked by now what does this have to do with anyone in Southern Africa, but I think it is important for us too, because ideas spread. During the Covid-19 pandemic, did you come across someone who believed: Ivermectin as a better bet against a killer virus, than a vaccination, despite the scientific data to the contrary? Women's rights are shaky enough here as it is. Something like this succeeding in another country, could only help spread outdated ideas in our own neck of the woods. So, we need to do what we can to help and look to what we can to help women's rights locally.

When I first read the scenes involving the Quakers in *The Testaments*, I thought 'Hell, yes ... Those are my people!' only now it has become a question, 'What are my people going to do to help?'

# The Root Cause of Poverty in Zimbabwe

*Phillemon Takarindwa Chirimambowa, Bulawayo Quaker Meeting*



Quakers See the Light of Christ in You



The state of poverty in Zimbabwe is beyond description. Zimbabwe is currently experiencing complex problems. One wonders how people are surviving and coping up with those complex issues.

The major issue that has led people into poverty is corruption that has reared its ugly head in every government institution and private sector. **Corruption** in Zimbabwe is worse than **sanctions**. Corruption has literally crippled the country. We rejoice in our suffering knowing that suffering produces endurance and endurance produces character and character hope. With hope we can never be disappointed as we look forward to brighter days. God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit which has been given to us.

## Sources of Hope

Zimbabwe is far from achieving sustainable development goals which were initiated in the Brutland report of 1987. These include ending poverty in all its forms and eradicating hunger. Zimbabweans are currently experiencing multiple complex issues such as: drought, hunger, HIV/AIDS, poverty and violence. However, in order to deal with these issues efficiently and effectively, it is important to keep hope alive. Poverty leads to mistrust, creates enemies rather than friends and hopelessness. Poverty deprives one of reasoning capacity and being innovative. Lack of innovation hinders development that can alleviate poverty. Poverty leads to fatalistic attitudes (desiring acceptance) which is destructive. There is proverb in Ndebele which says **akugoba lingeqondiswe. Meaning there is no problem that cannot be solved. The very people who suffer the most, if given encouragement, can improve a situation like ours.**

We are under structural conflicts which denies people their basic rights as outlined by M. Max-Neef which include, food, clean water, shelter, protection, understanding, rest, identity, creativity, participation and

freedom. We are experiencing physical or direct political violence, beatings and killings as well as structural violence. 75% of the population live in poverty.

The issue of environment has become a global issue and we are currently experiencing unusual weather patterns such as floods, high temperatures, and extremely cold temperatures. The livelihoods of farmers such as cattle, goats are destroyed due to drought or floods making the farmers poorer. Due to high unemployment in the country poor people are cutting down trees for sale for firewood as way of making a living and as they do that they are creating ecosystem imbalance. During our SYM 2019 one of our shared Quaker values is sustainability – the earth and environment. In Zimbabwe we experiencing the following environmental problems:

1. **Human conflicts with wild animals.**
2. **Gold panning.**
3. **Wild fire.**
4. **Destruction of trees for fire wood.**

With the above stated problems, it can be deduced that when drought occurs wild animals resort to feeding on crops thereby destroying farmer's crops which in turn reduces yields. Due to drought and veld fires, live stocks are affected as well. There is no compensation to the affected communities.

Due to high unemployment young men and women have resorted to unlawful gold panning. This has resulted in high pollution in water sources. This therefore poses as a threat to life in water and humans as well since water is unsafe for consumption. Uncovered pits are a threat to cattle and goats as they fall into those pits and die.

**Zimbabwe is a leaking bucket, with all that is most valuable: skilled people, wealth, investments, jobs, affordable food and education, confidence and co-operation pouring out. What will be left out for my children and grandchildren?**

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**'Corruption has literally crippled the country.'**

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# Confessions of a Reluctant Quaker

## *Michael Sperger, Abingdon, Pennsylvania Meeting*

In the summer of 2013, I agreed to serve as the interim treasurer at Abingdon Friends School (AFS) for one year. I'm just completing that "one-year" term now, only seven years behind schedule. Meanwhile, in the summer of 2018, I agreed to serve as a co-clerk of the Finance Committee at Abingdon (Pa.) Meeting. Between these two roles, I've now served for more than a decade as a Quaker finance clerk. This is longer than I've held any other job in my life, other than being a husband and dad.

It's funny to me that I ended up in this place. For one thing, I grew up hearing from my family that I wasn't very good at maths. That isn't true, but the myth persisted for a long time, and made numbers of all kinds feel scary to me. I majored in English in college. I've never held a professional finance job of any kind. My own personal finances are a work in progress, to put it kindly.

In my years as a Friend, I have always felt that my true calling was pastoral care, not finance. I stepped down from the Care of Members Committee in order to begin serving on the Finance Committee at our meeting, and it was not an easy transition for me. Still, if we are what we repeatedly do, then I must reluctantly admit that I am a Quaker finance person after all.

