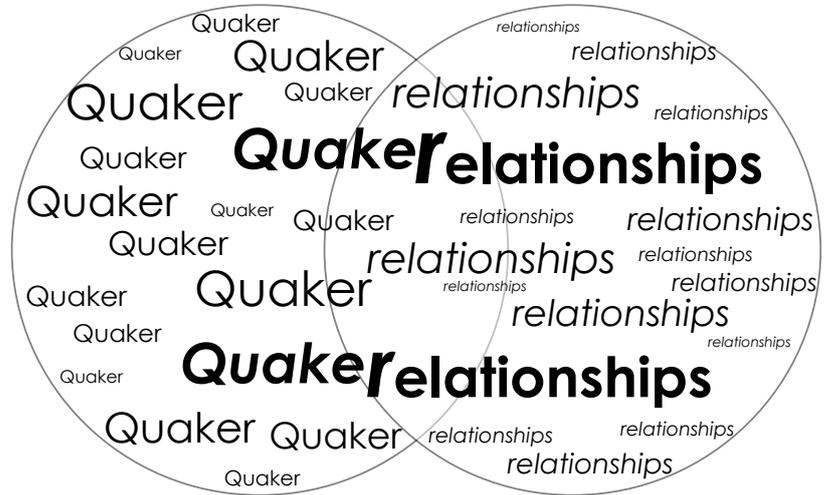


# THE YOUNG QUAKER

Feb 2017 • Issue 14 • Free

*Relationships Issue*

With Brexit and Trump and our governments' reactions to the refugee crisis, it seems like the world is turning in on itself and dividing faster than we can work to unite it; that our governments and societies are rapidly narrowing the categories of people that we should love, respect or even regard with anything except fear and mistrust, even treat as really human. But we can counter this by acting out of love in our day-to-day relationships, and by reaching out a hand to strangers. These change our lives every day, and it is the collective action of individuals that changes law and policy and slowly changes our cultures. 'Think global act local' has never been more relevant.



## REFUGEE TALES

By **Alice Crawford**

Last July a diverse group of people walked over sixty miles from Canterbury to Westminster, sleeping on the floors of community halls along the way and stopping to share tales and music with the locals in the evenings. They were walking to protest indefinite immigration detention in the UK, that is – our government's illegal policy of locking up people who haven't committed a criminal offence, and putting no time-limit on their sentence. There are currently over 30,000 people being detained in 11 "immigration removal centres" across the country, including approximately 1,000 children, despite the government's pledge to end child detention in 2010. From the moment you are put in detention you don't know if you'll be there for a week, a few months or even a few years.

Last year, around a hundred people walked together each day; some had experienced immigration detention, some work with those who have, and others were appalled by what they'd heard and wanted to do something positive to counter it. The concept for the

Refugee Tales Walk is based on Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, in which medieval pilgrims walked together and told each other their stories. The walk was arranged by Gatwick Detainee Support Group and a resident poet at the University of Kent while many of Britain's beloved literary voices joined the movement to relate the experiences of detainees to local communities along the route and to bring their voices out of the shadows. Each night the walkers and locals heard the story of someone who had been held in detention in the UK; the Mother's Tale, the Soldier's Tale, the Teacher's Tale...

A large portion of those in detention are people who have come to Britain after fleeing their country because their lives were endangered or because they were being persecuted for their beliefs, ethnicity or sexuality. These are people who our government, as signatories of the UN Convention on Refugees, recognises as refugees with a right to seek safety here. The flip side of this is that our government also recognises, in theory at least, its responsibility to protect them. CONT p10

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Our faith urges us to welcome the stranger as our equal and friend, feed those who are hungry and shelter those who are homeless, needy and frightened.

Meeting for Sufferings, February 2017

## YFGM RECEIVES FUNDING FOR OUTREACH WORK FROM BYM

By Nick Watts

In Autumn 2016 YFGM applied to Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) for a grant towards its outreach activities and in January 2017 they confirmed that they will give us £9455. This covers the cost of printing and posting The Young Quaker, travel for the outreach committee to YFGMs and other external events, the travel costs of first time attenders to YFGM and our accessibility bursary for anyone who requires additional support in attending YFGM. This funding fits into BYM's wider activities around engaging young adult Friends will hopefully introduce even more people to Quakerism and the YFGM community. YFGM says a huge thank you to BYM for their support! ■

## MENTAL WELLBEING REVIEW SURVEY

By Jenny Baines

The Mental Wellbeing Working Group needs your help! Last October we launched the first YFGM Mental Wellbeing Review with the aim of finding out how YFGM affects the mental wellbeing of those who attend. We'd like to thank everyone who's filled it in so far; we've had a good response and it's encouraging to see so many thoughtful comments coming in. However, we still need more. In order to gain a representative understanding of mental wellbeing at YFGM – particularly those areas in which we could improve our processes – we are looking for as many people to complete the survey as possible. The link to the online form can be found on the YFGM Facebook group or in recent YFGM emails, or a paper version can be requested from the concern Working Group. Please share the link with anyone you know who has attended YFGM in recent years as we're keen to hear from those who have left, too. Thank you for your support and engagement! ■

## MEETING FOR SUFFERINGS: 3RD DECEMBER

By Rici Marshall-Cross

Meeting for Sufferings (MfS) is the Representative group of Britain Yearly Meeting (BYM) which carries out the work and discernment on behalf of Yearly Meeting when YM is not in session.

