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# TRIBUTE TO A PEACEMAKER: OUR FRIEND TOM FOX

FLORENCE FULLERTON  
(BALTIMORE YEARLY MEETING)

WAITING IN THE  
LIGHT.BLOGSPOT.COM  
SELECTED ENTRIES FROM  
TOM FOX'S BLOG



## Acknowledgements

**Cover Photo:** Tom Fox (on lower right) with Palestinian refugees on the Iraq/Syria border in October 2005. Courtesy of Christian Peacemaker Teams.

### Information sources:

The web site for Langley Hill Monthly Meeting:

<http://www.quaker.org/langleyhill/>

The web site for Christian Peacemaker Teams:

<http://www.cpt.org/>

Tom Fox's web log:

<http://www.waitingintheight.blogspot.com/>

Amber Healy is a reporter for [www.connectionnewspapers.com](http://www.connectionnewspapers.com) in Fairfax County, Virginia. The quotes are from a commentary she wrote on March 23, 2006, titled "A Simple Twist of Fate."

The people of Iraq are angry. The people of Iraq placed so much hope in the election process, but now it seems as if the elected officials are subsuming to the politics of factionalism. This week, a member of the Provisional Assembly was entering the Green Zone to attend a session and he apparently seemed threatening to U.S. military guards. They arrested him by subduing him on the ground with a soldier's boot on his throat. When he did make it into the Assembly session, he was so distraught that he wept. Crying in public is not something that is a cultural norm in this society for a man. Why is CPT here when the "principalities and powers" seem to be in total control? What can a few (currently three) of us do in the face of such massive physical and structural violence?

We are throwing ourselves open to the possibility of God's grace bringing some rays of light to the shadowy landscape that is Iraq. We are letting ourselves be guided by something that is beyond rational, intellectual analysis. Gardens beneath which flow rivers can again be the dwelling place for the people of Iraq. Everyone whose government and corporations are playing a role in this land needs to throw open the book of their heart. They need to let their Light run before them as they bring redemption to those in power who are seeking to rule from a place of fear, violence and shadows. That truly would be the highest achievement. ◇

## TRIBUTE TO A PEACEMAKER: OUR FRIEND TOM FOX

On March 9, 2006 the body of Tom Fox, Quaker, peace activist, and member of Christian Peacemaker Teams, was found in Baghdad. He had died from gunshot wounds to the head and chest. The 54-year-old Friend from Clear Brook Virginia, member of Langley Hill Friends Meeting, had been taken hostage on November 26, 2005 together with 3 CPT team mates. His team mates were safely released in Baghdad on March 23.

Tom had worked for two years with Christian Peacemaker Teams in Palestine and Iraq. Before his capture he had been working with Iraqi human rights organizations to promote peace. He provided first-hand, independent reports from the region, worked with detainees of both United States and Iraqi forces, and trained others in nonviolent intervention and human rights documentation. In his work with incarcerated Iraqis, he often served as the only link between them and their families on the outside. Fox also escorted shipments of medicine to clinics and hospitals and worked to form an Islamic Peacemakers Team.

The day after his body was found, Christian Peacemaker Teams responded to the news of Tom's death by asking "that everyone set aside inclinations to vilify or demonize others, no matter what they have done. In Tom's own words: 'We reject violence to punish anyone. We ask that there be no retaliation on relatives or property. We forgive those who consider us their enemies. We hope that in loving both friends and enemies and by intervening nonviolently to aid those who are systematically oppressed, we can contribute in some small way to transforming this volatile situation.'"

At home, friends came together and testified to Tom's willingness to give himself in service:

From the Quakers in Baltimore Yearly Meeting, the wider Quaker organization to which his home meeting belonged: "Fox

was known as a person who quietly supported youth and their elders, and who was a model of someone living out his beliefs. The founder of Quakerism, George Fox, had written '... be patterns, be examples in all countries, places, islands, nations, wherever you come, that your carriage and life may preach among all sorts of people, and to everyone.' Tom used a modern paraphrase of this quote as the motto of the blog he wrote while in Iraq: *'Be patterns, be examples in every country, place, or nation that you visit, so that your bearing and life might communicate with all people. Then you'll happily walk across the earth to evoke that of God in everybody. So that you will be seen as a blessing in their eyes and you will receive a blessing from that of God in them.'*

From the members of his home meeting, Langley Hill Friends Meeting in Virginia: "When Tom Fox went to Iraq with the Christian Peacemaker Teams, we saw a side of him we were not aware of before. He had prepared himself for the possibility he would not return from Iraq. In October 2004 he wrote, 'I am to stand firm against the kidnapper as I am to stand firm against the soldier. Does that mean I walk into a raging battle to confront the soldiers? Does that mean I walk the streets of Baghdad with a sign saying "American for the Taking"? No to both counts. But if Jesus and Gandhi were right, then I am asked to risk my life and if I lose it to be as forgiving as they were when murdered by the forces of Satan.'"