### **Facts and Feelings**

Most of us have a hard time talking about money. Sadly, our strongest feeling about money might be shame of one kind or another. This feeling of shame could be rooted in our upbringing, our level of exposure to poverty, or the current state of our own finances. As a result, we may not have spent much time exploring our own feelings about money. Those feelings might come out of us in surprising ways when we're talking about money with other people.

We also lack a shared language and practice for working on financial topics with each other. Some schools teach kids about personal finance, but relatively few schools are insisting that kids learn how to read a balance sheet before they graduate. People who don't have financial training or a finance-related career often feel shut out of the world of finance.

Within the Quaker world in the United States, we also live with two financial issues that might be less common elsewhere in our lives: a persistent narrative of decline and the special challenges posed by forever money.

We seem convinced as a group that Quakerism is doomed to fade away. We believe this despite the incredible longevity of our meetings and schools. Abingdon Meeting had already existed for nearly 100 years when the Declaration of Independence was written!

This narrative of decline shows up constantly in my experiences with Quakers and finance. For example, someone at our meeting might say that our meeting is living beyond its means and running deficits every year. Never mind that our donations are exceeding our forecasts every year; that we're averaging a net surplus for the past seven years; or that our deficits and surpluses average out to less than 1 percent of our operating budget, meaning we are operating well within normal variances. The facts are right there on the page. But the feeling of decline dominates our conversations, as long as we allow it.

Meanwhile, the history of Quakerism tells us that early Friends were well-known for their trustworthiness in business. They were thrifty, clever, and disciplined. Those generations of Friends before us invested in the future—our present—by creating trusts and endowments that were built to last pretty much forever.

I didn't have any experience with asset management before I started serving in these finance roles. I had to learn about things like draw rates, and how to conduct a portfolio review. I also learned that most people have a hard time knowing how to think about forever money: Do we have a million dollars right now, or not? Is our meeting actually wealthy, or is it poor?

Our confusion about forever money can lead to the "magic Quaker elves" problem in our communities. Let's say we want to invest in a project that requires a fair bit of money, and the project is not already part of our budget. With a little bit of effort, we can often find some long-forgotten trust to pay for some or all of the project. Just like that, the magic Quaker elves come to the rescue!

This feels like using a credit card: spending money gives a kind of "sugar rush" in the moment; it doesn't feel quite so good when the bill arrives later. In the same way, spending forever money today can have long-lasting effects on the financial future of the community. But it's not always easy for people to understand those effects.

We have run adult education sessions at Abingdon Meeting to talk about the many layers of money and time that exist within our meeting. Because people come and go over the years, I suspect this education effort is with us forever. That's okay, because we are all overlooking the very best thing about Quaker finance—the chance to form a healthier relationship with money.

### **Stewardship without fear**

Working on the Finance Committee at Abingdon has given me a chance to think and feel differently about money in every part of my life. I'm still learning how

to talk about this with other people, but I already know it has become a kind of superpower for me. In that spirit, I invite you to consider some new ways of relating to money in your own life and in the life of your community of Friends.

Let's start with a fresh look at capitalism. We need to recognize that we live in a system that compels us to think of money in terms of scarcity, competition, and fear. But we don't have to bring those feelings into the lives of our Quaker communities. When I started serving as treasurer for AFS, our Finance Committee was made up of people from business backgrounds, like me (I work in sales for a software company.) We all knew that we were serving a not-for-profit school, but we couldn't help thinking about AFS in terms of a business. We talked about profit margins and debt ratios: financial concepts that we knew from our professional lives.

In those days, we behaved a little bit like gladiators, moving from one arena to another as we came to finance meetings after work. We showed up ready to do battle with lions. But the result was that we were treating the staff of the school with suspicion and contempt for doing their jobs. We looked for bad management and financial ruin around every corner, because that's what our day jobs had taught us to see.

After a year or two, I wised up. I asked the Membership Committee clerk to seek out people with non-profit operating experience to serve on the School Committee. We needed hospital executives, charity administrators, heads of other schools: people who understood that the job of a mission-driven organization is to spend every possible dollar in support of that mission.

Over time, I've found this query most helpful when clerking in financial settings: *How will we know when our valid concerns about stewardship might be leading us toward unhelpful fears?*

This query can put Friendly financial conversations on a more useful footing. We are not called to be passive or wilfully ignorant of challenges. We are simply called to be present for our mission and for each other. We are called to walk cheerfully, not with distrust and doubt.

### **Matters of Faith**

About three years into my one-year term as the interim treasurer at AFS, the school began its first major capital campaign in more than a decade. We conducted a feasibility study for a new athletic centre, built a case statement and a gift pyramid, and started calling on potential donors. I had been involved in fund raising work at the school over the years, but this was a thrilling new adventure for all of us.

Every fund raising campaign has its surprises and setbacks. At one point in the middle of the campaign, the school's Finance Committee met to discuss our progress. One key gift had not come in as hoped, and a

few other key tasks were still unresolved. It felt like we had a long way to go; the team was feeling down.

Just then, I had a flash of inspiration. I heard myself say aloud, "We're a faith-based institution. Seems like we need to have some faith right now."

