SIMPLE RICHES:

REFLECTIONS ON THE WORK OF THE QUAKER PARENT

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INTRODUCTION

Judy: When Denis and I were asked to give the Michener lecture this year, I was daunted by the realization that we would be treading in the footsteps of Friends far weightier than we. But I calculated that taken together, we weigh nearly three hundred pounds, so perhaps our combined weight will see us through. (I'm especially glad that my mother, Jean Michener Nicholson, is in the gathered group today. Regardless of how our talk turns out, she will tell us we did a wonderful job.)

Although Denis and I view our roles of Mom and Dad as a work in progress and can claim no special expertise, we have chosen as the topic for today's lecture the work of the Quaker parent or grandparent or aunt or uncle — work that we find challenging, rewarding, humbling, infuriating, and spiritually uplifting, often all in the same day. Dwight and Ardis Michener and then my mother Jean have struggled with, refined and passed by example on to me how to infuse Quaker values into their work as parents.

As a child, I knew I could get my grandfather Dwight's attention by telling him some slightly exaggerated fact, such as "I just ate 5 peaches for lunch!" His reply was always the same and always delighted us: "Mercy me!" He let me work with him in his wood shop, let me model for private photo sessions, rode me on his tractor; in every small gesture or word he made me feel important, a feeling the fourth girl in a family can't get too much of. Not until I attended his memorial service did I learn about the loans he made to European families to help them escape Nazi Germany and about the work he did in France with my Grandmother during the war feeding children in Marseilles.

My fondest memories of Grandmother Ardis come from my adult life. Her habit of living simply, fine-tuned during the Depression, made it hard for her to spend money on herself. When Denis and I, newly married, wanted to spend 6 months in France working at the Friends Center, she helped finance our trip. She was always interested in what we were doing and made us feel that we could do anything we set our minds to.

I won't even attempt to describe how my mother Jean has influenced me, because she is, after all, the best mother on earth. My recollection is that she never yelled at us or spanked us, and even though my oldest sister claims that my recollections are flawed, Jean provides a great model for motherhood. When I was in junior high school, a friend once said to me in disbelief, and with almost a tinge of disgust, "Is you mother always this nice?" I had to admit that yes, she was.

These three people, along with my father, my Nicholson Grandmother and many aunts and uncles, modeled for me what I consider to be the key ingredients to successful Quaker parenting, and which we would like to explore in more depth today: 1) Living simply, 2) loving unconditionally by accepting our own and our children's shortcomings, and 3) having faith in the ongoing revelation of our Divine potential.

We live in a society which largely embraces the antitheses of these principles. Our marvelous human ability to make bigger and better machines has complicated and sped up rather than simplified our lives. Our prejudices against "the other" — be it other races, other economic classes, other religions — make unconditional love seem way beyond our reach. And most important of all, and perhaps the root cause of the first two, our society has embraced as gospel the scientific model of an objective reality, that the world is essentially a material place, and human life an essentially biochemical phenomenon. Even as quantum physics shatters this Newtonian notion of objectivity, our social institutions, our governments, our way of looking at the world are still largely dominated by the paradigm that if you can't see it or measure it, or spend it, or kill it, it either doesn't exist or isn't important. What matters most to us as a country, and more increasingly as a world, appears to be political and economic power.

I would argue that economics underlies the debate about education, since most educational reform aims to increase our children's access to wealth in a competitive global economy rather than their access to truth. Economics frames our foreign policy,

justifying wars to keep gas prices low. Economics frames our self-perception, equating success with income and job status.

What does all this have to do with being a parent? In my view, everything. For this is the cultural status quo in the world our children inhabit. The gauntlet for the Quaker parent, and I would define the word "parent" to include any adult concerned with the legacy we pass on to the next generation, is to find ways to nurture children who can respond to life more openly than the culture may allow, who can see themselves as powerful, creative, enthusiastic creatures of nature, spiritual beings, and agents of social good.