We covered numerous items from BYM Trustees, Quaker Life and the Book of Discipline Revision Preparation Group. We added the June protesters arrested at AWE Burghfield to the Court and Prison Register, holding them in the light. A European theme emerged with reports from BYM representatives to eight European Yearly Meetings and the Quaker Council for European Affairs (QCEA). We affirmed our commitment to QCEA and supported changes to its governing structure.

We discerned two topics brought by Area Meetings. The first was the decriminalisation of the possession of drugs for personal use, brought by Cornwall AM. The discernment was quite moving, with personal stories of people's lives harmed by a criminal record, and the disproportionate negative impact on the young, poor and ethnic minorities. We heard about Portugal's similar decriminalisation. The engagement of many Area Meetings produced differing conclusions without a united decision. The outcome was that those united with Cornwall will work together to push this forward.

Next we discerned Quaker Peace and Social Witness (QPSW)'s 'Vision for a criminal justice system paper. MfS and Area Meetings were asked to consider whether it represented the views of British Quakers. The paper stated 'Justice should be compassionate, forgiving and healing – restorative, not retributive. We want to change attitudes and encourage the criminal justice system to move towards this vision of justice.' The 'vision' was found by many to represent their views and be useful in challenging Meetings to consider the topic, whilst some felt it didn't go far enough. Our discernment encouraged QPSW to continue working on these issues. ■

## ENGAGING YOUNG ADULT QUAKERS PROJECT

By Oliver Waterhouse (Assistant Head of Ministry & Outreach, Quaker Life)

Are young adult Quakers the future of Quakerism or are they a key ingredient to its beating heart right now? A new project over three years is going to ask questions such as this, as well as identify ways to help Quakers aged between 18 and 35 feel more included in the central structures of Quakerism in Britain.

The first part of the work will build on the research that led to the project's creation. It will need to link with communities such as Young Friends General Meeting and other places, such as Quaker summer events, where many young adult Quakers find their faith is rooted. It will make strong links with local and area meetings where some young adult Quakers have found a spiritual home. The project will look at Quaker ser-

vice and see if opportunities at all levels can be more inclusive. It will work alongside all of these Quaker communities to discover what can be improved or what might need to be developed to make Quaker structures more accessible to young adult Quakers.

The project officer, Jonah Mckenna-Moss, a Quaker with keen interest in the young adult Quaker communities worldwide and a long history of participation in New England Yearly Meeting and Friends Committee on National Legislation in Washington, will be leading the project and is starting work towards the end of February 2017.

For further information: [youngadults@quaker.org.uk](mailto:youngadults@quaker.org.uk) ■

## TRIDENT CONCERN IN COURT

By Hannah Brock

After taking nonviolent direct action to delay the production of nuclear weapons at Burghfield Atomic Weapons Establishment on 27 June 2016, myself and four others were on trial for Aggravated Trespass in Reading Magistrates Court in December. We were all incredibly grateful for the support we received both before and during the trial, and after just half a day of a planned three-day trial, the judge said there was no case to answer, so dismissed us. Whilst we were naturally pleased not to have been found guilty (we argued that our actions were reasonable in trying to prevent a greater crime: preparation for war crimes), we were also sad that we didn't get a chance to voice our motivations and objections to weapons of mass destruction, having 'got off' on a technicality before the case for the defence was even heard. Thank you everyone for all your support.



The following month, we were back in court, but this time supporting our friends from the Put Down the Sword Christian affinity group, who had been blockading on the same day but at a different entrance to the factory. Five people (including a Friend from Tottenham Meeting) were found guilty of Obstructing the Highway. Whilst this was disappointing, the judge said he admired them and gave them a relatively short conditional discharge and very low costs.

Then on 29th January, our Friend Sam Walton was arrested (also as it happens with a member of Put Down the Sword, a Methodist minister), having broken in to the BAE Systems Warton factory and attempted to disarm war planes being sold to Saudi Arabia, and which were likely to be used to commit war crimes in Yemen. Thank you, Sam, for this witness and we look forward to supporting you through the trial that may follow. ■

# Why 'I do'?

## Young Quakers on marriage

**“It’s a life-defining, weighty commitment.”**

Emma & Siobhan

Why did you decide to get married?

E: We wanted the support of friends and family and the Meeting when making our commitment – that was very important for us.

S: We didn’t ever consider staying together without eventually getting married. We knew we wanted to get married quite early on.

E: It had always felt like the right thing for us.

S: Marriage is a calling. It’s a life defining, weighty, commitment and so it’s important that our declarations to each other were made acknowledging our need for God’s help and in the company of our community of friends and family.

E: I agree. Marriage is ministry to each other and to the community. It was very important for our union to be in front of God, and made by God. Our faith is an important part of our marriage.

**“We wanted to be known as partners, rather than husband and wife.”**

Kristin & Ian

*Kristin and Ian have been together for seven years and are going to get married in March of this year. They were heavily involved in the Equal Love campaign.*

K: The Equal Love campaign challenged the twin bans (at the time) of homosexual couple marriages and heterosexual couple civil partnerships. Now that the bigger injustice has been addressed [homosexual couples were given the right to marry in the UK in 2014] the campaign has finished.

