

MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal, Chapter 7

WHEN HAS FOLLOWING THE LIGHT LED YOU TO A CHANGE OF HEART, DESPITE INITIAL RESISTANCE?

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 Turning Point

Introduction: Last year, a week or two after we published the first chapter of Minding the Light, Fred Edera came to me and said, "I have a story." At that time, Fred was losing his ability to speak, but he was able to tell me the bare bones of the story below. It was clear that Fred intended this story for Minding the Light, but it didn't work for the chapter at the time. I've held the story until it could work with a query, and now that it does, Peg has added some details from her personal knowledge. I wish that I could show Fred his published story. I hope that Someone will show it to him. – Sally Gillette

I had been smoking for 30 years. I knew it was bad for my health, but

I hadn't been able to quit. I joined a support group, Nicotine Anonymous, and still, I couldn't stop.

One day I asked Jesus to help me. I don't even know why. I had never done anything like that. Suddenly I felt Jesus standing beside me. He put his arm around me and said, "I'll help you quit smoking." And he did, and I never smoked another cigarette.

I had attended West Hills Friends for at least five years by that time. I was not a believer. I just loved being with such good hearted, well intentioned people and good musicians with liberal views. From that day on, I participated in the community more fully, more whole heartedly. I understood it all differently. 
– Fred Edera, as told to Peg Edera and Sally Gillette

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Just When You Think You Are Done. . .

When I was young, my church taught that women were to be submissive, under the authority of some male: father or husband or church leader. Women were not to have authority over men. This is a common teaching in Christian churches, but that did not make it easy for me to accept. It felt wrong, even though I could read in the Bible where it was clearly right. But if it were true, why did it feel so bad? The older I got, the worse I felt, until one day I realized that either something in me was going to die, or I had to figure out how the church had made a mistake.

My first step was to analyze why it felt so wrong. The "Aha!" moment came when simple reasoning showed that if God didn't want women to teach or

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.

have authority over men, then God would have no cause to speak to women or give them a message or insight or anything worth mentioning. God wouldn't need (or particularly want) women in the church. That clearly made no sense, so I decided the "if" statement must be wrong.

I spent years looking deeply at the Bible passages used to justify the church's teachings. I learned Greek. I read the words in context. I learned that not only was the apostle Paul badly translated (sometimes so badly that one begins to wonder if a conspiracy was afoot) but badly interpreted.

So I was happy. I'd done my homework, I was grateful for knowing that I had a place and a voice (even if my church wouldn't accept it for the present or near future), and now my task was to figure out a way to spread the good news.

In this state of blissful smugness, I found myself at the college library one day. I don't know why or how I was in a particular section that had this particular book, but I was idly scanning the shelves when I saw a title: "Is The Homosexual My Neighbor?" Immediately my thought was, "Oh, no. I've solved my problem; this is NOT for me."

And I heard The Voice say, "One day, you will have to put the same focused intent into this issue as you have just put into your issue." And I knew it was true. 
— Julie Peyton

Tell us Your Story

The query for our next chapter is, "What's something you have created, in response to the Light within?"

Please tell us your story — in words, photos, art, music, video, or . . . ? We publish stories as told to the extent that they fit within our guidelines (see Guidelines box).

Story Deadline: 7/22/12.

If you have a story and would like help telling it, let us know and we'll send a Story Catcher to work with you.

The Unwelcome Change

It began when my son came out as Gay during his senior year in high school. My husband quit talking to him, although living in the same house. That only increased my commitment to support him—I loved this creative, sensitive, gifted son.

I learned from books and movies about LGBT issues and culture. I helped where I could as my son found his new community and went off to college. I feared for his safety and future. I mourned the loss of grandchildren I would not have. And I felt loss and grief when I slowly shared with relatives and family friends and saw relationships change.


The losses and grief expanded to include my marriage. We divorced. I ended this already broken family: I did that, I, the one who planned to be married forever. I felt strongly led to end this marriage, not be a party to anger, and do what was right. I felt God leading me to a healthy new life where I would stand on

my own. I was scared, continued to sit in silent worship daily, and followed those leadings and nudges toward divorce for nine months.

I continued learning about gay culture and saw a movie about two women falling in love. I suddenly knew that I, too, was gay. I was a lesbian. Who? Me? I'm not one of them ... don't act like them ... don't dress like them... NO! I only agreed to divorce. I'm just supporting my son. I did not leave my marriage to become a lesbian!!!! NO! I was angry! This felt like a cruel joke. And I wanted no part of the pain I'd witnessed with my son.