In the end, the athletic centre opened ahead of our original schedule.

Scripture defines faith as "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). I don't think of my own faith as a belief in magic. Quite the opposite. My faith reminds me that in every moment, the future contains a range of possible outcomes. Some of them might sound better to me than others, but that's mainly because my imagination is limited. It is likely that things will come down right, not because an invisible deity gave us what we wanted when we asked nicely but because our community can handle whatever comes our way.

My faith is in the Divine Spark within each of us. We have such a hard time remembering our own resilience, as individuals and as a community. So the query I ask of myself in finance work is this: *How can I place my faith in this community right now?*

Our faith is the only thing we truly control in our work. If we come to our work with faith in each other, we will experience the same surprises and setbacks that were always coming to us. But we will accept those moments as our chance to shine.

### **Talking about the future**

I've found in the life of my meeting that we talk much more about the past and the present than we do about the future. This has always felt strange to me. I've always thought that a faith based on continuing revelation should feel comfortable working in the future tense.

In so many ways, Friends have always lived in the future: a future of equality and justice that most people still hope to experience in their own lives. The racial balance at AFS today, with nearly 50 percent being students of colour, matches the overall racial balance that the United States will achieve by the end of this decade. Our kids enjoy the great advantage of learning how to live in their own future before it arrives.

For these reasons, the narrative of decline has never truly matched my own experience of life as a Friend. I believe that in the rest of my lifetime, we are more likely to see growth than decline. The search for meaning is eternal in human life. We have a faith and practice that happen to fit with modern life incredibly well. Our schools are full of energy and potential. It seems to me that a very bright future awaits us.

So we must remember that continuing revelation is an invitation to growth—not growth for its own sake, which Edward Abbey called "the ideology of the cancer cell," but authentic growth in the form of deepening

community. That could take the form of greater numbers in our membership and our finances; it could also take the form of stronger faith and richer practice. If we are called to grow our Quaker communities, we should open ourselves to this blessing. We should have faith in each other and in our ability to rise to this calling.

We must use every available resource to bring about justice in our time. We live in an age of structural inequality, which affects every discussion we have about money. The problems we hope to solve can feel much too big sometimes, which can lead us to inaction.

The query that I like to use for staying focused on action is this: *What can we do right now in this community to invest in a just and joyful future?*

There is great strength in our numbers, regardless of whether or not they are growing. We may even find that working for justice in our communities will attract people to join us, much as we experienced with the Baby Boomers during the '60s and '70s. Quakerism is built for times like these.

### **Care and loyalty**

My favourite thing I've learned from Quaker finance work is the concept of fiduciary duty. It's a legal concept in the United States and other systems derived from

English law. As a treasurer or a clerk of finance, I have a duty of care and a duty of loyalty to the organizations I serve. I must act with the best interests of the organization at heart, and I must not engage in self-dealing or other acts of harm.

I think of my Quaker life as a relay race. The care of our meeting and school gets handed from one generation to the next. My duty while carrying these batons is to make the best choices I can during my part of the race, while giving the best possible start to those who come after me.

I invite you to consider how your own relationship with money affects the life of your Friends community. Are you taking care of both the present and the future? Are you working against the tide of inequality to seek justice? Are you finding a helpful balance between alertness and fear?

If you are doing financial work in the Quaker world, I hope you will carry your own duties of care and loyalty joyfully. This is wonderful work that we are called to do. And if you haven't served as a treasurer or finance committee clerk yet, give it a try—maybe just for a year—and see what happens.

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# QUAKERS IN ACTION

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## River Rescue – Part 2

*Helen Holleman, Eastern Cape Quakers*

It's not really accurate to talk about 'the river' in Grahamstown/Makhanda; the city sits in a bowl of hills, forming a catchment from which many small streams and wetlands feed into the river that eventually runs into the sea at Port Alfred. Up until March 2020, we

concentrated on a section that was conveniently close to the city, and during the first lockdown, we continued working there, and Evans Street (below) was beginning to look pretty good.



So, come July 2020, I headed across town into a section called Vukani, which has a reputation for being 'dangerous'.

The verdant green of the Vukani valley concluded my last article; a sight for sore eyes, but nauseating for noses – the lushness is the result of the sewage that flows into the watercourse.

Overgrazing further up the valley caused soil erosion which silted up the bridges completely; rubbish provided the finishing touches



### July 2020

Every time we went to clean up at Vukani, the children simply arrived, ready to help. The rule was: If you've got a facemask, we'll give you gloves. On every occasion, they set to with a will and we'd fill a skip in under two hours. They came so regularly that we started a pop-up school led by Jess Cockburn and Preven Chetty. When the skip was full, the children would return the gloves, wash hands, make a socially distanced circle and tell us what they knew about rivers, and we'd tell them what we knew. A similar pop-up school developed in Evans Street, too.





