

MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal, Chapter 12

WHEN HAS THE LIGHT COME TO YOU THROUGH THE PRESENCE, WISDOM, OR GENEROSITY OF OTHERS?

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

John Woolman

The Quaker I Most Admire

Recently Mike asked committee clerks, and me, as treasurer, to submit profiles of ourselves for the West Hills Friends website because he wants the website to reflect the community's shared leadership.

Mike also asked us to complete a survey, and one of the questions was, "Who is the Quaker you most admire?" My first thought was Wendell Berry, only to discover that he's not a Quaker! I wanted to answer the question, so I researched a bit.

I love to read but haven't read many books by Quakers, so I have a limited library of Quakers from which to nominate my "most

admired." I admire Edward R. Murrow's stance against McCarthyism, but I don't know much about him otherwise, so I can't say that he's the Quaker I most admire.

I realized eventually that the Quaker I most admire is often the one who most recently gave First Word in meeting for worship.

Friends at West Hills Friends who have given First Words or advice that I truly appreciate have been Carol Bosworth, Julie Peyton, Greg Morgan, Wilbur Wood, Allyn Dhynes, and Derek Lamson. Carol actually introduced me to Wendell Berry. Julie talked about an experience reading the bible that changed how she viewed her faith. Julie shared that she'd discovered a historical inaccuracy in the Bible where scripture had not acknowledged a female judge along with several male contemporaries. She said this was initially challenging

In this Chapter

- The Quaker I Most Admire
- A Warm Welcome
- Hyperemesis Gravidarum
- Light From a Stranger
- Let Me Count the Ways
- Beyond the Mind
- Untitled Poem
- West Hills Friends Loves You
- Jury Duty
- The Angel Interpreter Friend
- Claire's Dream
- Discovering a Caring Community
- By Kindly Words
- Jesse's Stone

for her, but the experience ultimately led her toward a renewed and stronger faith in God.

Greg once shared how he feels when asked whether he believes the biblical stories of Christ's resurrection. Having wrestled with the question, Greg has concluded that the important thing to him, related to his faith in Christ, is that when he has needed God and called out to God, God has answered. From Greg's story, I received reassurance of God's presence in my own life – an answer to my own prayers.

I appreciate when Wilbur discusses the history of hymns and also when he shares stories of his experiences in Palestine. I appreciated Allyn's First Word when he shared from his experience in driving a bus in Portland. Derek sang songs and

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.

gave First Word early in my experience at West Hills Friends that helped me realize that West Hills Friends is the place for me, and a place where I want my children to experience Christianity.

Words of encouragement are often given to me through members of our meeting, and I appreciate the opportunity to share some of the experiences. First Words from Friends in the community have profoundly strengthened my own faith, and I'd like to close this story by expressing my sincere gratitude to this community for seeking and acting upon Christ's leadings.

While I'm not sure that there's a Quaker I most admire, I am sure that I've found a community at West Hills Friends that lifts my spirits, and helps me to grow as a person and a Christian. I enjoy spending time with the community and am looking forward to our next group bike ride. 

—Brian Hunter

A Warm Welcome

One of my best teachers is a girl with wheat-colored hair and green eyes that spark with delight. She is a poet, world explorer, and horse enthusiast. Because of the West Hills Community, I know this little girl, her dear parents and her adorable little sister. I always look forward to time with my friend, her wisdom and whimsy—and how she runs up to hug me. We are an unlikely pair of friends, at least upon first glance. There is fifty years and six months between us.

Once, she calculated this gap with a Hello Kitty pencil on a paper bag—fifty years, six months, and seven days, to be exact. Because of all these days, months and years, my little friend worries that I might not be around to see her marry or meet her children. I promise to try to live long enough to knit booties for her first child—as good a reason to take care of myself as any. I want to see what this little girl becomes, or at least the beginning of her becoming. I know what she is now—quite wonderful.

My friend is a lifesaver. I don't mean one of those rainbow-colored candies with a hole in the middle. There is no hole in the middle of my friend. Light radiates out from her center. She brightens the world; she connects me with the Light. She has also learned graceful hospitality from her parents who are caring, authentic people who love people.

Several years ago, I was dealing with a crisis. My husband was away on an extended business trip and was unavailable, even by phone. I needed support, but I couldn't have thought for what to ask, had I the wherewithal to do so. When I was feeling my lowest, my little friend's father telephoned with a spur of the moment dinner invitation. After agreeing to join them, I burst into tears. Approaching their door, I dabbed at my eyes, hoping the tear-stained redness wasn't obvious.