But a paradigm shift has no reverse. I could not deny this new insight about myself. Looking back, I saw I always was lesbian. But now, what would happen to me? What would people think? How would I talk with people? work? live? tell the relatives? friends? One morning, I awoke with the devastating awareness that I could get killed for being myself. A lesbian and also a gay man had been killed, nearby, recently. I felt alone, unsafe, disconnected and confused. I now had a secret. Who could I tell? That year was very long as I worked through many dilemmas. I lost friends, others became distant, and family relationships changed again. I worked to integrate my new self with my old self. I sought out others as I needed support, wisdom, guidance, and friendship on this new path. In the stillness of silent worship I suddenly noticed more space within, more openness. I could hear my inner voice more clearly. When I no longer blocked

inner nudges, awarenesses, likes and dislikes, preferences, then the inner voice became stronger.

Gradually joy crept in. I came into new life, unexpectedly. My world and awareness expanded. Those changes were hard. And life today is hard when inclusion in community, friendship, and family are threatened or denied; these are basic stabilizing and meaningful elements in my life. But I am also grateful today to be living with new understanding, integrity and honesty. As I learn to know myself, I become the person God created. I am not like everyone else; I am to be me. 

– Pat M.

Resolve

Bear him. Bear him lightly,
as an incense bearer
swings the censer,

as a dancer bears
the air above her and
across her shoulders,

as bread is borne home
hot and light from market
in a basket,

as bell notes borne
on waves of air from open,
arched courtyards,

bear him. Bear him like
that Job, who bore sharp
news with song,

who heard from God with
one hand over his mouth,
like this. 

– Margaret Kellermann

Joining West Hills Friends Church

In 2006 I joined West Hills Friends Church. This was not a transfer from another Friends Church nor a simple transfer from another church body. I had been a member of the Presbyterian Church, and an ordained minister of that church for over fifty years.

I had spent part of the summer of 1949 traveling with a group of young people and working in churches in Texas and Louisiana. The rest of the summer was spent hitchhiking across the US visiting family. During this time I felt a call to the ministry that was clarified in conversations with two of my uncles who were ministers.

In two years I finished my college degree and then went on to theological seminary for three years. Having finished the required education and passing muster with the appropriate committees and the Presbytery of Carthage-Ozark, I was ordained and installed into my first church on August 11, 1954.

Ordination in the Presbyterian Church confers upon the minister a number of opportunities and responsibilities beyond those of lay people. Although I left the pastoral ministry and went into secular employment after fourteen years, I retained my ordination and it opened doors to many opportunities for service over the years.


After three years attending West Hills Friends I realized that this is where I belonged and it was clear that it was time to become a member. However, by leaving the Presbyterian Church I was also

leaving my ordination, which had been valuable to me over the years.

As I considered losing that ordination by joining WHF, it became clear to me that ordination was just one kind of response to my call to ministry. Over the years my ministry had changed in form and practice. My leaving the Presbyterian Church was another change, but not an ending to my ministry.

Friends and Presbyterians do not have the same views on the church. For Presbyterians there are things that have to be done by ministers. When boards, councils and assemblies are organized they must have a balance between numbers of ministers and lay people. (The time is past when that balance involved three genders: men, women and ministers.) Ministers have a number of special responsibilities and functions, both in leading worship and in the administration of the church as an organization.

Friends, from the beginning, have had a very different foundation for the way we function. It is said that George Fox did not abolish the clergy, he abolished the laity. Every one of us has the same responsibilities and opportunities in the worship and governance of our faith community. This is well expressed in the line in our Sunday bulletin: "You are the leadership of this meeting!"

Every function and opportunity I had as a Presbyterian minister, I have as a Friend. I did not leave the ministry, I joined the gathering of ministers we call West Hills Friends. 
– Wilbur Wood

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A New Purpose


I don't know that this story fits the query for this Chapter, but I offer it anyway.

A few years ago I was minding my academic business, largely doing what I had been trained to do: research in the basic biophysics of proteins. This work took me in a number of directions (as it still does), often guided by the interests of other researchers who come to me with problems that are perhaps amenable to the primary research technique which I perform. In this way I have been fortunate to study a very broad range of very intellectually interesting problems. And my work life might have gone on in this fun and interesting way for a long time.

