

The Mystery Of It All: I Give Thanks

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Introduction by Maurine Pyle, Clerk, Illinois Yearly Meeting

Janet Means Underhill is a dear friend. She is a friend of yours and mine and that is why she was chosen to give the Plummer Lecture about her spiritual journey. We cannot know merely by looking at a person the trails she has traversed. Janet has traveled to many places, both companioned and alone. But she was always accompanied by God. As you listen to her story, seek also the Light that surrounds her numinously. Then her sorrow will be your sorrow, and her joy, your joy, and her spirit the Universal Spirit that covers us all.

The Mystery Of It All: I Give Thanks

Good morning dear Friends. How good to be here with you, my family, my community of Friends.

When I was asked to consider giving The Plummer Lecture, we had celebrated the life of my husband Tom only a few months before. We celebrated both on Cape Cod at Yarmouth Preparative Meeting and in the mid-west at Lake Forest Friends Meeting. I felt unbalanced and wasn't sure what God was desiring of me. I thought that if this direction had been given through you, I had better listen and say yes.

Thank you for this gift. It is both a privilege and a great responsibility.

The mysteries and wonders of this life continue to astound me. It seems a miracle that I was brought to this beautiful old meetinghouse on the fertile fields of Illinois. It is a miracle that I was brought to you who form so much of my self.

When I started to consider this talk it was my hope to tell you all the wisdom of the ages. It soon became apparent that this was not possible as I hadn't been given that yet. To tell the truth I'm convinced that if I haven't absorbed it by this time, I never will.

My next thought was to go to my many books and tell you the truths those gifted people have written. I realized that wouldn't do either. I was faced with the fact that you were asking me to tell my own story of my journey toward seeking The Eternal that I have never seen but often sensed and experienced.

Language provides so many meanings within a single word. How could our mortal language ever convey the Divine Creator of the earth and universe? How can we give name to That Which is here with us and beyond? I hope you will forgive me if I use the words I am accustomed to using over my life. Please put into your mind whatever vision you have that fits the known but indescribable Divine Spirit.

It is in our diversity that we have strength and in our collected beliefs that we open to wisdom.

I trust people can go to God from many unique and different perspectives. The image of a huge wheel fills my mind. Many spokes connect from the rim to the brilliant, Light-radiating Center. My journey is guided for the most part by the life and words of Jesus

The spoke I travel is named The Religious Society of Friends. I give thanks way opened for me to find Quakers. I give thanks to be a part of our community of Friends.

My early childhood was lived in an old river town in New Jersey. We had a neighborhood filled with children. Summer days were spent next door on the Pattersons' porch. We created fantastic adventures in the amazing world of childhood. In the evenings we would play Kick The Can and Giant Steps in the street until our parents called us home. We made huts in the fields out back

and would swing across the brook on vines. My life with my friends was full and fun. I clearly remember standing in the morning on the kitchen stoop as a little girl and raising my arms to the sun. It was a greeting to the larger beyond. I felt goose bumps when Pat Wixom identified this as Orantes, the earliest posture of peoples in worship.

Those happy memories are underlined with strands of darkness.

I enjoy John Calvi's story of how excited he felt as the angel was carrying him to his mother's womb. He could see his perfect parents straight ahead. Suddenly he slipped from the angel's arms and found himself in a freefall heading toward another couple. "No! No!" he shouted, "It's the wrong one!" and fell into his place on earth. And so it is with all of us. We are born into what is given to us. We move in our growth from our beginnings.

My parents were good, intelligent, well-intentioned people. Our family problem was that both suffered the disease of alcoholism. My two brothers and I suffered too, each in our own way.

Fortunately, my parents drank only on the weekends. Those days were a turmoil of conflict and often out-of-control behavior. They did not drink during the week. I look at it as a Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde existence. We lived a moral, well-cared-for life from Monday through Thursday, and then came the weekends.

Our family structure was built on the medieval notion of male hierarchy. Sam was born five years after me. He was the prince, named for my father. Whitman was twelve years younger than I am. He was second in line for succession. Due to my gender, I was below the line. Both my mother and father adhered to this view.

As those of you who know me can imagine, this scenario did not fit smoothly with my temperament. There were often angry altercations concerning perspectives of justice and equality between me and the King and Queen. This may explain some of the actions and reactions you have observed in my conduct as an adult.