For the rest of 2020, we concentrated our efforts in Vukani and Evans Street. Preven led the children downstream to the confluence with the Bloukraans/ Mrwetyana; a group of interested adults from Port Elizabeth and Grahamstown walked upriver to look for the source and assess the kinds of problems: alien vegetation clogging the watercourse, overgrazing leading to erosion and silting, rubbish dumping, and the inevitable sewerage



... The bridge at Evans Street is largely clear, thanks to Elizabeth’s vigilance and the help of people who live near it. And near to it I was shown a spring of clear water that gently bubbles up and from which people can get a little clean water. Once, not so long ago, all the Makhanda rivers were like that!

**2021**

The second wave of Covid provided an opportunity to spend some time moving River Rescue towards NGO status. I’ve had an opportunity to share our exploits with the Makhanda Residents’ Association, with learners at PJ Olivier, with teachers at Kingswood, with Jess Cockburn’s Honours students from the Department from Environmental Science, and with Community Engagement at Rhodes. One of our dreams is to get groups of people to ‘adopt a part of the river’ near them.

There’s a LOT of work to do: the valley that leads up to Sun City, through Ghost Town is horrific: steep and inaccessible, but at the top there’s a small spring of clear water. This is the second small spring that I’ve been shown since we started working in this catchment.

We’ve also walked up to the top just below Extension 10 where there is a wetland that feeds into the tributary that we’ve been working on. The view from the top is breath taking – but one

doesn’t want to breathe too deeply because a sewage pipe leaks into the wetland.

In a sense, we’re working ‘backwards’, moving upstream from Jarvis Street, making contact with the folk who live on either side of the river as we go, simply working there, answering their questions, stimulating interest and hope. Evans Street is a park now, swings and slide installed, grass mown, and people have asked, “How did you do that?” Our response is to go to where they are and do the same thing, finding a local champion if we can and working together to restore the river to health. No one gets paid, everyone comes only if and when they want to. Wherever we work, the children come – unasked and enthusiastic – to help. Their energy is astonishing and their delight infectious. It’s a way of opening up the community to our efforts, and of teaching the children about the rivers on which the lives of everyone and everything depend.

I’ve learned (am learning still) SO much from ‘mucking about’ in rivers – it’s led to new philosophies, new attitudes, new friendships. I recommend it to anyone who wants to feel truly connected to the wonders of this world again and to the people who live in it. Something about pulling muck out of water brings out the best in those who do it!



*Uthando lwemilambo (for the love of rivers)*

# The Friends Ambulance Unit in South Africa — Part 2

Anthony Barlow

**Tuesday 28th July 1942 – Durban**



My dearest

[.....] We now have some work in a civil hospital, but it has a military section too, with a Lt Col as the medical super-intendant. The Matron has a most forbidding exterior, but after we got off to a slightly grim start, she proved to be quite friendly. It is a fine, quite newish hospital, which was opened on the day of the abdication and called after the abdicating monarch. They told me that when the Earl of Athlone came to open it, he couldn't remember which numbered King Edward it was and he named the hospital after Edward VII instead of VIII. One hopes that didn't get back to Buckingham Palace!

I later went in to the Office of the Daily News to see Florence Bayman, who is the librarian there. She is a Friend, between 45 and 50, a widow with one daughter Cynthia, out in Denmark. She is very pleasant, sensible and sympathetic, with a slightly motherly air, even perhaps a bit lonely. But she is very brave, very thoughtful and very kind. I think I am going to like her! She very sweetly offered to send a cable to you, my dearest one, which I hope may get through quickly, as I am so worried about the German raids and do hope and pray that you are safe.

**Sunday, 2nd August 1942 – Durban**



Dearest Joan

For a change I had a very good night's sleep. Thank God I am sleeping better now and I've managed to make the tent a little more comfortable.

I seem to have let Maurice Webb talk me into giving a lecture on housing next week, to some Social Study students at the University. That's if we are still here. This afternoon I have been frantically trying to think what I am going to say. I'm shortly going down to Maurice's house for supper and will ask him if what I have in mind, is the sort of thing he wants.

Later.....

Well I had a very pleasant evening with Maurice. We made further plans, in case we find that we do have to stay even longer, such as more hospital work, some lectures and the possibility of a visit at the weekend to Adams College, the large native school here, with which Maurice is involved.....[.....]

*"The long delay in awaiting our onward journey often got me down, with the feeling that it was all my fault. But local Friends were very supportive, especially Florence Bayman and Maurice Webb, whose help in finding opportunities to keep the men occupied, was invaluable. And much as I enjoy camping, after several weeks its joys can begin to pall!"*

**Wednesday, 5th August 1942 – Durban**



My darling,

I was very low yesterday, but today I am more cheerful, and starting a new letter to you. The camp, sand, heat, soldiers, homesickness, responsibility and a feeling of not being good enough, were all getting me down. But Florence and Maurice are very supportive and tell me how well I am doing! So perhaps I am not a total failure![.....]

Getting into Durban is not too bad, though the train journey back can be tiresome, as it's nearly always crowded, often with noisy drunks. Today I got a train and went to a place whose name I am not sure I can even spell, let alone pronounce, but it's something like Amanzimtote, and one of the other stations on the line was called Umbogintwini (believe it or not!).