Denis: Let's start with living simply. To frame our look at how we can live more simply in the world of the Internet, MTV, fast food, and shopping malls, I'd like to offer St. Francis of Assisi as an appropriate teacher.

But first, a moment pops into my mind from one of my favorite musicals, "The Music Man." You may recall the scene when Mayor Shinn snaps out of Professor Harold Hill's hypnotic sales pitch and orders his sidekicks to "get that man's credentials." You know about Judy's credentials as a Michener descendant, but perhaps you'd like to hear more about mine. Unlike Judy, I'm not a birthright Quaker, but I comfort myself with the fact that neither was George Fox. I was raised a Roman Catholic and by age thirteen, I was convinced that God had called me to the priesthood. I joined the Franciscan Friars of the Atonement, a monastic order dedicated to ecumenism. Its mission echoes Christ's prayer, "That They All May Be One," very avant-garde theology for the mid-sixties when I joined.

My official break with Catholicism coincided with my departure from the Friars. But if the old dictum "Once a Catholic, always a Catholic" is true, then I stand before you as a "recovering Catholic." Quakerism slipped in where Catholicism left me, and although the two religions may seem like an odd couple, they are for me siblings sharing the same home, supporting each other and rooted in the same mysticism. Those are my spiritual credentials in a nutshell.

LIVING SIMPLY

Now to St. Francis and his view of simple living. Francis Bernardone of Assisi, Italy, was one of an unusual number of mystics in the late 12th Century whose devotion to all of creation led them to that place from which they could contemplate the creator. Creation and mysticism were closely intertwined. A visionary, a gentle rebel, a challenger of the status quo, Francis provides us with an exciting model to forge a new world view. He joyfully embraced what he called Lady Poverty, rejecting his comfortable middle-class existence to live as do the Lilies of the Field in pure faith that God would provide.

I, on the other hand, can't seem to live without air conditioning in Pennsylvania, and I'm guessing most of you Floridians feel the same way. And I'm certainly not planning to give away my Macintosh computer. Without it, Judy and I couldn't have composed this lecture as easily. Perhaps Lady Poverty now includes a limited number of modern amenities to compensate for the 800 years that separate Saint Francis and us.

Saint Francis, who internalized the experience of a living cosmology, could serve us well today as the patron saint of ecology. For Saint Francis, Mother Earth is nothing less than a royal person. As a giver of life, she is praised for her birthing fruits, flowers, and herbs. If the planet is to survive, then our world view — our cosmology — must place significant importance on how simply we live and how connected we are to the nature that we are part of. How do we teach this to our children?

Each year we take a family vacation to the Pine Barrens at the Nicholson family cabin in New Jersey on the Rancocas Creek. There is no electricity, no plumbing, no phone, no computer, and no television. Each of us admits privately to adjustments of one kind or another when we first arrive at the cabin and adapt to a lifestyle where "less is more." Yet only two days into the experience, no one volunteers to leave the cabin to buy provisions at the market in Browns Mills. Four Days into the experience and there's a quiet revolution when we consider leaving this Cathedral of the Pines, this sanctuary that allows us to detoxify from our unsuspected addiction

to things. We begin again to hear, feel, touch, taste, and see nature's creation in ways we can't when residing in the electronic fortress we call home. When we return to civilization, the modern conveniences of our house more than suffice to meet our needs. Simplicity needn't mean sacrifice or deprivation, but a reconnection to that which is most important and satisfying, a sense of ourselves as part of nature, not apart from it.

Judy: I'm reminded of a similar moment shared with my daughter Carrie last summer when we hiked in the White Mountains of New Hampshire. Her wide eyes saw better than mine the natural beauty that surrounded us as we climbed. There wasn't one detail that escaped her attention. As we walked, she commented on this unusual flower, that particular moss, this impressive tree, that distinctive bug, or those colorful mushrooms. Each remarkable element of nature awakened her awe and stimulated her imagination to weave tales of fairies and magical dwelling places. Modern technology cannot duplicate these marvelous things. Carrie's heart was spontaneously lifted with joy and so was mine because of her uninhibited enthusiasm. She never tells similar stories when we walk through a shopping mall.