I was fortunate to have a Grandmother who loved me deeply. I was the first girl born in the Boynton family in three generations. She was the mother of five boys. I was her "sweet thing." Her love gave me the stability that was lacking in my home. She was my third parent. I give great thanks she was part of my life.

In the summer I would often leave my home early on a Sunday morning and walk the three blocks to my Grandmother's house on the river. I would get the oars from the rickety boathouse, shove the rowboat off shore and drift out into the current.

The Shrewsbury River is wide and slow moving with soft hills coming down to the edge. The early-morning light played on the water as I would row around the sleeping boats, dipping my oars and being held in the beauty of it all. Then, as now, I am in awe and wonder at God's creation. The seagulls flew high overhead. I felt safe and at peace.

We moved to the country when I was nine. My parent's drinking escalated. The woods became my haven. I followed old Indian trails beside the brook. My favorite place was in a circle of grass surrounded by laurel bushes, tall beech and hemlock trees. In the early spring the pink lady slippers would form their circle within the larger clearing.

Often I would sit here in silence and just BE with the earth scents rising and the wind stirring the leaves. I felt connected to the whole. I became a part of this special place.

I continue to go to the woods to leave the larger world and find peace. Trees comfort me. I have hugged many trees in many places as I have shared my troubles with these living creations of God's world. I believe The Eternal Spirit is present in the trees, in the rich duff of the earth and the running streams. The woods are a good place to sit in the quiet and open to The Spirit in prayer and meditation.

During this phase of my life I was introduced to Christian Science. My parents did not attend church. Every Sunday my mother would drive me the three miles to my closest friend's home. This consistent effort was a real, unspoken gift from her. She quietly made sure I had the opportunity to get to Sunday school and to learn about God. She took the risk of going against my father's thinking.

Trudy's mother would drive us to church in the next town. It is the custom of this faith to read selections from *Science and Health With Key to The Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy and *The Bible* daily. I remember sitting in my little room working to write the meaning of each selection. The concept that God is Love, Truth and Spirit was developed at this time. There was no thought of having an intercessory figure between a person and God. We came together and communicated directly.

My father held anger toward any concept of God. His father, my Grandfather Boynton, died of a heart attack three weeks before the stock market crash in October, 1929. I was born a few weeks later in November. The burden of my grandmother, his brothers, the family business and a new baby fell on his young shoulders. He missed the opportunity to join an archeological dig in Greece.

It seems to me he became embittered. He would often ridicule the concepts and beliefs I was forming in my seeking toward God. I think the Divine Spirit was holding and guiding me during those times.

I learned that my Grandfather Boynton had worshiped in the Christian Science faith toward the end of his life. When I found his marker as an adult, in an old cemetery, these words by Mary Baker Eddy were inscribed in the stone: "Divine Love always has met and always will meet every human need." These words continue to fit my faith today. I remained in Christian Science until I went to college. It was there I found the wonders of physical science. I could no longer agree that matter wasn't a real part of our existence. I began my search for a spiritual home.

My search continued for many years. My husband Dick, the children and I probably attended a minimum of five protestant churches. I enjoyed the companionship of the church members. I enjoyed singing and my husband Dick sang in the choir. These churches seemed a loving gathering of people. I sensed that of God in these churches but somehow I never connected to the Divine Presence as I experienced it in the quiet of the woods. After David and Betsey completed their confirmation, my husband started to play tennis on Sunday mornings. The children were not interested in continuing to worship in the local Church.

I decided that I could reach out once more to find a spiritual home. Sarah, my youngest child and I went to the Unitarian Church. This was nice. They worked for peace and justice. However, the worship did not bring me closer to The Spirit.

In the fall of 1972 Betsey told me that she and a friend had gone to a Quaker Meeting. She thought I would like it. When she told me it was held for an hour in silence, I was horrified. "What! Sit in silence for an entire hour?" I said. With The Wind at my back and my heels digging ruts in the road, Sarah and I went to Lake Forest Friends Meeting.

My memory of this day remains clear. I sat on the wooden bench and fell into The Silence. The Silence was filled with The Divine Presence. The feeling of being held in the Whole of creation, of being a part of the eternal Mystery was deep and profound. I'm sure this occurred due to being in the corporate gathering of prayer. For me it was a covered meeting.