And from his personal friends:

"Tom had a strong faith and a strong belief that he was 'called' to go to Iraq, despite the dangers he knew were there." — Pearl Hoover, minister of the Northern Virginia Mennonite Church in Fairfax VA.

"This guy was not after martyrdom by any means. He actually believed in his heart that he would better them by his conviction, his beliefs and his skills, and I think [he] largely succeeded. What he leaves behind is a tremendous challenge for the rest of us and a guiding force." — Paul Slattery

## THROWING OPEN THE BOOK

Thursday May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2005

It was the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, the birthday of the prophet Mohammed. We had guests from Najaf and Kerbala visiting us for dinner that night. For grace before the meal, a CPTer went into the office and opened up the team's English/Arabic Qu'ran and put his finger down on this passage,

*"One day shalt thou see the believing men and the believing women- how their Light runs forward before them. And by their right hands their greeting will be, 'Good News for you this Day! Gardens beneath which flow rivers! To dwell therein for you! This indeed is the highest achievement.'" Surra LV "God Most Gracious" section 2, verse 12.*

We asked one of our guests to recite it in Arabic and then a CPTer would read the English translation. It was a passage the guest knew from memory. This opened up a discussion of the tradition in Islam, Christianity and Judaism of throwing open the holy book of that faith tradition and reading the first passage that your eyes fall upon. Is this superstition? Does it have any relevance for our broken lives and chaotic world?

Many people have said that there is no logical, rational reason for CPT to be in Iraq right now. The level of violence, which subsided after the elections, has risen each week until now the attacks and kidnappings of Iraqi officials, civilians and internationals are as bad or worse than the months leading up to the election. The infrastructure of the country continues to deteriorate. The people of Iraq appear weary.

Gush Shalom peace organization) along with some Jayyous farmers and about fifty internationals spent the morning planting olive tree saplings in the area that had been bulldozed as part of the expansion plan. The destruction had been halted, at least for the present time, by an Israeli court order (the colony is over ten kilometers on the Palestinian side of the Green Line, the UN-recognized boundary between Israel and the West Bank). After the planting, they peacefully marched towards the security fence. At the same time, after Friday prayers, most of the village (about one hundred and fifty) along with about twenty internationals peacefully marched down the hill to their side of the security fence. During the weeks of planning, the Israeli and Palestinian activists came up with the idea to negotiate a symbolic “crossing” of the security fence with an olive tree from the uprooted grove to be replanted in the village. It took an hour of hard negotiating with the hundred or so heavily armed Israeli troops, but in the end three Israelis and one Palestinian took an olive tree across the barrier and gave it to the owner of the grove that had been uprooted (he did not at that time have a permit to cross the fence to work his lands).

It was a tiny thing-- but it was totally peaceful, and there was a sense of joy and celebration and much waving of hands in a spirit of friendship and peace between the Palestinians on one side and the Israelis on the other. And the press coverage of the event (both Palestinian and Israeli) was uniformly positive.

Here was a seed that can take root. Here were people working through their anger and coming out the other side committed to peace. Here were people listening to their hearts and listening to each other. Here a tiny part of the Peaceable Realm was created. Here was the justice of God taking shape. ◇

“Tom was so ordinary in some ways, but that is what is important to remember; it doesn’t take a superhuman kind of person to do what he did. Tom didn’t do anything other than be faithful to what he believed in.” —Hoyt Maulden

“Tom Fox can teach us about forgiveness. He would want us to forgive the person who killed him because his violent death was an act of fear, not an act of terrorism.... He would be quick to point out that thousands of Iraqis have lost loved ones, through kidnapping or death, for decades.” — Amber Healy

Christian Peacemaker Teams commemorated Tom Fox in Baghdad by erecting traditional funeral banners at the site where his body was found. On the CPT web site, Doug Pritchard wrote that these banners are all too common in Iraq today. In careful consultation with Iraqis, they painted the following words on the large black banners, in Arabic: “In memory of Tom Fox in this place. Christian Peacemaker Teams declares, ‘We are for God and we are from God.’ To those who held him we declare God has forgiven you.” The first sentence notes the place of his body. The second is a traditional condolence from the Qur’an. The third sentence echoes Jesus cry from the cross “Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.” It is also in keeping with the local understanding that people do not forgive, only God can forgive.

