

MINDING THE LIGHT

Our Collective Journal, Chapter 27

HOW HAS THE LIGHT BEEN REVEALED THROUGH HOPE LOST, HOPE FOUND OR HOPE SUSTAINED?

Giving Up

Our father was both a wonderful, lovable parent and an abuser, both a liar and a former medic who sometimes understood how to comfort without being asked, both a vicious intellectual bully who gaslighted all of us and a producer of truly inventive ideas. To say his wife and two children were confused, while accurate, does not do justice to the anguished internal contortions, self-attacks, pain and rage that filled the atmosphere at home, even when we were not interacting.


By the time I was sixteen the family was, finally, falling apart. We, or sometimes just our parents, were traveling a couple of hours for appointments with a family therapist. He saw me individually once and asked me what I'd like to ask of my father, if I could. I think he was surprised by my answer, but gently went on to ask how I thought he would respond. That stumped me. I had no idea, but the seed had been planted. Perhaps I was not so desperately helpless after all. Perhaps I could speak to my father.

Dad did the dishes after dinner. I dried most of the time. So it was a relatively low-key moment for raising something. Though I thought at the time I'd never forget my exact words, I have. It went something like this: "Dad, I have something I'd like to ask you."

"What's that, baby?"

"Could you please be like other fathers?"

"Oh, no, baby. That's just not the way I am."


And with that simple, serious exchange the light of reality began to grow and to replace the darkness of false hope. Maybe more important, that lovely therapist who had so nondirectively suggested the importance of speaking up, had begun my lessons in how to hope: not for the fine, glorious redemption one can imagine, but for the next good step, the thing one can do in the face of so much one cannot. That is the hope that is such a wonderful ingredient of our daily bread. 

—Kathy Knowlton

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The Gates of Hope

Our mission is to plant ourselves
at the gates of Hope ~
Not the prudent gates of Optimism,
Which are somewhat narrower.
Not the stalwart, boring gates of
Common Sense;
Nor the strident gates of
Self Righteousness,
Which creak on shrill and angry hinges
(People cannot hear us there;
they cannot pass through)
Nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of
"Everything is gonna' be all right."
But a different, sometimes lonely place,
The place of truth-telling,
About your own soul first of all
and its condition.
The place of resistance and defiance,
The piece of ground
from which you see the world
Both as it is and as it could be
As it will be; The place from which
you glimpse not only struggle,
But the joy of the struggle.
And we stand there,
beckoning and calling,
Telling people what we are seeing
Asking people what they see. 

—Victoria Safford, Minister, White Bear Unitarian
Universalist Church, Mahtomedi, MN

Minding the Light is a collection of stories from the lives of members and attenders of West Hills Friends, a Quaker meeting in Portland, Oregon. We publish quarterly, or as the Spirit leads. 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 Gift of Hope

October 2006. Four months since my son Jesse died. Until now my grief had been tempered by hope that he would come to me in a dream to show me that he was okay. But as days and weeks passed, I began to fear that something was wrong, and I was close to despair.

I had expected to hear from Jesse very soon because, like me, he had the dream gift that runs in our family. Every family member I'd been close to had come to me at least once in a dream after they died—although sometimes not for years. And Jesse and I had talked about communicating through dreams after one of us “crossed over” (as he called it).

The dream I'd been waiting for arrived by email one Sunday evening. A woman from Meeting who I didn't know well at the time had written about a dream she was feeling led to tell me.

Claire's dream was a dart to the heart of comfort, hope, and joy—strong healing medicine. As I read the dream, I knew instantly that it was Jesse. I cried for joy and was euphoric for days. People at Meeting and work remarked on the change in me.

The full dream with commentary would take too many words, so highlights follow, with quotes around Claire's words.

The dream had a “Native American motif,” though Claire knew nothing then of my ancestry or background. A house and the surrounding area were covered by a dome of buff-colored leather, like the surface of a drum. As Claire looked at the dome, an opening appeared and Jesse came through. Before the opening closed behind him, Claire saw the sky beyond —“bluish-black with billions of bright stars, like salt on a dark blue plate.”

Jesse (who had been paralyzed) was walking. He looked healthy and energetic and told Claire, “I can do everything now.” But Jesse had other reasons for visiting Claire than to show that he was alive and well, and this element of the dream took time and prayer to discern.

Jesse told Claire that this dome-covered place was where he had lived. As he showed her around, he told her that he'd been troubled while living there, and he shared a few details known only to me. Jesse said these things were in the past, that he'd been healed.

Outside, as Jesse and Claire stood talking beside a split rail fence, I rode up on an Appaloosa — a Nez Perce horse. Claire didn't know then that horses have special meaning for me or that Jesse had once named a horse I'd seen in a vision.