It was where I had yearned to be, worshiping with people in the midst of The Spirit. I cannot remember if a spoken message was given that morning. I only know that Peace and Love radiated from without and within.

I had come home. I give thanks to this day that I was led to the family of Friends.

I had no knowledge of the history of Quakers. I had no knowledge of the testimonies or Quaker process. I only knew that I was among a people who had a deep belief in God. They connected with The Spirit and believed The Spirit works in our lives. I began to read. Rufus Jones and Thomas Kelly were my original guides. Michael Bly was moving on the same path of seeking. We would often share our understandings.

My basic knowledge of Friends grew from being among the members of our meeting. *They let their lives speak.* They lived with what Wilmer Cooper has identified as the testimony of integrity. I see them now. Sylvia Shaw and Sydney Haskins, Bill and Mary Lloyd, Blanche and Daryl Frey, Lloyd and Emma Cadbury, Ann Eckman, Ruth Winter, Jane and John Elliot, Allie and Lew Walton, Paul and Bernice Corteol, David and Mary Stickney. These were people I could trust. They moved in their lives with what Wilmer Cooper describes as, "faithfulness to conscience illumined by the Light Within."¹

I look at you, our body of Friends, today and see us desiring to live with the same integrity. We are seeking and striving to live up to the testimonies of peace, justice, equality, simplicity, human relationships and care of our earth. I think the common desire to live our lives with these concerns for the Divine Creation forms a living bond between us. We are a community of persons who know there is that of God among us. This does not mean that we see everything from the same perspective or always come into agreement with ease. I believe it does mean we are open to listening to each other. We are open to going into the Silence and waiting in the Spirit to find the way toward which we are being led. It is my belief that we are together seekers of Truth. It seems to me we are held together by Love.

The mystery of our passage through life always amazes me. I had found my spiritual home only five months before my husband had a severe heart attack in Houston, Texas. David was in college. I left Betsey and Sarah in Lake Bluff and went to be with Dick. He was very ill. He was in intensive care for four weeks. The hospital was Saint Joseph's. It was the family hospital in Houston. The doctors had done much of their training with Dr. DeBakke.

My place of daily worship evolved to be in the lavatory behind the Roman Catholic Chapel. It was very simple and quiet there. The tile walls were a soft, Mother Mary blue. No one ever disturbed me. I have always thought The Spirit took care of me. My thoughts traveled to our meetinghouse. My worship seemed to be held with my community of Friends. It seemed to be a time when The Eternal Presence was holding and guiding me. I was not alone.

It was here in Houston that racial prejudice became evident in its most undiluted form. It brought back memories of my town in New Jersey where African Americans lived in one part of town and the white people lived everywhere else. It brought back violent arguments with my father concerning the equality of humans. There were about fifteen family members who were in the waiting room outside intensive care on a regular basis. We were allowed to see our loved ones for five minutes every hour. Each of us sat in a chosen spot. The Texans were warm and friendly to me, "the little Yankee lady." One day after returning from seeing Dick, I sat in my regular seat. Across from me were two African-American women. They were sisters. We started to talk. All of a sudden I realized that no one was sitting near us. It affronted and shocked me as I realized why. The women were there for Dorothy's husband who was in intensive care for the second time with a heart condition. She became my friend. Gradually the other people came to sit in their former places.

One night Dick's heart monitor was faintly beeping and moving in an almost straight line. I met Dorothy on the elevator. Her husband was going home the next day. She was upset over my looks and gave me her pillow. It was a generous gift. I slept on the hall floor that night. The pillow of my friend made it possible. They inserted a pacemaker in the morning and Dick started to recover. I returned the pillow to Dorothy. As she took it, she foretold that Dick would take care of himself for "awhile" and then would slide back into his old ways. She was right. Dick died of a second heart attack five years later.

These were hard times. Psalm twenty-three, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" and Psalm forty-six, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in time of trouble," were my constant companions.

We put Dick's ashes on the crest of the hill at our Camp Manatauck in Maine. It was a wind-blown day with clouds scudding over the clear, blue sky. The women's long skirts whipped with the humming of the grasses. The view of miles of woodland stretched before us to the horizon. The Guide Within opened the poetry book to this poem by Robert Louis Stevenson.