I am certain Saint Francis walked in the same kind of joy as hers, for he understood that true glory comes from the Divine source of all things, and all of nature is its tangible conduit.

Many of you may know of the Seventh Generation Company in Vermont that sells environmentally safe household products. It derives its name from sound Native American advice that consumers make decisions today that consider the impact seven generations into the future. Imagine moving through the day with a sensitivity to how our lives will enhance the quality of life for those who come after us. This is definitely not a popular approach! The prevailing culture wants us to live more fully now and forget holding our wants in check.

Denis: At home, we used to make fun secretly of my wife in her frugal endeavors to live life more simply. When the first issue of the "Tightwad Gazette" arrived by mail several years ago, the kids and I wondered what we were in for. It wasn't just a question of budgeting to make ends meet, but more her desire to live more simply as a responsible citizen of the Earth. We now avoid juice-in-a-box and overly packaged products. We compost our garbage, recycle everything we can, and take pride in putting out one can of trash a week instead of the usual two or three for a family of four. We've cut our electric usage down through fluorescent lighting, and live in a super insulated, passive solar house. We still use more energy in one week than most third world citizens use in a lifetime, but it's a beginning.

Simplicity in regards to material possessions and the responsible stewardship of the earth is evident. But how simple are our days? our weekends? our months? How cluttered is our life with activities that eclipse those small calling voices deep inside? As a teacher, I have become painfully aware of how we can't breathe deeply anymore in our school curriculum. Students overextend themselves in courses and extracurricular activities and find free time hard to come by or even difficult to manage when it falls in their laps. We teachers are poor models. We rush from class to faculty meeting to the Xerox machine to coaching. The students often witness us breathless, and as good students, they learn their cues accordingly.

And what about at home? Do we rush back from school or from work to do home maintenance, rush to shuttle our children to soccer practice, dance class, judo class, birthday parties at the bowling alley, or the gym? I now loiter suspiciously at the calendar hung up on the refrigerator and panic whenever I see additional commitments multiply before my eyes. When I can no longer see the original number of the date, then I know we will be knee deep in rushing for the next 24 hours.

We have tried to draw the line at the family evening meal as a moment not to be tampered with. Yet both my wife and I are often called to committee meetings that extend well into the evening. We squeeze what feels like two days' worth of work into one. We all

breathe a sigh of relief in June when the school year comes to an end. Our summers so far exclude involvement in day camps, overnight camps, computer camps, sports camp, etc. As a family, we move as a unit in the summer, traveling, swimming, playing, and even working together.

We are learning how to say "No!" to that additional commitment, and as you all know, it's difficult to do. We inevitably are asked to serve on this or that committee, knowing that we could do a good job and enjoy it, but at what cost? I often feel as if I am disappointing the Meeting, the School Parent Council and the local community organization when I say "No!" I feel selfish. But children learn best by our example. Let them see us strive to live joyfully and simply both in possessions and in rhythm of life.

LOVING UNCONDITIONALLY

Judy: The second attribute in our work as parents that we struggle with daily is how to love our children unconditionally. I once jokingly said to Nathaniel, who was about 3 at the time, that the trouble was, I loved him too much. He said with total seriousness, "Oh no, Mommy. I need all that love. It goes down into a big pit in my tummy and makes me grow!" His perception turns out to be pretty close to the truth. We now know that babies fail to thrive when love is withheld.

The most important aspects of unconditional love that have emerged for me in my work as a mom are first, loving myself, in spite of my warts and bumps, second, learning not to equate my child's bad behavior with her character, and finally, setting limits.

Loving Ourselves As Parents

I can remember vividly one Sunday in Meeting basking in the deep love I feel for my children when it suddenly dawned on me that this uncritical love I was feeling was exactly the love my parents must feel for me. My parents have many times told me that they love me, and yet not until I experienced that love for my own children could

I really know the depth of their love for me, that wellspring of acceptance that serves as bedrock for my sense of myself. Knowing that I am essentially good and lovable helps in those moments when I blow it as a parent.