As I prayed and journaled about Claire's dream, I saw a connection between the leather dome that covered the area where Jesse had lived and rawhide domes that cover sweat lodges. And I came to see Jesse's confession to Claire as part of a healing process, sometimes uncomfortable, that the dream had likened to a sweat lodge experience.

The euphoria from Claire's dream lasted only a few weeks, and the grief returned, but the healing medicine

remains as part of an inward river of memories and feelings that comfort me with reminders of God's love and grace—like Claire's dream. 🔥

– Sally Gillette

[Postscript] About six weeks after Claire's dream, Mike and I went to Jesse's grave on his birthday. As we stood beside the grave, still covered with a mound of dirt, I was aware of the connection between graves and sweat lodges. I read aloud a Nez Perce poem about the sweat lodge that I'd found when praying about Claire's dream. In the poem (below), confession is part of the healing experience. The italicized words are spoken by Old Man, the Sweat Lodge.

Old Man the Sweat Lodge

*This small lodge is now
The womb of our mother, Earth.
This blackness in which we sit,
The ignorance of our impure minds.
These burning stones are
The coming of new life."*
I keep his words near my heart.

Confessing, I recall my evil deeds.
For each sin, I sprinkle water on fire hot stones.
The hissed steam is sign that
The place from which Earth's seeds grow
Is still alive.
He sweats.
I sweat.

I remember, Old Man heals the sick,
Brings good fortune to one deserving.
Sacred steam rises;
I feel my pores give out their dross
After I chant prayers to the Great Spirit,
Through this door dawns wisdom.

Cleansed, I dive into icy waters
Pure, I wash away all of yesterday.

"My son, walk in this new life.
It is given to you.
Think right, feel right.
Be happy."

This Too Will (Siskiyou) Pass

By the time we reached the Siskiyou Pass, the sky was dark. A steady snowfall sparkled in the sweep of my headlights. The road was slippery and visibility was very limited. Behind the wheel, I felt a knot of tension in my stomach.

I was in my early twenties. I had little confidence in my abilities, and even less confidence in my vehicle. I was driving a borrowed Ford sedan. The seats were comfortable. But even on dry pavement, the car moved like a giant marshmallow. Everything was squishy and imprecise.

To further complicate matters, my in-laws were in the back seat. I should've said, "I don't feel comfortable driving this car in the snow." But I didn't say that.


As we came around one curve in the freeway, the night sky was suddenly illuminated by an orange glow. A car was burning on the side of the road. Other drivers had stopped, and it didn't appear as if anyone was in immediate danger. Even so, the knot in my stomach twisted into a double knot.

After we started our descent into California, I lost control of the car. I had enough time to think, "This car is rear-wheel drive. So that means I should turn into the skid." Despite my best efforts, I couldn't regain control of the car. We were moving quite slowly, but I was powerless to prevent the car from sliding downhill. That meant we were sliding over a narrow median and toward oncoming traffic.

I tried every possible solution. I turned the steering wheel one way, then the other. I tried braking. I tried accelerating. Nothing altered the trajectory of my car. I felt completely helpless.

It occurred to me that this moment would not last forever. At some point, this lightly armored marshmallow would stop sliding. Either we would collide with another solid object, or some miracle of inertia would bring us to a halt. That realization gave me hope. At some point, this terrible moment will end.

Inexorably, the Ford sedan slid across the median. It slid into the lane of oncoming traffic. Then, finally, it came to a stop. A police officer pulled up next to me and rolled down his window. After asking if everyone was alright, he motioned me back onto the freeway. We continued down the mountainside without further mishaps.

The story isn't terribly dramatic. There was no collision. There wasn't even a near-miss. I guess the burning car was dramatic, but it was only visible for a moment. Yet this memory has become a touchstone for me: Sometimes, hope is knowing that the current situation will change. 

– Mike Huber



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Queries for Chapter 28

Our next Query: *When have you been led to a place of healing?* Tell us a story about your experience of a location that was healing or restorative to you.

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:

April 28, 2017

Publication Guidelines

Stories and other written responses should be 500 words or less, and written in the first person by a member or attender of West Hills Friends. Written responses should be submitted in text format in the body of an email addressed to: mindingthelight@gmail.com.

Story content should be appropriate for young Friends.

If your story needs to be edited to conform to our guidelines, one of our editors will contact you.

Please include a title and byline with your submission. We will withhold your name at your request, or use initials, etc.

Original music and videos should be submitted as links to websites like YouTube or Vimeo.