Requiem

Under the wide and starry sky,
Dig me a grave and let me lie.
Glad did I live and gladly die,
And I laid me down with a will.

This be the verse you grave for me:
Here he lies where he longed to be,
Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
And the hunter home from the hill.

My life took a turn after Dick's death. I was teaching third grade. I enjoyed working with children. They had the principal fly the flag at half-mast the week of his passing. I became depressed without the companionship of Dick and other adults. Had I known about clearness committees, this would have been an excellent time to explore my direction with that support. As it was, I went to a psychologist, and eventually determined to move to Boston.

How is it that there are times in your life when opportunities open up in a flood of synchronistic happenings? I have the feeling The Divine Spirit is moving within you, working over time. There grows this strong, concerted pushing. It becomes beyond nudgings, way opens and keeps opening. We find ourselves in the stream of living waters going fast toward new beginnings.

Suddenly I moved from being a third grade teacher to being an assistant director of my college's Capital Campaign. I found a tiny apartment in Boston on Beacon Hill. My home sold quickly. Life changed.

My main objective in moving east was to adjust from being Dick Means' wife to developing into an independent, self-sufficient woman. The transition began soon after I arrived in Boston. Having been married twenty-eight years, I was used to having a washer and dryer in my home. Imagine my surprise to realize that there were no such things in my apartment building. I was to carry my laundry down to the laundromat on Charles Street. This didn't appeal to me at all. It reminded me of college days. It was heavy.

My first memorable recollection of the delight that occurs in having choice with no one else to consider took place on a Saturday morning. I was lying in bed contemplating the day and the great pile of laundry waiting for me. Suddenly it occurred to me that I could put the laundry in the car, get to Cape Cod in two hours and put my dirty clothes in a laundromat in Orleans.

How well I remember drinking the cup of coffee and eating the doughnut while the clothes tumbled about. The clear salt air filled me with joy and tumbled me toward being a renewed person. God works in mysterious ways. I found a room for twenty-five dollars a night in an old farmhouse named The Ivy Lodge. I would often drive down to the cape in off-season, do my laundry and walk Nausett Beach.

This was my time of contemplation and prayer. Slowly I grew to experience being closer to the core of The Spirit within and the wholeness of myself as an individual. The ocean in all its moods and depths is a giver of life.

Ecclesiastes 1:7

"All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full;
unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again."

My daughter Sarah left college and came to live with me. We divided our times of worship. Some Sundays we would go to the high Episcopal church of her choice and some Sundays to the Friends meeting in Cambridge. The Eternal Presence filled both of those places as it has filled so many spaces where I have worshipped.

My work as Assistant Director of a Capital Campaign for my college was to visit alumnae. I would tell them how the college had grown in serving children and their families. The objective was to build a renewed relationship with the alumnae and the school. I enjoyed the travel and the work. The conversation would often turn to the alumnae's family. They would tell me their problems. I found that I enjoy listening and sharing with people.

After two years the winds of change blew again. My landlord in Boston wanted to combine his apartment with mine. I would have to seek another living space. The next Sunday at Cambridge Meeting a young woman stood in the balcony and told her life experience. She filled the meetinghouse with her clear, full voice singing, "Amazing Grace." This went deep to my soul. Sarah and I went to the woods in Belmont. It seemed the time had come to return to the mid-west. I called a dear friend. An apartment had just been put up for rent across the hall from her. The owner and I made a contract. Sarah and I came home.

That summer I attended FGC Gathering. Lew Walton had told me of Martha Roberts and her workshop concerning Therapeutic Touch. This was an epic opening for me. The process of being

a conduit for unseen energies in the universe seems to me a natural extension of our physical world.

Shortly after I returned home, a friend called to say her daughter was stricken with sarcoidosis. I was looking for a job. The Spirit swept me along. Within hours I was offered a job where I could go see Susan at noontime. She was a dancer. When she opened the door, she was bent over like an old woman. Her children clung to her as she shuffled back to bed. We worked well together. She knew her body. I knew I was going very deep. I needed guidance. First I attended The Massage School in Chicago. I kept asking if anyone had heard of a practitioner of Therapeutic Touch. No one had.