I remember calling my sister Erica once in total hysteria after I had left the cellar door open in a distracted moment and let my six month-old fly down the stairs in his walker. He escaped with minor bumps and bruises, but my confidence as a parent had been shattered. My sister lovingly empathized. "Oh Jude," she said, "You've had your first 'I'm a bad mother' experience." What did she mean, my first?! Would there be more?

Since that phone call, there have indeed been many errors in judgment in dealing with my children, moments when I find myself saying and thinking things about them that are not particularly loving, moments of anger that make me feel more like Dracula than dear old Mom.

We attended a week-long conference for families at Pendle Hill a few years ago, and one theme that came up again and again was the anger that could erupt in our families. Where does it come from? Why does it keep rearing its ugly head? How can we deal with it? Gradually we realized that we all carried around in our heads some notion of the "Ideal Quaker Parent" — the parent who never raises her voice, or ever spanks, or ever thinks unkind things about her children. Collectively, we killed off this mythical parent as we discussed ways to cope creatively with anger, ways to keep ours and our children's anger from becoming rage, and how we can still view ourselves as pacifists and loving parents even if we occasionally "lose it" with our kids.

One insight I gained from that discussion centered on the moment of time between a negative action from our child and our reaction as the parent. By stretching that moment — the gap between action and reaction — we can choose our response, rather than lash out without thinking. This may seem only a slight twist on the old adage to "count to ten," but to me it suggests a bigger idea than just cooling off a degree before screaming. The gap of time gives us the critical chance to exercise our freedom to choose.

I have been fascinated by reading accounts of Victor Frankl, a Jewish prisoner in a death camp during World War II who maximized that moment between stimulus and response. Even while being tortured, he considered himself to be free because he could still choose how to react to what he endured. His captors could not control his attitude. This extraordinary capacity to claim freedom in the most horrific situation imaginable provided spiritual nourishment not only for other prisoners, but also for some of the guards.

Now, I don't exactly wish to equate parenthood with torture, but there are those days when I feel like I'm being nibbled to death by ducks. My daily challenge is to focus on that gap of time between the moment my children hit me with a choice bit of negative behavior, and my reaction to it. The longer I can prolong that moment, the freer I am to react in a way that best helps my child and me, that builds rather than erodes our relationship.

We also learned at Pendle Hill that summer that early Quaker fathers in many parts of Africa were most distinguishable from their non-Quaker counterparts in that they did not beat their wives or children. Imagine the impact on those families! They had chosen non-violent responses to inevitable family tensions, choices that ran completely contrary to cultural norms.

Loving Our Children

Just as we are learning that unconditional love for our children doesn't exclude emotions that seem "un-Quakerly" and doesn't mean that we have to be perfect, we are also exploring how to respond to what seem like un-Quakerly attitudes and feelings in our children. Nathaniel has played war games, made guns out of Legos and drawn pictures of B-2 bombers ever since he was four. After we got over our initial distress at his attraction to these things, we have come to recognize that he is responding quite naturally to his particularly strong appetite for power, danger and adventure. He does not have a violent character, but he clearly needs to play out the battle between the good guys and the bad guys in order to grow. Short of

buying him a toy gun, we have consciously tried to provide outlets for that hunger.

Denis: One creative solution we dreamed up in response to his "testosterone poisoning" as one friend calls it, are "night hunts." Nathaniel and I arm ourselves with tree branches, flashlights and the flash from my camera and charge out into the dark night around our home to zap imaginary monsters and bad guys. We'll crash around for an hour after dinner cleaning up the territory before returning to the civilizing influences of a warm home. It has been a great outlet for all those destructive impulses which, in an eight-year old, more likely disguise feelings of weakness and powerlessness than reflect any real hatred.