Heterosexual couples still don’t have the right to get a civil partnership – what happened to that?

K: We took the campaign to the European court of human rights (ECHR) but it was rejected – it didn’t even get to be a case: a judge of the ECHR can sign a submitted case off with no given reason.

What are you and Ian planning to do now?

K: We are getting married! We’ll have a civil ceremony in Bristol, which is where we gave our notice to request a civil partnership in 2011 – we find it fun to draw the full circle and have our civil ceremony there now that same-sex couples can also do that.

We will need to call each other ‘husband’ and ‘wife’ for the ceremony’s purpose, but forever before and after those five minutes we’ll be ‘partners’.

Do you secretly, in that deep place where you don’t let anyone in, do you secretly dream of getting married? Your life’s ambition: a life-long commitment to your one true love? In the UK today, same sex and opposite sex couples can marry in a civil ceremony and marriage is more popular than ever. (Same sex couples can only marry in a religious ceremony if the religious organisation has agreed to marry same sex couples - Quakers agreed this ages ago but the Church of England and the Church in Wales has not agreed to this.) The roots of marriage are in creating social order, in religion and also in patriarchy, but we don’t need to do it for those reasons anymore. We’re marrying for romantic love these days, but this is radical new concept if you take the long view. The long-term romantically committed don’t have to do it – but loads of people still do, and lots of young Quakers do too. Quakers, in my experience, tend to be fairly critical of any societal norm, so if any group was going to have thought carefully about this, it would surely be us. I spoke to Kristin, Emma, Siobhan, Sam, Joseph and Harriet to find out the young Quaker view on getting married.

**“I trust the wisdom of my heart and feelings more than traditions like marriage.”**

Sam  
*Sam hasn’t ever really wanted to get married or civil partnered; he feels called to life in intentional community.*

I don’t think I’ve ever really wanted to get married (although I have often wondered what my best man’s speech would include!). As I get older (I’m 27) this doesn’t seem to be changing. While I do value commitment, honesty and generosity in relationships, I don’t necessarily feel drawn towards making a life-time commitment towards another or wanting it from another.

One of the big influences on my approach to relationships (and I guess my whole life!) was Erich Fromm’s book *The Art Of Loving*. I can remember him saying that he felt that genuine “romantic” love between two people was not necessarily eternal and that a healthy relationship may well come to an appropriate, healthy and happy end, with both partners parting ways without a deeper friendship and love ending. My limited experiences in romantic relationships fit this idea, and so I have come to trust the wisdom of my heart and feelings more than traditions like marriage.

If I do end up getting into a relationship that goes the distance, I don’t think it will be because we have made life-long vows, but because it works and we both want to remain together.

**“The decision to marry was to mark the specialness”**

*Ellie and Joseph got married in May 2016.*

Why did you decide to get married?

J: The decision to marry was to mark the specialness. I feel we are blessed to have been given a real chance together so it’s gratitude for that too. It’s a way of being grateful to the world for what you have by making a public declared commitment to each other. Falling in love is quite possible, what’s exceptional about marriage is that commitment.

Ellie & Joseph

**I don’t believe that ‘God’ somehow ‘prefers’ marriage.**

Harriet

The Christian idea of marriage is that the couple make their vows to each other in the presence of God, and that the ceremony is blessed by Him. Some Christians believe that the God and Church (in the followers of Christ sense – not the building-with-a-steeple sense) relationship is a mirror of the marriage relationship.

However, no young Quaker I spoke to thought that marriage was some kind of ideal. Harriet said: “I think if I got married I would want it to be a religious ceremony but I don’t believe that ‘God’ somehow prefers marriage”.

Couples choosing a Quaker marriage may opt to ask either for God’s help, or Divine Assistance. Last year, a proposal from a non-theist Friend to amend the Quaker marriage declaration contained in Quaker Faith & Practice caused consternation. The wording has not been changed, although the minute from the meeting recognised that ‘some Friends may find the current wording difficult’.

Quakers don’t view marriage as the gold standard and recognise that relationships can be just as healthy and fulfilling outside marriage. Marriage is life-defining for those couples who choose it. It’s a big, weighty decision, yes, but if you choose to make that decision then it becomes a public celebration too. The ritual reinforces a family, a community, and for Quaker couples, a meeting. Some of us won’t choose to marry but let’s always mark and celebrate everyone’s life defining moments, with the same enthusiasm, support and joy that we have in celebration of the marriages in our communities.

Interviews and words by **Bea Shelley**  
Do you have thoughts on marriage?  
Email: [theyoungquaker@gmail.com](mailto:theyoungquaker@gmail.com) ■

# Talking Ethical Polyamory

By **Mish Liddle**

When I was invited to speak at YFGM about ethical polyamory I didn't know what to expect. I wasn't sure I was the right person to talk at all, asking "but don't you want an expert?" I hadn't written a book, a website or lectured on it. Not having a Sociology or Ethics degree seemed to make me a poor speaker about polyamory. The fact that I'm celebrating my fourteenth, eighth and fifth anniversaries this year with my two girlfriends and one boyfriend gives some indication why I was approached. This is how I live and YFGM were curious.