Then I attended an Edger Casey Healing Workshop. We changed groups every half hour. Each time I would ask if any one knew about Therapeutic Touch. No one did. Finally we had one more half hour before closing. I must tell you that I rarely talk to God in angry tones. This time I was upset. I clearly remember me saying, "God, I need your help! I have searched everywhere and can't find anyone to direct me. I don't know anywhere else to look and time is closing in!"

I entered my final group and once more asked my question. One of the men looked up and pointed to a young woman about four feet away. "I think she knows of someone," he said. I went to her and she led me to Dora Kunz, Head of The Theosophical Society and the founder of bringing Therapeutic Touch to our country.

The mystery and miracles in life are beyond knowing. I attended weekly "healing" sessions in the library of The Theosophical Society for a year. Eventually John and Jane Elliot joined me. My work with Susan continued. Through her understanding of how her body functioned, she gave a dance performance in the spring.

My work with Therapeutic Touch led to my becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. I believed that if people could work through their problems in a mental health setting, the physical consequences of stress might be avoided. This was no doubt over-simplistic. However it is what drew me to enter the field.

Don Fuhrman was my mentor and guide in helping me choose my direction. This time of learning was one of the great gifts of my life. I was given language that I had never known to describe the human condition. There was learning about family system theories, human development and the internal workings of the human psyche. I was fascinated to begin to learn how we are affected by life events and how we affect each other.

How I wished I had gone to school before I had my children. I wouldn't have known it "all," but there would have been guideposts to lead from.

Following graduation, while I was looking for a job, a little two-line squib rose from the newspaper. It was to alter my life. It directed me to a conference at Illinois Masonic Hospital.

The subject was AIDS. It seemed strange to me that I was being pushed so strongly in this direction. I hesitated but the leading was insistent.

I found myself in an auditorium filled with people. A young priest spoke about this terrible epidemic that was striking the gay, male community. The man next to me asked if he thought the church could forgive those who had contracted the disease. The priest looked out at the audience and said, "It is not a matter of if the church can forgive you. The question is, can you forgive the church for closing its doors to you." A wave of The Breath of The Spirit swept through the room. Compassion and wonder held us.

I thought I was too old to get involved with this movement. The people at Howard Brown Clinic convinced me they needed volunteers. Men diagnosed with AIDS were pouring into Chicago from all directions of the mid-west. This was early in the eighties. Training of volunteers took place over two full weekends. One man and I were the only heterosexual persons present. Friday night of the second weekend was full of hilarity and joking. I felt out of it. I wasn't a part of this culture and didn't know the language. I went back to my daughter's home in the city and thought, "This isn't for me. I can't do this. I'm not going back."

How vivid it comes to me, lying on the futon and opening my Bible. The words from Luke 5: 31 rose, "And Jesus answering said unto them, they that are whole need not a physician; but they that are sick." I knew this was my guidance.

Saturday morning we met again. There were about twenty-five people. The leaders began their prescribed program. One member of the group spoke up. "I think Janet got the wrong idea of us last night."

I continue to experience the Mystery that held us that morning. The leaders immediately stopped their structured program. We were sitting in a circle. The leaders had us speak and tell our stories. I spoke of my husband's death and the difficulty of being a single person in a couple culture. I acknowledged this wasn't in any degree the prejudice these people experience as being gay but that it gave me a small idea. As we went around the circle, The Silence deepened. This became a covered meeting. The Eternal Spirit was with us.

My Buddy, Alan, was a wonderful person. He made sure I became involved with his friends and his life. He had me attend his support group for Persons With AIDS. After some confrontational questions of why a person like me was getting involved in this epidemic, they took me in. The next week they asked if I would run a group for their lovers, wives and significant others. I said I would if I could have a co-leader who was a member of the gay community. This opened a whole new area for my learning. I was gifted to be a part of this gathering.

Our group was composed of men and women from young to older middle age. We met weekly. I felt that there was The Presence in our midst. This was a time of death surrounding us. I would come home from my job at Salvation Army and see my answering machine blinking. Most often it concerned a member of the group. We had many celebrations of life. There was so much loss, so much sorrow.