A memorial service was held for Tom at a local church in Baghdad on March 12. Fifty Christian and Muslim friends of Tom’s attended. The team read from Tom’s writings, gave a eulogy, and sang his favorite hymn, “Be Thou My Vision.” After the service, the team was sharing with an Iraqi friend their concern for Tom’s children and their regrets that any children they might have will never know their grandfather. The friend replied, “Tom is a hero. It will be an honor for those children to have a grandfather who died in this way and to tell their children about him. I never met anyone like you people who would come here, at this time, to people whom you don’t know. You are angels.”

\* \* \*

Tom showed all of us that “peace is possible. We just have to remember that it still exists, that it can be found in times of turmoil and grief and war and seemingly insurmountable pain and suffering. The light is always there, even in the darkest night, the most frightening storm, the most painful tests. Peace is always within reach if you stretch out your hand to find it.” -- Amber Healy

Tom Fox shared many inspiring insights of his faith on his blog site. On August 30, 2005, he wrote "Is there something in life that will fill this vacuum and prevent this sad wearing away of the heart?... The only 'something in my life' I can hold onto is to do what little I can to bring about the creation of the Peaceable Realm of God." In 2004 he wrote of a "very clear image" that had emerged in worship... "of a land of shadows and darkness. But within that land candles were burning; not many but enough to shed some light on the landscape. Some candles disappeared and it was my sense that their light was taken away for protection. Other candles burned until nothing was left and a small number of candles seemed to have their light snuffed out by the shadows and the darkness. What was most striking to me was that as the candles that burned until the end and as the candles whose light was snuffed out ceased to burn, more candles came into being, seemingly to build on their light."

Florence Fullerton  
(Baltimore Yearly Meeting)

protect their hearts from exposure to the pain and suffering they live with daily. Others I have experienced as being burdened-- as if they have absorbed much pain and suffering to try and lighten the load for those they live with daily.

Must these be the alternatives to a violent response to anger? James says that, "*A person's anger cannot promote the justice of God.*" No matter if we succumb to anger, harden ourselves against anger or absorb anger; none of these ways can promote the justice of God. But does that mean we are not allowed to feel anger? James says that we need to be slow to anger and that first we need to listen carefully, next to put some words to our feelings and then finally express our anger. But clearly he does not say "never become angry." However, he does say that our response to anger, no matter what form it takes, cannot promote God's justice. So then, what do we do with our anger? James says we need to turn that anger over to God and then, "*Quietly accept the messages planted in our hearts.*"

One of the most positive experiences I had during my time in the Middle East happened in that same village of Jaiyous I mentioned earlier. We were part of a non-violent action that was jointly planned by Israeli peace activists and the Palestinian village council. The villagers have plenty to be angry about. The village is separated from its fields, olive groves and greenhouses by the security fence. There is a gate that is opened three times daily to let some (less than 10% of the villagers have permits) go across and work their crops. Even more of a threat is that an Israeli colony (the Arabic word for settlement is also the Arabic word for colony) is expanding towards their olive groves. But rather than resort to violence, or denial, or shame as a response to their justifiable anger, the village council worked through their anger and came out on the other side-- the side of peaceful, non-violent, direct actions. In the action that I participated in that Friday in January, over two hundred citizens of Israel (mostly from the

interviewed a family that had just had their home demolished to make way for a new section of the security fence. I listened as they described the family watching the bulldozers level the home that they had lived in for generations. I again felt myself becoming judgmental and angry as I was told that the bulldozers being used were made in my country expressly for such demolitions.

Now I want to be clear that I'm not saying that only Americans and Israelis are capable of such actions. I have no doubt that at the same time I was listening to Dr. Ammad's story, there were people in America listening to the story of a family whose loved one had been killed by insurgents in Iraq. or at the same time I was listening to the story of the home demolitions, there were people listening to the story of a survivor of a suicide bomber in Tel Aviv.

But the pattern seems to repeat itself over and over throughout history. Human beings listening to stories of abuse perpetrated by other human beings. Then speaking out against those abuses and feeling the surge of anger inside of them which can then lead to violent retaliatory action so that "justice will be served."

"Bringing them to justice" is the refrain no matter what side you are on. And it is a violent justice-- the justice of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Is there no other way?

