

WIDER QUAKER FELLOWSHIP, AOTEAROA NEW ZEALAND

LETTER 134

AUGUST 2015

19 Exeter Place, Rotorua 3015, New Zealand.

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Dear Friends,

One of our correspondents has written to tell us about her friend who is also a member of our Fellowship:

“Mrs. Pauline Keuning of Selwyn Village, Pt. Chevalier, reached the venerable age of 100 in March 2015 and I was wondering if your next issue could mention this. Her three daughters will be coming from England and the States to mark the event, but one cannot get here until May/June so she will arrive later. Naturally Pauline is very excited about her birthday. She keeps quite well and is still able to have a short walk every day. She has a clear mind and spends her days reading. However, she has been almost totally deaf for many years and this keeps her isolated. She is well loved and respected by everyone at Selwyn Village.”

We would like to congratulate Pauline and wish her well as she enters her second century. There's no doubt that in spite of her deafness she contributes in her own way to the well-being of her friends and neighbours at Selwyn.

It does seem that more of us are able to enjoy a longer life these days. I remember that in 2011 there were five ninety-year-olds in one of our Quaker Monthly Meetings. All of them were active in Quaker decision-making and two are still with us.

And then we have to remember the four 60-year-old couples who had the vision, commitment and strength to start the Quaker Educational Settlement in Whanganui in 1975. They lived to see the results of their years of hard work and one of them, having also achieved her century, was with us until May this year.

In spite of such examples there seems to be great resistance to the idea of growing old. There's little recognition of the fact that all of us are ageing at exactly the same rate – even our children and grandchildren! My son tells me that 45 is now the “new young”.

I thought that in this Letter we might explore some Quaker thoughts about ageing. It seems that with the aid of the Spirit that unites us, it is possible to manage the process gracefully.

Yours in Friendship,

Ruth Gadgil.

Quaker attitudes to ageing

“With mainly two generations present at Summer Gatherings a heavy responsibility falls on the ‘parent’ age-group to cope with the physical and spiritual aspects of the whole group. There is a real need for older Friends, the young (and young-at-heart) grandparents to attend. They may not feel that this kind of family gathering is their cup of tea for a holiday, but to be willing to come, to talk, ‘to be available’, will be valuable.”

Carole Emslie 1971: *Quaker Faith and Practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand* 2003: 8.47.

“Betty Duffield ‘read in the paper that the Gulf Peace Camp was being set up on the Kuwait border and she knew that she had to go there too. Despite having said that she was too old and tired to go to Summer Gathering that year, she set off for the Gulf instead, fully prepared to give her life in the cause of peace... News of that action affected many people around the world, who were amazed at the courage and determination of this 80-year-old grandmother!’”

Quaker Faith and Practice in Aotearoa/New Zealand 2003: 7.28.

“There are fewer and fewer things that truly matter. The years have accumulated such a store of inner lasting value that I no longer feel the weight of the perishable. Letting go of all things – and not only “things” – that have a hold on me. The glamorous, the lure of shallow success, have no way of touching me anymore. My life is becoming intensely focused on presence and Presence.”

William Z. Shetter 2012: Some thoughts on becoming eighty-five. *Pendle Hill Pamphlet 418.*

Who is this old woman I have to live with now?

All my previous life I’ve lived with myself,
Not always comfortably I admit,
Still we got along.

You see we shared the same habits, myself and I.
For instance – we both thought and moved fast.
This stranger uses a stick – creeps along,
Drops things, can’t pick them up.
Slow at picking up a point too.
I lose patience with her.

Myself and I would work, play and sleep at nights
After crammed days. She sits and sits.
Kind people say
‘I’ll come and see you soon dear’.
‘Isn’t she wonderful’ they say.
I don’t think so. Sometimes I think...
Well, you know what I mean!
(Others think so too,
Otherwise they wouldn’t be so kind to the old
thing.)
The worst of it is, it seems I’m stuck with her.
God knows how I’ll manage,
But as he knows, perhaps he’ll see to it.

Katherine Moore 1983
Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice*
1995: 21.47

Saturday morning, making chocolate clusters,
And you with chocolate
All smeared around your rosy mouth,
Looking very comical
Turned to me and said,

‘Will your body
Come back again, Grannie,
After you are dead?’

‘No, not this body,’ I reply ...
‘But I’ll be around all right,
Hovering somewhere, laughing with you,
Feeling quite near
As Grandpa does with me.’

Your thoughts had very nearly
Moved elsewhere but, satisfied,
‘That’s OK’ you said.

Ruth Fawell 1976
Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1995: 21 53.

“I am convinced it is a great art to know how to grow old gracefully, and I am determined to practise it ... I always thought I should love to grow old, and I find it even more delightful than I thought. It is so delicious to be *done* with things, and to feel no need any longer to concern myself much about earthly affairs ... I am tremendously content to let one activity after another go, and to await quietly and happily the opening of the door at the end of the passage-way, that will let me in to my real abiding place.”

Hannah Whittall Smith 1903: Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1995: 21 48.

“Those of you who are kept by age or sickness from more active work, who are living retired lives, may in your separation have the opportunity of liberating power for others. Your prayers and thoughts go out further than you think, and as you wait in patience and in communion with God, you may be made ministers of peace and healing and be kept young in soul.”

London Yearly Meeting 1923: Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1995: 21 46.

“Friends do not take readily to being cared for... But many of us will find that we ourselves are in need of full care in our old age. This will not be easy. It calls for ‘a different kind of living’ ... But there are compensations and opportunities. Loss of physical well-being can bring a new experience of the strength of the Spirit which can overcome pain and suffering... we come to recognise death as a natural and often welcome event. Yet another movement of growth into the fullness of the knowledge of God.”

Margaret I. McNeill 1990: Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1995: 22.26.

“I am glad I was here. Now I am clear, I am fully clear...”

George Fox, shortly before his death, 1691: Britain Yearly Meeting *Quaker Faith and Practice* 1995: 21 49.

**Weekends at the Quaker Settlement,
76 Virginia Road, Whanganui 4500:**

28-30 August – Quaker Learning: the way ahead

Facilitators: Elizabeth Duke and Alistair Hall.
Contact: Elizabeth.duke@actrix.co.nz

11-13 September – Listening to the Spirit

Facilitator: Elizabeth Thompson.
Contact: elizabeththom@actrix.co.nz

13-15 November – Strengthening our Meetings

Facilitator: Linley Gregory.

Summer Gathering
will be at Teapot Valley Christian Camp,
Brightwater (close to Nelson),
Monday 28th December 2015 to
Monday 4th January 2016
Theme: “Building Bridges”

If you are interested, please phone **Barbara Curtis:**
03 548 4883 or email
summergathering2015@gmail.com

The Wider Quaker Fellowship is an association of persons of diverse backgrounds who wish to have ties with the Religious Society of Friends without necessarily being in its membership, or who, through isolation, illness or some other circumstance are unable to attend a Monthly Meeting.

Any person who finds the fundamental Quaker testimonies and the Quaker way of life, with its emphasis on sincerity and simplicity, compatible with his or her philosophy of life is welcome to join the Fellowship. A request to the Clerk will ensure enrolment as a member.