

Live Oak Meeting (Memories and Lessons at 50 Years)

Symbol of Gulf coast territory
the largest tree on hurricane's brow
the live-oak tree green all year
turning brown gradually at Spring's time.
Dropping leaves one by one in tiny suspiring sounds
at the very time new leaves sprout light green
keeping the eternal cycle of life going.
For this it is called "live-oak".
Can grow to trunk of 10-12 feet in diameter
live hundreds of years
yet from the horizon it cannot be noticed as particularly high.
She spreads out horizontally
bent against strong winds of nature's festal release
of stored energy, coming across from Africa's coast
far away: the hurricane.
This symbol of my Friends meeting
fitting one for Quaker's peaceful, firm stand, brow bent
against the wind of violence so apparent in recent centuries.
Made more appalling by industry's revolution
mechanization de-humanizes the carnage.
We don't even see, now our media coverage
clothed in state-sanctioned silence
masquerading as "national security", an illegal war.
Far away 10,000 Iraqis die, Who cares?
for "Our God is better than their God" says one general in charge.
Does this not sound like before the so-called Middle Ages?
Returned we are when city-state idolatry
and dim isolation ruled the mind.

My Live Oak Friends Meeting
received me with open arms
sinner out of mind, depressed with distressing change.
Yvonne, Mel, Neal, Albert and May, Dave, Polly and Allen
Names with faces dear to me
with no questions asked, nor even thought of
nor questions about my loyalty to some set of creeds
but the single one (and not then even a question):
The Inner Light of God shines in everyone no exceptions.
As on the bumper sticker oft seen in meeting's parking lot:
"God bless everyone, no exceptions!"
Yvonne approaches me, so to serve with Outreach's friendly band.
"I don't know", I reply, "I have no experience in reaching out"
(and I didn't, not much anyway).
Returns my response with a Friendly laugh
"No experience necessary!", just desire to love and serve.
So there I was soon at Christmas time
standing in front of Galleria, bold symbol of consuming society's hold,

Holding a lighted candle with others
symbols of world peace in 1986.
Several take note of us, passing drivers
the TV people even come out.
Simple lesson: Simply do and it shall be given.
A little common-unity develops at one apartment complex
in this complex city: Warren and Marsha, Dave, myself and Norman
often shared dinner.
There Marsha taught me how to soften the edge
of a pie crust in such a way to discourage burning.
Now, every time I make a pie, I think of this lesson:
Softness promotes a collected response to edgy matters!
And Norman who dwelt with the scantiest of furniture:
A violin, a mattress and a rowing machine,
all in 900 square feet of apartment space
a lesson in simple living I have not forgotten!

On to other service too for meeting and community:
The newest project: build a home into which we can all fit.
and fitting too, a beautiful time, a troubled time when
anxieties flared and community closeness grew as well.
Is that not odd? We lost some (most temporarily)
we mourned their absence but the experience made us stronger.
With help from a member newly-borne into our midst
we met James Turrell noted artist of Light, Quaker too
his friendly presence guided us through
the dark night of reaching out to non-Quaker life
for help in bringing to fruition a vision more than simple shelter:
Repose in peace for everyone each Friday night under the "Sky-space"
where dome of earth's envelope of air
catches the changing light of sinking sun
runs a gamut of colors, and contrasts inner- and outer light.
Gives vision to what one would not ordinarily see
(especially on cloud-covered evenings): Peaceful blue!
Of many shades moving into deepest black
as heavy the patch descends upon our sight
as if merely by stretching out our hand we could touch it!
Darkness, do not be afraid of darkness.
It was after all what God started with, there our journey too begins.
I, an assistant clerk of meeting then to able John who got the project going.
In between I was clerk for two years, my other book-end was Donna.
These two clerks, John and Donna stood for me examples of
patience and able guides, outdid me in involvement deep
with meeting's triumphs and tragedies during this time.
For here began the sicknesses and losses
of elderly meeting members on whose wisdom we counted:
Grant, Benji, Jan, Lois and Allan.