My Buddy Alan died after weeks in the hospital. I grew from knowing his Mexican family. They never left him alone. He knew he was loved. I continue to have dear friends from our group. We always felt there were too many men being called into the choir of heaven. After our original group had lost all the loved ones, we closed with a celebration at my home.

My second opportunity to work with persons with HIV and AIDS was in an agency that focused entirely on supporting persons and their families affected with the disease. I conducted individual therapy and support groups. Through this work with people of different cultures, genders, racial backgrounds and diverse sexual orientations I grew to know many of them intimately. They shared their lives. I learned of the unfair practices, prejudiced actions and verbal slurs that had wounded them as they entered the world at large. I was given insight into family relationships. They shared their fears and hopes. I think most of us here believe "there is that of God in each of us." I wonder if we take the time to fully contemplate the meaning of this truth.

Psalm 139 verses 13 - 15 speaks to all people:

It was You who created my inmost self,
And put me together in my mother's womb;
For all these mysteries I thank you:
For the wonder of myself, for the wonder of your works.

You know me through and through,
From having watched my bones take shape
When I was being formed in secret,
Knitted together in the limbo of the womb.

These words are spoken to all humans. They speak to all races, genders, cultures, and sexual orientations. Each person is a unique creation of God. It is my hope we will examine our prejudices. Prejudice can be so deeply ingrained in our early structures and beliefs. It emerges in subtle and hurtful ways. Prejudice can also be blatant but I think we can recognize that clearly. It is my hope that our Religious Society of Friends will enfold humans of all diversities, honoring each person, equal, held in the arms of Love.

I had always wanted to attend Pendle Hill. One year I inherited some money. I have never regretted using it to be a part of that community.

The Spirit flowed. We began each morning with an hour of worship. It seemed the barn was filled with the presence of those sitting on the benches and those who had gone before. It was filled with The Spirit. Synchronicity became the norm rather than the surprise. I will always hold this place as Holy Ground. We had fun together. Laughter and stimulating conversation were part of our lives. It became a time when the double-layered experience of having an awareness of being held in The Eternal was combined with conducting the daily tasks of the present. This was not constant but it was experienced.

Fran Taber was my mentor. I was able to conduct Therapeutic Touch with her. Patti O'Hara and I conducted Therapeutic Touch for the community. This was another gift in my life.

It was also a time of sorrow. The Gulf War was declared. We organized a bus to go to Washington the week before the declaration to demonstrate for peace. How sad it seemed to be organizing this march.

The Peace March in New York City only a few years earlier held such exuberance and hope. Streets were filled with balloons and happy, singing people. Now we were moving in the direction of war again.

We went the following week to protest the declaration. There were many more people present. It always seemed to me that there should have been a larger turnout before the decision had been made. In looking at the picture now I wonder if that would have helped. There were protests and marches around the world before the war in Iraq was declared and yet look where we are.

I am a deep believer in the possibility of building peaceful communities. I believe we can move within our circles of Friends, both capital F and small f, workers and acquaintances toward forming peaceful relationships.

I am deeply disturbed by the decisions that have been made by the leaders of our government. I hold in trust and value the principles that the United States of America is built on. It seems a tragedy to me that they are not being honored by those who are making the decisions for the present and future acts of our nation. My prayer is that our leaders in government might open to The Spirit within and without to bring us to discussion, listening, mediation, and peaceful resolution of differences. Communication, careful listening and trust are the basics for building peaceful communities.

Matthew 18 has long been a model among Friends for working to solve differences in the holding of Love. Our books that offer guidance and support are called, *Faith and Practice*. It seems to me that in order to bring about peace we must go deep into our faith and follow with our practice.

When you are aware of landing in a spot that is a total surprise you just paddle along, keep your head above water, and do some praying. This is what occurred when I became Clerk of Ministry and Advancement for IYM. I remember sitting under the trees outside the meetinghouse and suddenly being propelled into that position. I was new to IYM. It took time to develop a concept of what this committee was responsible for.

At the session held the following year, clerks were giving reports of their committees. It occurred to me I might be responsible to do this too. I had the flu. I sat on a log facing the cornfield and attempted to put something together. When it was my turn to report, I was terrified. I looked out at the sea of faces before me. They were smiling, such a beautiful sight! I think of our Illinois Yearly Meeting in that context of love and forgiveness for shortcomings.

