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# What Canst Thou Say?

**Friends • Mystical Experience • Contemplative Practice**

*You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this: but what canst thou say?  
Art thou a child of Light and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest,  
is it inwardly from God? —George Fox*

## Disabilities

### Not By Chance

Angeline Reeks

*Has my spiritual journey been affected by my disability?*  
Yes, and profoundly so. Almost twenty years ago I made a very serious and nearly fatal attempt on my life. I spent several weeks in the hospital and several more at home recovering. This gave me a great deal of time to both think and pray. I was at a very low and rocky place in my spiritual life. I thought there might be a God but I wasn't sure anymore.

Meeting others who were as seriously ill as I was eye-opening. They provided me with insights into some of my destructive self-talk. It set me to thinking about how they had been put into my life, "not by chance." So I started to read and study the Bible again, and to find others I could trust to study with me.

*Have my struggles and pain altered my relationship with God?* Oh, my, yes. As I stated, I tried to run away. That didn't work. I'm still here. I still struggle and I still have pain, but I don't believe I've ever known another human being without

those conditions. Each day I am simply more or less aware of them, I suppose. My relationship with God now is one filled with gratitude and love. Each day is different— filled with new experiences and flavored with pain and struggle. Now most of my pain is physical rather than the emotional and psychic pain (depression) I have suffered through most of my life. I have found a good mix of medication, therapy, vitamins and healthy foods, along with moderate exercise (yoga, mindfulness and meditation) to keep me in balance.

*In my experience, is there a difference between healing and curing?* It is like the difference between a paper cut on your finger and a migraine headache. You can cure the paper cut with antibiotic ointment and a bandage, if you allow a couple of days' healing time. The migraine headache also takes time to heal, but it is not cured, because the underlying condition is still there, awaiting the next trigger. I have been healed of much of the pain that has filled my life, but I will always bear the scars from the wounds that caused that

### **From Editors:**

*Human beings have looked at disabilities and the people who live with them in many ways: as objects of scorn, pity or blame, as symbols, as examples of courage. In this edition of **What Canst Thou Say?** our authors demonstrate that people with disabilities can speak for themselves, and want to be seen simply as people on their own spiritual paths.*

*Having a disability, or loving someone who does, can have a profound effect on one's spiritual journey. We may question God. We may feel "broken." We may feel left out of our traditional faith communities. In our daily struggles, we may draw closer to God. Some have even asserted that if the disabled are created in the image of God, then perhaps God too struggles with disability.*

*Our authors write in heartfelt ways of how disability has touched their spiritual lives. I invite readers to read these stories, and the additional stories on our website, and to ask yourselves how open your own life and community are to the experience of those with disabilities.*

*Guest Editor Faith Paulsen with WCTS Editorial Staff*

pain. Those scars are not physical but in my soul.

Gratitude or resentment? I am very grateful for many things I have gained—one being the 20 years I have under my belt! I now have patience with myself that I did not have before that suicide attempt. I would not have seen my beautiful grandchildren, nor would I have graduated from college, had I succeeded that day. I'm glad I failed!

*Angie Reeks is a member of Upper Fox Valley meeting, Illinois. She has a very large cookbook collection, as well as books by Karen Armstrong, Marcus Borg, Jim Wallis, Bibles of various translations, and many Quaker books. She frequently rereads J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis.*

## God, Where Are You?

Sue Green

I have asked myself this question numerous times. Has my spiritual journey been affected by loving someone who has/had a disability? I answer yes.

Many years ago my sister was diagnosed with scleroderma, an autoimmune disorder which took away her independence and life. A diagnosis was given in March, and she passed away in June on her thirty-ninth birthday. I watched her body weaken; her role changed from mother and wife to being dependent on someone to assist her with daily care. During this time I continually asked God to heal her. Hear my cry, O God; listen to my prayer. Please make her well again. Please don't let her suffer. Weeks went by and I wondered if my prayers had been heard. God, where are you? Why is this taking so long? And then it happened. He ended her pain, while mine lingered on.

Throughout my life I have been care provider for several other members

of the family. My sister-in-law had a spinal cord tumor that completely paralyzed her and left her dependent on others for her care. During her illness I often asked God to help. One Saturday after spending most of the day at the hospital trying to comfort her, I was emotionally exhausted and ran out of her room. Tears flowed down my face. I held my head down, trying to disguise my grief. I entered a small waiting room. It was empty, and I sat down in a chair and sobbed. A woman came into the room, touched my hand and said, "I see that you are very upset, and I would like to pray with you."

