

MINDING THE LIGHT

OUR COLLECTIVE JOURNAL, CHAPTER 29

When has saying yes taken you in a surprising direction?

A String of Yesses

In 1971, I was without a job or apartment, living with friends in Boston. A friend told me about a place on the south shore that was hiring, so I got a ride there. This place was an old abandoned summer camp that a Catholic Priest and a social worker were about to open as a camp for what they called “last-chance kids” who were graduating from the juvenile justice system into the adult system. They had a vision of stability, help and work in a beautiful place as a healing, turn-around possibility. I wasn’t sure if I was applying to be a resident or a staff person but they hired me as staff and that was where I lived that summer.

I met Terry, another staff person, there. We didn’t get along well, but the next winter we would meet for tea in Boston and a real friendship grew between us. All through our 20s we were best friends. I knew her entire family except for her big brother who

lived on the West Coast. We grew up together then, sharing a lot of hard times and a lot of laughter.

Twelve years later, when she decided to get married, her wedding day concurred with her brother Fred’s trip east for a visit. Fred and I finally met that day and got along quite well. He came to visit me in Portland, Maine, where I was then living. In December he planned to have Christmas with his folks and New Year’s Eve with me, but a week before Christmas he called to say he couldn’t make it; he had too much work. He suggested sending the ticket to me so I could go visit him. I was not pleased with this idea and said no.

A few days later, I remembered that it was against my principles to turn down a free ticket to just about anywhere, so I arranged to visit Fred in Portland, Oregon, for two weeks in February.


Three months later, after selling almost everything I owned except

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for a dozen boxes of books and my cat, I was on my way to be with Fred in Portland. A year later we were married. Six years later, our daughter Mia was born.

Fred claimed for many years to be an atheist. I would tease him and say we were proof of the existence of God. And if not God, then angels. The series of unlikely Yeses I made on the road to our life together was proof, to me, of divine intervention. He would bring his intellectual skepticism to this and say it was just luck and good judgement on my part that I said yes to him. I knew it was too many unlikely yeses to be less than the guiding Light.

Eventually he came to make his own great unlikely Yes by joining me at West Hills Friends, where we attended together for many years until his death in 2012. He died understanding that long string of Yeses as the proof I claimed it to be. 

–Peg Edera

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.

Him for Her

I've always had a complicated relationship with parenting. I knew that I wanted children, but I didn't NEED to be a parent. Parts of it sounded nice. Sharing knowledge, a sense of pride as they grow older, someone to keep me connected to the world when I'm old and don't feel needed. I liked those ideas, but I wasn't compelled by them.

When Taylor was born, I felt a crushing weight that I hadn't expected. This child's life or death is very much contingent on my behavior and my decisions. The logistical aspects of raising a newborn didn't bother me much, but the greater implications of being a parent felt like too much to bear. Sometimes they still do.

Pregnancy was a nightmare. Sarah had a rare condition called *hyperemesis gravidarum*, which is a fancy way of saying she had crippling nausea and vomiting for the entire duration of the pregnancy. We spent many nights in the hospital so she could receive fluids. We learned all about the chemotherapy drug Zofran, which was the only thing that made the nausea livable. It helped, but it was forty dollars per pill. We hit our annual deductible in two weeks. While the pregnancy was dreadful, the delivery was beautiful. My superhero wife went through a 9 hour, drug-free, natural labor. And she didn't make a sound during any of it.

We weren't sure if we wanted more than one child. We'd always said 1 or 2, but life kept moving, and we were doing pretty well. We both had good jobs, and were renting a really nice house in Vancouver. Eventually we decided to go off birth control for a year, and see what happened. What happened was Sarah got pregnant almost immediately. I stocked up on carpet cleaner, looked into how much Zofran was costing now that some time had passed, and hoped for the best.


Taylor was easily the most excited about the upcoming baby. She'd been begging for a sibling for a few years, and had all sorts of ideas about how to implement the role of big sister. Her excitement rubbed off on Sarah and me. The kids would be 5 years apart, which seemed like a good distance. Whatever distance I felt between myself as a person and myself as a parent, I was glad we could give her this gift. The OBGYN appointment was on the calendar. We were ready.