MINDING THE LIGHT

CHAP 27: HOW HAS THE LIGHT BEEN REVEALED THROUGH HOPE LOST, HOPE FOUND OR HOPE SUSTAINED?

Ouroboros


Hope has long been a friend of mine. As a depressed teenager, the thing that most kept my spirits up was the anticipation of the next youth group event, or date with a girlfriend. Whatever the reasons for my current sadness, the future was a question mark, and sometimes question marks are amazing.

As a young adult, my hope was smaller in scope. During long days at work, my hope was in an evening of video games, or the dinner I planned to make later. My life was a series of small hopes followed by small victories, and nearly all the days were good days.

My early thirties expanded my hopes to the distant world, and the supernatural. Maybe God could be found again. Maybe the latest social justice cause had a light at the end of the tunnel. Each day had the possibility of far-reaching improvement, and I looked forward to participating in it. When social justice asked me to shun people who thought differently than me, my hope in people led me to put my efforts elsewhere. For a long time, I thought my hope was well placed.

These days I struggle to find hope most of the time. Because humans are as weak as we are, we betray our

better intentions. We'll abandon real people in our physical lives in favor of idolized people thousands of miles away. We'll repeat the mistakes of our ideological opponents, changing the labels, but keeping the logical errors. We'll allow ourselves to be emotionally affected by the sorrows of people we can't help, and will never meet, but we'll never learn that our neighbor has a lost a partner, or that our postal carrier got a promotion. It's as if our technological evolution has surpassed our mind's ability to cope with everything our eyes can see, and we're paying the price for it. I don't know how to process daily doses of disappointment. In myself. In others.

I want my hope back. I want to believe that events and people and organizations matter. I want to believe that light is real, and that I'm capable of finding it. It seems absurd to be hoping for hope. But maybe recognizing the circular motion of it all is the first step in making it real. 


—Ryan Blanchard



Never lose hope, my dear heart. Miracles dwell in the invisible.

—Rumi

Hope

There's a mummy on the hillside: me. Wind- and sun-dried, with new grass growing up green and rank around it, I am long dead, sunken, wizened, hollow. The skin below the breastbone splits like old paper, and particles of colored light escape. They gather in a little whirling ball just above the corpse for a long moment. Like a hummingbird, suddenly the ball of light speeds off and disappears in the distance. 

—Derek Lamson, 1995

Light Brigade*

Clerk (Alternating)

Mike Huber, Recording Clerk

Anne Anderson

Carol Bosworth

Stephen Deatherage

Peg Edera

Sally Gillette

Pat M.

Julie Peyton

Britten Witherspoon

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*Story Committee

New seed
is faithful.
It roots deepest
in the places
that are
most empty.

— Clarissa Pinkola Estes

Angel Doves

A few years ago our family went through a difficult time. The Great Recession swept away our fragile home business and we were in danger of losing our home. We started questioning our understanding of God and the Bible, leading to the loss of our church family and some friendships. We had hopes of having a child which were continually dashed. It was hard for people in our lives to know how to help us, most of them having been insulated from these kinds of devastating losses. I felt ancient and alone.

I remember erupting in pain and tears at book club one night. I had lost hope and was truly not able to manufacture an ounce of belief that life could get better for us. The kind of faith that had previously structured my responses to life's circumstances was gone for good. That night was a small release of pain, but nothing came, no relief. The grim details of life in these kind of conditions; food stamp lines, collection calls, silence from church members, well-meaning words of advice and admonishment from friends, shame... were pressing so hard a deep breath was impossible.

During this time one of our children became sick with a kidney infection. We were told there could be damage to her kidneys, and we should make an appointment for a special procedure to assess her condition. We had no money to cover the procedure, and had to make the difficult decision to put it

off. Hopelessness continued. I cried as I listened to these song lyrics, "Keep on believing God is soaring above a world that's running out of love. Pouring hope out over us, His angel doves." I had no belief that we were worthy or significant enough to receive anything.

One afternoon, after arriving home from an errand, I noticed a small, white envelope under our front mat. In it was some money, enough for the medical procedure, and a short note asking us not to seek out the giver. After having the procedure the kind doctor informed us our daughter's kidneys were functioning well.

Another time a family member left a box of food in our kitchen. A bit later a week's worth of food was given to us by some new acquaintances.

I would be dishonest to say that any of these happenings revived a sense of hope in us. They were tiny drops of water in the desert. But these people carried us. Their faith covered us when we had none, and we were given a heartbeat of relief to keep funneling our every effort into surviving. Meeting our immediate needs meant we could take tiny steps into believing again that the world could be good.