But one of the lines of investigation was quite divergent from the rest. It came as a single idea. It was more 'applied', even practical in nature. It involved exploring the possibility of discovering a cure or prevention of a disease that causes tremendous suffering and death among the World's poor. But there were reasons to think that I'd not succeed at this venture - this would be a field that I'm not trained in; I was only a little familiar with it; I was probably too old in most peoples' minds to switch research focus so dramatically. Together, these reasons would make my credibility quite slight - especially to the funding agencies who would have to pay for the work to have a chance of being anything but only a slight, laughable effort.

But I really did not hesitate - at least not much. I assigned my entire research group to the new effort. I naively wrote research grant proposals in my newly


chosen field. And we, the entire laboratory, worked hard. Results were not quick, but when they came they were beyond my expectation, almost beyond my hope. Eventually funding did come, and it looks like the original idea may turn out to be practical.

Will the "new project" work, really? Will it come out ahead of the many other wonderful ideas that other researchers are pursuing? How much does that matter? I don't know the answers to those questions. But this I do know: I am now following in the Light in my work, and my work is a very large part of my life. Was all this a "Change of heart, despite resistance?" I don't know. But this I do know: I felt called to this new direction, and in it I have found joy that I never had in my work before. 

- d

The heart has its reasons of which reason knows nothing.
- Blaise Pascal

Jesus Under the Bridge

In the evening light
on a river walk
as we dipped under
the thundering traffic
a picture of Jesus
pasted high on
the undergirder beam
smiled down at us
How fitting it was
posted on a span
that crossed the waters
and sad, that as in life,
He too was trod upon,
unknowingly
by the feet of those
who need Him most. 

- K. L. Killian

[see photo at mindingthelight.org]

Resisting Dream Wisdom

Until reaching middle age, I rejected the information dreams offered as mere concoctions of my unconscious mind, influenced by happenings of my day, or what I ate before going to bed. I now see dreams as gifts from a loving God who is guiding me day and night.


Around 1983, I had a dream that ultimately landed me at West Hills Friends, but it took about fifteen years to get me there. I had a lot of growing to do. At the time of the dream, I was an active member of a kindly, liberal Episcopal Church, but found the liturgy and hierarchy stifling. A numinous conversion experience at sixteen had led to my baptism by a beloved Episcopal priest. I still felt loyal to the denomination, despite my longing for something more resonant with my soul.

Here is the dream as I remember it. *I am sitting naked in my Episcopal Church, observing the rite of Confirmation. The seats are theatre seats, rather than pews, and I stand up on one to see what's going on at the altar. The Bishop is performing a confirmation rite*, striking each youngster kneeling before him. He is clobbering each teenager on the head with his scepter, making the kids scream with pain. While feeling outrage at this, I suddenly become aware of my nakedness. Uncomfortable being naked in church, I look up at the crucifix above the altar, at Jesus. He is looking right at me. I see that He also is naked, and still alive, squirming on the cross and beckoning me to help Him. He wants to be taken down from that cross. I proceed to the altar, pass the Bishop and the kids, and make it my work to remove Jesus from the cross. Freed, Jesus hoists me onto His back and we fly outdoors into the daylight.*

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The Friends Church I went to after that was Christ-centered but just as unsuitable for me as the Episcopal one. Instead of nailing Jesus to the cross with liturgy and ritual, these Friends impaled Jesus with dogma, fear, and prejudice. As I grew more and more uncomfortable, I recalled the dream I had in 1983. I didn't want to give up on being a Quaker, even though I couldn't be authentic there. Finally, I made a decision to heed my dream's wisdom, and I found a better fit at West Hills.

The change of heart required trusting my Inward Teacher, and sojourning only where I can be openly myself, where Jesus is not nailed down, but alive and well. 
– Claire Nail

**This symbolic blow is actually part of the confirmation rite, but is usually administered much more gently than in my dream. – CN*

The Parable of the Two Sons

What do you think? There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.'

'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

"Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go.

"Which of the two did what his father wanted?"

"The first," they answered.

Matt 21:29-32

"His name is Elmer... we have to take him!"

My ears perked up when I heard the announcement in our small Quaker meeting concerning a young Guatemalan boy, crippled from the effects of polio. He had been cleared to receive medical care in Portland and needed only a foster home for his time here. My husband had also wrestled with polio in 1952, so I was sensitized to the ravages of the disease and couldn't stop thinking of the fellow.