The years spent as clerk of M&A provided opportunity to visit many meetings throughout Illinois Yearly Meeting. Opportunities arose to get to know you better as communities and as individuals. This time is held with great appreciation as part of my life journey. I learned so much.

Paul Schobernd was field secretary when I became clerk. He gave many meetings the feeling they were part of a whole family of Friends not only at yearly gathering but during the year as well.

Barry Zalph accepted the responsibility of using his skills in the art of remediation as he worked with your meetings toward building them into communities of peace. It was at this time we came to realize that work was best accomplished by going forward with two people. Ministry was conducted with one person actively communicating with the meeting and one holding the proceedings in The Light. This followed the examples of the earliest Publishers of the Truth in the sixteen hundreds.

Other opportunities for getting to know so many of you dear folks in depth have come forth through our Yearly Meeting efforts to encourage increased understanding of different perspectives among us. Elizabeth Mertic and I visited your homes as we took turns being listener and scribe in the Listening Project.

I have visited meetings alone and with Maurine Pyle to bring what we named "Shalem" to your meetings. As many of you know this is a process conducted in small groups to help each member discern "What is God's desire for me?" Sister Rosemary Dougherty developed this manner of working in group direction under the auspices of The Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation in Washington D.C.. I was fortunate to be attending a session there when Sister Dougherty was teaching how to conduct this process. I brought it back to our women's group that had been meeting monthly in my home. I was reluctant to ask these busy people if they would be interested in forming such an approach to discernment. To my surprise they each said yes.

On a cold, snowy, February night these women came one by one out of the dark, their coats flying. They looked like spirits descending from the skies. Our group has met for 13 years.

These companions on the journey are Pat Bogie, Claire Cafaro, Janice Domanik, Elizabeth Mertic, Maurine Pyle and Genevieve Wimp-McCann. It has been a joy to learn that many of you continue to meet using this format as you seek to discern, "What is God's desire for me?"

I have not spoken of a fundamental core in my life. It is my family. Family is my dearest treasure. We have moved through times of sorrow, conflict and joys. Happily today we are at a plateau where we love and support each other.

David and his wife Sonja live in Maryland. Betsey, my son-in-law Scott and my granddaughter Emily live in Chicago. Sarah and her partner David live in California. I have a gift of an enlarged family. Sarah, my second husband Tom's daughter, lives with her husband Charlie and their two

children Nick and Emily close by in Champaign. Tom's son Nick, his wife Mary and their daughter Jane live in Ohio.

It is good to hold these people dear in my heart. Each has a streak of integrity. Each lives with kindness, intelligence and caring regard for the planet. Fortunately all have marvelous senses of humor. I give thanks to be so blessed.

These past five years are difficult to speak of. I have asked God what I was supposed to be learning from such a confusion of new approaches to living life. I am still being given unfoldings to contemplate.

It seems it all began with becoming a participant in The School of The Spirit. This is a gathering of individuals seeking to develop a ministry of contemplative prayer and spiritual nurture. It was founded by Sandra Cronk, Fran Taber and Kathryn Damiano. It had depths in bringing us into the historical life of Friends in community and precepts into the expanding of Friends' life in the world today. Our small Koinonia groups provided opportunity for examining The Spirit in our lives and deep sharing. Kathryn Damiano was the convener of our group. She continues in her faithfulness as friend and mentor. I give thanks for all the persons who opened and became part of my being with this flow of The Spirit.

In the fall of my second year as a participant, on my birthday, I received a letter from an old friend asking if I would consider building a relationship with him encompassing the thought of marriage. To make a not very long story short my friends say I became "twitterpated." They were right. I did and I was. Tom Underhill and I were married under the care of Lake Forest Meeting, September 11, 1999.

Now began a new life with my wonderful husband. We lived half the year in my home in Illinois and half of the year in his home on Cape Cod. I never did quite get used to the balance. It often felt like I was a circus horse rider, balancing on two horses at the same time. Every time I would get involved with a commitment in one place, I would be changing addresses to another.