Had they asked me a few months earlier I would have said that I hadn't read up on the theory in years. A friend who had gone from a long-term monogamous relationship to a polyamorous one, asked my advice. Whilst this is not unusual it was the first instance when it was not about a new relationship.

Since I've been in multi-partnered relationships since I was twenty and have only ever begun relationships as polyamorous, I thought a bit of a bit of reading up might be in order.

Polyamory is practically mainstream compared to when, fifteen years ago, I was looking at obscure websites and forums based in San Francisco. No wonder the Quakers asked me – why get a professional when Polyamory is a lived reality?

Unsurprisingly the talk itself started out about the practicalities and moved on to the ethics of the situation. By the end I was giving general relationship advice. Quakers, I've discovered, agree with the underlying principles of polyamory – being true to yourself, honest in your life and communicative with your partners and friends. I've heard that works in monogamous relationships as well polyamorous ones. ■

# Quaker Marriage is Unique

**Laurence Hall** spoke to Michael Booth, the person who supports registering officers.

The first thing to know is that Quakerism, along with Judaism, has its own system of marriage which linked to but separate from the state. This resulted from the refusal of Quakers to be married by hierarchical powers be they priests or judges. When some tolerance was finally granted, Quakers were legally allowed to have their own autonomous system of marriage which they set their own rules and records.

With amazing clearness, Michael described what a couple organising a Quaker marriage must do. It begins with the couple talking to the area meeting's (AM) Registering officer. The first stage is for the couple to fill in Quaker forms, the appropriate legal forms and have a meeting for clearness with elders and the registrar. This is an in-depth discussion for the couple ask what they want out of a Quaker marriage and general married life to ensure they really want to get married. If all are agreed then the next stage is to involve the

community: the couple's intention to marry is announced to their local and area meetings. In the past this was a time when objections could be voiced but now this is mostly a celebratory announcement to the community. Then the time and place of the meeting can be organised and this is publicly announced to the meeting.

Then we turned to the day itself. Once everyone is in meeting room, music, prayers, hymns or other agreed celebrations can be performed. There are no set rituals: what is important is that people are ready for the meeting. Someone will usually stand and explain the process and then meeting for worship will begin.

When moved, the couple will say their declarations of Quaker marriage. For British Quaker marriages, these words are laid down in Quaker Faith and Practice and while there is opinions within them, nothing must be added or excluded from

declarations. That was an issue at 2015 Yearly Meeting as for a Quaker marriage to be valid, you have to use the words 'with divine assistance'. This is not easy for non-theist Friends to say. Michael's diplomatic response was that Yearly Meeting decides the wording and can change it. After the couple have said and signed their declarations then the meeting opens up for all to be involved, all to minister and all to sign the marriage certificate.

With everything explained I asked Michael the big obvious question; why should Young Quakers have a Quaker Marriage? His answer sum up why Quaker marriage is so unique:

You can get married within your unique worshipping community in a unique way. You marrying partner without anyone telling you in the wedding that you are married, but knowing that a community of equals is supporting you all the way. ■

# Young and Free?

Why is being long-term single sometimes hard in our society? **Bea Shelley** writes.

"You don't need to worry about being 30, love". There's nothing like the aforementioned comment from your mother to zero in your attention on the approaching 30 and all the possible reasons why you might want to worry about it. Welcome to one of the best decades, you've come through the wilderness years, you're more secure in yourself, you know who you are now. 30, for me, doesn't feel terribly secure yet. My thirties feel bumpy on entry. I'm bumped against fiancées, bumped against babies, bumped against joint homeowners, bumped against a lot of 'smug couples' and, worst of all, bumped against my parents' not-too-well-hidden concern for my being single still.

**My parents.** That's the biggie according to psychologists. Self esteem is said to relate very strongly to 'whether you have achieved more or less than your mum and dad'. So I wonder whether my parents' 30-year strong marriage is making me feel embarrassed and ashamed about my long-term single status. Our parents' lives are the first model we have of what adult life looks like. Many of us weren't presented with a model of clan living, or of life in an intentional community: many of us grew up within marriages and nuclear families. Many of our peers might be creating these too now. Being single, like perhaps any other form of difference from the prevailing model, feels hard when you realise you don't have the same form of close relationships that others around you do.

If 'not being where you expected you would be' makes being single hard, perhaps instead an ongoing feeling of insecurity does. You've either got to be knackered from the day or have pretty solid self-confidence on Saturday nights to be a happy single I contend. Because being single means arriving at parties on your own, and often (though not always) means arriving at home on your own. If you're in a suffocating relationship, you may crave the freedom of this but if you're not you may long for the backup of a partner. It's nice to go out and know that someone in the room cares about you the most. It's nice to come home to someone you can make long-term, life-defining decisions with. 30 is the first decade of big decisions: money, kids, where to live, parents

and jobs. How nice it would be to have someone to bounce your insecurities off.