Another successful outlet has been reading adventure stories out loud. Last summer, I read Tolkien's *The Hobbit* to the family. This story of dwarves, elves, goblins, and dragons provides plenty of sit-on-the-edge-of-your-seat adventure. *The Hobbit*'s protagonist, Bilbo Baggins, travels over swift rivers and through dark forests to Lonely Mountain where the dragon, Old Smaug, resides. His dwarf-companions know what they want — the gold in the dragon's lair — and they want Bilbo to steal it . In the course of the story, Bilbo escapes from the sly Gollum, the wicked Goblins and the giant Spiders, and even conquers Old Smaug himself. Who would have imagined little Bilbo capable of such epic wonders? His hidden resources always surface when push comes to shove.

Nathaniel and I entered our own Hobbit world when we decided to hike up to Mt. Haystack in New Hampshire last summer, not an easy climb for an 8-year old (or for a 46-year old for that matter!) The deceptive beginnings of the path alongside a clear mountain brook captured and sustained our interest and eclipsed the fact that we were rapidly changing elevation. The running water soon disappeared, the grade got steeper, and the forest darker. Nathaniel and I crawled over boulders and slipped along our way. The absence of sky and light gave us no hopeful perspective. It was here that he and I equated the trail and our experience to that of the dwarves and Bilbo on their journey through the forest of Mirkwood. We

remembered the wizard's advice to "stay on the narrow path and don't lose hope," but we were thirsty, our feet and calves ached, and we were hungry. We climbed and climbed and climbed and for what purpose? Even though the beautiful parts seemed obscured, Nathaniel kept going with an urgent sense of purpose. In two and a half hours we emerged unexpectedly from our gloomy "Mirkwood" above the tree line and suddenly were on the peak. The visual feast was stunning, and I could see the wonder in Nathaniel's eyes. He just couldn't take it in all at once. He had never before experienced a journey that required such physical exertion and reaped such abundant rewards. From there he gazed longingly at the 2 mile ridge trail leading to Mounts Lincoln and Lafayette, and his determination propelled us onward to climb those two peaks as well.

If, in loving our children, we want them to respond to personal leadings in life, we will need to teach them that sometimes it's hard work. The tenebrous Mirkwoods of life linger out there to obscure the path and discourage the spirit. As a parent, I am tempted to take away difficult experiences from my children, deliver them miraculously from their hurts so that they can arrive at understanding without having had to struggle to earn it. We have been taught to think of negative emotions and pain as bad things, rather than growth producers. As parents, we can climb alongside our children as they struggle, but we cannot lift them to the mountaintop.

Judy: When Nathaniel was going through a rough time at school, a friend who is a school psychologist provided me with a helpful phrase: "Respect the integrity of the child's struggle." When Nathaniel was sad at school, I got sad with him — told him how upsetting it was to me to know he was unhappy. My friend helped me see that my attempts to make him feel better were actually adding to his burden. I had to stand by as his loving guide, not as his anxious "what's the matter with my kid?" mom. When I stopped mirroring his anxieties with my own, he gradually revealed the source of his suffering and we worked to resolve it together. Respecting the integrity of the child's struggle as his own, not as my struggle, is part of our unconditional love. If we get pulled into our children's discomforts, or hatreds, or

fears, or anger, we cannot be the supporter or provide the loving authority they most need in those tough moments.

Creating Boundaries for Growth

And how do we set limits? Unconditional love does not mean never saying no to our children or giving into their every whim. Quakers have historically challenged authority, and for my generation which came of age in the 1960's, authority of any kind was suspect. Now here we are 30 years later in positions of authority ourselves as parents, having to determine when to set limits on our children's behavior and when to let them choose for themselves. Just as surely as they grow out of the shoes we buy them, they eventually grow out of the limits we set for them when they are young by learning to check their behavior and impulses.

