

MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal, Chapter 24

TRAVELING MERCIES: HOW HAVE YOU EXPERIENCED THE LIGHT AWAY FROM HOME?

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

John Woolman

Gratitude for Traveling Mercies in the Everyday

I am grateful for my guardian angels. These are not cherubic babes with wings and harps on clouds, but scrappy, fierce protectors alert of my blind spots and ‘heaven-may-care’ enthusiasm for adventure. My partner jokes that God drew us to one another on the urgings of our respective guardian teams—mine calling in for a leave of absence, his antsy for a bit more spice and risk in life.

My awareness of these protective agents has always been highest when I am adventuring abroad. Much of my exploring has been solitary; and while I met many delightful people along the way, I rarely had travel partners. Despite my isolation—or maybe because of it—I encountered

a profound sense of Protective Spirit throughout my journeys, especially in moments of uncertainty and risk. As an experienced traveler, I do not take these moments lightly; and the sense of protection I consistently encountered brings an enveloping sense of gratitude for those holding me in the Light each time I left home.

It has been awhile since I have traveled far from home alone; and this past summer presented the opportunity to be grateful for traveling mercies in the everyday. I had been commuting by bicycle several times a week, relying on my trusty tank-of-a-steel-frame to carry me 60-80 miles each week. I felt a renewed sense of vitality in the physical and mental challenge, as well as a sense of peace in the transition offered by this mode of transit.

The morning broke crisp and clear—a gorgeous day for an early morning ride. I was off and cruising, mentally logging the miles ahead and

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enjoying the early sun at my back. As I approached a traffic signal, my eyes caught movement on the left—jarring me to reactive alertness. I made eye contact with the driver of the Jeep as the collision unfolded.

I have been hit by a car before (did I mention my guardian protectors have petitioned for a transfer?). Previous experiences included a sense of disconnected observation, slow-motion travel through space and time without the accompaniment of surrounding noise or ancillary participants. This time was different. I am on the ground, beneath the bumper in an instant—the sense of slowed time is present, but my brain can only process one layer of information at a time—a) the car is not moving ... b) my head hurts ... c) the driver has opened the door as a bystander runs toward me ... d) I am okay ... it is going to be okay—thank you, Spirit Force, for your protection and presence.

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 relationships with God and shared them with the community. For example, John Woolman’s *Journal* has been continually in print for more than 200 years. By publishing stories from our community, we hope to continue the Quaker tradition of disclosing God’s activity in our lives.

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

The Healing Process is iterative, and always takes longer than I want. I have received the all-clear to ride my bicycle outside again, but am giving myself permission to wait until the cherry blossoms return—either that, or I find a large hamster ball within which to ride around. My partner and guardian angels are all pushing for the second option. 🔥

—Melissa Baker

Light Brigade*

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- Mike Huber, Recording Clerk
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A Summer's Journey

In June of 1948 I had finished two years at UCLA and had no clear direction as to what I wanted to do, so I dropped out of school and worked for my father. We built greenhouses, and it seemed like we were always on the brink of bankruptcy.

The following summer I wanted to do something different, so I planned to visit my grandparents in Indiana. Working for my father, I rarely got paid so I planned to hitchhike. This would be feasible

because I had a scattering of uncles spaced out across the country. When my uncle Francis heard of my plans, he wrote suggesting my participation in a church program called Youth Caravan where a team of young people would work in various churches, a week apiece, for five weeks. I followed up on my uncle's suggestion.

My journey began when my father dropped me off on the edge of the LA metro area. The next day I got a series of rides from a salesman selling wheel balancing weights to gas stations. We got to Albuquerque where he paid for a motel room for me. The next night I was in Amarillo with my uncle Francis.

A few days later a bus ride got me to the gathering place for the Youth Caravan. A week of training was followed by our team visiting four churches in Texas, plus one in New Orleans. When the Caravan was over, I resumed my journey to the hometown of my grandparents, a great-grandmother and a mix of cousins that I never got sorted out.

My return trip was quite uneventful until I spent a few days with my uncle Francis in Amarillo. One evening he put the question to me, "Have you decided to become a minister?" I could not answer "yes" because I had not specifically considered that decision in any organized, thoughtful way.