My mind goes back to other thoughts before the building project:
The meeting considered the marriage of two women.

Our education process began ably led by clerk Warren's hand.
Why should we allow a certain kind of human being
To "live in sin" while insisting that heterosexuals not do?
Homosexuals are born not made.
Thus crafted as well in God's design
as natural as any couple whose sex happens to be different.
Bible interpretations notwithstanding
Hebrew elders disapproved of men "sodomizing"
(What a septic term!) their women.
It was Lot's wife turned to salt as tragically she looked back
with fondness and loss.
What was her sin? Lot got away apparently with his own flesh about him.
"Sodomy" has naught to do with homosexuality.
Jewish leadership sought those ways to increase their population.
A ragged band of a few escapees from Egypt's grip
the responsibility felt to assert Israel's place and bring the good news:
that God's forgiveness does not end
and he is one with all of us, all man- (and woman) kind.
Like Roman church today decrying birth control
lest population numbers slip and tradition be overtaken
by fertile wave of infidel
the Hebrew leaders came down hard
on man and wife engaged in pleasure-acts without fertile outcome.
What has this to do with homosexuality?
In the end, we supported the two women
and held a ceremony of marriage, celebrated by all.
A few Friends were lost here too,
a greater loss for those who remained
disappointed we could not reach them
for they could not see their way to come around
and support the meeting's decision.
Then the day of the wedding came
a day important for me in ways unexpected.
for there I saw, as I took my seat
a beautiful woman I had not seen before
sitting in reverent and supportive silence with her daughter.
A friend of the bride she turned out to be
and as I was also a friend of the bride, I decided
when meeting ended to introduce myself to my future wife.
What is your name? (Discouraging her answer
for it did not sound right to me!)
as if I expected some other set of words to describe her.
Well, the story can be shortened.
I came to love and respect her, name and all!
And soon we were asking meeting's council and advise
on marriage to each other.
Married in Hiram's beautiful, simple and self-constructed inn of art
a man who gave his aging neighborhood restored homes
and a beautiful garden stretching from his reconstructed 19th century home
(once blown over on its side, in the 1900 hurricane)

down the block, to his gallery building.
His home became for a time of generosity, mid-week meeting's place.
In the garden children of the neighborhood were invited every Easter-time
to hunt for eggs in this beautiful setting.

Then the years went by and we opened the new meeting house to all the
community.

This opening was shepherded by able Friends
who became hosts to all of Houston and beyond.
The scheduler and her assistant, Jane and Edwin respectively
organized and kept us going initially
when this new vocation challenged our participation in unfamiliar rites.
Many Friends, I cannot mention them all
dedicated themselves for many years to construction project's tasks, now
completed.
Monumental patience and constancy were Larry's gifts to meeting.
Friday nights, watching the wonder overhead-mostly in silence
(no one told them that they had to!)
it just seemed natural, and often we would hear
the comment of transforming experience.

Our meeting gave much to me and Pat
and taught us how community and God are inseparable.
There are no gurus alone on mountaintops communing with God.
This is just an appearance.
They are there awaiting our arrival to learn from them
what they hear in the silence
that "still small voice" of psalm-sung truth.
Though our Friends are dear, we made a decision to move away
Finding a place that seemed so right
that we could no longer stay in the city
home to us for three decades, nearly.
Friends are missed, and it is hard to say goodbye
to so many who were our unselfish guides in ways still not known.
Our new home and life, finding Quaker community in the region
is thus supported, as we were in years past.
Our hope is that Friends will visit and participate
in what we have found here: A closeness to nature
I dearly missed (though not really knowing how much)
while busy raising family and career.
Know that we are with you (through this poor poem),
in your celebrations of the 50th year.
A community of example for all to see and hear.
And our home is open to you friends, at any time of year.

William H. Mueller, April 11, 2005
written for the 50th anniversary of Live Oak Friends Meeting