The latter is a charming small holiday resort on the coast, and I continually thought of you and David, wishing so much you could have been here with me. There are endless miles of sand dunes here, with brush-covered cliffs rising inexorably behind a great stretch of blue sea, and lines of waves breaking in dazzling foam, rushing up the sand, as the spray rises into the air, all sparkling in the afternoon sun. The day was cloudless, under a hot sun, with a gentle breeze at my back. Ahead were rock pools, full of crystal clear water, just rippled by the wind, containing curiously marked tiny fishes, like those we saw at the zoo once – do you remember?

Occasionally, I could hear small Plovers, rather like Ringed Plovers, but without their especial ring marking, calling softly, as they ran and bobbed up and down on the beach or glided gracefully over the sea. Many another sea bird flew past too, like the ubiquitous Black-headed Gull, whilst on the rocks a couple of white Herons stood gracefully, or else walked about with absolute dignity, save occasionally when splashed by a disrespectful wave.



*Gilbert Reynolds*

Gilbert Reynolds, Clerk of Natal Monthly Meeting, who sent the letter (right) to all Friends on the FAU's visit. He was also a well-known botanist, who wrote many studies on the Aloe plant. Photo SA Friends Library

There was scarcely a person on the beach, and as Wordsworth puts it, "Dull would he be of soul who could pass by a sight so touching in its majesty." Here was a clean, fresh pure world, which just lit up the human spirit, and as so often, I thought if only Joan could be here to share this with me. How I miss your company.

I seemed to get completely away for once. I then struck inland up a river estuary, through fields of sugar cane with brush covered hills beyond, down to the next station, a pleasant holiday place called Isipingo, where I got some welcome tea and caught the next train home.

All for now dearest, Ralph

**Sunday, 2nd August 1942 – Durban**



Dearest Joan

Yesterday the clocks went back an hour, so we now get up and go to bed by candlelight. Talking of which, I don't know if I mentioned that the other day I bought two lovely coloured

**SOCIETY OF FRIENDS  
NATAL MONTHLY MEETING**

Clerk:  
GILBERT REYNOLDS,  
11 Castle Avenue,  
Durban.  
PHONES: | Success 2592,  
          | Builders 4452

P.O. BOX 149,

DURBAN, Natal

28th July, 1942

Dear Friend,

For the past week or so we have had the great joy of meeting and entertaining 34 members of the Friends Ambulance Unit under the leadership of Ralph Barlow.

Owing to our numbers being very limited we have not been able to entertain all the party every day but we have tried to see that all were given a share of hospitality and I am sure that all of us who had them at our homes enjoyed the visits very much indeed.

Sunday morning meeting for worship which 16 of them managed to attend was a very helpful occasion.

Owing to petrol rationing we were unable to use our cars as much as we should have liked but several were taken out into the country over the week-end to visit places of interest.

This visit has come at a most opportune time as in South Africa we have been discussing the possibility of similar work being organised out here and meeting this splendid group of young men raises our enthusiasm to try to follow their example. Besides which, their very helpful advice will be very useful if we do manage to plan something.

Most of us have found common ground and feel we have made many new friends amongst the group which included a member of your family.

With very friendly greetings,

Yours very sincerely,  
*Gilbert Reynolds*

Clerk, Natal Monthly Meeting.

*My wife & I were particularly interested in meeting Ralph as he was at Dighton Pond the same time as our one & only, Norman who is at present with an Engineer Co in Sophia Downs Railway work & I hope possibly Ralph may come time to time to work there etc.  
We can give you an opinion that our loved ones are able to return to us safely in the not too distant future.  
You probably know the husband & wife & also daughter of Pennington all corners of mine  
Ralph is well but works hard & has lots of work & responsibilities*

candles, which cast a soft gentle glow inside the tent.

I sent you an airgraph this morning as well as ones to Paul Cadbury and to Leonard Appleton. At the moment I am writing at the back of Gilbert Reynold's eye shop, as I am later going out to supper with him. Later, as I mentioned I had supper with Gilbert Reynolds, which was quite delicious. As well as being Clerk of Natal Monthly Meeting, he is a very well-known botanist out here, and a brilliant eye specialist, and guess what - we talked birds of all things, on which he is also knowledgeable, and

he filled me in on a lot more that I didn't know, so one way and another, I'll soon be an expert!

During our time in Durban, Maurice Webb, our wonderful South African Friend took us out to Adams College, one of the largest native colleges in SA and of which he is Chairman of the Governors."

#### Saturday, 8th August 1942 – Durban



Dearest one

Today we had Meeting for worship, which was quite well attended and very good, for a change. So often an inspiring meeting really does help one to cope. Afterwards we had a section meeting in the Webb's garden, when I explained my various proposals to everyone. Maurice then kindly provided lunch, before taking me back to Camp so that I could go and visit two of our boys who are ill in hospital.