But I could not say "no" either. With the Youth Caravan I had spoken from the pulpits of five churches. With my team, I had helped

organize and teach in vacation church schools, and taken part in many other activities. We had carried on serious conversations among ourselves and with many church members and ministers. My experiences in those weeks showed me that I could do the basic ministerial tasks and more than that, I felt a real calling to the ministry through the interactions with clergy, lay people and family members.

So, yes, I said "yes."

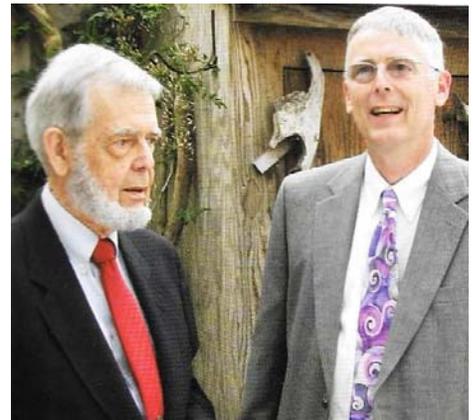
Having experienced all these traveling mercies, I headed for home and returned to UCLA in the fall with a purpose and a goal. What started out as a mild adventure, gave me a deep connection to



God in Jesus Christ that continues to give my life purpose, guidance, and joy. 🔥

—Wilbur

[Photo captions: Above: Wilbur, 1960, in his Presbyterian minister robes. Below: Wilbur, more recently, with his son.



For Me

-Alyss Broderick

The cathedral is enormous - stone arches and
colored glass stretching to the sky.
Uneasy in this unfamiliar place.
Each carved pillar, pleated robe or exquisitely
rendered stained glass face
shows the blessing of countless
hours of human labor.
The ritual is complicated and precise.
Four people, no five, are required for the read-
ing of the Gospel.
I listen so closely, just letting it in.

Sometimes a mystery is so great
we need a lot of help to get close to it.

Then the communion. It's awkward
and unfamiliar. Kneeling, waiting,
taking, drinking.
Both the bread and the wine
are surprisingly sweet.

As I walk away from the bench I gasp,
my hands over my face. The tears come.
"You did all of this for me?"

Yosemite is spectacular - sheer silver stone
stretching to the sky.
Getting here took anxious hours
Each mile of paved road, bite of food, amazing
machine allowing the trip,
Showed the blessing of countless
human efforts.
The view from Glacier point is stunning,
Three, no four, waterfalls plus Half Dome
and the valley.
I stare for an hour, just letting it in.

Sometimes a wonder is so great
it takes a lot of help to get to it.

The drive back to the valley shows
wonder after wonder. Craning my neck
I whoop with excitement.
The sky, stone and river
Perfect like heaven.

Overwhelmed by the grandeur I gasp
facing those awe-some cliffs. The tears come.
"You did all of this for me? For me??" 

On the first Sunday of Advent our preacher, Veronica, said that [broken things are] life's nature, that lives and hearts get broken, those of people we love, those of people we'll never meet. She said the world sometimes feels like the waiting room of the emergency ward, and that we, who are more or less OK for now, need to take the tenderest possible care of the more wounded people in the waiting room, until the healer comes. You sit with people, she said, you bring them juice and graham crackers. And then she went on vacation. 'Traveling mercies,' the people at our church said to her when she left. This is what they say when one of us goes off for a while. 'Traveling mercies: Be safe, notice beauty, enjoy the journey, God is with you.'
Anne Lamott, from *Traveling Mercies*.

These all died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. 14 For people who speak thus make it clear that they are seeking a homeland. 15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.

Hebrews 11:13-16

Now I Will Tell You a Better Answer

In the Old City of Jerusalem, the streets are too narrow for cars. The streets stay narrow so they can squeeze through stone archways. Neighbors who live across the street from each other can look up and see the awnings above their doorways almost touch. Sometimes, a narrow street will become a staircase. The stone steps have probably forgotten most of what they once knew about right angles.

On a rainy day in November, I went for a walk down these ancient streets. The rain revealed shallow gutters in the street, and downspouts that I'd never noticed on sunnier days. Because the stone had been worn smooth by countless footsteps, the ground became slippery. Maybe that's why the streets were far less crowded than I had come to expect.

