


MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal, Chapter 11
WHAT EXPERIENCE OF THE LIGHT DO YOU TREASURE?

I have often felt a motion of love to leave some hints in writing of my experience of the Goodness of God.

John Woolman

Untitled

When skies are clear on Winter days, the sun beams through tall windows and sparkles across the 90-degree therapy pool. Often the only one present, I feel the freedom to twirl and splash. The salty water holds me upright. I can dance in the beauty, joy and wonder of warm, liquid Light. 

—Thea

God's Tower

My cousin, Jesse Gillette, died in June of 2006. We'd been good friends at times, especially as youngsters. I went through some bleak times in my life after Jesse's death and for a period was gripped by a terrible fear of

death. At that time in my life I seemed to be hopelessly stuck on a path I didn't want to be on.

Two years to the day after Jesse's memorial, I had a dream that changed my life. In the dream, I seemed to be at a funeral or a wake near a train station. As I looked around, a doorway appeared where a wall had been. I walked through the doorway, past a man who might have been Mike preparing a message, and through to the other side.

Outside, I found a tall stone tower surrounded by a magnificent field full of beautiful green grass, colorful flowers and tall trees everywhere. The tower appeared to reach directly into the heavens.

Inside the tower there were beautiful paintings with religious themes. Many of them were of Jesus, and all the paintings were

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circular. As I went into a room connected to the tower, I saw my cousin, and he seemed to be waiting for me. He was the most perfect Jesse I could have ever hoped to find. He was physically and spiritually healed - that was clear. He'd been confined to a wheelchair for over a decade before his death, but now he stood tall, strong and handsome. He seemed as happy as I'd ever seen him.

I started to sob uncontrollably because I was so relieved and happy to see Jesse. More than that, I felt a powerful sense of meaning and complete contentment with everything. I was overcome with the feeling that Jesse was truly okay and that everyone would eventually be healed and happy, as he was. It was the most peaceful, comforting feeling I've ever experienced in my life.


Jesse and I talked for a long while. I was never able to recall

MINDING THE LIGHT is a bimonthly collection of stories from the lives of members and attenders of West Hills Friends, a Quaker meeting in Portland, Oregon. Among Quakers, "minding the Light" means noticing, listening for and paying heed to the voice of our Teacher.

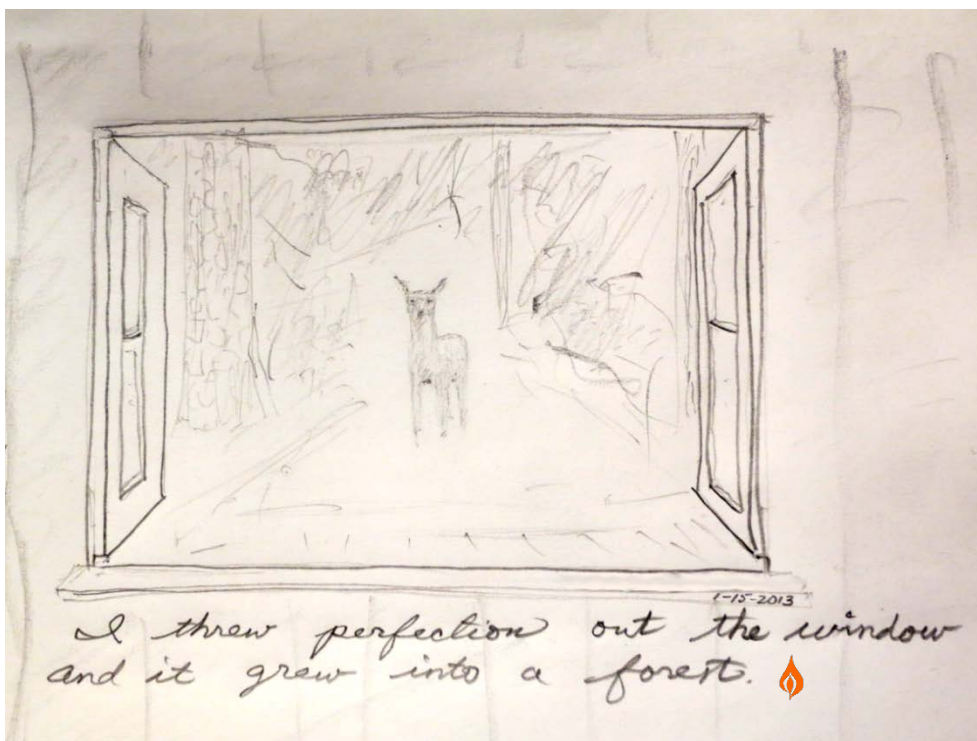
Early Quakers kept journals about their relationship with God to share with the community. A well-known example is John Woolman's journal, which has been continually in print for more than 200 years. Quakers believe that the Light of Christ is in everyone and that God speaks to everyone, giving us all stories to tell. We hope to carry on the tradition of sharing stories about minding the Light by publishing them for our community and making them available to others on the web.