Having seen the boys, who both seemed to be on the mend, Maurice took four of us out to Adams College, where he is Chairman of the Governors. The drive took us on a pleasant run, first along the high road close by the sea, then slowly climbing inland into rather broken country, with groups of trees and rough grass and magnificent views inland to miles and miles of the same. Rough grassy hills, jumbled with steep-sided valleys in between, brown and green as far as the eye can see. Here and there, round straw native huts as well as the occasional rather pretentious modern concrete building.

Adams College is certainly very impressive and owns 500 acres of land with the college buildings and staff bungalows scattered about like an American University campus. The buildings are nothing very much, but the grounds are lovely. Quite hilly, covered in places with bush and lines of eucalyptus trees with all sorts of flowering shrubs, all framed by glorious views out to the sea some ten miles away, and so many birds, that I've already lost count.

The staff, who come from all over the world, live in very pleasant bungalows with verandahs. I met two of them, one a German refugee, another an American. All very friendly. Originally it was an American Mission College, but is now administered by South Africans themselves. There are about 400 students, varying in ages from 14 to 25 and they come for one, two or three years, learning to be teachers, or to study agriculture on the College's own farm, or learning any one of a variety of trades. I

#### Adams College, Durban

Adams College was originally a missionary college. During the FAU's time in Durban it was run by Edgar Brookes, whose objective was to improve the lot of native Africans, and the school became one of the most important schools for black education.



Above: Adams College as it was pre 1947. The college was founded in 1853 by an American missionary. Sadly much of the old school burnt down in 1947. Photo Adams College archive



Right: Philip Sanford, John Gough and Ralph Barlow in the grounds of Adams College.

found it very interesting indeed. [...]

Later I got back to Camp, changed hurriedly, polished everything, and then back into town to Maurice and thence to the Natal University College, where I addressed 25 or 30 students from mixed backgrounds on social science and economic Housing courses. I spoke for an hour and answered questions for an hour. I remembered more than I expected, and they actually seemed interested. [...]

all for now  
Ralph



## Report on Children’s Easter Meeting 2022

*Cecilia Nkesi and Khosi Daniel Sekoere, Quakers in Lesotho*

Seven children came in a celebration of Easter, among them were two Young Friends and two adults. The celebration started with 30 minutes moment of silence.

Everyone was over the moon, excited and carried away, some of them nearly gave up hope as they were hunting and not that successful in collecting more eggs. However, the struggle, someone kept on pushing

“Go, go, go there are still plenty to look for. Never give up hope, we are all the winners ...” says one of the Young Friends.

Other kids were watching and couldn’t help it, they came and joined us. It was super exciting and so graceful to see happiness on their faces.

They all managed to collect as many as they can, and at the end the eggs were divided equally. They ate and kept some for those they left at home mainly being mums and grannies.

Pictures and video were taken.



# Alternatives to Violence Workshop Report

## 8-10 April

*Kopano Moteane and Ruvimbo Kadungure, Co-Clerk, Young Friends*

Our first retreat in two years as young friends happened at Cyara Lodge in Gauteng, one of our elders Bronwen Wilson-Thompson helped us with the planning, which we greatly appreciate. As young friends, we have all been wanting to do an Alternative to Violence Workshop because of the Covid-19 Lockdown, we had to wait. The lockdown and Covid-19 had eased off, so we decided to start with an Alternatives to Violence basic workshop in Johannesburg. The border to Zimbabwe was still closed and travel was still difficult, so we were not able to include as many young Friends as we would have liked.

Johannesburg decided to plan a workshop with the young friends from Pretoria, as we are quite close to each other and the more the merrier. In the 2 years' time has moved so fast that the young friends are not so young anymore.

We had a total of 11 young friends from both meetings with the following names: Doretta Ndayiragije, Miracle Ndayiragije, Kopano Moteane, Omphile Gobuapelo, Emmy Mugambe, Ruvimbo Kadungure, Vaughan van Heerden, Pelo Gibberd, Gugulethu Machin, Tau Machin and Ruth McCormick. We also saw this as an opportunity to invite other young friends from other meetings, Samantha Mirasu from Botswana was able to make it and joined us.

We had two elders as facilitators John McCormick and Marie Odendal they were working with two young friends Marianne Mupota from Bulawayo and Keletso Mompoti from Botswana, which went

well. The weekend turned out to be a blessing. It rained the whole time. Our workshop was a success, and we are looking forward to doing an advanced workshop at the next yearly meeting, if all goes well. We thank Marie and John for their time and being our facilitators. The workshop turned out to be of great help and what we all needed at this time in our lives. We came from it with a much better understanding of communication with others and within ourselves, and how to live in a nonviolent community.

We do encourage other meetings to also do the basic workshop, so that next time we meet we can all do an advanced workshop. We do hope to do more activities in future as young friends in Southern Africa.



# Yvonne Pickering Kindergarten – Outjo

*Enid Ellis, Namibia Monthly Meeting*

The small town of Outjo lies in the north-western part of Namibia, in the Kunene region. It is a commercial centre for the surrounding farming community and a stopover for tourists *en route* to Etosha National Game Reserve.