At the time our 'girl tribe' ranged from four to fourteen with our house and lives completely full and overflowing. We consoled ourselves by committing to pray for this little guy hoping that some nice family with boys would take him in. For two weeks he danced in our minds and sat on our hearts. Out of curiosity one day, I called to find out what had transpired. "Praise God, you are the first people to call." Oops..."We are just checking". That night we discussed the situation. I was maxed out and so was my husband. If we became involved, everyone would have to pitch in. "His name is Elmer... We have to take him." Our children were unanimous in their desire to mother, sister, experience, and pull this little boy into our lives.

So it came to pass. Elmer arrived with only the clothes on his back, a pencil, a notebook, and cursory medical/social history papers. We learned from these records that in Guatemala he helped his mother grind corn. They lived in a rented wooden shack with no electricity. His father was known to drink excessively and at such times would beat Elmer, as he was an extra mouth to feed. One of his

legs was nonfunctional and the other had 60% usability. Quite adept with his handmade crutches, though, Elmer could move faster than most people run.

Daily he wore an ear-to-ear grin and a cheerful attitude fueled by the hope that he would return to Guatemala, able to walk unaided by crutches. He was grateful and helpful with incredible resourcefulness, through skills honed from living by meager means. Then, after six months, Elmer's bubble of hope burst. Following reams of tests, prodding, poking, with endless consultations the doctors concurred that they could do nothing to help him. We were all heartbroken. With no other recourse, we put him on a plane to Guatemala with a few extra pounds, a backpack, loads of memories "unfixed" ... "unhealed."

This time with our family had been marked by joy, sorrow, tension, exhaustion, tolerance/intolerance, stretching, learning, love and disappointment. I questioned God on the purpose of it all and found little resolve but that Elmer impacted and penetrated each of us on different levels in unique ways. The light of this young smiling crippled boy exposed the petty in each of us...for me, the rougher, miserly, ungrateful edges of my thinking and living.

A few months later we received a phone call from Healing the Children, asking if we would consider fostering a Korean baby girl needing open heart surgery. The family assembled to discuss it. "A baby Korean girl? We have to take her!" chimed the girls unanimously. 
– A.S.W.

Death Wasn't Part of the Plan

Twenty-five years ago, I worked as a summer intern at Reedwood Friends Church. It was a great opportunity. The church had four very competent pastors on staff. In that company, "I felt like a grasshopper in my own eyes." I felt very inadequate.

Because my internship was during the summer, all of the other pastors kept leaving for vacation. More than once, all of them were gone at the same time. On those rare but dreadful occasions, the crushing responsibility of pastoral care fell on me. I was terrified that some dear saint of the church would die while no better qualified pastor was available.

When it comes to death, we pastors are expected to sound triumphant: "Where, O death, is thy victory? Where, O death, is thy sting?" But in the presence of real suffering, those words feel counterfeit to me. If someone can point to the body of their beloved and say, "There is the sting of death, you jerk," then I am inclined to concede the point. I don't have the knack (nor even the inclination) to find a sanctified silver lining within someone else's dark cloud. So I hid in my closet, and I prayed that everyone would remain alive for a few more months.


Happily, everyone at Reedwood survived the summer. I made it through my internship without exposing my incompetence.

The following summer, I started my ministry at West Hills Friends. The handful of people connected to this project were relatively young and healthy. Best of all, I

was given the responsibility of forming a new church. I could invite people to participate in something positive and healing and life-giving. Death wasn't really part of the plan.

Of course, death is rarely part of the plan. Over the last 24 years, people from my church have died. Some of them were young. Some were older. Sometimes, death was expected. Sometimes, it was a shock. Every time, I felt inadequate. I still don't know what to say. I still don't know how to help in a way that feels meaningful.

I'm afraid that I will find myself in an aging congregation, where a majority of my attention is devoted to the end of life. I don't want this to happen. I don't want to feel inadequate so much of the time. I've informed God that I will leave the ministry if death becomes routine. Although I've kept this commitment to myself, the matter has long been settled in my mind: "If people are dying all the time, I am done with this."

Over the last six months, God has been changing my heart. I'd like to say that God has finally shown me a secret for helping to guide people through grief and loss. But that hasn't happened. I still feel inadequate. Only now, I don't mind so much. 

– Mike Huber

And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.
Ezekiel 36:26

Publication Guidelines

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: mindingthelight@gmail.com.

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 safe websites such as YouTube or Vimeo.

Contributions to Minding the Light for printing and mailing costs are much appreciated. Send your tax-deductible donation to:

West Hills Friends
P.O. Box 19173
Portland, Oregon, 97219

Note on the check the contribution is for Minding the Light.

Visit our website to see the beautiful photos that have been contributed.

www.mindingthelight.org



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