Hope came again, slowly, without us even realizing it. One day I took a deep breath. One day I laughed out loud. One day we were able to leave food on a doorstep for someone else, infusing it with our fledgling faith in hope's return. 🔥

—Katie Gates



Mesa Verde Kiva: Light in the Ruins.
Mike Huber

Hope is the thing with feathers

That perches in the soul,

And sings the tune without the words,

And never stops at all,

And sweetest in the gale is heard;

And sore must be the storm

That could abash the little bird

That kept so many warm.

I've heard it in the chilliest land,

And on the strangest sea;

Yet, never, in extremity,

It asked a crumb of me.

— Emily Dickenson

Deep Seated Love Brings Hope

It was the day after Election day, and I was feeling deeply despondent. My brother kept sending me non-political cartoons via email. I asked him if he was trying to console me.

Pete and I are 16 months apart. Our mom used to say we were like two peas in a pod, or like a mama duck with her duckling following. A few years ago, we realized we are like emotional twins. We understand each other and are there, always, to love each other. That said, Pete is a born-again Christian and rock solid Republican. Our pact is: we try not to talk about politics or religion.


He called me late in the day, and I almost didn't answer. I didn't need any gloating. Instead, what he said was that 8 years ago, when Obama got elected, "I felt like you do now. I understand how you feel."

What had happened was that I almost lost my brother. He took the pain and depression and became filled with anger and hate. He told me, "do you know how many people want Obama killed?" I was shocked. His anger and hate spilled over into his life—his work, his family, me. I went to visit him and his family, and he was wired so tight that when I dropped something on their tile floor and it shattered, he screamed at us to get out.

Who was this man I so loved?

I didn't know if I could stay with them again. But I kept needling Pete—I don't recognize you, why are you doing this, I love you, I'm

Election Day, November 8, 2016

The known becomes the unknown.
 The unknown looks me full in the face, unblinking,
 At first incomprehensible.
 Now is the time,
 I hear from someplace far away
 Yet closer than breath,
 To step forward.
 To cast aside the ease of compliance,
 That familiar, once-comfortable mantle
 Long tied about my neck, resting on my shoulders,
 The extreme heaviness of which I only now
 Begin to notice.
 Has the time perhaps come for us to grow up?
 We are no longer an infant nation,
 No longer the infant feeding, as infants always do,
 Off of the body of the all-giving Mother.
 We filled in the little rectangles on our ballots;
 We sealed and stamped the envelopes and dropped them in the mail.
 There. That's done.
 Now then, what's next?
 Back to business as usual.
 Who knew that we might not be able
 To return
 To business as usual?
 Who knew that we were participating in a rite of passage,
 Embarking on a time of change,
 A time of growing up?
 That we were being called to find our guidance,
 Our compassion, strength, and wisdom
 Even in the stark and barren places of the night?
 Have we forgotten
 That every seed that springs to life
 Breaks open in the dark,
 Sending vibrant, life-empowered roots
 Deep into the dark and fertile earth?
 Have we forgotten that pain, even pain that overwhelms,
 Can be, at times, a natural part of giving birth?
 Each of us,
 Alone, and yet together as groups and as one nation,
 Rise up, each in our own way, to grow beyond
 All that we who call ourselves Americans
 Have known.
 We waken and we rise.
 Then through, within, between, and all around us
 The great and beautiful, unquenchable Unknown
 That has been quietly gestating in the dark
 Begins to move, inch by inch and breath by breath,
 Along the birth canal of human consciousness
 To become
 The new and treasured
 Known. 

—Laurie Hoff Schaad

losing you, it scares me. I held in there with him. I asked him to get help. I told him I loved him. I did not desert him.

What he told me on post-election night was this. He started to change. He turned off the news. He didn't engage in political discussions. He decided to do the best he could every day. He loved America no matter what. He looked for the good in his life, his country and his fellow Americans. In four years he could vote again. He said, "I did all this, Kris, because I love you so much that I couldn't stand the thought of losing you. And you continuously gave me 'wise counsel'. You stood by me and believed in me." We were both sobbing.

He sent out a Facebook message to this affect, and asked people who had supported Trump to please not gloat. He asked people to cross a bridge and make a connection. "We are not "us and them", we are all Americans."

I still am not happy with the election results, but more than anything, if he and I could find a bridge, it gives me HOPE. And faith. And a belief in our democratic system. And yet, we are more than our democratic system. Deep down, we are just humans and we need to look for that common link. One person at a time..... 🔥
—Kristine Kiser

The Separation

Hope is the beguiling optimist who enchants me to another day. She whispers encouragement to open my eyes; the trickster who takes advantage during that fracture of time between sleep and consciousness. The brief second that I lie suspended between my dreams and the world. That brief moment before dread sweeps through me and I realize that my waking world is the nightmare. The dread of another day watching my husband battle for his life.