According to a Gallup trend analysis more young adults are single than not – but you can be sure that the unsmug unmarried doesn't believe that! Single people melt away in our films, books and advertising. (They're either on the sidelines or else they find their true love by the end – so they don't count!) Many of the rites of passage, the markers of real success for adult humans concern relationships: marriage, engagement, kiddos. There is no equivalent for a single person of the celebration that couples get, so, even if we don't necessarily view ourselves as 'failures', we certainly don't see ourselves as successful yet. We're still lying in wait. If only being single was presented as an option of equal status [and there are plenty of reasons to enjoy being single] that more people could choose actively. Would being single be easier if more of us who are within this category celebrate it?

We might wrack our brains with our friends. Am I too picky? Are you unwilling to compromise? Am I too scared to share? Are you too scared to make yourself vulnerable? Are your standards too high? Am I too cautious, unwilling to take risks? Are you too romantic and not pragmatic? Am I prejudiced and close-minded? Are you not mixing with people enough? Am I too shy? Are you too confident? Lots of people can make their judgements and so single people can easily feel like we must be doing something wrong.

There's a kind of mysterious internal buoyancy of the soul which is vital for countering the self-doubt. And friends who become your urban family are critical too. And if, for whatever reason, you don't have those things, that, on top of all the other reasons I found in my own soul-searching, is why being single might be hard. ■

**What's your experience? If you have stuff to say on being single – good or bad – please write in and let us know.**

# My Sister, My Quakerism and Me

By Laurence Hall

The most important relationship in my life is the one with my youngest sister. Obviously my relationships with the rest of my family, girlfriends and friends have been and are important, but on reflection my relationship with sister has done more to shape me, including my Quakerism, than any other. One of the important elements of this is that my sister is a disabled person with Down's Syndrome. This chance nature of my sister's genes would not mean anything in a truly just society, but means everything in our repressive society.

But before I continue, I don't want this to be seen as a neat, uncomplicated story that takes away from the great complexity of me, my sister, or our relationship. The demands of the word count mean that simplification is inevitable and the resulting simple picture will never do justice to a relationship spanning nearly three decades.

The equality testimony can sometimes seem abstract. Even when it becomes focussed on something more concrete, it is as a future goal to work on. Most Quakers will say they want a more equal society. But for my sister the struggle for equality is something she has to live every second, every day, simply for being who she is in our society.

To be a disabled person with Down's Syndrome in our society is to face inequality at every turn. Even just being alive is an amazing achievement. As soon as Down's Syndrome is discovered in a foetus there is huge cultural and institutional pressure for an abortion with barely a hint to the pregnant woman that a person with Down's Syndrome can live a fulfilling life. This continued into education as my sister had to struggle against educational segregation to get into a mainstream school. This

was just the beginning of her resistance to a system of separation which attempts to force disabled people away from the rest of society. Yet, resisting these structural inequalities is possible, which my sister has shown with her mainstream education and full life, but inequality is doesn't originate exclusively from institutions.

Inequality and resistance to it is her everyday. People look down on her and treat her like a child, thinking that they are being nice when in fact they are embracing the worst of inequality. Yet she resists through demanding equality for herself. To give just one example of many, we were having my sister's birthday dinner in a restaurant and when the waiter realised it was her birthday he patted my sister on the head and said to her "you are good girl". This was her 30th birthday and she shot back "I am not a cat", stating her humanity and her equality in a few words.

This enactment of her equality, which she has to do every day, is one of the main reasons why I'm a Quaker. When you see someone you love face so much inequality and yet offer so much resistance you can't fail to be influenced, you can't fail to be inspired. When I found the Quakers and saw that the foundation of everything that they are comes from this radical egalitarian phrase 'that of god in everyone' it seemed to provide a framework to live an egalitarian life that is chosen, not forced.

The best way to overcome inequality is not look to abstract futures, but to live an egalitarian life as best you can in every moment there is. That, for me anyway, is when we live the truly Quakerly life, when we live as true equals and the chance nature of your genes no longer matters. ■

the couple of meetings we went to while on holidays.

After over six years together, we wanted to celebrate our relationship and affirm a conscious choice for permanency. Having felt progressively in the right place in the particular quality of quiet at meeting, it seemed the natural place. For me an Anglican service could still be meaningful, but my spiritual home isn't really there now and for Sam it never was. We have appreciated the very supportive conversations we have had with Friends about the possibility of marrying at my meeting. The process of establishing if this is the right thing looked slightly daunting at first but, in the context of the people involved, feels like a good journey, another gift. ■

## MY JOURNEY TO QUAKER MARRIAGE

By Frances Sleap

I have been attending my meeting with a sort of regular irregularity for around two years. I had first been to a meeting with a friend at university. Years later, no longer feeling sincere in my local Anglican service, I decided to try again the form of worship that my mum had always felt an affinity with but never got round to trying herself. My fiancé, Sam, grew up atheist. But he was full of enthusiasm for the simplicity and honesty of

# A Love Letter To My Quaker Role

Bea Shelley writes a personal experience of all it has meant to have (and love!) a Quaker role.

When should you set down your Quaker role? Or when should I? That's the thought that's been bobbing around my mind for a little while now. It occurs to me that when your role means that you are so "Quakered out" that you can't face the thought of going to a Quaker meeting, then perhaps that is that point. In fact, quite clearly I went way past the point where I should have set down my role.