Beaming her joy, my little friend opened the door, chanting my name with operatic gusto – over and over again! Soon, my sad heart was salved with the good medicine

of play, laughter, and a meal shared in good company. I had new strength to meet the challenges facing me.

My young friend continues to teach me. She reveals the temporal joy even in difficult times. These momentary joys are cumulative medicine. With these moments she offers hospitality that heals my heart and strengthens my soul. About these spiritual matters (and much else) the lovely children in our community are poets and savants. 

—Claire Nail

Hyperemesis Gravidarum

My childhood religious experience was all about me and god and the relationship between myself and this mysterious all powerful, all loving being. "He" was all I had to cling to – my sense of love, acceptance, belonging, and hope. I was surrounded by believers – most more broken than I. We masked our brokenness so others were oblivious to our hidden pain.

For 10 years after leaving that life, I worked endlessly to rewrite my future. It was both rewarding and exhausting. As I shed my old views and needs, this "god" who I'd so desperately craved and loved hovered in the background, sometimes existing only as what I tentatively considered "a figment of my imagination."

Then in August 2012, I followed my husband to West Hills Friends (WHF). It was a tumultuous time. He had just lost his job; I was 4 months pregnant and was sick with

hyperemesis gravidarum – a rare illness of pregnancy associated with excessive vomiting, dehydration, medications, weight loss, hospitalization, and IV fluids.

I went to the hospital 5 times, spent over 100 hours on IV fluids, was poked around 20 times, took over 500 orally dissolvable tablets of Zofran and 150 tablets of Reglan, vomited more times than I want to remember, and urinated myself every morning. Without medication, I could hold nothing down.

I came to WHF at the perfect time. This community did not know me or my struggles. But unlike my past religious experience, I was not alone and "god" could not possibly be attributed to my imagination. Instead, the Light existed within the people of WHF. And here I found strength.

When my husband lost his job, many changes happened very quickly. We moved. I increased my workload to full time. We lost health insurance and a company car. I swayed between a state of hope and fear.

But at WHF, as people shared their experiences, I found the mantra that would help me survive. In my darkest times, when sound, smell, temperature, lighting, or movement could send me into a state of nausea followed by vomiting, panic, and fear, I closed my eyes, breathed deeply, and quietly repeated, "I am okay. I have everything I need."

The hyperemesis did not go away. But my internal sense of panic did. And though the journey was

tumultuous, I did have everything I needed – a present husband, a caring OB who trusted me and advocated for my health care needs, an aunt and uncle who cared for me during the worst part of the first trimester, a job that provided enough flexibility for my self-care, a state that guarantees health care to children and pregnant women, and a community with some of the kindest, most generous transparent people I've ever met.

Throughout pregnancy, I found solace in the silence at WHF and comfort in the words of wisdom shared by its members. They inspired optimism, and I found power in my mantra and what it meant for everyone. Because in the end, "the what" doesn't matter – illness, financial instability, food, managing material possessions, or any other human struggle that has been shared or even those that haven't. We have what we need. And somehow just knowing this changes the experience for the good.

Looking back on my journey, I now realize that I not only have what I need, but as a member of community, I and my family have been blessed with significantly more.

Thank you, WHF. 
–Sarah Blanchard

"The life I touch for good or ill will touch another life, and that in turn another, until who knows where the trembling stops or in what far place my touch will be felt."
Frederick Buechner

Light From a Stranger

When I was five, I composed a poem to God. I remember thinking how amazing that was and how amazing I was. I felt so capable and creative and smart and I sadly wondered why no one else had ever noticed those things about me. Growing up, there was always the sense that no one really saw me, my value, or my experiences. As a friend put it, "I wasn't even a blip on my parents' radar."

Many things contributed to my being "unseen." My father's alcoholism and addictions, my mother's youth and abusive childhood, my parents' mental and emotional states, the era and culture we lived in, little extended family, my constantly changing schools, my shyness and my great fear of other people. I grew up feeling alone, valueless, and unrecognized by the world.

One day, when I was 9 or 10, I was waiting in the reception area at our family doctor's office while my mother was being seen. There was a woman sitting there, and she asked me about the crocheting I was doing. I answered her, and we proceeded to have a lengthy conversation. This was the first adult who had ever shown an interest in me, or had even seemed to really see me. We (well, mostly I) talked on and on, until my mother came out from the exam room and she and I left.