I got the call around lunchtime on a workday. Sarah was in a bathroom at Walgreens, crying. The baby was gone. She came home, and we spent the afternoon on the couch, staring at the wall, trying to process what had just happened. I didn't feel much. Miscarriages are statistically common, I said. You couldn't have done anything differently, I said. It's not your fault.

Eventually I had to pick up Taylor

from daycare. The ride home was fairly normal, but she kept talking about the baby, and my composure was leaving me. Once home, we sat together on that same couch. I wanted to be the one to tell her. I don't know why, but it mattered that it was me. I had my speech planned, but I never got to most of it. "Taylor, something bad has happened. The baby died. I'm so sorry, but you aren't going to be a big sister right now..." I sobbed into a pillow for what felt like 10 minutes. It's the only time in my life I've been able to cry uncontrollably. We spent the evening huddled as a family of three, trying to find the ground that used to be there.

I didn't know if I could go through that again. Sarah wanted to. Taylor wanted to. But the miscarriage sapped my emotional reserves, and I was hesitant. In the end, I said yes for Taylor. I felt like she had been robbed of something she wanted more than she'd ever wanted anything. Together, we all said yes.

A year later, after another dreadful pregnancy, and another beautiful, silent delivery, Morgan had flesh we could hold. That boy gives me life I hadn't felt before. I see myself in him. I will always be proud of myself for saying yes. 

—Ryan Blanchard



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MINDING THE LIGHT

CHAP 29: WHEN HAS SAYING YES TAKEN YOU IN A SURPRISING DIRECTION?!

Yes, My Lord

You know I get so weary, Lord,
And I lose my way,
But then I turn and see
You smile at me, and
I can hear you say,

“If you want me to, I will
Walk with you
Down this lonely road,”

And I said, yeah, yeah,
Yeah, yes, my Lord.

You say, “My little one
My beloved one
You know you’re not alone,”

And I said, yeah, yeah,
Yeah, Yes, my Lord.

You know I get so tired, Lord,
Of my selfish ways,
But when I turn and see You
Smile at me, I can hear you say,

“If you want me to, I will
Walk with you
Down this lonely road,”

And I said, yeah, yeah,
Yeah, Yes, my Lord.

You say, “Buck up my son,
My beloved one, you know you’re
Almost home.

And I said, yeah, yeah,
Yeah, Yes, my Lord.

I’ve heard your promises,
Promises of love before;
And you give me love
And you give me love
And you give me so much more.


I can hear you sayin’...

“If you want me to, I will
Walk with you
Down this lonely road,”

And I said, yeah, yeah,
Yeah, yes, my Lord

You say, “Buck up my son,
My beloved one, you know you’re
Almost home

And I say, yeah, yeah,
Yeah, Yes, my Lord.

And I say, yeah, yeah,
Yeah, Yes, my Lord. 

—Song by Derek Lamson



Prodigal Son IV (Luke 15:11-32), mixed media by
Cody F. Miller
<http://www.codyfmiller.com>

Our message did not say 'Yes' and
'No' at the same time. The message
of Christ has always been 'Yes.' God
has made a great many promises.
They are all “Yes” because of what
Christ has done. So through Christ
we say 'Amen.'
I Cor. 1:19b-20

Queries for Chapter 29

Our next Query: *When did acting out of responsibility connect you to something deeper?* Tell us about a time when a duty or obligation became a source of Light in your life.

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:

January 28, 2018

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.

Are You *Serious*??

Sometimes it takes an insightful friend to change an “Of course I won’t! Are you *serious*?” into a difficult “yes”. My friend Georgia helped me to see clearly during a difficult time with another friend, Teresa.

Teresa and I had been roommates and best friends for many years, though eventually we’d moved to different parts of the country. We worked for the same research organization, but at one point her choices and actions hurt me immensely and I emotionally pulled away...far away.