So, I'm going to finish up doing my Quaker role, but just before I do, I want to tell all the readers of this little piece how absolutely (is life-changing too strong a word?) my role has been for me, and why, therefore, I encourage everyone to take a risk, take a role, run with it, ideally love it, let it change you, enable you to do good things, let it do good things for you, and then pass it on!

Shortly before I started my role, I had just returned from three years' living abroad. I was unconfident in the world of work in England, unconnected and at sea ( ... so to speak: I might have wished I was back on the coasts of the Med, in reality I was lost in the Midlands). God knows what I needed at that point was a gigantic, huge-mongous Quaker role to get myself into. As it goes, the universe got involved at that point because it turned out that *The Young Quaker* was in the market for an editor.

There's no experience required in Quaker roles - and this is ideal! I did not have the first clue about how to edit a magazine, and I suggest that it's probably about the same degree of clue as you have. So learn it, why not learn it on the job - it's the best way, so it's said.

In the time that I've been TYQ editor I've sent myself on about four journalism courses. I've bought a couple of exciting reads: "Just my Type" (it's not about dating) and "The Handbook of Editorial Design". I've cut up

countless magazines and made collages of fonts, line-spacings and layouts to fill two ring binders. "What an obsessive nutcase" you might think. "Damn right!" I'd agree, but imagine if I hadn't been a TYQ editor? I have never known I was such an enthusiast. Because the thing about Quaker roles, is that they are not necessarily what people normally do as hobbies. You can't be a general fund manager as a hobby (I don't think), you can't nominate people for things in real life (I don't think!) nor do interfaith relations very easily on your own. I could go on. You might discover some unexpected things about yourself if you decide to do a Quaker role, I tell you!

The other thing about doing a Quaker role, is that you have a role! You are part of what helps an organisation of people work - and work well at that! You are needed, for some reason or other, and that is a really confidence-giving feeling. The Royal College of Psychiatrists say that spirituality is something like a feeling of meaning and purpose, combined with a deep-seated sense of belonging. I see a ton of meaning in TYQ, a ton of purpose in what this role is for and, my goodness, did it give me a great sense of belonging within YFGM.

While I'm waxing on and on about the virtues of my role, you're probably wondering where it all went wrong. Why am I giving it up? Like chocolate, an overdose on your role can make you a bit sick. Or sick of it. Quaker roles can be huge, and if they are too big for one person, then it means that your life gets a bit unbalanced by it. My role helped bring me into this community which has been hugely important to my form of spirituality, but before it pushes me away too much, I'm going to set it down.

So here ends my love letter to my Quaker role. It's been BRILLIANT and I've grown up such a lot within it. I hope very very much that if you have the chance, you have just as deeply fulfilling experiences with yours as I have had with mine. ■

CONT. from p1.

As most of their asylum cases haven't been resolved yet, the unjust treatment of detainees can't be defended with the familiar argument that they are "bogus asylum seekers". In this country, since the Magna Carta was agreed to by King John in 1215, our legal system has been based on the idea that we are innocent until proven guilty. But we treat people seeking sanctuary as threatening criminals and worse, we take away their basic human right to freedom, we take away their right to see loved ones, to access healthcare and legal support and their right to a voice.

Medieval pilgrims walked from London to the seat of Christian power in Canterbury to seek redemption. The Refugee Tales walkers walked the route in reverse, heading for the seat of political power in Westminster with a very clear message for our government: we stand in solidarity with detainees and we

want an end to indefinite detention. We were walking on ancient pilgrim route, across which thousands of feet have tramped over hundreds of years, often on journeys of redemption, healing and self-discovery. In many ways this walk also played these roles. Redemptive because we were seeking to counter the dehumanisation of others within our society; healing because we were seeking an end to detention which causes unimaginable harm to individuals, and to create a new discourse in which they can be heard and through which those who have not experienced detention can connect with them. All of this: facing the inhumanity, and reaching out a hand, is also a process of self-discovery, and it can help to make us whole again too because allowing this injustice harms us all.

The act of walking together through our landscape was both redemptive and defiant. The government's policy of division

and detainment attempts to transform our country into an incarcerated space in which we can't reach out to each other, or even hear each other's voices. The Refugee Tales Walk reclaims the land as one of welcome, and it brings people together in friendship. This year's walk will be from Runnymede to Westminster where we'll ask the government again to stop their unjust and unlawful imprisonment of innocent people. Beginning at Runnymede reminds us of the writ of habeas corpus, incorporated in the Magna Carta, which commands that all imprisonment must be justified. Walk with us in 2017 to share in solidarity and positivity: a demonstration of love in the face of an increasingly fearful and selfish political context.

[www.refugeetales.org](http://www.refugeetales.org)

[www.gdwg.org.uk](http://www.gdwg.org.uk)

<http://www.aviddetention.org.uk/immigration-detention/what-immigration-detention> ■

## DO YOUNG FRIENDS KNOW THEIR PLACE?

By **Paul Parker**, Recording Clerk of BYM

Meeting for Sufferings, in its visionary document *Our Faith in the Future*, imagines a future where 'Quaker communities are loving, inclusive and all-age.' How close are Quakers in Britain to that today?