When I plant a tomato seed, it already contains all the information it needs to become a mature plant. But I have the special knowledge of what it requires to grow to maximum size and productivity: weed it, water it, keep the soil rich and loose, support the new branches. Untended, the plant will grow low to the ground, choke out the neighboring plants and spill onto the lawn into the path of the mower. Fruit maturing near the ground will rot, and the harvest will be diminished. Yet I can't stake the plant too tightly or the stems will break when the fruit ripens. I have to provide support that guides the plant but gives it room to grow. When we raise a child, we also have the distinct advantage of knowing what a fully grown person can be. We have experienced growing up ourselves and have more wisdom about the best conditions for maximum growth than do our children. We need to provide them with boundaries.

Kind and gentle as she is, my mother knew how to set limits. Here's an example. After college graduation, I moved back in with my parents. Two months later, I was still unemployed and nursing feelings of self-pity, having been recently rejected by my college boyfriend. One morning, my mother placed the want ads in my lap and said with uncharacteristic bluntness, "Get a job." After I got over my complete shock, I did. That very day, in fact. By stating her

expectations, she was showing how much she loved me; she put down a stake for me, offering a way for me to pull myself up off the ground. It was exactly what I needed.

GROWING IN THE SPIRIT

Denis: The final aspect of our work as Quaker parents that we would like to explore today is perhaps the most important: how to reinforce in our family life the power of the unseen Spirit. Divine insight — continuing revelation — is available to each of us, child and parent. Consider the natural enthusiasm of children, which literally means filled with God (*en-theos*); we can learn much from their spontaneous wonder and joy in the world, attitudes of mind and spirit that have perhaps grown a little rusty in myself.

Between two teaching jobs, I chose to stay home with Carrie and Nathaniel, then ages 1 and 3, and Judy went back to work full time. It was as though I had entered a new dimension of time. Each day seemed an eternity but the months flew by. My pre-children mode of organizing my days to the minute and getting things done crumbled before the insistent needs of the children who pulled me into the present with every diaper change, juice spill or spontaneous giggle at some unexpected pleasure of the day.

The experience was deeply humbling. I was doing what millions of women have done for generations and continue to do thanklessly: nurture our children. I now consider it God's work and would describe my fifteen months at home with my children as sacramental. Perhaps my choice of the word "sacrament" shocks you. Quakers tend to shy away from such theological expressions. Yet if by "sacrament" I mean "an outward sign instituted by God to give grace" then there is no better word to describe the work we do with our children. The sacrament suggested is "Holy Communion." To raise, to instruct, to counsel, to coach, to nurture, to support children is a shared experience, an intimate fellowship between children and adults. From that communion emanates an enduring grace.

During those months as primary parent, relatives and friends often called me "Mr. Mom." The label disconcerted me, as it implied

that women are the ones called to play the dominant role in raising our children. Historically this is true, but that year my reply to the address "Mr. Mom" became "No, you mean Mr. Dad!" Men are called to communion with children as well. The ensuing grace of this sacramental relationship will satisfy our children's "Father Hunger" (as Frank Pittman calls it in his book, *Man Enough*). More importantly, it will show them that masculine doesn't have to mean only domination, competition, and "getting ahead" by force.

Judy: Our children are also living models of spiritual transformation, showing us how quickly we can slide from an unproductive mode or habit into a positive, productive one. Denis and I joke that just when we think we can't stand another moment of one of our children's phases, or can't stand some irritating habit, they miraculously change. Carrie sucked her thumb like an addict until she was five. She once announced in a very loud voice, to the great amusement of an orthodontist's waiting room full of parents whose kids had braces on their teeth, "I am going to suck my thumb FOREVER!" My many short lectures about her severe overbite and my sweet cajoling to get her to stop had no effect, and so I gave up and never mentioned it again. Many months later, she decided on her own that she had had enough and stopped cold turkey. I was dumbfounded. When we take the pressure off our children, they often choose those moments to leap forward, transforming themselves more completely than we would have thought possible.

We need to re-envision our children constantly, allow them to change in our mind's eye at least half as quickly as they are in fact changing. The revelations provided by our kids make parenting much like being part of a collage or a moving sculpture, like weaving a tapestry that continually changes in hue and texture.