Today, Hope watches me, shaking her head. I'm blubbering on the cold, sterile tile floor of the hospital bathroom, my temporary hideout each week that Les is infused for 36 hours with chemotherapy - his treatment. I've taken a short break while he sleeps knowing that when I return, his face will have taken on an ashy green tone. Hope is demanding, "Put it in a box—we need you up and at 'em". I splash cold water on my face and take a deep breath. Hope shadows me back to the infusion room. She's popular here—like a diva rock star. To me, she's become more like a stalker. Why does she insist on pursuing me so relentlessly?

I guess we have a long relationship together and she's been walking

alongside me as long as I can remember sharing my carefree, youthful optimism. She was with me, along with Wonder, as I jumped from a plane and instead of worrying about plummeting toward the earth, I was enraptured with the gentle curve of our blue planet, the black blanket of space above me and the brilliance of life. Yes, she was there just to say "I told you so."

Our relationship has changed now, and Hope uses my trust against me. Hope seems a little too much like a cartoon character that is flamboyant and unreliable. Les is skeletal. He's long since stopped eating solid food. No amount of cajoling, cannabis or care will help him eat more soup, bone broth, and protein infused smoothies. Hope has become the fair-weather friend that has cast me off like an old shirt.

I am blessed to have walked Les to death's portal. It is through the very narrow opening between worlds that I feel the vivid love and peace he is headed toward. But, as is the way, I am quickly pulled back to this grey and muddled world; my disappointment in that I cannot follow. Standing at this edge, fully in the moment, vulnerable without a reference point to grasp this loss; I am unmoored.

Les has been gone for nine months now. I've let Hope go on her way to

beguile someone else for the time being. I think Hope's stardom is overrated despite her litany of endorsements; "Don't lose Hope—Hope for the Best—Hope to see you soon".

Don't get me wrong- I'm not angry or worried about this. I feel pragmatic. The Loss of my husband unveiled our impermanence and the ephemeral nature of who we are. I have stood at the edge of the unknown and found a steadfast and reliable, weathered friend with me. I remember that truly what grounds me and is always reliable is Love. 🔥

—Claudia Carlough



Spring Crocus. Tim Ehlbeck

My Prayers Answered

In March 2015 I decided to move from the duplex. Rats were running in the walls and attic the last five years. Did you know the City would only do something if the owner knows where the entry is and doesn't fix it? Of course there were traps and poison which left dead rats in the walls to smell.

I lost permanent work in June 2013. Temp work was not steady.

By Feb 2016 a social service agency helped to pay rent. I began at this time to pray for myself. I gave the owner a list of 20 things that needed to be fixed before I paid a rent increase. I filed for bankruptcy. I was on lists for two years at apartments for those older than 55 and low-income. I was closest to move-in as #12. I called the City to inspect my apartment for code violations. Both my neighbor and I were given evictions (90-days) which nulls the retaliation aspect.

My mind is not wrapped around money so I did not think, "Who will rent to me if I file bankruptcy?" The money held by the State unemployment department during decision making did eventually come into my hands. I found an apartment for \$950 without an extra security deposit and scheduled to move-in June 25.

My temp assignment was coming to an end. I continued to pray every night for safe and affordable housing. On May 30 I got a call from an apartment I was on a list as #34 when I checked in March. It was the complex I wanted most. I was over income by tax year

2015 but kept my name on the list anyway while my income fluctuated. The temp agency brought the wage down to meet the move-in requirement. The hallway heat keeps me so warm I have not had to turn on the heat this winter. On October 20 I found a job 4 miles from here for a low-income wage with a person I like in the area of accounting.

In the Spring while all of this was happening I had the urge to go to Chicago. I no longer had a credit card and did not have a permanent job. There was a grammar school reunion scheduled Labor Day and I wanted to see new friends I made on Facebook from grammar school. I looked on kayak.com and found airfare \$400 round trip (too much). I was still praying everyday for myself. The next day I felt prodded to look again and found an airfare \$175 total. I bought it with money in the bank. Then heard in August my brother John and his wife were being harassed to move from a building that fell into foreclosure in Chicago. The sheriff's office in the City had an ordinance in place they would no longer serve evictions to building foreclosure victims. But the real threat was he was sick. He would not be allowed anywhere with the alcoholism at that level.

I arrived in Chicago on August 31 for 3 days-2 nights. My brother came with me to the hospital and admitted himself. His wife and my sister had tried for 10 years to get him to do this. This is a miracle. He is staying in a nursing home getting well now. 🔥

—Name Withheld