As I walked, I paused outside one shop to admire a travel poster in the window. The bold shapes and bright colors drew my eye. It portrayed the Al-Aqsa Mosque, as seen from the Mount of Olives. Because the poster was designed in the 1930's, it could proclaim, "Visit Palestine" without footnote.

The shopkeeper came to the door. He asked me, "Have you been to Palestine?"

Inspired by all my recent travels, I replied, "Yes! I've been to Hebron

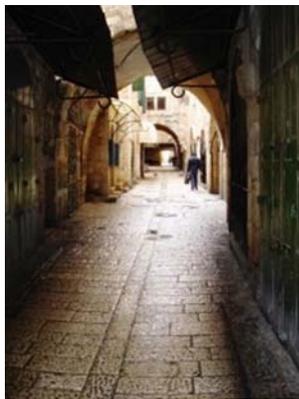
and Bethlehem, to Ramallah and Cana."

The merchant regarded me for a moment, then he nodded. He said, "No one is shopping today. Come inside and have tea with me."

After pouring me a cup of strong tea, my host said, "When I asked if you had been to Palestine, you gave me a good answer. Now, I will tell you a better answer. When you are in Jerusalem, and someone asks you, 'Have you been to Palestine?' here is what you should say: 'But we are in Palestine right now!'"

On my trip through the Holy Land, I often felt a deep need for God's mercy. There were so many stories of loss. In Ramallah, photos of the dead were plastered onto cement walls. In Hebron, an Israeli soldier raised his weapon toward the crowd. Behind the barrel of his gun, he had the anxious face of a teenager. Everywhere, the security barrier ran like a scar through olive groves and city streets.

Over and over, I felt God's mercy. There are so many stories I could tell. On that particular day in November, a Palestinian merchant welcomed me into his shop. He was exhausted by a lifetime of conflict. Even so, he invested his time in me. Although I was a stranger, he served me a cup of tea without expecting anything in return. Without rancor or condescension, he offered me a better answer.



This is the traveling mercy I crave the most: to meet those who will teach me that there are other ways of seeing the world. 

—Mike Huber

[Photo caption: Old City, Jerusalem, Mike Huber] See larger version on our website, www.mindingthelight.org

Queries for Chapter 25

Our next Query: *When has the Light urged you to speak out or stand up for something?* Tell us a story about a time when you were nudged to address a concern through words or action, even if you didn't follow the leading.

We encourage young Friends to participate, so please consider interpreting this query for young children in your life to see if it makes them think of a story. If it does, consider helping the child tell their story in words or images, or ask us for a Story Catcher.

Story Deadline:
March 13, 2016



Flight Into Egypt, Albrecht Dürer, 1511

Reassurance

Following an injury in an automobile accident in 1989, most of my intestines were removed, and I am no longer able to absorb nutrients and fluids. Since that time, I've been dependent on total parenteral nutrition, or TPN, which means I receive all required fluids and nutrients intravenously.

In 1993 I received a scholarship to attend Pendle Hill, a Quaker retreat and study center in Philadelphia. I lived in Arizona at the time and I was quite nervous about being so far from my doctors and the rest of my medical team. I was afraid that if I had a problem I would have no one to help me. I had found that most of the medical professionals I had come in contact with since the accident knew little or nothing about TPN and that had kept me from travelling very far from home. But I badly wanted to go to Pendle Hill and decided to take the risk.

As I boarded the plane and settled into my seat I continued to worry about being far from any support. I was also quite anxious because I was going to have to take a taxi from the airport to Pendle Hill. I had always been terrified of strangers and was afraid to get into a taxi with a driver I didn't know.

As the trip progressed, I began to talk to my seatmate, who was traveling with her two young children. As we exchanged details about our lives, I discovered that she was a nutritionist at a hospital in Philadelphia who was very familiar with

TPN, wrote orders for it, and followed patients who were on it.

As we prepared to land, she shared her concern that her husband would not be picking her up for some time and there would be no one to wait with her children while she collected their dog, who had travelled with them, and their luggage. I offered to sit with the children, telling her that I was in no hurry and wasn't even sure how I would get to Pendle Hill. She was very relieved to accept my offer and offered to give me a ride to Pendle Hill.

