

Beacon Hill Friends House

Weed Lecture

**Peace
through
Transformation**

presented 4th month, 2003

by

Vanessa Julye

BHFH – 03

The Weed Memorial lecture is presented annually by the Board of Beacon Hill Friends House, Boston, Massachusetts. The lecture series was established in 1993 in honor of Ernest and Esther Weed, co-directors of the House from 1960 to 1974. Each lecture features a prominent interpreter of Quakerism addressing a topic of importance to members of the Society of Friends in New England Yearly Meeting.

Beacon Hill Friends House strives to fulfill its mission, to provide Quaker education and foster leadership in the Religious Society of Friends in New England, to offer hospitality to a directed community of 18 adults interested in combining Quaker practice and community, and to furnish a meeting place and hospitality for Friends in Boston. The House is located in a Bullfinch house built in 1803 on historic Beacon Hill.

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Preface

"Peace is an ideal that we as human beings have been striving for my entire life. Our path to peace is one that we all must take on a personal level. Each and every one of us must examine our behavior and understand that we are one of the reasons why our country has not found peace. What are we doing? How can we make the changes we need to in order to find peace?" With these provocative words, Vanessa Julye described *Peace through Transformation*, the 2003 Weed Lecture which she delivered on Sunday, April 13 Beacon Hill Friends House. Vanessa, a member of Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting, is currently writing, with Donna McDaniel of Framingham Monthly Meeting, a book that explores the relationship between African Americans and Quakers from the 17th Century to the present entitled *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship*. In her biographical sketch Vanessa states that she has "a calling to ministry with a concern for helping the Religious Society of Friends become a more inclusive community for people of color." To this end she leads workshops about racism, focusing on its

eradication and healing from racism's wounds. Vanessa has established several organizations to empower people of color. An active Friend, Vanessa has served the Society of Friends in many ways and at all levels. She is active in the FGC Traveling Ministries Program and Committee for Ministry on Racism as well as serving as the Coordinator of the Center for People of Color at the FGC annual Gathering and FGC Central Committee. She has been instrumental in the Fellowship of Friends of African Descent. Recently, Vanessa was a representative at the U.N. World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban, South Africa and attended the FUM Triennial in Kenya. Vanessa worked for a number of years as the Associate Secretary of FWCC Section of the Americas and also for the Green Circle Program, which helps children and adults understand and appreciate difference.

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I have a vision. My vision is a peaceful world where everyone is healthy, loved and respected for who they are as children of God. I envision a world where it is normal to be different and everyone is respected.

Can we have such a world, you ask? Yes! What will it take for us to get there, you ask? I have taken my first step, seeing and feeling it in my heart. I ask you to join me, as we create this world together. Take a moment, close your eyes and truly see this world. Our new world has eliminated poverty, greed, hunger, racism, war, emotional and physical abuse, disease, and the enslavement of people. The lives of women and children are highly valued. Everyone is entitled to a free education that adequately prepares him or her for maintaining a comfortable standard of living. It is a world where we are all able to live together in neighborhoods and countries where we listen to and respect each other. A world where differences are not used as opportunities to fight with and conquer one another. A world where we take the time to talk, listen and negotiate with each other in ways where each participant is respected and

solutions are created where all parties experience a positive outcome.

Thank you for visioning with me. You may open your eyes now and we will return to today, April 13, 2003, where it feels like we are as far away as we can get from this envisioned world. The United States of America and Britain are at war with Iraq. A war that we are told is being fought "to help liberate the Iraqi people," but is really about controlling another country and their resources so that the citizens of the United States of America can live more comfortably. A war that has already cost all countries involved the loss of too many lives.

Then there are the other wars that are not as new. The people and governments of Israel and Palestine continue to kill each other. Civil war is happening in eleven countries - Afghanistan, Angola, Burundi, Colombia, Democratic Republic Of Congo, Indonesia, Russia/Chechnya, Sierra Leone, Sri Lanka, Sudan, and Uganda. All of this is happening during a time when many of us have in Rabbi Michael Lerner's words: "...a deep hunger for a different kind of world, a deep spiritual yearning, a recognition that at the deepest levels each of us is an expression of a loving energy that both manifests through us and surrounds us."¹ What will it take for us to

begin to move toward the peaceful world we have just spent time envisioning and that we are yearning for?