She sat down beside me and began to pray. I was so touched by her compassion and realized that God had used her as a messenger to comfort me. Later in the day, when I was driving out of the hospital parking lot, I stopped at the ticket booth to pay, and the tender of the booth looked at my face and said, "It looks like you have had a very hard day. I will say a prayer for you." God, you are here.

Now I am a care-provider for my 90-year-old mother. I'm also the wife of a farmer, mother of two grown children, and work as an occupational therapy assistant in a school. I work with children who exhibit one or more

of the following: fine and gross motor deficits, sensory issues, physical and cognitive impairments, autism and other disorders that may impact a child's ability to function in school.

I have seen and felt God-like moments daily. At work, when I see a child take a step for the first time, catch a ball, write his name after months of trying to get him to hold a pen, tie her shoes after years of practicing, sit up in a chair unsupported, I can feel God's presence. Some sessions are very challenging, and I have prayed for patience and the skills necessary to teach. Sometimes it takes years to see a little progress with each child, and I try to remember that God wants us to be teachers and use our talents to help others.

We are a sum of our experiences. God can use every part of our past, painful and good, to inspire us, to heal our wounds, and remind us of our many blessings.

*Sue Green attends Second Church of Christ in Danville, Illinois. "I start my day off with a prayer, thanking the Lord for another day of life, and for the opportunities and blessings that I have been given. I say a prayer before going to bed every night; and during the day whenever I want to lift someone."*

**What Canst Thou Say?** is an independent publication by and for Quakers with an interest in mystical experience and contemplative practice. It is published in August, November, February, and May. The editorial and production team is Lissa Field, Mariellen Gilpin, Lieselotte Heil, Richard Himmer, Judy Lumb, Grayce Mesner, Mike Resman, and Eleanor Warnock.

Please write for *WCTS!* Send editorial correspondence to <mariellen.gilpin@gmail.com> or *WCTS*, 818 W. Columbia, Champaign, IL 61820. See the *WCTS* website for a history of *WCTS* and updated queries for future issues: <whatcanstthousay.org>

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# A Song of Jean

Sibyl Ruth

*Let my tongue and keyboard both proclaim the power of Jean.*

*For in the meetinghouse, Jean gets to her feet often and ministers with a voice that is a clanging gong.*

*She drives away false peace, awakens us.*

*Teach us not to fear becoming caught in the long diversions of Jean's thoughts, lost in the ring road of her speech.*

*When the appointed hour is done, may we engage Jean in conversation*

*and not run away from her in the lobby for some invented reason.*

*Let us acknowledge the aging of Jean*

*who doesn't enjoy being eighty*

*but wishes to go on as she did at thirty.*

*Allow us all to accommodate Jean's fury*

*listening with tenderness to her shouts and rants*

*Jean's demands for help. Her refusal of help that's offered.*

*Those cries of No. No I can do it. I can manage.*

*May we make time to watch over Jean for she mislays her spectacles, her watch, her keys, her purse.*

*Help us to worship the Spirit that shaped the hands of Jean*

*hands that once tied knots, hammered tent pegs, peeled thousands of potatoes.*

*Jean's hands now in their fleecy gloves, their knobbly, twisted, arthritic fingers*

*hands that can no longer do buttons, whose buttons are done wrong*

*frantic hands that keep on searching bags and rattling papers.*

*Jean has been diminished, yet we shall magnify Jean's name.*

*Lead us to esteem properly the engine that is Jean's body*

*the darkness of her teeth*

*the hairs of her head, white and coarse as dune grass*

*her stertorous breath*

*her bent back*

*her slumped chest.*

*Also let us praise Jean's black-handled stick that likes to slip from her grasp and hit the floor with a great clatter.*

*May we remember always the muchness of Jean's mind.*

*Her mind that carries those seas from which we crawled in the beginning*

*that holds those caverns which shall open to receive us at our end.*

*May glory and honour belong to Jean, and every day that remains to her be blessed.*

**Sibyl Ruth** is a member of Central England Area Meeting, and her local meeting is Cotteridge—a few miles south of Birmingham. “To be honest, I am feeling rather ‘lapsed’ at the moment—and recently joined the British Humanist Association, (partly) because of my concern that there are ways in which religion is becoming quite a negative force in public life in the UK. I feel that a lot of what politicians here say about ‘Christian values’ is a not-so-thinly disguised attempt to win the votes of those who are hostile to other spiritual traditions, and very little to do with the messages of the Gospels. But I suspect that whether I do—or don’t—start going back to Meeting for Worship, Quaker ways of thinking (and being) will remain a major influence.”