Each issue is organized around a query about minding the Light. Our writers speak from their own experience, not going beyond the measure of Light they've been given. We hope these stories will transform our way of seeing God and each other and that they will bring comfort to those who seek news of God's presence in the world.

the details of our discussion, but it involved the tower and what its purpose was. While dreaming, I thought for a while that I, too, had died. I couldn't imagine another reason for being in this place and feeling so free of all my burdens - so content and happy. I was entirely at peace with the thought that I might have died. I accepted it with no fear. I knew during the dream that no matter what awful experiences we have in life, eventually we'll be reunited with our loved ones in a beautiful, joyful place.

This dream was one of several with Jesse that made me feel he was sent to help me find my way towards a much better path. 
-T.M.R

Perfection Out the Window
- Drawing by Charles T.



The Eagle and the Sunrise

I wish the dying process were more like the movies – relatively quick without protracted pain or suffering – but it seems it's rarely that way. It certainly wasn't for my brother-in-law, John, as he went through this process a few years ago. He'd been diagnosed with colon cancer that eventually spread to his other organs and, bit by bit, over the year, his body deteriorated from the handsome, vibrant, strong man he used to be.

This process was more like a transition, like a hesitant young swimmer going into a cold mountain lake for the first time: the swimmer first wades in the water at the shore's edge, and then comes back. Then perhaps he goes in a bit further...up to his knees, perhaps...and then

comes back. The water is cold and takes getting used to, but finally he makes the full plunge and swims free...gloriously free! This seemed to be what it was like for John as he experienced less and less of "the shore" and more and more of "the water."

A few years ago, on March 31st, at 6:30 a.m., John made that final transition. Though the week had been full of gray, rainy days, that particular day dawned with a glorious sunrise that highlighted Mt. Hood in orange and pink clouds. It was as if that day were specially made for John's transition.

At noon that same day, we gathered for a bit of lunch in my sister-in-law's dining room that overlooks downtown Portland from the Northwest hills. Our hearts were heavy with sadness at John's passing and yet light with the realization that he was no longer confined to a body that had wasted away. As we sat at the table overlooking the city, a sight appeared, like no other, before or since – a huge bald eagle, flying free and strong about fifty feet away, just beyond the house! I felt strongly that it was John's spirit that came as a comfort and testament to the glorious relief and new life he felt. That image has stayed with me and is one of the special times that I treasure that testifies to the presence of The Light. 
- Anne A.



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In My Time of Darkness

This is, indeed, one of my treasured stories of Light on my spiritual journey.

It was one of the first times, if not THE FIRST, I came to worship with West Hills Friends. I was in the midst of a time of spiritual confusion, of losing faith in a theology that had carried me through childhood, young adulthood, and safely into my early thirties. But that day at West Hills I had nothing, and I didn't understand why God (who I was no longer sure I trusted, much less believed in) would have let that happen.

I was tired of words, one reason I was seeking out Quakers. And I certainly didn't want to hear or sing joyous songs of Our Faith. The old hymns and the newer stuff were noisy gongs and clanging cymbals.

That morning, a lone bluesman sat with his guitar and sang these words:

*In my time of darkness
From that locked and raving lunatic,
my heart,
I finally call
And You come, offering peace.*

Somehow the combination of words and melody pierced me like a lightning strike. I, too, felt my heart to be locked, and raving like a crazed thing.

*We have never argued
We just break out the flamethrowers
and smash all resistance;
Put the ashes on TV.
Still He comes, offering peace.*

The dark humor buoyed my spirit for a reason I still don't understand and cannot explain, yet there was an answering spark of genuine hope that I felt as clear and bittersweet as the song itself. It was a new hope, a glimpse of the chance of a new faith.

*I beg you listen
As He comes, offering peace, peace,
peace. Amen*

I asked Derek if I could use his song as part of my story, and he, Ruba, and Adam re-recorded it and posted it on YouTube. You can find it here:

<http://tinyurl.com/bh9nymo> 

– JP

I will go before you
and level the mountains,
I will break in pieces
the doors of bronze,
and cut asunder the bars of iron.

I will give you the
treasures of darkness
and the hoards in secret places,
that you may know that it is I,
the Lord, the God of Israel,
who calls you by your name.

Isaiah 45:2-3 (RSV)

Heart Filled With Peace

In the grand scheme of things, the surgery I had scheduled to replace my deteriorating hip was "routine." Hip replacement is one of the most effective and successful procedures in the annals of surgery, having been performed many thousands of times with few complications. "You'll be fine," I told myself.

"Many friends have undergone far more complex surgeries and come through just fine." Conversations with my doctor and other knowledgeable and experienced friends (like Rosalie!) had given me further comfort and confidence.