From the evidence in BYM's 2016 research into Engaging Young Adult Friends, not all that close. Although the young adult Quakers who participated in the study reported high levels of commitment to being Quaker, they experience difficulty in finding ways to participate in the life of the Quaker community. Often this is because Quaker meetings are not organised in ways that suit young adults – the timings of meetings, the time and commitment demanded and the quality of the welcome don't always work. Being greeted, every time, with the words 'isn't it nice to see the young people here!', doesn't always cut it. Neither does being told the basics of Quakerism by a new member in their 60s, when you're a young Friend

who's been attending meeting since childhood 25 years ago. And being seen as the 'future of Quakerism', when you want to be a living part of it here and now, really misses the point!

Isolation, the experience of being the only young adult in a meeting, was another common factor. Many meetings, in urban as well as rural areas, are small, and the chances of stumbling across another young, or even young-ish, adult Friend are even smaller. Even meetings in university towns struggle to welcome young Friends and offer a high-quality spiritual experience. Community matters – we know that for many Friends of all ages, feeling they belong, and finding others of like mind, is as important as the meeting for worship itself. And shared concerns, the opportunities to engage in witness and other Quaker work together, can be a key part of what glues our Quaker communities together.

We know there are young adult Quakers around – they're a vital presence at events like Yearly Meeting Gathering, world conferences and as volunteers

and staff at summer schools and JYM. They're active in Young Friends General Meeting and in Quaker activism; there are young Quaker groups in a few cities, they work for BYM, Woodbrooke and other Quaker organisations.

So how to build that 'loving, inclusive, all-age' community? How can young adult Friends be more visible, more present, more welcome? Are there easy things the wider Quaker community can do to make it easier for young adults to be, and stay, involved with Friends? How can BYM and Meeting for Sufferings (on which YFGM has a representative, and to which it can send minutes) hear more from young adult Friends about their experience of Quakerism, their concerns, their needs and their gifts?

Let's try to answer these questions together. BYM is about to launch a project on Engaging Young Adult Friends. Let's make Britain Yearly Meeting, and every meeting in it, a loving, all-age, inclusive community. ■

# Decisions, decisions

**Beccy Talmy's YALP project was born after a decision was taken in her Area Meeting which some Friends had felt was rushed. How do Quakers disagree? No one in that moment could answer. She describes her exploration of group decision-making, our commitment to equality and the Quaker Business Method.**

Decision-making processes seem like a rather dry, bureaucratic area of interest but, for me, the question of how people can be less alienated and removed from the decisions that determine their lives is key to making the world a more equal, happier place. Participating in Quaker decision-making in particular feels like an experiment in finding better ways to work together inclusively, laying the foundations for a time after we have established the Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, or 'after the revolution'.

I approached everyone from Jesus Lane Meeting, and some others too, with a set of questions about the Quaker Business Method. I received around 40 responses in total and over 35 from my Jesus Lane Friends! It was a lot of rich data to make sense of, especially because I actively opted for very open-ended questions. I can't claim that people's responses are representative, but that's quite a high response rate and a lot of the responses reinforce each other. I heard from people with varying degrees of involvement, and both people who did and didn't know who I was. Some people simply responded saying that they didn't participate or hadn't participated in a long while so didn't feel able to comment on the QBM, which highlights the centrality of experience to practice.

**'How successfully, in your experience, do the Quakers involve everyone in decision-making? Are there any ways in which Quakers could involve everyone better?'**

Focusing in on the responses to those questions, it's clear that not everyone who attends MfW is involved in decision-making. There are differing perspectives as to whether this is a problem – for some it is inevitable and better that those who are keen take the lead on decision-making; for others it is a problem and something we could do more to address. The idea that we are strong at inclusion relative to other groups came up a lot. Pretty much everyone highlighted that the QBM is time-consuming – it was a recurring theme that the time taken is worth it and leads to more robust decisions, but people also questioned how accessible is it to take that time, and whether we could sometimes be more efficient at decision-making. Lots of people emphasised that there is opportunity to be involved, and it is up to individuals whether to take it up or not, but then I was troubled that people who felt more like newcomers tended to find the QBM mysterious and had often only found out about it by chance.

**'are there any individuals or groups that you would identify as having authority within Quakerism? If yes, how is this authority exercised?'**

It's interesting that some people were confident that no one has authority within Quakerism, whereas some people said that of course we do have authority figures. A theme that emerged was of authority being exercised out of necessity and on behalf of the Meeting and in order to keep things running smoothly, rather than as an end in itself or something that was associated with status.

It's fascinating that elders are the group with an official role most strongly associated with authority, particularly because of visible displays of authority e.g. reminding friends of the importance of silence when there is lots of ministry in quick succession at MfW – sitting in some sense 'at the head of the table'. Whether they were named as such or described in a way that struck me as amounting to the same thing, 'weighty' friends were mentioned as much as elders as figures of authority. These are people who, by virtue of wisdom and experience rather than an official role, are often looked to for guidance. Some people stressed that the authority of both elders and weighty friends was exercised gently and to the benefit of the wider meeting, but I wonder whether the QBM intends for these authority figures to emerge. I remember learning at Woodbrooke that early friends definitely did have leaders, whose leadership was very much based on their charisma.