Contributed by **Janice Stensrude**, a Friend who lived several years in Australia. She reports, “At the Devonshire Street Meeting in Sydney, there is an elderly member who has trouble sitting upright. The meeting purchased a Lazy Boy for her. She nods off during meeting and may offer a hymn of testimony in the form of a soft, steady snore. The recliner is placed at one end of the semi-circle that is the primary seating (more is arranged against the wall and a couple of rows behind it). That snoring hymn felt to me like a testimony to the love the meeting has for her.”

# Wrestling with My Phantom Self

Tina Gunsalus

I know I'm lucky, even to have the challenges I do, and that they are good problems to have. With that as context, the sensation of oddness persists. I finally found a phrase that aptly covers it. Have you ever read an account about those who have lost limbs who still experience sensations from the phantom limbs? That's how I feel about my missing self. I still have the same impulses, ideas, reactions as always. I know what it feels like to be me. Even with that sense, though, the energy and, often, the full cognitive capacity to "be" that person are gone. My phantom self is always present, often itchy, and I haven't found a way fully to integrate it into my new reality.

Some examples:

- I have made modest progress reading young adult fiction and other non-taxing stuff. The price is that I need breaks every ten or fifteen minutes, for reasons I don't fully understand.
- My interest in doing puzzles turned back on. I've made progress in the difficulty of puzzles I can complete.
- I still lose my balance after about five hours of being out in the world, and it still seems connected to visual/aural overload.
- While writing is much slower than before, my greatest fear, that maybe I've lost the ability to do long-form writing, seems misplaced.

The process is different than it was before, and the jury is still out on whether the quality is worthwhile, but it seems to be possible to produce words in a coherent stream. That's been a relief. Interestingly, my dreams are completely different when I'm writing than when I'm not. This turns on and off almost daily, and corresponds

directly to whether I've been writing or thinking about it seriously on any given day. Six weeks into trying to move the book forward, it's a totally bizarre experience.

Before you leap to offer reassurances that I seem just the same to you, please, don't. I know that my imitations of my former self are great and that the changes are outwardly imperceptible. I know how much it is your caring impulse to tell me so. That has been the universal response when I've tried to articulate this sense of a phantom self. Notwithstanding how it all looks on the outside, it doesn't live the same way. We've adapted our lives thoroughly enough that it all works, more or less seamlessly, most of the time. It feels totally different, though, all the time. Up close, our life is different. My not reading irrevocably alters the texture and rhythms of our life. My energy and balance limits mean that we make explicit calculations just about every day, and often have to re-adjust on the fly several times a day.

Here's another example that's small in the describing and big as experienced: we don't listen to much music any more. Music has been a part of our lives; it brought us together and has always been a shared joy. With the overload problems, though, most of the time, I need silence in order to be able to work, talk and stay upright. Changes like that shape our reality. Still, that same reality encompasses more: I'm alive, functioning, my brain works, and I can work. I count these blessings every day, even while scratching at the ever-itchy phantom self.

*Tina Gunsalus is a former colleague of John and Mariellen Gilpin. She had a brain tumor surgically removed three years ago, and blogs regularly about her recovery adventure <[ckgunsalus.blogspot.com](http://ckgunsalus.blogspot.com)>*

## Easy Mover

Ruth Stillwell

*How easily I move at night,  
Leaving my body lying flat:  
In lissome leaps like a leopard light,  
With supple smoothness like a cat!  
Gliding glissando as on glass,  
Twirling on tiptoe like a top,  
I pirouette, plie' and pass,  
Soar like a singing lark—  
And plop!  
Here I am, back on my bed,  
Facing another graceless day,  
No ease of movement now; instead,  
I lurch and lumber my labored way,  
Longing for darkness and dreams to  
free  
The easy mover trapped in me.*

**Ruth Stillwell** wrote this sonnet in 1990, shortly before she died. A member of the Wesley Methodist Church in Urbana, Illinois, her husband Gardiner chose a Quaker memorial because he wanted closeness with the Quakers, who loved her dearly.