I want to talk a little about our goal, peace. According to Patricia Loring, "Peace has been regarded both as a fruit of the Spirit and as a sign of authenticity...It has also been a cherished witness to the world of how we live with one another when we live in the experience and guidance of God."² the peace sign to each other and to viewers, some were putting flowers into the barrels of guns that guards had pointed at them during some of the televised protests against the Vietnam War. I know that our desire for peace has been around longer than I have. Why is it so difficult for us to achieve and maintain peace? What are some of the things that we need to do to achieve peace?

Peace is an ideal that we as human beings have been striving for my entire life. I was born in 1960, which means I was in elementary school during an active period of the civil rights movement and time of the hippies. I remember the peace sign; I had a large one hanging in my bedroom. I saw teenagers on television giving the peace sign to each other and to viewers, some were putting flowers into the barrels of guns that guards had pointed at them during some of

the televised protests against the Vietnam War. I know that our desire for peace has been around longer than I have. Why is it so difficult for us to achieve and maintain peace? What are some of the things that we need to do to achieve peace?

I believe that peace will only come through transformation. A transformation that is so radical, but is already occurring. The transformation of inward growth or change, which will result in our knowing and behaving as one people. Somewhere in our history we have forgotten who we are. How can we return to our wholeness? We can reach this unity through transformation; a transformation that restores our humanity; one that begins in our soul and moves out throughout the world; one that changes how we think and thereby how we treat one another. A transformation that causes us to understand that we are connected to each other and that when you are honoring my humanity, I am honoring yours.

I am referring to a transformation from separateness to wholeness. It is time for us to remember who we are and where we came from. However, for us to be open to this transformation we need to remember our connections to one another. Why is this important? It is important because if we

remember that we are one then we can begin to stop the violence and hatred that occurs each day in our world. We have divided this world into a place where gender, culture and ethnicity are used as ways of identifying and categorizing us into separate groups. We use gender, race and ethnicity as a means to justify hurting one another. Classism, racism and sexism are all products of this separation. We need to remember that when a man oppresses a woman or a person of European descent oppresses a person of African descent that we are damaging each other. We should not only know, but feel that if I hurt you that I am hurting myself and when I help you I am helping myself. So I will talk this afternoon about our unity and our wholeness to help you see the importance of making this transformation from a world filled with separate nations, races and cultures to a world that is unified in its belief and behavior that we are all one, the human race. Many of the messages that I was given to share with you are rooted in Africa, our home of origin; the place where we were one. In 1974, a skeleton of a young female was found in Africa. Scientists named this "young lady" **Lucy**. Lucy lived in Africa 3 million years ago during the Stone Age. Lucy is our ancestor. Lucy and her relatives are believed

to be the very first human like beings (human-like primates) called *Homo habilis*. Scientists believe that true humans first appeared in Africa. Lucy could stand up and her hands were different than an ape's. Lucy and her people did not stay in one place very long, but were always on the move, in search of food and they also made stone tools and weapons. Scientists are pretty sure that *Homo habilis* built campfires, but they did not know how to make fire.

Man continued to evolve. Around 120,000 years ago *Homo sapiens* emerged as a new species, most likely in central East Africa, and from there migrated into the Middle East, South Africa, Europe, central Asia, and finally into the New World.

Why am I giving you this scientific history lesson? To help you remember that we really are one race: the human race.

I want you to understand that I am not asking people to give up their identity, their differentness, culture or ethnicity, but to realize that we are all a part of one big family. As a human being, the fact that I am Vanessa Julye, a child of my parents, William Julye and Carolyn Jones is important to me. My cultural heritage, which is diverse, is also important to me. The ancestors I know of in my family are West African, American Indian

(Seminole, Monacan and Cherokee), and European. The fact that I am a Quaker is also an important part of who I am as an individual. Yet I am also a member of a larger family, the human family.

How do we move to this wholeness? I began my journey toward wholeness when I was in high school. I attended Westtown School for six years. I was a boarding student there for four of those six years. While I was there my world changed. It changed because I had an opportunity to get to know and befriend several international students. I was also blessed with the opportunity during those four years to return to their native countries with two of the students, to visit Brazil and Japan. I was able to live in their homes, meet and spend time with their families and friends. It was a wonderful experience. I was welcomed into their families and in one instance invited to return the following year to live with them for the entire year.