Other themes which struck me when going through the responses as a whole were: the idea of putting ego to one side is very important, and looking for the right way forward as something out there to be discovered rather than something individuals know in advance and push for; regular role changes and agreeing minutes have both been mentioned as very important by lots of people; there is a lack of clarity around whether QBM involves consensus or something entirely different, and whether individual friends have 'power of veto' or not; and there is a recurring theme of newcomers finding the QBM mysterious, not being actively taught it, and even only finding out about it by chance. Some people appreciate Jesus Lane as a worshipping community and are glad that it does not demand more of them than that.

I have come to realise that delegation, and not everyone being involved in every decision, is a perfectly legitimate part of an inclusive process for decision-making; indeed, not everyone wants to be involved in decision-making, and they shouldn't have to be, but the key is for involvement to be as accessible as possible and for decision-making to be transparent.

It seems like a huge indulgence to have had so much time devoted to reflection and personal growth, but I have come to realise that it is by investing in ourselves that we make ourselves better placed to serve. I cannot recommend enough looking at the programme of courses on offer at Woodbrooke – if money is an object, there is a lot of financial help available, and it's such a fantastic resource that we're all so lucky to have. ■

**What is...****The Young Quaker?**

**T**he Young Quaker is a magazine for young Friends everywhere, produced in print and online. Published by YFGM, TYQ comes out three times a year, to coincide with YFGM weekends, meaning that you can expect a new issue in February, May, and October, full of news, comment, and more.

We're always looking for new material. If you've got an idea for an article you'd like to see in The Young Quaker, get in touch with us at the email address below. If you're able to write it, even better!

The editors would like to thank all those who have contributed to this edition of The Young Quaker. It would be impossible to produce the magazine without the ideas, articles and photographs that you send in.

Please get in touch if you would like to contribute to the next issue, due out in time for the next YFGM in May 2017. We would welcome any submissions for this edition no later than 30th April.

Co-editors for this Issue: Beatrice Shelley, Laurence Hall and Alice Crawford. With special thanks to Rachel Evans.

Marriage feature illustration credit: Jenny Orme. Front page illustration credit: Tim Rouse. Thank you to Naomi Hook for inspiration and encouragement of the relationships theme. The Young Quaker can be found online at: [www.theyoungquaker.org.uk](http://www.theyoungquaker.org.uk) For all enquiries, including advertising enquiries, please contact TYQ at [theyoungquaker@gmail.com](mailto:theyoungquaker@gmail.com)

The Young Quaker is produced by Young Friends General Meeting. [www.yfgm.quaker.org.uk](http://www.yfgm.quaker.org.uk)

**What is...****Young Friends General Meeting?**

**Y**oung Friends General Meeting is a community for young adult Quakers aged 18-30ish, in Britain. Our main events are the three General Meetings which take place at Quaker meeting houses around the country in February, May, and October each year.

If you'd like to get involved in YFGM, come along to a YFGM event, or simply find out more, then visit the YFGM website at [yfgm.quaker.org.uk](http://yfgm.quaker.org.uk) or email [yfgm@quaker.org.uk](mailto:yfgm@quaker.org.uk). You can also find the YFGM group on Facebook.

**Who are...****the Quakers?**

**Q**uakers, or the Religious Society of Friends, are a religious group with Christian origins. Quaker worship is mostly silent, with people speaking when called to do so by the 'Inner Light', sometimes called 'that of God within everyone'.

Central to Quakerism are the Testimonies of Peace, Equality, Truth and Simplicity. A commitment to these principles has put Quakers at the forefront of political and social issues; campaigning for the abolition of slavery and more recently for the legalisation of same-sex marriage.

**YFGM Catch Up:**

Around 60 of us gathered in Lancaster from the 21st to the 23rd of October for an autumnal YFGM. For many of us it was our first experience of Young Friends General Meeting and a noisy and energetic welcome session helped us begin to get to know each other. We built more fellowship over meals, talk and washing up. We began the Saturday thinking about the spirituality we bring to meeting for worship for business, and found out that what sometimes feels like a mundane part of Quaker life can reveal truths about how the divine reaches into all parts of our life as Quakers. In our epilogues we explored our own spirituality and meditated on the changes life can bring to ourselves and to our community, at this time of the year. Ruth Wilde led us in an exploration of Quaker discipleship – does this mean leading, following, or simply walking the path together? With a great diversity of beliefs and experiences, can we say there is such a thing as the 'essentials' of Quakerism? When words struggle to express these things, what we feel through our shared practice can unite us. Hilary Wainwright gave a talk on the Lucas Project, when 40 years ago arms workers united to make ambitious plans to use their skills to make more socially useful products. Hilary highlighted some of the differences between then and now, but also made the case that valuing workers' skills and helping transfer them to positive use remains relevant today. In tumultuous times, YFGM remains a space to ground ourselves, even as our own community welcomes newcomers and adapts to changing circumstances. What remains consistent is the fellowship we feel, whether in deep spiritual sharing, or over a simple cup of tea. We carry this fellowship with us as we leave Lancaster, and look forward to reconvening in February.

Jenny McCarthy and Peter Doubtfire, Co-clerks, October 2016, Lancaster.