# Like a Chick Pecking at Its Shell

Rosemary Ann Blanchard

I was a young woman, getting ready to graduate from a small Catholic women's college. It was a time of giddy anticipation, coupled with a fear of the unknown. My classmates and I were at the end of our undergraduate experience, getting ready to move on to whatever life had waiting for us. What I remember the most is that we were like chicks still in the egg, pecking at the shell to emerge into who knew what.

I feel like that's where I am all over again, as I grow older and my body wears out while my spirit is still being born. I have made peace with the injury I did to my body, more than 23 years ago, in an automobile accident that almost killed me. I've made peace with it, but I still haven't got used to it. I'm still surprised when I wake up and start to spring out of bed and can't. For more than 23 years, getting up has been a slow, achy process for me. I still have, somehow, inside me a lively young woman without physical limits who's pecking at the shell of her limitations, trying to emerge.

Maybe that's where we all are, to one degree or another. My theology doesn't go any deeper than that. Theology was my curse in college—I was so good at it that it almost ate my faith. I could write an essay on just about any proposition, and I wrote myself into a state of nonbelief.

Over the next several years after I graduated, I relaxed into a comfortable agnosticism, until I surprisingly found myself called, inwardly, toward a spiritual Something that wouldn't let me go, even though I told myself I

## Living A Whole Life

*In order to arrive at the second half of life, one has to realize there is an incurable wound at the heart of everything. Much of the conflict from the age of twenty-five to sixty-five is just trying to figure this out and then to truly accept it. A Swiss theologian, Hans Urs Von Balthasar (1905-1988), said toward the end of his life: "All great thought springs from a conflict between two eventual insights: 1) The wound which we find at the heart of everything is finally incurable. 2) Yet we are necessarily and still driven to try." (Think about that for an hour or so!)*

*Our largely unsuccessful efforts of the first half of life are themselves the training ground for all virtue and growth in holiness. This wound at the heart of life shows itself in many ways, but your holding and suffering of this tragic wound, your persistent but failed attempts to heal it, your final surrender to it, will ironically make you into a wise and holy person. It will make you patient, loving, hopeful, expansive, faithful, and compassionate—which is precisely the second half of life wisdom.*

*Adapted from [Loving the Two Halves of Life: The Further Journey](http://archive.cacradicalgrace.org/conferences/2011/two-halves/) <archive.cacradicalgrace.org/conferences/2011/two-halves/> and [Falling Upward: A Spirituality for the Two Halves of Life](http://cacradicalgrace.org/bookstore/falling-upward/) by Fr. Richard Rohr <cacradicalgrace.org/bookstore/falling-upward/>. (Contributed by Anne Scherer.)*

didn't believe in it. Haltingly, I began a timid return to something like prayer through the theology-free guidance of a Quaker meeting, located across the street from my house. My Friends encouraged me to wait on the Spirit and not worry about what it all meant. A dear Friend, Henry, the greeter who had met me the first time I ventured to cross the threshold into Meeting, assured me that the Way would open in its own good time and that if I was supposed to be there, eventually the reasons would become clearer to me. I began to relax and trust the Something that seemed to be calling me toward some approximation of worship. I began to think that maybe Henry was right, and I didn't need to construct a theological stance to explain to myself what I was doing.

One day I needed more faith than I had regained yet. I was preparing for surgery because of a cyst-like growth on an ovary, and my doctor told me that it was virtually impossible that a

young woman of my age could have an ovarian cancer. He didn't know how hollow his words were for me. My younger sister's fiancé, a boy of 21, had recently died of non-Hodgkins lymphoma after a short and terrifying illness. I knew more than I cared to about young people dying of cancer.

So I was pretty much on my own, and too new at worship to trust prayer. I lay in the hospital the night before the surgery, unmedicated by choice, and seeking to breathe and center myself into a place of peace. Peace came. I don't know how. I don't know from Whom or What. But, I do know that peace came.

Almost as if there was someone speaking to me, I heard/felt/experienced the question,

"So, what has your life been so far? Is it something that should have happened, or has it been some kind of dirty trick?"

Within myself, I answered: “No, it hasn’t been a mistake or a bad joke. Life is good. My life has been good, even with all the things that have happened in it.”

“Well then,” said/breathed/expressed the Presence, “why would any of the rest of it be bad? Why would you be given something good if it was only to take it away with something bad? Do you really believe I would play that kind of a game with you?”

“No.” I answered. But, as the sense of Presence was receding, I called out in spirit, “But, I still don’t know what happens. I still don’t understand it!”