A few days later I received a letter in the mail. It was from the woman I had talked to at the doctor's office. She told me how nice it had been to meet me and how much

she had enjoyed our conversation. And, although I don't remember now exactly what she said, she also acknowledged my worth and uniqueness; commenting on how intelligent, creative, and articulate I was.

I don't think anything else in my life ever had, or ever has, impacted my self-worth as positively as this woman's recognition. It still brings tears to my eyes to remember it. To know that it was true, that I was important, that I did have worth, that someone else had seen it, was a shining light that helped me navigate through my dark, lonely world. I've always been baffled about what led her to write to me, but it was such a validation. I felt that I must really be special and amazing if this stranger took the time and made the effort to get my address and write to me. I doubt she had any idea what a life preserver that letter, and more importantly, that acknowledgement was to me, yet throughout my life it truly kept me afloat.

I grew up terrified of "strangers." Yet it was a stranger who affected my life so positively. Although I often fall short, the hope that I could likewise be a blessing to someone else encourages me to kindness, generosity, and light towards others in my community. Even the strangers. 

—Mica Coffin

"I have inherited a belief in community, the promise that a gathering of the spirit can both create and change culture. In the desert, change is nurtured even in stone by wind, by water, through time."

Terry Tempest Williams

Let Me Count the Ways

I am sorry to bring this up one more time to you all, but the query for this Chapter overwhelms me with beautiful, grace-filled memories and endless gratitude.

When my husband was dying, we were sustained by community. Early on, I learned to ask for angels and they came again and again. They came to walk with us literally in an enormous show of support at the ALS Walk. They walked with Fred for miles in his daily determination to keep moving. They walked with me through my grief, allowing me to voice my deepest fears and sob, bearing witness to my aching heart. They prayed for us, day after day, week after week. They fed us and helped us with household chores. They moved furniture, built railings, cut wood, and raked leaves. They held my unsteady hands while I learned to do things I had never done before. They helped me think through the complex issues of Fred's care. They came with us to the endless medical appointments. They drove us when I was too distracted to drive. They moved our daughter home from college. They reached out to us with cards and emails and phone calls. They loved us. They celebrated Fred, our family, our marriage and their friendships. They slept at the house on the hardest nights. They came at a moment's notice. They helped Fred die surrounded by love.

This is just a list. Behind every sentence there are long stories I will never finish telling as I will never finish saying thank you. Thank you. Thank you. 

—Peg Edera

Beyond the Mind

After the birth of my first child in 2003, I experienced an extreme bout of postpartum mania, culminating in a psychotic break. Though I was surrounded by family and friends, no one recognized the signs of my increasingly manic behavior. At first, I felt extremely good, like I could do anything, but I wasn't able to sleep. After five days, my sanity disappeared in a flash, and I thought I had entered a new plane of reality. I was awakened to my destiny: I was the new Mary, and my son was Jesus, come back to earth. I was vaguely aware of my behavior during this time, but I had absolutely no control over it. I was hallucinating all sorts of strange things.

My Mom tried to take the baby from me, and I thought she was trying to take Jesus. I squeezed him so tightly I probably could have killed him if she hadn't gotten him safely away. During all of this, my amazing, solid rock of a husband tried to calm me, and I'm sure he prevented more violence. My family and friends rushed me to the hospital, where I fought off the staff, but was eventually calmed by a dose of antipsychotics.

As my sanity slowly returned, I was devastated that my mind had snapped so completely. I was incredibly lucky to have a community surrounding me. I shudder to think of what might have happened if I had been alone with my baby.

In therapy, I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and a depressive episode. I spent the following week

having my medication adjusted, finding a psychiatrist to continue my treatment, dealing with the emotional trauma, missing my newborn son like crazy, and above all, learning to relate with other people who were mentally ill. Suddenly, now that I had “been there,” they weren’t so scary. Until this, I had assumed mentally ill people had some control over their actions – that they just didn’t have enough faith, prayer, or support. But I had all of these things, and my brain chemistry had stopped functioning correctly.

It took two years to recover fully and to start trusting my brain again. I no longer take antipsychotics, but do take a mood stabilizer that keeps me emotionally stable. I still monitor my thinking process and discuss thoughts that concern me with caring family and friends. And my husband makes sure that I get enough sleep – no more night feedings. How lucky is that?

Although I was raised as a Christian, mental illness has changed my perspective on God. As a result, I put up many walls in churches, out of fear of receiving the same judgments I once harbored, and because I still can’t stomach the notion of “God talking to me” the way I once believe it worked.

