

About the Wider Quaker Fellowship

Friends World Committee for Consultation, Section of the Americas, works to facilitate loving understanding of diversities among Friends while we discover together, with God's help, our common spiritual ground, and to facilitate full expression of our Friends' testimonies in the world. Friends World Committee's Wider Quaker Fellowship program is a ministry of literature. Through our mailings of readings, we seek to lift up voices of Friends of different countries, languages and Quaker traditions, and invite all to enter into spiritual community with Friends.

©2003 *Quaker Life*

Reprinted 2005,

with permission from *Quaker Life*,
by the

WIDER Quaker Fellowship

a program of Friends World Committee for
Consultation, Section of the Americas
1506 Race Street

Philadelphia, PA 19102-1498 ♦ USA

Tel: 215-241-7293 ♦ Fax: 215-241-7285

E-mail: wqf@fwccamericas.org

Web: www.fwccamericas.org/whatwedo/wqf.html



Friends World Committee
for Consultation
SECTION OF THE AMERICAS

Comité Mundial de Consulta
de los Amigos
SECCIÓN DE LAS AMÉRICAS

God's Presence in Trauma

By Pam Ferguson

(Indiana Yearly Meeting)

It all matters... landfill space consists of paper waste products, recycling is an important thing to do. One ton of recycled paper saves 20 trees, conserves energy, water, prevents air pollution, and saves 3 cubic yards of landfill volume. And paper can be recycled up to seven times. What we throw away matters. Actually, my friend Walter is the real recycler. He subscribes to the newspaper and gives them to me a day late. I simplify his life by taking his newspapers to the recycling bin and he helps me simplify my life by saving money on a newspaper subscription.

I've been too exhausted the past 14 days to look through Walter's newspapers. This morning I sat down with a cup of coffee and a pair of scissors to cut out several articles I wanted to save. I had a specific interest in 6 days of front-page news articles that involved my life. As I read the other news articles, I realized how connected they were to what happened to me. On the day before my big news day, there was an article about

U.S. prisons and jails now holding a record 2 million inmates. There was news about the war in Iraq and a "Speak Up" opinion column where someone called in and said: "If President Bush wants peace, why are we acting as an aggressor for the first time in history against a nation that is falling like dominoes and has yet to use any weapons of mass destruction?"

One afternoon two weeks ago my husband and I arrived home from teaching 80 6th graders sex education. We teach a weeklong class on creating positive relationships, whole person maturity, and encouraging abstinence until a loving and committed marriage. My husband then walked to the county jail, a block from our home, to visit an inmate who needed help. I went upstairs to the computer to work on an article for the newspaper about recycling oil.

The next half hour would take pages to describe. It ended up as the front-page news story for the next week. The short version: A young 27-year-old man, sentenced to 30 years in jail for dealing drugs, was on the way back to the jail from the courthouse when he broke loose and attacked his 19-year-old guard. He ran down our alley, found our secluded back door and kicked in the locked door. He grabbed my keys on the kitchen table and ran upstairs where found me at the computer. For the next 20 minutes I was confined in

About the Author

Pam Ferguson and her husband Ron have been co-pastors at Winchester Friends Meeting, Indiana, since leaving Uganda in 1998.



jail. People know what kind of car we drive and that we choose to live with only one vehicle. We teach 6th graders to create positive relationships and that their actions and choices have consequences. And I recycle paper... because it all matters.

my home, tied up, and then had our car stolen by a man I did not know.

I've lived in war zones in Uganda and Sudan, and joked about how boring life was in our small town. Incidents like this happen everywhere in our country; none of us are immune from danger, suffering or pain just because we live in America. As I looked at the articles in the newspaper surrounding the report of this escape, I realized how our lives are surrounded by violence. Most of us ignore the prison population because we don't have to deal with them on a daily basis. Our prisons are full of people needing help to break the cycle of drugs and violence. Our nation's involvement in violence with another nation surrounds our daily lives. Violence seems to only beget violence.

Because of this incident, I live life in America with more purpose now. Through the whole time this young man was in our home, I remained calm and was very aware of God's presence. I am thankful this happened to me. I go to jail every week with my husband where he leads a worship service for the men and I lead a worship service for the women. I've been around enough prisoners that I see them as people who for the most part aren't threatening. This young man responded to the fact I had little fear, I did not panic and I talked to him. At one point, he even broke down crying and hugged me, telling me he was sorry.

I am thankful he didn't break into another house on our block where there are elderly people or young children. I am glad none of them had to go through this experience. Of all the houses on our block, this young man broke into a pacifist home where he found no weapons. Even though I felt all alone during this time, I am so thankful the police, who I knew were walking around our home, did *not* look into our windows and see this man here. I was aware there could have been bullets used or I could have been held hostage. I am very thankful my husband did not come home during this time. One more distraction for this young man would have been too difficult to work through.

There were moments when I was uncomfortable: when he took off his clothes in my kitchen in order to force me to give him other clothes and when he made me lie face down on the bed to tie my hands and ankles together. Those were moments I had visions of what could happen. Even when I feared the worst, I had an incredible sense of God's presence with me, and I knew that whatever happened, however much pain I would experience, God would help me through it. There was an incredible amount of calm associated with that feeling. I am thankful I was not injured, but I knew in those difficult moments that God was still God, that God would still be love and would still be good even if

there wasn't a good outcome or even if I suffered. I'm aware of the deep, rich experience this was for me in my relationship with God.

This has been a growing experience for my husband and me. It matters that 26 years ago we had a leading from God to be married because I needed his presence in my life to help me through this event. I am more aware of his love and care for me today than I ever was before. It matters that God led us to the Winchester Friends Meeting five years ago because I was surrounded immediately with a loving, praying, caring community to help us through this trauma. It doesn't mean I'm not struggling with this event; it does mean I am struggling within a loving, caring, forgiving marriage and community.

How we live matters. I've had most of the police force and sheriff's department through my home. Judges, lawyers, policemen and guards who have been cynical about our work with prisoners and released prisoners watch carefully how we respond to this event, to this young man, and to all prisoners.

I am in the process of reconciliation with the man who broke into our home. Reconciliation matters in our culture of violence. The community at large witnessed how supportive our worship community has been for us, how they've been "the church," and how gracious they've been to release us for ministry at the