Yet one's brain can only go so far in communicating with one's heart, and a subtle but persistent anxiety simmered just beneath my calm exterior. At a meeting for worship a few weeks before my surgery, we sang a favorite Taize hymn, and I knew immediately that I needed to make it my personal anthem:


*Come and fill my heart
with your peace
You alone, O Lord, are holy
Come and fill my heart
with your peace
Alleluia*

To borrow a phrase from Allyn, this became the top song on my inward playlist over those next few weeks, and it floated right back into my consciousness the morning of the surgery: getting showered and dressed in the morning; on the ride to the hospital; in the pre-op area as I changed into the hospital gown; as I climbed onto the gurney and began to be wheeled into the operating room.

Lying on my back on the gurney, settling deeply into the rhythms of this hymn, I felt an overwhelming sense of light, warmth, and comfort. I thought "You, O Lord, have truly come here this day to fill my heart with your peace – light and peace beyond

words." I was giddy with delight at God's presence there with me, overwhelming any lingering sense of anxiety I may have had earlier. I felt drawn ever deeper into the Light and disappeared into it.

My next awareness was of lying on my back in the post-operative recovery unit and noting that my hip felt really different. The pain would come later, but the knowledge that the procedure was complete brought a smile to my heart. The hymn was no longer playing, but the light and peace remained.

I treasure this experience of the Light not only for the comfort it gave me that day, but even more for reinforcing my belief that if I invite the Light into my heart, I will experience the Light in my heart. *"Knowledge so wonderful is beyond my grasp."* (Psalm 139:6) 
 – Greg Morgan

Please Share Your Story

Our next Query: *When has the Light come to you through the presence, wisdom, or generosity of others?*

We're looking for a story from your experience of a caring community. A story from your experience in community will be a blessing returned to the community.

We welcome stories in words, photos, art, music, video, or . . . ? We publish stories as told to the extent that they fit within our guidelines.

[Story Deadline: 3/24/13](#)

"[The shepherds] hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart"
 (Luke 2:16-19)

"Nos perdimos el tiempo por Dios"

Seven of us piled into the Toyota Landcruiser and drove off a half dozen miles from the lake. We were going to visit our friend Eusebio before leaving Peru. Where the road ended, I scrambled out to walk another half mile across the barren altiplano landscape – three children in tow, baby on my back, husband in front, and our trusted friend, Ed, in the lead.

We were warmly welcomed by Eusebio and his wife when we arrived mid-afternoon, and they invited us into their small tin-roofed adobe hut. White-washed walls brightened the otherwise dark dirt-floored interior. Sheep, llamas and pigs roamed their backyard. A large loom sat in front of the house with piles of raw handspun wool in baskets beside the crude structure. Several other smaller huts formed the remainder of the homestead. Puffs of smoke blew out of the chimney.


They offered us seats on handwoven chairs and served

sweetened mint tea with fried bread, gracious hospitality shown by people of faith born into a harsh indigenous Aymaran social fabric on the altiplano of Peru.

Eusebio had spent four to five days each week of the past seven escorting Ed and my husband from village to village as part of a fledgling Peruvian herd health program, identifying needs, examining sick animals, vaccinating, castrating and teaching community leaders. He served as guide, helper, technician, translator and liaison in each of these communities. The people loved him and thus trusted the words and work of his two accompanying friends. On Sundays, Eusebio functioned as pastor in his small community meeting. It was a hand-to-mouth existence around Lake Titicaca, where a family's diet consisted mainly of potatoes prepared in one form or other, while sheep, pigs, llamas, chickens and eggs are sold often for cash, rather than consumed for much-needed protein, by those who raise them. Social mores and attitudes in this subsistence level society often paralleled the landscape's roughness.

During our weeks with him, Eusebio always exhibited a ready smile, a gentle spirit, and a keen sense of humor along with a twinkle in his eye. To me, he was a sinewy brown angel with gleaming white teeth. Coming out of our American culture and environs where time is so precious, and carefully meted

out so as not to waste any, I often wondered how he could afford to leave his home and wife, children, weaving, and farm responsibilities for such an extended time to serve where he could not be monetarily compensated, to give when there was nothing extra. Seizing what might be my last opportunity, I broached the subject during this visit.

Eusebio laughed, and his image, a glowing face with sparkly eyes, was forever etched in my mind and on my heart along with his responsive words: "*Nos perdimos el tiempo por Dios*" ("we lose time for God"). These words have served as a beacon of light to me for over twenty-five years. 

– AW

Light Brigade*

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Story Catchers

Please let us know if you have a story but don't consider yourself a writer, don't have time, don't feel well, are too young to know how to write stories, or any other reason. We would love to send a story catcher to record your story.