Many years before, when we were in college together, we were more like sisters. Though we lived together in the dorm, our parental homes were close by, and I’d often visit her family with her as she did with mine. Her parents were like second parents to me, and I remember many meals shared with laughter and discussions around the table as well as preparing meals with her mom in the kitchen.

Teresa’s and my friendship had deteriorated after “the event” so we talked only when necessary and kept the topics to work related matters. We were cordial, but not warm, which was due to the fact that we had to work together. Fortunately, our organization was based in Chicago and we lived 2000 miles apart, so we communicated by email and, on rare occasions, a phone call. When her mom died, I heard about it through a company announce-

ment, along with scant details as to the date and town in Texas where her funeral would be held.

When I shared this with my dear friend, Georgia, she asked, “Are you going to go to the funeral?” “Of course not,” I replied. “It’s too far, plane fare would cost too much, and Teresa and I aren’t really friends anymore.”

Then Georgia said something that I’ve remembered and applied not only to this event but at other times as well. She said, “This is one of those times you only have one chance to get it right. That’s it. It may go well, or it might not, but it could make a big difference later on. You don’t want to regret not trying. This is one of those times when you really should show up.” I had to grudgingly admit she was right. She could see what I couldn’t. Though it would be one of the most challenging things I’ve ever done, I chose to attend her mom’s funeral.


I didn’t tell Teresa I was coming. I called different churches in the Texas town where the funeral was to be held until I finally found the right one and got the details as to time and place. I made a motel and car reservation and bought the plane ticket, and the day before the funeral I flew out of Portland, trepidation filling my heart.

The day of the funeral I drove to the large church, which was filled to capacity. Teresa and her family were nowhere in sight, but pews at the front were saved for them.

Just before the service was to start they filed in and she sat down with her husband and children about ten pews in front of me. My nerves were on edge as this was the first time I’d seen her in person for quite a long time. As far as I could tell, there were no other people from our organization in attendance.

I watched Teresa from behind, and couldn’t detect any emotion, but I knew she loved her mom very much and was extremely close with her. I knew she must be filled with grief though I couldn’t detect crying.

Toward the end of the service the people in each pew filed down to walk in front of the open casket for one final viewing of her mom. Heart pounding, I joined the people in my pew as we slowly made our way down to the front. When I was even with Teresa’s pew, she looked up and our eyes met. She was so moved that she burst into tears and grabbed her husband’s arm!

Afterward she embraced me with smiles and tears and said that I’d have to come stay at their home with them; no more Motel 6. Because of that reluctant “yes” our friendship was revived and over the years we’ve visited each other in our respective states many times. I’m forever grateful to my wise friend, Georgia, for being connected to the Light and helping me see the way. 

—A

Getting To YES!

Recently, when one hurricane after another was making landfall on US soil causing widespread devastation and human suffering, I was wondering how I could help. How could I possibly make a difference given the enormous scope of these disasters? The answer came in an email from the Red Cross just a few days later. The job requirements were tailor-made for me and my skills.

I knew it would be a challenge. Was I up to the task? I said, "YES" anyway. Five thousand health and mental health professionals nationwide also said, "YES" to a call from the Red Cross!

I have been volunteering in Disaster Health Services as a nurse in our Cascades Region chapter of the Red Cross for nearly 12 years. I have deployed to both local and national disasters, but much of my time has been spent recruiting and training other health professionals in disaster response.


For the past month, I have been working from a spreadsheet of 200 health and mental health professionals from both Oregon and Washington; recruiting, training and deploying them to the nine Red Cross hurricane responses we have in Texas and Florida. It has been a huge

undertaking with long hours, but definitely rewarding.

I asked many of those that I deployed to let me know about their experience when they returned home. I especially wanted to paraphrase one nurse's story when she returned from Texas. It is stories like this that make the hard work so worthwhile!

She told me the trip was simultaneously incredible and heartbreaking. She and another nurse were on outreach teams helping people with health care needs, and she met many resilient people. The experience was rewarding, but painful because many continue to suffer. They have no insurance, nothing left, and nowhere to go. Some are recovering well with insurance covering their losses.