One last echo: “You don’t need to understand it. You just need to trust what you already know, what you’ve already seen.”

I cry as I write about this, because I knew then that it was true. And, even as my beliefs have gone up and down and I’ve grown wary of just about anything that human beings say about God, I’ve never lost the Faith that it was true. This is a Faith that is grounded in Trust more than in Belief. To come into existence, to live, is good. Good! Whatever follows from having come into existence is also Good and will be Good.

*Rosemary Blanchard is a member of Albuquerque Friends Meeting and a frequent attendee at Sacramento Friends Meeting. Her practice is spottier than she wishes it were, “and more Spirit-led than I have any right to expect. Any more than that and I’d be veering closer to theology than I’m comfortable with, to say nothing of sounding like less of a slacker than I actually am.”*



## Molly

Janice Harrington

*Unlike the others, with her it was never rough  
or quick, or half-done, and never,  
because it was endless, done with anger  
or jaws grinding enough, enough.*

*It was done carefully, spreading thighs,  
lifting the scrotum with its rope  
of penis, the leaves of labia eased aside,  
a washcloth, slicked with soap,  
washing flesh and flank in a tide  
of heat  
of touch  
of water.*

*This was intimacy,  
a shame they couldn’t hide, but did it matter?  
Handmaid, menial, servant, daughter,  
each movement precise, each movement ceremony,  
cradling these white-fleshed raku,  
each holding its fill of bitter tea.*

*All the exquisite parts of her work—fingers,  
palms, wrists, arms, shoulders—  
intent on the motions of cleaning and drying,  
the certainty that one day she too will lie waiting,  
in a county bed seeking compassion  
from the hands of strangers.*

**Janice N. Harrington** writes, “my spiritual practice is now writing and walking. I have long debates with myself about faith, the good that I can do in the world, the good I should have done and didn’t. I ask unanswered question and ponder what our work should be as human beings. God, of course, never seems to pay me the least attention. My questions are no different than a myriad others, I suppose, but I hope that a prayer or two gets through. I try to pay attention in the world. I try to be grateful. I try to remember that faith is a gift, but that doubt also has its purpose. It’s not a small thing to ask, to wonder, to admit that we don’t know. “Molly” was published in 2011 in, *The Hands of Strangers: Poems from the Nursing Home*, and is reprinted with the permission of The Permissions Company, Inc. on behalf of BOA Editions Ltd. <boaeditions.org>.

### **Tell Us Your Stories!**

*WCTS has a vision—we want to tell the world that God is much more various and wonderful than our skeptical culture allows. We hope to help Friends be tender and open to the Spirit. Please share your stories. Articles that best communicate to our readers generally focus on specific events and are written in the first person.*

*The Editorial Team of WCTS:  
Mariellen Gilpin, Judy Lumb, and Michael Resman*

# Conversation with Jesus

*In the 34th year of psychiatric medications*

*Written on Day 34 of Zero Medication*

Mariellen Gilpin

*Gosh, Jesus,  
I need to talk to you.  
I'm having trouble adjusting to being healed.*

*I understood when friends abandoned me  
Because being crazy might be like measles.  
They were butterflies.  
They went where the nectar was easier.  
I understood they needed fun  
When I went to sleep in mid-sentence  
Or couldn't start the sentence  
Because the word I needed wasn't there.*

*I understood when friends abandoned me  
Because they didn't want to hurt my feelings  
By telling me how I'd upset them.  
I understood when they blamed me  
For taking too much medication.  
I understood they cared  
But it was too painful for them  
To know they couldn't fix it.  
I understood it was easier to walk away  
Than walk beside in humility.*

*I understood other needs came first—  
The dying mother, the frail father—  
There was no need for forgiveness.  
But I never called again.*

*I understood when professionals  
Couldn't hear the vocabulary of my pain.  
They chose the profession because they cared.  
They had compassion.  
But they didn't try to learn the vocabulary of my pain from  
me.  
I spoke a different language.  
They were uncomfortable.  
They labeled me and walked away.  
I understood they couldn't deal with the fact  
That they couldn't deal with my pain  
Without learning things they didn't want to know.*

*I was sad.  
It was hard work.  
I forgave.*

*You gave me new friends,  
Different professionals.  
We were all healing together.  
We admitted we didn't know.  
We could walk beside each other in humility.  
A mistake was a mistake  
Not the end of the relationship.*

*Then you healed me.  
I am filled with joy.  
I leap,  
I shout,  
I praise your name to my friends.*