The experience of living with international students was a gift. I grew up as a middle class African American female who attended schools in the suburbs where the students were predominately of European descent, but lived in the Bottom, a ghetto in West Philadelphia. My father had a family business in the ghetto and it was important to him that

we live in the same neighborhood as his business. Living in these vastly different worlds was difficult for me, especially because I was not accepted in either of them. I was a part of the minority in both places. At school, I was one of a handful of African Americans and at home, even though everyone was African American, I was middle class while most others were working class.

I found that being with the international students was fun. They were different from the other students and so was I. We all came from distinctly different cultures and were treated as less than human by many of the students and some faculty of European descent in the school. I felt a closeness with these friends that I had not shared before. I enjoyed learning about their cultures and sharing mine with them. Although we were different we were the same. These friendships began my journey to restoring my humanity. I learned that we are all human beings who want to be loved; cry when we are in pain; get angry when we are hurt; and dream of having families and a happy life when we become adults. We all want a roof over our head; food in our bellies; and people to love who love us in return.

Throughout my entire life, race has been used to divide us so that we can have a reason to

harm one another. As an African American, race has been used many times as a means of oppressing me within the Religious Society of Friends and the wider world. Racism has existed in the United States of America from its inception. In the research that Donna McDaniel and I have been doing for writing our book, *Fit for Freedom, Not for Friendship*, about the relationship between African Americans and Friends of European descent it is clear that racism has also been embedded in Quakerism. In the mid-1800's Sarah Mapps Douglass, an African American attender at Arch Street meeting in Philadelphia was forced with her family to sit on a segregated bench in the meetinghouse. She wrote a letter in 1839 sharing her mother, Grace's feelings about Friends:

“The hardest lesson my Heavenly Father ever set me to learn, was to love Friends; and in anguish of spirit I have often queried; why the Lord should require me to go among people who despise me on account of my complexion?”³

This pain among Friends of Color continues in our meetings today. On March 29, 2003, a Latina member of Lancaster, PA meeting

gave a presentation during Philadelphia Yearly Meeting sessions in which she talked about the hurt she has experienced from a racist incident this past summer at the Friends General Conference Gathering. Given all of these factors, how are we, as Friends, going to make that transformation to one race – the human race - in the world if we haven't made it in our own community?

There are people who are working towards this transformation. As many of you know, Friends General Conference has established a standing committee, the Committee for Ministry on Racism. Friends World Committee for Consultation and the American Friends Service Committee sent delegates to participate in the World Conference Against Racism. Members of New England, Baltimore and Philadelphia Yearly Meetings are actively working within their monthly and yearly meetings to increase Friends awareness of racism in the Religious Society of Friends and for the need to eliminate it.

I see the formation of the United Nations as a step towards that unity in the wider world. Another step has been the three World Conferences Against Racism. The first World conference was in Geneva in 1978, the second also occurred in Geneva in 1983 and

the third happened in Durban, South Africa in 2001. I was able to participate in the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance that was held in Durban, South Africa, August 26 through September 8, 2001. When I heard that the United Nations was sponsoring another World Conference Against Racism, I knew that I was going to be there. I did not know how I was going to get to South Africa, but that didn't matter. If the World was going to be talking about racism I was going to be there. I felt called to participate in a discussion about racism with the world. This was going to be a painful and challenging discussion. However, it was one that was necessary to begin the transformation that needed to occur for the people of the world to begin the long process of healing our wounds. As I said earlier racism has been a part of my daily life, my ancestors' lives and my son's life. I do not want us to continue this legacy of institutional racism which strips us all of our humanity. The World Conference was a phenomenal opportunity for individuals and countries to come together to identify, talk about and create solutions for racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and other

related intolerances. These behaviors are not identified as universal concerns very often. There were thousands of people, non-profit organizations; hundreds of countries were represented by heads of states and foreign ministers and many Quaker delegations. Of course the international media was also present. I learned about the Dalits (a hereditary Hindu caste in India commonly known as untouchables), the Roma (a group of people that we know as Gypsies who have suffered from discrimination and ethnic cleansing throughout Europe for hundreds of years) and witnessed people talking about the current slave trade in the Sub-Saharan countries of Mauritania and Sudan. All of these people were talking about their oppression with each other and with their oppressors.