This woman was humbled and blessed to have this experience and would deploy again.

She said she had found her calling, but did not hope for more disasters. She thanked me for facilitating her experience with Red Cross. She felt very grateful both for the experience and the people she met. She ended by saying she would NEVER forget this time in her life. 

—Margie Simmons

Military Recruiters

Sometimes I've said what has to be said. The organization Veterans For Peace had mutual friends to Women's International League for Peace & Freedom. I attended a small meeting at Veterans For Peace and volunteered to speak at the public schools board meeting regarding the military presence in the high schools. Every family's privacy is invaded every year with personal information furnished by the school to the military recruiters. The attendees at the meeting looked so grateful I couldn't let them down.


Fortunately during a lunch at work I viewed an article in The Oregonian (with pictures) of the recruiters walking in the hallways during exchange of classes at Wilson High School. That fueled my fire. I wrote a page and appeared at the board meeting and got in line. The meeting was being videotaped. Just about everyone who spoke was yelling (board members do seem to be half asleep and have make up their minds before it begins).

The public consistently used the policy of not allowing gays in the military as building a stronger defense against their presence in the schools. I was treated a full year before this time for a thyroid

illness and had just reached normal test results (November 1999). I had been robbed of my energy so when I spoke in a small voice which was loud enough for the microphone I agreed that I could complete what I committed to. I laid out why I thought the military were to be displaced from the high schools. I was organized. It was clear and concise. I was an outraged parent of 3 daughters attending the public high school system with military recruiters walking the hallways with them during exchange of classes and was unbending in giving my views about gays who are our neighbors and working within the constraints of our society also being able to serve in the military which the military did not agree.

Since June 30, 2016 transgender people have been openly allowed to serve but our present US President is planning to reinstate a policy commonly referred to as "Don't ask, don't tell."

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Don%27t_ask,_don%27t_tell

I walked away and made a good impression. It was quipped at me that it was a clever approach by a WILPF member but I knew it could not have been any different and thanked God it was put in place. 
-E.W.

Wait For It

Last month I was given the opportunity to be a traveling minister for Friends World Committee for Consultation (FWCC), to visit Jamaica Yearly Meeting. The committee that receives requests for traveling ministers had discerned that this request from JYM was for me; now it was my turn to discern if I felt called to go.

I listened to my mind and heart, weighed the pluses and minuses, did everything I normally do... and was getting no sense of "yes, this is for you to do." With a bit of disappointment I thought, "Well, if it's not yes, then it must be no." But I felt a stop, not a rebuke but a sure sense that I also was not free to say no.

How odd. This continued for three weeks. Doubts about our Quaker process, about my ability to hear my Shepherd's voice, about the reality of this faith tradition began to creep nearer.


But the "not yes, not no" was strong.

Finally, just a couple weeks before I would have to leave, I wrote to the committee and apologized and explained that I was going to call some trusted Friends at West Hills and get a "rapid-response clearness committee" around me, and that I

hoped to have an answer to them within 24 hours.

I asked my husband to be on this clearness committee; he said, "Of course." I began making calls and sending emails. In the course of doing this contact work, which took a few minutes, I got a clear sense of "Yes; this trip to Jamaica is for you."

It wasn't embarrassing to meet with my Friends the next day, to explain that I had my answer already and the answer came exactly while I was asking then to serve, because I knew what I would ask next: I asked them if, since they were willing to serve on a clearness committee would they be willing to be my anchor/support committee while I was traveling. They all said, "Yes."

Three weeks home now I am still processing the lovely experiences and lessons learned, and soon I will meet with my anchor committee and we will talk. 

-Julie P

It could happen any time, tornado, earthquake, Armageddon. It could happen. Or sunshine, love, salvation.

It could, you know. That's why we wake and look out – no guarantees in this life.

But some bonuses, like morning, like right now, like noon, like evening.

—William B. Stafford