*I'm having trouble, Jesus,  
Because there's so much new information  
I am so happy sorting it all out  
And enjoying being able to find the words.*

*I understand my friends  
Who understand the vocabulary of my pain  
Are inundated  
With my efforts to sort all this new information—  
This combination of uncautious words  
And my insufferable joy at your healing me—  
To have the opportunity to perceive  
And come to understand you better.*

*I understand I'm driving them crazier than ever  
And I haven't yet learned  
To think through all this new information silently.  
There's no need for forgiving anybody here—  
Myself included.  
Mistakes are opportunities to learn more.  
I'm adjusting to being healed.*

*Now what?*

**Mariellen Gilpin** is an editor of WCTS and member of Urbana-Champaign Friends Meeting, Illinois. At the end of a four-year process of gradual reductions in the medication she had taken for 15 years, she told her husband about this poem. He said, "Oh, I get it. This isn't in the Bible, but it should be."

# The Blister

Faith Paulsen

Click. Clack. It was the soundtrack of my day, the sound of my five-year-old son Judah tapping his wooden toy trains together. A pot of soup simmered on the stove.

I sat at my kitchen table and picked up the dog-eared notebook Judah carried back and forth to school. That notebook. Every day like clockwork it came, its black and white marbled cover an intruder in my daily routine. My husband would be home soon. Judah and his brother Seth, 2 ½, were watching “Mr. Rogers Neighborhood” in the next room. Time to read the notebook.

Next to today’s date was a sticker. “This is what I did today!” exclaimed the bright yellow happy face. “Language therapy today: He/I; I/you. Judah still confuses these words. Echolalia noted. Comments: We are trying to redirect Judah’s behavior regarding unstructured free play. He has a tendency to go off on his own and become engrossed in one object, e.g. trains. He is in his own little world. He isolates himself and will not tolerate other children. Self-stimulatory behavior observed. Poor eye contact.”

The clear message was this: Your son is imperfect, damaged, broken. God’s mistake. Sometimes it felt as if we were locked in a nightmarish tug-of-war, me and my husband on one side, desperately pulling our son’s body from the jaws of a monster. The monster was his autism.

Click. Clack. Judah wandered by, a toy train in each fist. He had chewed his turtleneck collar to shreds.

“Hi, honey.” I leaned toward him, cupping his chin in my hand and twisting his face to mine. My eyes captured his and grasped them forcefully. “Judah, it’s almost time for dinner.” I paused, watching the blank face for signs of recognition.

It was like watching a glass gumball machine. The quarter went in, chugged its way down. Then, the gumball climbed a conveyor belt to the top of the transparent dome, and descended, sliding its way through roller-coaster turns, riding up and around and down until it plopped into the cup.

“You are having macaroni?” Judah finally said.

“You mean you would like macaroni.”

“Okay.”

“Okay, Judah. We can have macaroni. Will you help me?”

Again, the wait.

“Judah can help me?” he suggested.

“Judah can help me.”

“Okay.”

I propped him up on his tiptoes on top of the stepladder, and turned on the faucet. Together, we filled the saucepan and set it on the stove, moving the stepladder as we went along. While Judah perched next to the stove, gawking at the water, I turned to stir the soup.

“WA-A-A-A-A-A-A!” Face red, mouth contorted, Judah wrung his hands, his shriek exploding over the house.

I dropped the spoon, flew to him, swept him up in my arms.

“Oh, honey, are you hurt? What is it?”

He raised one trembling hand.

“Did you burn yourself?” Amidst his screams I pushed his hand under the faucet and let the cool water run over the burn. Then I used a clean dishtowel to swaddle his hand.

Judah glared at the bundle.

“It’s a burn, honey. I know it hurts, but Momma will make it better.”

I unwrapped the finger like a present. There it was, a new blister. My breath stuck in my throat.

“A tissue!” he screamed.

“A tissue? What for?”

“Wipe it off! Wipe it off!”

“Judah, no, it’s a blister. Part of your own skin. It doesn’t come off.”

“Take off the Band-Aid!”

“It’s not a Band-Aid. It doesn’t come off. It’s a kind of boo-boo and it will get better soon.” I touched the blister to my lips.

He sniffed.

I gathered him up in my arms, wrapped myself around my son’s bony body. Judah needed my reservoir of calm; I dipped into it with both hands.

He said nothing and did not return my embrace.