If you can't come to us, we would love to come to you :)

Ten Thousand Lights

As I grew up in the Los Angeles area, I saw the few stars that shone through the hazy, but very well lit sky. I knew there was more up there than the smoggy and light polluted sky showed, but I had rarely seen it.

In my senior year of high school our youth group went to a camp between Christmas and New Year's Day. The camp was well up into the mountains, above the smog level in the Los Angeles basin. It was also quite cold, near zero actually.


On the last night of our stay, I stepped outside the cozy dining hall where someone was droning on about something religious. The first thing that struck me was the cold. I had never experienced anything like it. My warmest jacket was of little help.

What really grabbed my attention was the starry sky. The cold air was crystal clear. There was no light from the big city. Just stars! From horizon to horizon, stars and more stars. When I focused my attention on one spot, even the dark places had stars. Scientists say that we can see about 10,000 stars with the naked eye. I was sure that I was seeing all of them and more. I was awe struck. It was awe in the deepest sense of the word: the feeling that there is something out there far greater than our ordinary experiences that is present in some unexplainable way.

As I looked at the stars I had some kind of feelings I had never felt before. Even the bone shivering cold was forgotten or ignored for a time. I saw the vastness of the universe. It wasn't a learning experience. But something was changed inside of me.

A few years earlier I had joined the church. But that was no big deal, a few of my friends were joining at the same time, why not me too? I had gone to Sunday School all of my life, and to vacation church school, and to youth group. I knew the stories and had even read the Bible all the way through. But all of this was just how I used some of my time.

I cannot say why or how, but the awe-creating vision of those ten thousand lights was the turning point that made me serious about my faith in God. It did not instantly change my life. I was not "born again" in the usual way that that term is used. But my study of the faith became just that, a study, not mere curiosity. In many and small ways my commitment and my concerns grew.

To this day I do not know exactly what happened but I continue to be thankful for the life that has unfolded, strongly influenced by those moments of awe. 

– Wilbur Wood

"There have been great societies that did not use the wheel, but there have been no societies that did not tell stories."

Ursula K. LeGuin

Lost and Found

I've always found it challenging to listen to God's voice — but on one occasion, I heard it very clearly.

A number of years ago, as part of my job, I drove up the Washington coast to Westport, near Grays Harbor, to observe testing at a school. I stayed in a motel right on the beach, overlooking the ocean. When testing was finished for the day, I was free for the rest of the afternoon, and I decided to walk on the beach.

The jetty was about a mile and a half north of the motel, and though it was February it wasn't very cloudy. I picked up my car keys, stuck them in the pocket of my jacket and started walking. The tide was coming in, but the beach was fairly wide and flat and walking was easy. I passed only three people as I walked. There were few footprints in the sand, and already the waves were washing away the few that were there.

When I got to the jetty, I climbed a small hill to admire the view from the top. I'd taken off my jacket a bit farther down the beach, and the evening breeze was refreshing, though crisp. The late afternoon would soon become evening, and I knew that with the tide coming in and the day getting darker, I'd need to walk back quickly.

I was about two-thirds of the way back to the motel when I reached into my pocket to get a Kleenex and discovered that the

car keys were gone! I couldn't believe it! I had no spare key — it was a rental car, after all. The light was waning, the tide was coming in, and I had no idea of where on that vast expanse of beach my keys could be. All I could do was try to retrace my steps and see if I could spot them. The jetty was about a mile away — a lot of beach to search.


Panic started to set in. How would I get to the next school in time for testing the next morning? Westport is a little town with no car dealership that could possibly help.

As I walked, I tried to follow my footprints in the sand, but the tide had already washed many of them away. I was alone on the beach, searching for something nearly impossible to see in the waning light that might have been washed away or covered by sand. I prayed as hard as I'd ever prayed before.

A "voice" told me to keep going, keep looking.

So I did. My heart was pounding, but I kept searching that long beach. "Keep going," I heard in my mind. I got all the way back to the hill I'd climbed to get to the top of the jetty at the north end of the beach — and as I looked along the sand at the base, there they were — lying in the sand where they'd landed when they'd silently fallen from my pocket!

I was overjoyed! As I walked back down the nearly dark beach, I sang and prayed many

heartfelt prayers to The One whose still voice directed my mind and eyes. God's presence, care, and love filled me with gratitude and awe — and still do. 
— Anne A.

Publication Guidelines

Your stories can be submitted in any publishable format: narratives, poetry, songs, art, other.

Word stories: must be 500 words or less, and written in the first person by a member or attendee of West Hills Friends. Stories should be submitted in text format in the body of an email addressed to: office@westhillsfriends.org.

Original paintings, photos, and other art can be submitted on paper or emailed in JPG format.

Original music and videos should be submitted as links to websites like YouTube or Vimeo.

To be a person is to have a story to tell.

Isak Denison

For it is the God who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

But we have this treasure in clay jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

2 Corinthians 4:6-7