I became a sojourning member of Yarmouth Preparative Meeting, Sandwich Monthly Meeting, New England Yearly Meeting. It took some time to feel a part of this family of Friends. Harry Desroches and Margaret Katranides met with me on the lawn here at Yearly to help me with my problem. Harry asked if people brought homemade cookies to hospitality hour after the meeting. I didn't think they did. He suggested that I make some the next time I was to bring goodies. This was a turning point. I made Dick's great grandmother's molasses cookies. They were a hit. People started to ask questions and to speak warmly to me. I think it gave them something to connect with me.

It was a reminder for me to give time and express interest in new attenders to my own meetings. It is so easy for us to connect with people we know and to pursue our committee work during

hospitality time that we often miss the opportunity to get to know others and make them feel at home among us.

The Yarmouth Meeting House was built in 1808. It is set under a huge black oak next to a Quaker burying ground surrounded by low stonewalls. The building resonates the testimonies of simplicity and integrity as does this dear meeting house.

A small gathering of people worship here in The Silence each Sunday. It seems the Divine Presence fills each place where people gather in expectant waiting. We are connected over miles and time.

The concept of ministry revolved in my mind as I worked in my garden by the sea. It was so different gardening in the sand of Cape Cod compared to the earth of the Heartland. It was so different being an unknown attender in a meeting than an established member of a meeting. There was a great deal to learn both within and without.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11 spoke to my mind:

"There are a variety of gifts but always the same Spirit: there are all sorts of service to be done, but always to the same God working in all sorts of different ways in different people, it is the same God working in all of them.

The particular way in which The Spirit is given to each person is for good purpose. One may have the gift of preaching with wisdom given to him or her by the Spirit; another may have the gift of preaching instruction given by the same Spirit; and another the gift of faith; another the gift of healing; one, the power of miracles; another, prophecy;

All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, who distributes different gifts to different people just as is chosen."

New Jerusalem Bible

I see each of us as a minister given our special gifts of ministry. How good and sometimes overwhelming to have such a diversity of ministries to choose from within our Religious Society of Friends. Our ministries often change as we change. There is a time to reap and a time to sow. There is a time to be fully active and a time to withdraw for renewal and contemplation.

During Tom's illness, I received the ministry of family and F/friends both Quaker and not Quaker. They wrote notes and made phone calls. My Lake Forest Meeting sent a huge scroll with well wishes and handprints from children and adults. The meeting clerk, David Shiner, sent me

notes expressing support and concern. I learned the importance of the quiet ministry of others during this time.

From my view, we Friends make up a diverse, wonderful family. We are a unique gathering of people. We have a history of people working to fulfill what Micah tells us God asks of us, "to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with our God."²

While we stand on the strength of our past, we are open to change for the future defined by our testimonies, the evolving needs of our planet and the continuing revelation of God. It seems to me that Divine Love has been and is the core for our faith and practice.

While I cannot see into the future to examine the next step on my journey, I trust that God is here, way will open and I will be guided on the way everlasting.

May we rest in The Silence of this moment, precious moment, perfect moment.

¹Wilmer Cooper, *The Testimony of Integrity in The Religious Society of Friends*, (Pendle Hill Pamphlet 296, 1991) p.20.

²Micah 6:8, New Jerusalem Bible

JANET MEANS UNDERHILL

Janet Hinsdale Boynton was born in New Brunswick, New Jersey. Her earliest years were spent near the Shrewsbury River in Fair Haven. Her later growing up years were lived in Colts Neck; both were in the soft hills of New Jersey. The wonder and awe of the beauty of the earth and unique gifts of God's creation were given birth here.

Janet graduated from Wheelock College with a degree in education. She received her MA from the University of Chicago, School of Social Service Administration. She enjoyed teaching young children. Later she worked with children and adults as a Clinical Social Worker. The relationships between humans and humans, and humans and their Creator, have continually fascinated her. She feels her greatest education has occurred on the journey through life. She remains a constant seeker.

She became a member of the Religious Society of Friends thirty years ago. Lake Forest Friends Meeting became her home. She has participated in First Day School, as a member of many

committees and as clerk. Illinois Yearly Meeting grew to be a second home while serving as clerk of Ministry and Advancement for several years.

Janet has been married twice. She and her first husband, Dick Means, lived together 28 years. They gave birth to three children, David, Betsey and Sarah. She has one grandchild, Emily. Tom Underhill became her second husband in 1999. They spent a rich life together until his passing in 2003.