One thing that has been in my heart the most in these first months of being a part of CPT has been getting to know people (both within CPT and with other peace and violence-reduction organizations) who have committed themselves to not giving in to anger when faced with injustice. But, and perhaps I am wrong, I have also experienced the sense that a number of these people have been affected by being exposed to so much violence and anger and retaliatory violence. Many I have experienced as being bitter-- as if they have encased themselves in a hard shell to

## **WAITINGIN THE LIGHT.BLOGSPOT.COM** **SELECTED ENTRIES FROM TOM FOX'S BLOG**

### **ONE COOL OCTOBER NIGHT IN BAGHDAD**

*Tuesday, November 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2004*

Sunday night mass at St. Raphael's

The cool evening breeze of Baghdad in late October  
Windows open letting the sounds at twilight enter in

The tenth day of Ramadan

The muazzin begins his call to prayer from the minaret  
Sound travels for blocks over the speaker system

Mass begins as the first chants of the azhan sound out

*God is greater, God is greater*

God have mercy, God have mercy

Sitting near the window the volume from the altar

Matches exactly the volume from the minaret

The sounds of both faiths each going into one of my ears

*Allah is the light of the heavens and the earth*

The true light that shines on everyone was coming into the world

Rush to prayer, rush to prayer/ Our Father who art in heaven

Songs of the eight-note scale merge with the chanting of twenty-four

Blending together in my ears to form a beautiful bi-religiosity

Chant and song forming sounds sent to Heaven.

The God of Abraham listening to the sounds of the evening

Might think that all is well with creation here on earth

The children of Abraham are singing my praises in their own voice

Later that cool October night in Baghdad  
The roar of F-16's returning from another night of missile attacks  
The rumble of a car bomb exploding on Karrada Street

*I declare that there is no god but God*

The Peace of God be with you, the Peace of God be with you

*I declare that there is no god but God*

*Writer's note:* For the sake of transparency, I admit while I am trying to learn Arabic, I don't have a clue what part of the Qur'an was being recited that night. I was having a lot of images of light, both physical and spiritual. Later I opened up a translation from the 24th surah of the Qur'an titled, "The Light" and wrote down the first line my eyes fell upon. I used a translation of the call to prayer, the azhan, by Yahiya Emerick. ◇

## PROMOTING THE JUSTICE OF GOD

*Tuesday, March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2005*

**The following talk was given at Northern Virginia  
Mennonite Church on Feb. 27th, 2005.**

Being part of Christian Peacemaker Teams in Iraq has led me to many "firsts"- first time in the Middle East, first time in a war zone, first time being targeted as "the enemy" due to being an American. Now the first time to stand before a religious community as a member of CPT and give a talk during a worship service. And I would have to say that I am more nervous about this "first" than I was about the others.

As a member of a silent Quaker Meeting, one aspect of the Mennonite tradition I have learned to appreciate is that of looking to Scripture as a basis for one's spiritual journey. And so it seemed

appropriate to use a passage from scripture as the basis of this talk. The passage that I was led to use this morning is from the Letter of James.

This is from the first chapter of James, verses 19-22. *"Each of you must be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to be angry. For a person's anger cannot promote the justice of God. Away then with all that is unclean, and the malice that hurries to excess. Quietly accept the messages planted in your hearts, which can bring you salvation. Only be sure that you act on the messages and do not merely listen to them."*

We did a lot of listening in Iraq with CPT, and the stories we heard were not always easy to hear. And after hearing them I would often find myself becoming quick to pass judgment on others and quick to become angry. The first time I participated in human rights documentation was last September. We interviewed an Iraqi, Dr. Ammad, who had been detained by American forces in May of 2003. He was imprisoned for six months, during which time he was subjected to many of the interrogation methods you are all too familiar with. He said that the people abusing him told him they were FBI (aside- but if you have read over the FBI documents recently released by the Freedom of Information Act on the ACLU website, these people were probably contracted security pretending to be FBI). But in any case, I was taking the notes as he described how they pulled out one of his fingernails. I listened as he described the beatings and showed us the scars. I felt myself becoming very angry at the thought of these horrible actions being done by my own countrymen and women.

After I left Iraq in December, I spent several weeks with the CPT project team in Hebron in the West Bank. Another CPTer and I traveled to the Palestinian village of Jayyous (which is near Ramallah) to participate in an action related to the Israeli security fence. We stayed with a European NGO (EAPPI- Ecumenical Accompaniment Program [sic] for Palestine and Israel). They had