Situated in this picturesque area, is the Yvonne Pickering Kindergarten, named after the British volunteer who worked in Namibia as an Education Advisor focusing on the provision of education to San communities. Tragically she died in a vehicle accident. For several years it also received funding from a German NGO. However, this funding is no longer available and the Kindergarten has been struggling to make ends meet. Parents of the 68 children are supposed to pay a fee, but many are out of work and have no income. The Kindergarten belongs to the community and is run by a local committee of 2 men and 4 women, two of whom are teachers. Bi-monthly meetings are open to all community members.

Looking for a project to which we could give some support, our Quaker group came into contact with Mona Oresee who runs the Kindergarten. Mona, a San woman, born and schooled in Outjo, has been running the Kindergarten for the past 16 years. Her own story is one of both resilience and perseverance. She failed her grade 12 school leaving examinations and, in her



own words, “thought the bottom had dropped out of my world”. She got a job at a kindergarten, picking up skills and training as she grew older. She now has several certificates from short courses offered over the years by NGOs and government ministries and an Early Childhood Development (ECD) Certificate from the Namibian College of Open Learning. She is now enrolling at Namcol to do a degree in ECD.

Her assistant, Belinda Guruses, also San, has completed various training courses including one offered by the *Ministry of Gender Equality, Poverty Eradication and Social Welfare* and will study for her Namcol certificate next year. Their dedication and passion is evident in the progress of the kindergarten. It is registered with the Ministry and has completed the accreditation process which looks at the 20 standards required. This has to be renewed annually and requires a Health Certificate from the local municipality. They also have the assistance of Immanuel, a past attendee of the Kindergarten, now volunteer gardener. In addition to the garden and his vegetable patch he helps supervise the children at play and provides another pair of hands at mealtimes. He is also a valuable male presence for the children.

The building is painted bright yellow with coloured pictures and posters on the walls. It is well maintained, clean and cool indoors. The Ministry has built a toilet block with waterborne flush toilets on the premises. Access to water is via a prepaid tap on the premises and another tap for general use in the street nearby.

Justin Ellis, Diana Thompson and I have visited YPK twice and have been enjoyed seeing the kids at play. Because of shortage of indoor space and sufficient adult supervision the children are divided into two groups who attend on alternate week days. Ages range from three to six years of age when children in Namibia are supposed to begin formal schooling. Because of a shortage of available places in the pre-school of the local Primary School, there are sometimes children as old as 9 years attending the Kindergarten. They are made school-ready and so are able to enter at Grade 1 level.

Mona tries to give the children one snack and one



meal per day. When available, a local supermarket provides day old bread that might make a peanut butter sandwich or accompany a bowl of soup made with vegetables from the garden. The Quaker Community in Namibia has committed to sending a monthly amount for the purchase of necessary items. We have also been fortunate in obtaining a one-off grant for the 2022 which will cover monthly food purchases, some jerseys for 15 of the children who were coming to kindergarten unsuitably dressed for Namibia’s cold winters, and the first year’s study fees for Mona and Belinda.



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# QUAKERS TRAVELLING

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## Flock to Marion – Two Quakers Share Adventures from the Southern Ocean

*Justine Limpitlaw and Margie Roper, Quaker Community of Johannesburg and Committee Members of Birdlife Sandton Bird Club*



We had gone to sea before with Birdlife South Africa in 2017 to the Continental Shelf where we saw albatrosses, petrels, skuas and shearwaters but this was another adventure entirely – sailing over 2920 kms south to the marine reserve that skirts Marion and Prince Edward Islands in the Roaring Forties.

Originally planned for January 2021, the trip was postponed because of Covid and we were all delighted to finally clear customs (and the rapid antigen Covid tests) to board ship in Cape Town harbour in January 2022.

The plan: seven days of sailing and seeing bird life that simply cannot be seen from the Continent.

We left Cape Town on a hot sunny day with brisk winds – and the winds only got brisker.

As we sailed out, we saw gannets, cormorants, gulls and terns and a friendly sun fish floating next to the boat, as well as whales and dolphins.

After a few days at sea, the birds became a lot more interesting and for us, new. So we relied a lot on the excellent guides who were positioned at various points on many of the decks from dawn to dusk to help us identify what we were looking at. After a while we adjusted and so could recognise the difference between the Indian yellow nosed albatross (fat, small) compared with the incredible Wandering albatross (huge in comparison and much more elegant with an enormous

wingspan – I never saw one flap once) (see pic on the next page) and we were able instantly to identify a Skua from Dr Peter Ryan’s description “flap, flap, flap, flap, flap”.

The most incredible day was the day we arrived at the Islands –

Prince Edward Island was magical – shrouded in mist with tall cliffs...

The birds were extremely inquisitive – flying (or swimming in the case of the Macaroni penguins) over to the ship to have a good look at our huge boat and the throngs of birders with binoculars and cameras.

At one point I (Justine) was standing at the stern of the ship and there were, in my normal field of vision, 15 albatrosses of four different types: Wandering, Shy, Sooty and Light Mantled as well as dozens of prions, skuas, shearwaters and petrels – all gliding over the ship’s wake.