And then I realized. I’d said it myself. The blister was part of his own skin—like his autism. His chewed-up shirt, his gnawed fingernails, his confused pronouns, his tantrums, were all part of him. They wouldn’t come off. They were woven into his gentle nature, inseparable from the presence

I saw in those unfathomable hazel eyes. I could almost picture the gears, lifts and pulleys running the colorful mechanism of his mind.

His question landed with its familiar plunk. “You are playing with trains?”

“No, honey. You, Judah, you want to play with trains.” I pointed to him.

He looked down at my finger touching his chest. The quiet eyes inched over my hand like a caterpillar, climbing the skin of my arm to my shoulder, neck, face. Eyes.

Eye contact. Something in me let go. I felt my heart fall backwards and land, surprised to look around and find that the tug-of-war was over, and Judah was safe, looking at me with his hopeful wordless eyes.

In that moment Judah gave me a great gift. I knew then something it takes most parents years to learn—that my child doesn’t belong to me, he is himself, not a reflection of my ego. That he is not broken but whole—created in the image of God, a God who understands disability, because there are things even God can’t control, things for which God needs our help.

Supper could wait. I took my son’s hand. “Yes, Judah. I’ll play trains with you,” I said, and I turned off the stove.

**Faith Paulsen** is a writer and a member of Gwynedd Friends Meeting in Gwynedd, Pennsylvania. This experience has been longing to be written for over 20 years.



## **Discovering God as Companion Now available as an E-Book**

In 2007 the WCTS team published *Discovering God as Companion*, an anthology of the first ten years of publishing the meeting for worship in print, *What Canst Thou Say?* In the past five years, over 600 books have been sold. We are happy to announce that *Discovering God as Companion* is now available as an e-book for Kindles, Nooks, I pads, and other such devices.

“Sixty-eight accounts of sacred experiences, described in ordinary language by ordinary people, (previously published in *What Canst Thou Say*) offer a spiritual feast to readers who have had a close encounter with Mystery or know someone who has. Saints and mystics are not the only ones graced with the immediacy and presence of Love. ...

“*Discovering God As Companion* underlines the power of ‘we’ sustained by the Religious Society of Friends for more than 350 years. Contributing Friends and companions of God have drawn so close to the Source of Love that Light streams through their written words into the world. Through the testimonies of these writers, readers can glimpse contemplative witness as one mark of the whole Quaker community.”

—Judith Favor’s review in *Friends Journal*

***Discovering God as Companion: Real Life Stories from What Canst Thou Say?*** Mariellen Gilpin, Editor, 2007. Published by Authorhouse. Kindle Edition available from <amazon.com>, Book Nook Edition available from <barnesandnoble.com> Paperback available from FGC Bookstore <quakerbooks.org> (800) 966-4556

## **SUBSCRIPTION FORM**

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1035 Hereford Drive, Blue Bell PA 19422-1925

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# Please write for *What Canst Thou Say?*



August 2012

## **Unity**

**Editor: Judy Lumb**

*The glory which thou gavest me I have given to them, that they may be one, as we are one; I in them and thou in me, may they be perfectly one.* John 17:22-23. Whether it is a sense of unity during Friends' business process, unity with all of life, a sense of the emails during a committee's deliberations, or the experience of God's presence and power, unity is a concept important to Friends. When, where, how, and with whom or what, were you filled with a sense of unity? Share your stories of unity with our readers.

Deadline: June 15, 2012

November 2012

## **Children's Mystical Spirituality**

**Guest Editor: Jennifer Elam  
with Mike Resman**

*A little child shall lead them* (Isaiah 11:6). Did you have a mystical experience when you were a child? Did you share your experience with others, and did those others honor your experience, or discount it? Did the mystical experience itself cause you difficulty? Did the response of others give you difficulty? How might you have been dealt with in ways that would have been more helpful? Have you helped a child with their mystical experiences? Share your stories of mysticism in childhood with our readers.

Deadline: August 15, 2012

February 2013

## **Prophecy**

**Editor: Margery Post Abbott  
with Judy Lumb**

*And afterward, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions.* (Joel 2:28 NIV) Have you ever experienced what you might name a "prophetic" vision (auditory, visual or otherwise)? What makes you name it as prophetic? How does it feel or seem different from other mystical experiences? How did you know it was a true vision? What did it lead you to do or say and what response did you receive?

Deadline: November 15, 2012

## **What Canst Thou Say?**

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## **Disabilities**