The next morning I went to the pottery studio at Pendle Hill. There was a man working on the potting wheel. He explained where things were and how everything worked and got me set up with a chunk of clay to work with. We started chatting, and I learned that he was a gastroenterologist who also knew all about TPN and had patients on it.

I soon settled into the routine at Pendle Hill and made many acquaintances. One of those acquaintances offered to drive me to the airport for the return journey. I had many fears about the trip, some well-founded and some perhaps not so much. But my fears were allayed and I found that the help I needed was always very much at hand. 

—Mica Coffin

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Be Praised, My Lord, Through All Your Creatures

When our little party arrived in Calais, it was all I could do to keep from laughing. The group of Brits traveling with me had often sneered at tourists in London for their exuberant giddiness but the minute they were on foreign soil, they transformed into a bunch of hooligans no different than those they so despised in their own city. We were on our way to spend Easter in Taizé, an international destination we had been told was possessed of a radiant spiritual energy. The year was 1972 and the quest for spiritual energy might take a young person anywhere, even to a monastery in the heart of France.

I had just turned 20 and was the only American in the van of rowdies. I had never set foot on the Continent before, but my heart was prepared for what lay ahead, for unlike my compatriots, I took this journey seriously. I felt quite alone, but surrounded by people, in my pursuit of the Holy Spirit.

Through the week that unfolded, I was brought to my knees by the beauty of the pastoral countryside. But there was more to come – two peak experiences that would change my life forever.

First was the morning I literally took the plunge into a stream that flowed alongside our campsite. Spring was just rousing itself from winter, and on that late March morning, the water looked dark and silvery, fast-moving and mysterious.

Was it safe to jump in? Would I be swept away? Would I sink like a stone? I could not answer to any of these questions, but I was young and did not care. My inner life was moving as swiftly as the water. With a great war cry, I jumped in.

I will never forget the shock of the cold as it enveloped me. I felt needles of pain all over my body as I broke through the surface, desperately gasping for air. But at the same time, I felt exhilarated, ecstatic, bursting with joy! That moment has stayed with me as a reminder that to be truly alive is to take risks, and to feel assaulted and embraced by the world at the same time.

Second, there was the sunrise Easter service itself, which led into a mad line dance snaking in and out of a massive tent. Young people from all over the world made a chain and sang together as we danced. The miracle was in the way the words we were chanting morphed from one language to another. What began as “*Laudato si, O mi Signore*” changed and changed again as half-heard words were translated into something familiar as the chant moved across the field. “Lord let me see,” I heard the English singing ~ but the French, the Spaniards, the Germans, the Poles, the Greeks, each echoed the Italian with something distinctly different, something that made sense in their own tongue. As I danced, I felt Christ’s message spread around the world, across time and space and nations, with the unique imprint of each singer upon it. It was only years

later that I understood that we had all, in our own way, been singing St. Francis’s “Canticle of the Sun”.
 –KD Burnett

With the drawing of this Love and
 the voice of this Calling
 We shall not cease from exploration
 And the end of all our exploring
 Will be to arrive where we started
 And know the place for the first
 time.
 TS Eliot, from *Little Gidding*”

Traveling Mercies

Last year was a very dark time in my life due to many moments of sadness and grief. One of the most difficult was the death of my nephew who was 22 years old.

The loss affected each of my family members differently. I personally was ill much more frequently than usual. Another family member also developed some serious health problems that required a hospitalization. Unfortunately, this happened during a visit to a friend in another state. It was my responsibility to help with the returning flight after discharge. My plane trip required my presence at the airport at 4am.

In the car as I tried to confirm my already expensive flight, I learned it had been canceled due to weather. When I got to the airport I transferred to another flight even more pricey than the first but with three transfers. It took me 12 hours to get to my destination—which was totally snowed in. I struggled to find my rental car but it wouldn’t start and had to go back up and ask for a second.

When I finally got onto the road it was dark and icy, and I made many wrong turns. By the time I arrived at the hospital, they told me it was too late for a discharge and I would have to come back tomorrow. I ventured to the hotel and was told I was at the wrong location for my reservation, so once again I went out into the dark and snowy night. Eventually, at 10:00pm I could finally rest in my bed across from a cheerleading team.