My family and I have been attending West Hills for six months, and I think it's finally time to admit that it has become our church family. We have felt really welcomed by the people at West Hills, totally free of judgment, and able to just BE here, which is what I need especially. It’s the only way I know how to pray

You lift my heart and I praise You, Lord.

You lift my heart and I praise You; I praise You
in the jay in the bare branches of March 1st beside the house,

in the puddle in the pothole
reflecting the sky and the utility lines,

I praise you Lord in the neighbor’s flag,
in his ornamental plums, in his child’s training wheels,

I lift You
in my heart
and I praise you, Lord.

In my new, still-almost-white PSU hoodie, in my ripped jeans,
in my barefeet at the glass-topped patio table on the front porch,
with this cup of strong black tea with milk and sugar
and this miserable Marlboro, delighting

in the mild March 1st peace and plenty in this kind
orderly
home for wayward boys, drunks and felons all alive-o
recovering in peace and plenty and hope:

You lift up in my heart and I praise You, Lord, I praise You.
–Derek Lamson

anymore. It’s the only way I can transcend my mind. It also helps that our two children love Godly Play Sunday School, and my husband, An, enjoys participating in the choir.

So this is my "trust fall" into community, and I hope to continue learning to love and trust the people here completely. 
–MV



This paper is 100% Post-Consumer Recycled

West Hills Friends Loves You



–Name Withheld
[See this photo on www.mindingthelight.org]

Jury Duty

When I received a summons for jury duty last November, my reaction was, “Oh, no, I just can’t put my life on hold during the holidays and change my busy schedule!” I read on and was relieved to see that one reschedule was allowed. I breathed a sigh of relief and quickly filled out and mailed the postcard saying that I would be more available in February. I then promptly forgot about it.

Well, February arrived and so did another jury summons (grumble, grumble). There was no getting out of it this time. The first day, I got up extra early and arrived at the Hillsboro courthouse by 7:45 am. I joined a long line of other bedraggled prospective jurors standing in the rain waiting to go through security.

Once inside the courthouse, I sat for a while until my name was called. Inside the courtroom, we were asked many questions. Once the lawyers were satisfied that they had weeded out those who seemed to have strong, biased opinions, I found myself sitting in the jury box!

The criminal trial began that afternoon. The defendant was accused by the state lawyer of child molestation. The defendant’s lawyer said, “It simply just didn’t happen.” We listened for several days to testimony from witness after witness representing both sides. Due to the sensitive nature of the alleged crime, some of the testimony was heartbreaking.

As the days went by, I realized that a sort of community spirit had begun to form among us. A group of strangers had been thrown together to decide the guilt or innocence of one man. If we declared him guilty, he would face prison time and be branded for life as a sex offender. This was a great burden to bear, and we wanted to share it with each other and make the right decision.

Finally, closing arguments were finished, and we were sequestered. All twelve of us were bursting to share our impressions and experiences of the past several days. It was 5 p.m., and most of us were running on adrenaline and talking all at once. Our daunting task was to find the defendant either guilty or innocent on six different counts.

I began to realize that not everyone thinks as I do! As we deliberated and the hours ticked by, it looked as if we might become a “hung jury.” By 10:15 p.m., I was tired, frustrated and discouraged.

It suddenly dawned on me to take time out and ask for Divine Guidance. Miraculously, and in minutes, we had reached a guilty verdict. It was clear to me that God had been brought into this difficult situation to guide us. I was now at peace with the outcome.

Why couldn’t I have remembered to pray earlier by depending less on myself and more on God? It seems Divine Guidance is always present.

Hopefully, in the future, I’ll remember to ask and deeply listen more often to the Spiritual Counselor. 
–Margie Simmons

The Angel Interpreter Friend

On a raw November afternoon in 2002, amid the throng of weary passengers disembarking from the plane, strode M., a seemingly confident and stunning 16-year-old Honduran girl who spoke no English. Only a half-smile betrayed her apprehension with us, her circumstances, her life. With welcoming hugs, we embraced our new foster daughter into our family.

The ensuing couple of weeks were filled with a busy agenda of doctor appointments, introductions, and learning exchanges. My limited Spanish was passable for basic communication, but hardly proficient enough to meet M.’s apparent desire for more meaningful in-depth dialogue. After a few days together, she began to tell me about her life, with a torrent of tears and gestures, assuming that I understood. The heartbreaking reality was that I didn’t have a clue as to what she was trying to communicate. I would nod, inwardly beg for wisdom, then seek out friends fluent in Spanish to try to discern what was fomenting beneath the surface. To my dismay, M. would suddenly clam up whenever one of these friends would attempt to connect.