Margie also got to see the extremely endangered Tristan Albatross – a special sighting.

The birds were so inquisitive and numerous that day that we did some of our best birding from our cabin balcony as you can see from these pics...

In the teeth of a fierce Antarctic storm, our boat turned around and set sail for Durban and the much more peaceful waters of the Indian ocean. We really felt that we, as the saying goes “belong to a higher cult of mortals for we have seen the albatross”.

Besides the birding, the trip aimed to raise awareness of the need to eradicate mice from Marion Island as the birds have no defences against them and the mice in fact eat the sea birds alive – killing hundreds of thousands annually. It is a huge task and Mouse Free Marion aims to raise over R300m in order to undertake the eradication programme.



*Justine Limpitlaw (left) and Margie Roper spent a week on the vast Southern Ocean.*



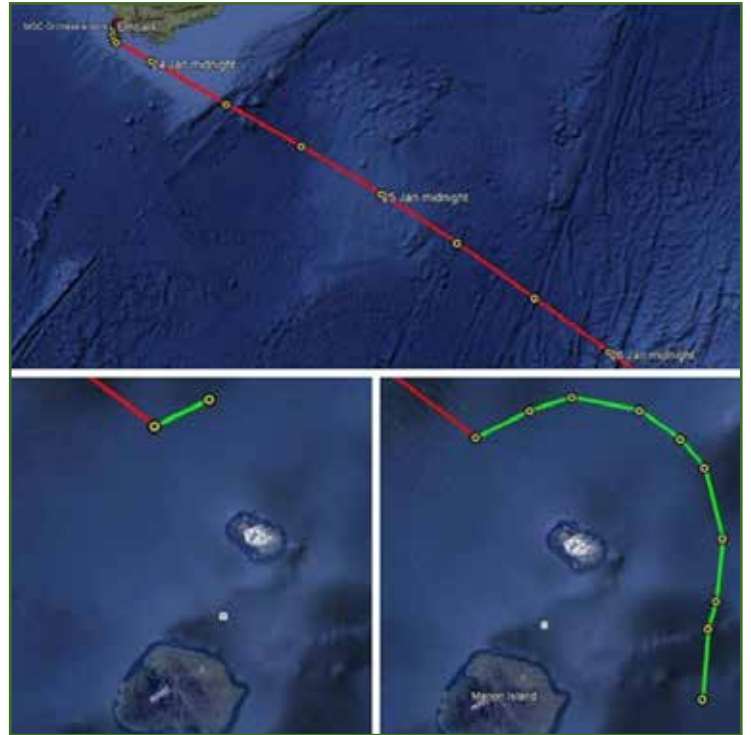
We managed to raise just one percent of that on this Flock to Marion – if you are keen to help, please consider sponsoring the eradication of mice from a

single hectare of Marion Island for R1000.00. Just go online to [www.mousefreemarion.org](http://www.mousefreemarion.org) for details.



Above: The Indian yellow nosed albatross (left) is small and fat compared with the incredible Wandering albatross.

Below: Sooty albatross



Above: Map of the Marion Island voyage

Below: Marion Island is part of the Prince Edward Islands, which are owned by South Africa. They are part of the Western Cape Province.



## MORE IMAGES OF UBUNTU



*Left: 2009, WITSAND COMMUNITY, WESTERN CAPE: Members of the Witsand Squatter Camp are eager to see the plans for their community which has been changed to solid and environmentally smart housing through a foundation that taught them building skills so they could participate in the building of their own homes. When they moved into the new house their shack was torn down. Photo by Susan Winters.*

*Right: 1990, KAYELITSHA TOWNSHIP WESTERN CAPE: Learners have classes outdoors to alleviate crowding in a community built and operated school in a township outside Cape Town. Photo by Susan Winters.*



*Left: 2012, WITSAND COMMUNITY, WESTERN CAPE. A popular pastime for girls is fast paced and complex rope jumping requiring coordination from all involved. They sing as they turn the ropes and jump. Photo by Susan Winters.*



*Above: 1994 EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE: Girls carry water from the river to their home as the first day of voting in the first democratic election in South Africa closes for the day. Photo by Susan Winters.*

The sunset closed the first day of the first democratic election in 1994 in a small Eastern Cape village. Behind the girls was the years of struggle and sacrifice, of world condemnation and revolutionary expectation of a blood bath for the people of South Africa. But South Africans surprised that bitter world on those days. They laid down the weapons and together, quietly waited to vote for the first time in their lives.

Still, I did not have a word for that. Nor for the years of the courage found in those who gave themselves to assisting others through the tragedy of AIDS.

Finally, I do.

Where is ubuntu now? Is it like courage, that it happens when we need it the most, and think it impossible? Is it still here, like the song of the person on a long journey on a gravel road? That one only hears if the noise of the world is turned down. The song is not only in the singing but also in the listening. While the eyes may never meet, a connection has been made.

— Susan Winters