Although, the darkness seemed all around me, the Light was very present throughout my journey. My mother-in-law graciously offered to drive me to the airport in the middle of the night and stayed with me until I had a new ticket. Although I usually read a good novel on flights, I ended up sitting by a woman around my age who was flying to meet her child, a competitive horseback rider. We started sharing our life stories. Although I come from an urban center and she from a rural ranch, we found common ground as mothers and sisters. She told me about losing her own nephew in a tractor accident at 14 years of age, and the process of grief for her sister and her family. I felt a strong connection of understanding and love that I had not experienced elsewhere. At the hotel, although I broke into tears, I was still greeted with kindness and even given an unexpected free breakfast buffet.

We got home safely, and in my mailbox there was a check from a loved one covering the cost of the whole trip.

–MKES

Milepost 128

Diane and I spent our honeymoon roaming the western U.S. and Canada, living out of the back of our tiny Honda Civic. Leaving the Honda in Chicago, our new home, we flew to Pittsburgh, site of our marriage earlier that summer, to gather our remaining clothes, wedding gifts, and furniture. We loaded these into a rented U-Haul, hitched it to my mother-in-law's 1972 Cutlass and, accompanied by Diane's brother Richard, headed west on the turnpike toward Chicago.

The late August heat and humidity in northern Ohio was sweltering, and the air conditioner struggled to keep up. I had noted a little light blue smoke coming from our car, but I was suddenly startled to note a white cloud obscuring my entire view, save for the flashing headlights of a semi behind us. As I slowed down and pulled onto the shoulder, flames erupted from under the hood.

As I popped the hood and jumped out, we were greeted by a swarm of truck drivers, each carrying a fire extinguisher. While they battled the blaze, we unhitched the U-Haul and moved it a safe distance away, then returned for the articles packed in the car. But the flames and smoke soon grew too intense, and we retreated. Huddled with our Good Samaritans, we watched the flames consume the old Cutlass.

I turned away to see a man standing next to our U-Haul. He called out,

"There's a wrecker coming to tow the car to a station at the next exit. I can take you and your U-Haul to the station, then wait while you make calls and figure out what you want to do next. But you should know that a farmer nearby has offered to put you up for the night, since it will be getting dark soon."

"Who are you, and who is this farmer?" I asked.

"My name is John and I'm a trucker. I don't live here, I'm just passing through. The farmer's name is Don Miller. I've never met him before. We were just standing next to each other on the overpass, watching the fire. As the smoke cleared he turned to me and said, 'Those are just kids, and now they have nothing but that U-Haul.' We wanted to help, and came up with this plan."

It was well after dark when we arrived at the farm, but we were escorted in to a feast that had been set for us by Don's wife Marilyn. We thanked John, washed up, then sat down and Don said grace for us. Overwhelmed, one of us asked "Why are you doing this?" Don replied, "We are Mennonites, and helping people in need is just what we think God calls us to do."

The next morning Don took us into town, where a Ford dealer offered us a van equipped for towing our U-Haul to Chicago. When we told him we didn't have cash or a credit card to secure it, he replied, "You are friends of Don's, that's all I need to know." After delivering us to Chicago, Richard returned the

van. Then Don bought Richard a ticket to Pittsburgh and said "Pay me back when you can."

Back in Chicago, Diane and I marveled at how many strangers—truckers, a farm family, a car dealer—stepped up to help three travelers in crisis. We reflected on the risks they had taken, especially the truckers battling the flames, but also on the trust, born out of desperation, that we had put in these strangers. We promised we would try to emulate these people as we went forward into our adult lives—to offer help to those in need, to respond to vulnerability with trustworthiness.

This experience did not lead me to believe in angels, but rather that people could act like angels, and that I could do the same. I did not become a Christian that day, but I gained respect for what a life of Christian faith could resemble. The terror of that day faded quickly, but the power of the human response arising from those flames shaped the road I have followed ever since. 
—Greg Morgan



"After the wise men had gone, an angel from the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Get up! Hurry and take the child and his mother to Egypt! Stay there until I tell you to return, because Herod is looking for the child and wants to kill him.'"
Matt 2:13, CEB.