The sponsoring medical organization stipulated that a fluent interpreter must accompany us to all medical appointments. Friends in my community could help locally. For the day of surgery, however, I would need someone to commit to spend a longer period of time at the hospital pre- and post-op. I sent out a plea to the greater

community of Quakers from Newberg to Portland. Why was I surprised when a perfect response came from a loving God? A woman – a stranger to me at the time – contacted us and kindly offered to help. She was not only fluent in Spanish, but had a background in counseling and theology.

This Friend met us at the hospital on the day of M.'s open heart surgery. She spoke with me, the doctors, but mostly with M., in a comforting and peaceful manner. In order to be at M.'s side when she came out of anesthesia our Friend stayed through the night. As M. awoke from a successful surgery, she once again revealed her traumatic history. This time, her words were understood and processed by our interpreter Friend.

Armed with a new respect, compassion and more than a bit of trepidation about the situation, I increased my vigilance in the weeks of convalescence that followed to maintain a healthy environment mentally, emotionally and physically. M. returned to Honduras with a healthy heart and, we believe, a healthier mind.

I now wholeheartedly believe that this angel from God may have saved M.'s life by listening with an open heart and mind, empathizing with her emotional pain, and wisely responding to M. with unconditional love and attention. She served as a catalyst to the greater community of people, who then continued to pray for M. and care for her, and to provide the sheltering pocket of Light that M. so desperately needed at the time.

This Friend continues to encourage and inspire me with her life, even now, as we worship in the same small Friends meeting. 
– A.W.

Please Share Your Story

Our next Query: *When was a time that your body helped you see the Light, either by its limitations or abilities?*

We're looking for your story about a time when your body warned you, delighted you, disappointed you, or otherwise taught you about the Light.

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

For inspiration, check out Melanie W.'s video "The Amazing Body"
<http://tinyurl.com/cbwjwpl>

Story Deadline: 5/19/13

Discovering a Caring Community

In 1993 the state of Washington passed a Health Services Act that implemented at the state level much of what the Clintons advocated for (unsuccessfully) at a national level. The state issued requests for proposals for consulting firms to assist with implementing various provisions of the law, and I led my firm's proposal related to one of its primary elements. In January 1994, having been awarded the work, I found myself in front of panels of business, legislative, and policy leaders, and occasionally television cameras. I felt completely over my head and began looking for an escape.

At this time I had also recently become part of a small group at Reedwood Friends Church, and during our check-in one Sunday morning I brought this concern to the group. One friend asked "How, more specifically, can we support you in prayer?"

I answered "I feel excited by this opportunity, but I feel unqualified to lead this project. I need clarity as to whether this is something God is leading me toward or a product of my own ambition. And if it is God's leading, I need to know what I am supposed to bring to this situation."

After some silence a friend asked "What about this makes you think it might be a leading from God?" I answered "This legislation is aimed at increasing access to affordable health care, and that is something I have always felt God has called me toward."



Claire's Dream of Jesse, 10/06 – a dart to the heart of healing medicine that took me instantly from despair to joy.

Multimedia collage by Sally Gillette
(See a larger copy of this image at www.mindingthelight.org)

Another friend asked “And there were proposals from other firms to do this same work?” I answered “Yes, eight other firms submitted proposals and ours was selected as the strongest.” Someone else followed up “So, this work will be done by someone no matter what, it’s just that you were selected to do it?” I said “Yes, that’s true.”

After additional silence, one friend said “I can’t speak for the group, and I know nothing of the world in which you work, nor of your skills. But how you were selected means you are likely competent. I do see access to affordable health care as something God cares about, and I would rather see this work led by someone with your heart for this concern than by someone for whom it might be just another project.”

Other friends murmured their assent, and I felt utterly convicted. Uncomfortable or not, I felt clarity that God had indeed led me to this place. I said to the group “That helps me a lot with clarity. Now what I need is your prayers and support as I work through this project over the next few months.”

What was born that day was what I now know is called an anchor committee. This was the first time I experienced the power of a spiritual community to provide clarity and strength in undertaking a walk on a difficult path. I am grateful that it has not been the last! 

–Greg Morgan

“There are no passengers on
Spaceship Earth. We are all crew.”
Marshall McLuhan

By Kindly Words

Even though I'm near a cacophonous corner on Hawthorne, I choose to sit at this cafe table because there's always something of interest here. I mention this to the man at the neighboring table. His name is Joe, I find, and we are instantly serenaded by an older gentleman on the corner. (I've seen him here before. Even though his back was turned, he'd swiveled and given me a knowing nod before he began). His choice today is "Faith of Our Fathers," all verses.