We needed to begin to hear and understand each other so that we could accomplish our goal. What was that goal? The purpose of the Conference was to create both a Declaration and Program of Action. Documents that state a political position and the process necessary to achieve restoring humanity. As we were talking we were changing each other and ourselves. Change among us can only begin with talking.

On May 1-4, 2003, there will be another Non-governmental Organizational conference this one is titled "Movement Beyond Borders, After Durban: U.S. Communities Building a Multiracial Justice & Human Rights Vision." It is being held at George Washington University's Marvin Center in Washington DC. People of African, Arab, Asian, Indigenous, Latino, Pacific Islander, and South Asian descent will unite to develop and implement an antiracist agenda that incorporates human, civil, immigrant and refugee rights. Indigenous peoples, women, lesbians, gays, bisexuals, queer, trans-gendered people, and people of color as members of interfaith and human rights groups will meet together to advance the antiracist agenda put forth at the United Nation's World Conference Against Racism in Durban, South Africa. As a global force of justice, the group will focus on developing a shared political agenda, which is seen as extremely critical due to the heightening state of violence in communities of color today and the racial implications for our war against terrorism? I plan to participate in this conference as well and am sure other Friends will be present.

Why are these conferences important to me? In order to affect change we must identify that there is a problem and something needs to

change. This is never easy, especially if you do not perceive yourself as being negatively affected by these so called problems. When your life is comfortable and you are not personally impacted by hunger, homelessness, racism or sexism on a daily basis it is hard to remember that these problems exist. When you live in a nice community in a house where there is running water and electricity, attend good schools, have nice jobs and the crime rate is low, it is hard to understand that you have all of these comforts through the exploitation of other human beings. I can buy a portable CD player from Walmart for \$30.00 because it was made in China where a person was paid \$1.00 a week for working extraordinarily long hours. Why is this a problem? I think what happened in the United States on September 11th should answer that question for everyone. It was a wake up call for all Americans. Unfortunately, very few people including our current administration accurately heard the message. The message that others in the world whom we exploit on a daily basis to have the nice house in the suburbs are saying, "Stop! You are hurting me."

We are a privileged country. Even our poor have so much more than the poor in other parts of the world. We need to remember that

we are one people; to give everyone back our humanity and treat everyone with respect. Yes, it will mean that those who have more will give up some things to share with those who don't have very much. But that is not a new concept and I don't mean Jesus or Karl Marx, but I'm talking about where I grew up. I grew up in a community a neighborhood where people shared with one another. You gave whatever you had even if it was only a little bit for the community. The great thing about it is when everyone gave something no matter how small it was, whether it was food or money there always was enough for everyone.

My final message will be told through a Ghanaian myth. *Fun-tum-me-rek-koo Den-chim-me-rek-koo*. What does that mean? Literally it is a Ghanaian mythical two headed crocodile with a common stomach. *Fun-tum-me-rek-koo Den-chim-me-rek-koo* symbolizes the need for unity especially where people share one destiny. *Fun-tum-me-rek-koo* and *Den-chim-me-rek-koo* were two crocodiles that had only one stomach but struggled over which one should have the food. In the Akan myth, these crocodiles are from the same family group and resemble each other. They possess the same stomach so whatever one crocodile eats benefits the other. The paradox

of the story is that whatever one of them eats is good for the other, yet they still quarrel over food.

What this story means is that even though we might belong to the same family and the same community, we have to struggle to obtain what we need individually. We have to contribute to the same pot (stomach) to benefit the community, or the family. Another closely related meaning is the phrase “unity in diversity.” This means that although members of a group may be different and have different opinions, they can still cooperate, achieve mutual goals, and be creative and a collective. Thus, if we share one destiny, we therefore should not fight. Fun-tum-me-rek-koo Den-chim-me-rek-koo. Unity, wholeness. I will leave you this afternoon with a challenge. Again I will quote Patricia Loring, “Over and over, Friends have found themselves led into the prophetic stance which critiques prevailing systems, calling them to greater faithfulness to divine unfolding.”⁴ It is time for you to begin remembering your Wholeness. I hope that as you remember that you will begin to make that transition towards unity.