We have been given many examples of the transforming power of the Spirit in the Bible, in the lives of great religious leaders like Gandhi and Dr. King, and through great works of literature. One of my personal favorites is Scrooge's awakening in *A Christmas Carol.* The insight he gains during his night with the spirits changes him in an instant. "I am as giddy as a school boy!" he laughs. "I don't know

anything, and I don't care that I don't know anything." George Bailey in the film, *It's a Wonderful Life*, experiences the same delicious excitement when his guardian angel helps him see how good his life really is. "I'm going to jail!" he exclaims towards the end of the movie, "Isn't that wonderful?" His external circumstances haven't changed; he is still bankrupt. What has changed is his attitude towards those circumstances. What I love about this movie and Dickens' classic is that both characters, after their brush with Divine truth, plunge into life with spontaneous, joyful enthusiasm (*en-theos*). In those Spirit-filled moments, they become exactly like children.

If we are open to them, we can experience our own mini-transformations daily and witness those of our children.

Denis: I believe that if we live the basic tenets of simple living, unconditional loving and openness to divine oneness, we have the potential to effect significant changes in our world and in the children we leave behind to inhabit it. Part of being a Quaker means to take risks, to question assumptions, and, to coin a Star Trek phrase, "to boldly go where no others have gone before." I imagine George Fox was that kind of risk taker. He felt a deep leading and responded to it with the same enthusiasm and joy that St. Francis did. We are the descendants, both birthright and convinced, of this compulsion to search for the truth. That truth must direct our intimate and communal journey with our children if healthy growth is to occur in our families, our communities, our country, and on our planet. In the words of John Woolman, we are simply invited to "let our lives speak!"

Judy: We'd like to conclude with two quotations that capture for us our vision for our work with our children.

From Chief Seattle to President Franklin Pierce in 1852:

> Will you teach your children what we have taught our children? That the earth is our mother? What befalls the earth befalls all the sons of the earth. This we know: the

earth does not belong to man, man belongs to the earth. All things are connected like the blood that unites us all. Man did not weave the web of life. He is merely a strand in it. Whatever he does to the web, he does to himself.

Denis: Prayer of a Native American child:

O Great Spirit whose voice I hear in the winds and whose breath gives life to all the world, hear me! I am but a child small and weak; I need your strength and wisdom. Make me wise so that I may know the things you have taught my people. Let me learn the lessons you have hidden in every leaf and rock.

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTES, 1995 -

Judy Nicholson Asselin

Granddaughter of Dwight and Ardis Michener, Judy grew up in suburban Philadelphia and enjoyed the benefits of a Quaker education at Lansdowne Friends School, Westtown School and Swarthmore College. She later taught English and theater and served as Dean of Girls at Westtown while earning a Masters degree from Middlebury. She and Denis had the same weekends on duty at the school; one thing led to another and they were married in 1981. Judy currently serves part time as Director of Major Gifts at the People's Light and Theater Co. while spending as much time as she can with their two children, Carrie, 6, and Nathaniel, 8.

Denis Nicholson Asselin

Denis spent his childhood in the White Mountains of New Hampshire and received his high school education at Saint John's Seminary, a Catholic boarding school. He studied for the priesthood at the Franciscan Friars of the Atonements Seminary, receiving his BA from Catholic University. He then studied at Bryn Mawr which led him to Westtown, to Quakerism (a different kind of priesthood), and to Judy.

At Westtown he served as French Teacher, Dean of Boys and Chair of the Language Department while completing his Masters at Middlebury College. Denis now teaches French and serves as Director of Professional Development at The Shipley School. Judy and Denis are members of Westtown Monthly Meeting where they have served on Overseers, Worship and Ministry, Religious Education and Marriage Committees. Their children both attend Westtown School and have taught their parents more in 8 years than they had learned in the previous 25.

POSTSCRIPT - NOVEMBER 2000

Denis is continuing his work at the Shipley School, and Judy is now teaching middle-school English and drama at Westtown, where Nathaniel, 14, and Carrie, 12, are students. They are all active members of Westtown Monthly Meeting.

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.

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