*...Faith of our fathers, we will love
Both friend and foe in all our strife;
And preach thee, too, as love knows how,
By kindly words and virtuous life....*

The preacher opens his Bible and reads a long passage from Jeremiah. I can hardly hear him through the crush of buses and trucks, with a shouting match between pedestrian and driver, each claiming right of way. Meanwhile I'm thinking Jeremiah was thrown into a pit because his listeners hated what he had to say.

I have no beef with this Christian on the corner. (Now he's singing "I Surrender All.") He doesn't shout above the chaos-chorus. He seems part of it. He could be the grace in this mess. He could be John the Baptist crying in this wilderness.

From his table, Joe shouts to the preacher, who walks over. All I hear is the preacher saying "Jesus" very gently several times in the conversation; then he crosses the street and is gone. Joe turns to me and asks proudly, "Did you hear what I said?"

Me: No, I couldn't hear over the traffic.

Joe: I shouted, "Hey, what are you selling?" He didn't get the joke, so he came over and said, "Jesus." I said, "You can't sell Jesus!" He didn't get it. I asked again, "What are you selling?" and he said again: "Jesus." Then he asked me if I wanted to be baptized! "Are you kidding?" I said. He said something about Jesus again and left. He wasn't very good at marketing!

M: Wow.

J: I've been selling for 30 years. When you've got a customer, you don't give up that fast. Unless you know you don't have a sale. Then you walk away and don't waste your time.

M: Maybe he knew he didn't have a sale.

J: You know, you're right. That could be. But you have to at least respond. You don't just walk away. Anyway, he was just reading on this street corner. Nobody could even hear him. What a waste!

M: I couldn't hear much, but I could tell it was from the Bible. You know, I'm a Christian, too. I was just writing in my journal, saying it's hard for me to judge whether or not that preacher's foolish to sing hymns on Hawthorne. God asked people in the Bible to do some strange things. God asked the prophet Isaiah to walk naked in the streets for 3 years! Maybe God's asking that man to read and sing out on this busy street.

J: Because maybe one little word will seep through.

M: Yes. 

–Margaret Kellermann

Jesse's Stone

After her son, Jesse, died, my friend Sally faced some very hard times. Among much sadness was the significant reality that expenses of his long illness had left her with no financial reserves. One of the important things that Sally had to defer was placing a marker on Jesse's grave.

When a friend of Sally's from West Hills learned that Jesse's grave had no marker, she and other caring Friends secretly raised funds to buy one. And so, one rainy Sunday afternoon a year and a half after Jesse's death, Friends from the community gathered at Jesse's grave at Riverview Cemetery to commemorate the placing of the stone.

Below are some of the words that were spoken that day.

What does a stone mean?

That a life was lived and will not be forgotten. Time can do its usual work and we, those who promise to remember, will also die. The stone, though slowly changing, will stand or lie in place, solid, constant and telling all who pass by in all the years to come that here was a life once solid, too, remembered and loved and learned from.

What does a stone mean?

It is a marker. A marker of life and love and relationship. It is the reminder for us that, though the body no longer lingers with us, the love and relationship continue. This is not what we, who are still walking on this ground, had planned on. The way of being together has forever changed. The vehicle for the love and relationship

is no longer in service. But the love and relationship remain.

What does a stone mean?

The stone reminds us of what is true: the one who lies here moved hearts, touched others. Some of us were touched every day with every breath. Some of us were touched because this person touched others we love. It is this movement of the heart that the stone holds. That touch that lights one of us with the spark of love and then is felt by all those connected in all the ways we connect. This is what the stone holds forever.

What does a stone mean?

A stone is a form of honor and recognition. It is not the only way we honor and recognize a life. It is, though, one of the everlasting ways we place memory. One of the ways we say this life had meaning. This life marked us. This life had substance and weight. This life spoke to us and when we pass by here we will remember.

What does Jesse's stone mean?

The answer is for each of us unique. How have you been marked? What was the touch of Jesse's life on yours? How does love live on? 

-P.E.



(See this image at www.mindingthelight.org)

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 attender 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.

*Two are better than one,
because they have a good return for their labor:*

*If either of them falls down,
one can help the other up.
But pity anyone who falls
and has no one to help them up.*

...
A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.
Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NIV)

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 :)