They will be small steps, but important ones. “[Unprogrammed Quakerism’s] vision has been one of slow and steady change, of

unremitting faithfulness...deep willingness to continue to change and be changed, willingness to seek and so become whatever was required of them in love and confidence in God....This is the expectation of transformation by the Spirit of God, not just of one or a few of us as we enter more intimately into relationship with God.”⁵ Maybe you will stop telling ethnic jokes and stop your friends if they are telling them, stating that ethnic jokes are harmful. Get to know people of different cultures, share your life with them. Visit their homes. Celebrate their birthdays, wedding and funerals with them. As we get to know one another our wholeness becomes more important than our differentness. We are members of a larger family, the human race. Don't forget that. Remember wholeness. Another way to approach this transformation is to begin reading and discussion groups on the issue of racism in your communities. I must emphasize a few things about this process. First it will be a long one. It has taken us over three hundred years to instill racism in our institutions in the United States of America. We will not remove the benefits of white privilege after a few discussions. Racism is a topic that we are not accustomed to openly discussing. These discussions will be painful, difficult, hurtful, frustrating and at

times confrontational. Because of these conditions it is important that time is taken to build a great sense of trust within the community prior to your discussions about racism. The community must be safe enough so Friends who have different perspectives can take the time to present, hear and discuss them in a manner where they will feel heard and are not intentionally hurt. During this process remind yourself and others of our wholeness and that we are doing this work to reestablish our family, the human race.

“We can be more at peace with ourselves, more at peace with God’s having the overall management of the world and its outcomes, more at peace with others. As we begin to grow in the awareness of the unique and particular ways God is and has been at work in our own lives, we may also become more respectful of the uniqueness, particularity and mystery of the ways in which God is working in the lives of others.”⁶ It is important for us to know and understand our own individual cultural heritage. We need to have an honest understanding of how our ancestors contributed to this world and the structure of institutional racism. How we continue to maintain vestiges of this structure in our behaviors today. Acknowledging the pain and celebrating the accomplishments will help us

be able to transform into peaceful human beings.

I will end with this quote from Dr. Martin Luther King's speech at the Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967.

“This call for a world-wide fellowship that lifts neighborly concern beyond one's tribe, race, class and nation is in reality a call for an all-embracing and unconditional love for all men. This oft misunderstood and misinterpreted concept ...has now become an absolute necessity for the survival of man. When I speak of love I am not speaking of some sentimental and weak response. I am speaking of that force which all of the great religions have seen as the supreme unifying principle of life. Love is somehow the key that unlocks the door which leads to ultimate reality. This Hindu-Moslem-Christian-Jewish-Buddhist belief about ultimate reality is beautifully summed up in the first epistle of Saint John:

“Let us love one another; for love is God and everyone that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is

love. If we love one another God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.'

“Let us hope that this spirit will become the order of the day. We can no longer afford to worship the god of hate or bow before the altar of retaliation. The oceans of history are made turbulent by the ever-rising tides of hate. History is cluttered with the wreckage of nations and individuals that pursued this self-defeating path of hate.”⁷

Vanessa Julye
4th month, 2003
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Notes

1. Rabbi Michael Lerner, Email publication: *Tikkum Magazine*, [Spiritual Politics And The Post-Iraq Realities Of Global Discourse](#), Sunday, April 6, 2003, 3:07 PM
2. Patricia Loring, *Spiritual Discernment*, PHP #305 (Wallingford, Pennsylvania: Pendle Hill Publications, 1998) p. 8-9
3. Margaret Hope Bacon, *Sarah Mapps Douglass, Faithful Attender: Quaker Meeting: View from the Back Bench* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Quaker Press of Friends General Conference, 2003) p. 5
4. Loring, *Spiritual Discernment*, p. 13
5. Loring, *Spiritual Discernment*, p. 14
6. Loring, *Spiritual Discernment*, p. 11
7. From Dr. Martin Luther King, April 4, 1967 Speech at Riverside Church in New York City, <http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/45a/058.html>