

# Honrar la Vida

**David Rutschman**  
**The 2006 Jonathan Plummer Lecture**  
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## **Introduction by Fernando Freire**

*"What does the Lord require from you but to do justice,  
love kindness, and walk humbly with your God." - Micah 6:8*

With these words from the prophet Micah, I would like to begin this introduction of my friend and "compadre." Some of you may know that David was born to a family of Mennonite missionaries in Colombia. There his parents worked with the children of a leper colony. At the age of seven, his family moved to Uruguay, where his parents continued their ministry at the

Mennonite seminary. It is in Uruguay where he met Marj Byler. She is the daughter of Mennonite missionaries who came to Uruguay from Argentina in 1962.

David and Margarita fell in love and eventually married in 1971. For those of you who know something about Uruguay and Argentina, it is not a small miracle that an Uruguayan and an Argentinean have lived in relative peace and harmony for so many years. One explanation is perhaps the strong peace testimony among Mennonites and now Quakers. From this union, two children were born: David in Uruguay and Marcos in Argentina, just to keep things balanced.

They had to leave Uruguay in 1973 when the military took over the government. This same military government began a massive persecution and torture of people whom they deemed "dangerous to the state." David's work and commitment to social justice and human rights made him a target. Some of David's friends were tortured in their effort to find out where he was. However, no one gave him away. David and Margarita first fled to Argentina and eventually arrived at New Mexico in 1980. There, David finished a PhD in Applied Mathematics and Margarita completed a Masters' degree.

While living in New Mexico they became active Friends. They were committed to Amnesty International, the Sanctuary movement, and the resistance to the military industry complex. Many times David helped to transport scores of Central American refugees in his own old van. Amazingly, the van never broke down when a refugee was present-only on family vacations!

In 1987 they moved to the Chicago area, where David has been a college professor and Margarita has continued her work with Amnesty International. Two years ago David, with the help of two colleagues and in partnership with Notre Dame High School, founded a bilingual high school completion program for immigrant adults. Thirty-four students have graduated from this program. They named this program the "Dorothy Stang Popular Education Adult High School" in homage to the Catholic nun who was assassinated in Brazil, for her work and resistance to the destruction of the environment. Margarita is still working with Amnesty International and is currently based at their London office.

In Chicago David has been deeply committed to 57th Street Meeting of Friends. I want to quote from their August 2005 newsletter:

"David Rutschman is the mentor/clerk who quietly guided us through the last two years of new committee structure. He was invaluable in linking us to the significance and integrity of the historical 57th Street Meeting. He carefully worded documents that provided the talking points for redefining our relationship with WYM and with each other. He seems a mild man, an intelligent man, one who never loses his calm, but don't be fooled. Right behind those quiet blue eyes there exists the sun-drenched, brilliantly-colored, pulsing rhythm and passion of a South American revolutionary."

I began this introduction with the words of the prophet Micah. David, my friend and compadre, for me you have been an inspiration and an example of these words. Your thirst for justice and

peace, your love and compassion, and your humble walk with God are a testimony of the best that a member of the Religious Society of Friends has to offer to a broken world.

## **Honrar la Vida**

"¡No es lo mismo que vivir... Honrar la vida!"

These are words from a tango by Eladia Blázquez that translate as: "To live is not the same as to honor life!"

When I was asked to consider giving this Plummer Lecture my immediate and instinctive reaction was to say, no! I have much to learn from Friends and little to teach.

When the request was followed by "you have interesting stories to tell," I realized that I could tell you stories of how I have come to be here today. Our community of Friends gathered here at Yearly Meeting has a wealth of enlightening stories, so I am honored to have been singled out this year. I agreed with trepidation to embark on several months of reflection (some haphazard, some intentional), of conversations (mostly with Marj, my wife, and Dave and Mark, our sons), and of reading. I thank you for this opportunity. It has been a valuable learning experience for me, forcing me to reflect in ways I haven't before.

The Old Testament understanding of faithfulness - and justice - is one of community, family and clan, not of individuals. Our names track our kinship. I am David Henry Rutschman, named after my father's father. In Uruguay, I am known as David Henry Rutschman Fischbach in recognition of my mother's and my father's families. Following this pattern, the next two names are Zuercher and DuPre. Marj's names in this pattern are Byler Hallman Stoltzfus Clemens. Our sons use both Rutschman and Byler, names of the families I want to tell about.

My mother's family is a mix of European immigrants from many countries over several generations: Scottish, British, French and German. There is a connection to Annie Oakley and other less verifiable claims. My father's family, as well as Marj's, is of Swiss and German Mennonite origin.

I'd like to begin with the story of the Mennonites because it is such an important part of my family's story.

The Protestant Reformation replaced one state church with another in parts of Germany, Switzerland, Holland, England, Scotland and Scandinavia in the 16th and 17th centuries. Going beyond the Protestant Reformation, in 1525, in the city of Zurich, Switzerland, a group that included the son of a wealthy merchant, a university student and a former prior of a monastery baptized each other and called themselves the Brethren. They believed the Scriptures to be the only source for faith and life, and that the Church should be made up of believers. Therefore the Church could not be affiliated with the State and children should not be baptized. Their calls for reform led to decrees against them by the Protestant Zurich City Council followed by vicious persecution. Many of the early Brethren were imprisoned and martyred for their faith. The message of this small group spread despite (and maybe because of) the persecution. Some Swiss

cantons allowed them to stay if they paid special taxes and farmed the least productive land. Despite that, the numbers are astounding: in the first ten years 5,000 Swiss Brethren were executed in Switzerland and surrounding regions. It was easy for the authorities to enforce the law because if one of the Brethren was questioned he or she would tell the truth: "yes, I am a member."

The name Anabaptist was used to describe the Brethren derogatorily, since they were "rebaptized," much in the same way as the term Quaker was used to describe the Society of Friends.

The story of the beginning of the Anabaptists in Northwest Germany and Holland is for the most part independent of the Swiss movement, and it touches on one of the questions I have grappled with - the question of violence and non-violence. Melchior Hofmann, a wandering minister, preached the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth. A group of his followers took control of the city of Münster in northwest Germany by force of arms for a short period in 1534 hoping to establish their vision of a Christian state. They were violently overthrown within a year.

Other groups of believers held to non-violence (and non-resistance) and their numbers grew. Menno Simons was a former Catholic priest who joined this group in 1536, and he became the leading figure in the movement. Because of him people began to refer to the group as Menist or Mennonite. He traveled widely and was very influential through his writings. The Dutch followers of Menno Simons prefer not to call themselves Mennonite, but most of the other groups that share their origins with the Brethren in Zurich or the Mennonites in Holland call themselves Mennonite.

The *Martyrs Mirror* was published in Holland in 1660. It documents the martyr deaths of thousands of Brethren, men and women. I understand that it tells of a Rutschman who was baptized in the first ten days of the Brethren in Zurich and later killed.

Harold Bender, whose book<sup>1</sup> provided much of the preceding historical information, summarizes the foundation of the Mennonites as:

the church as a fellowship of true believers,  
the nonconformity of the church to the world,  
the practice of true brotherhood and love among members (including in some cases the sharing of possessions),  
the principle of peace, love, and nonresistance;  
from which follow: the separation of church and state and freedom of conscience.

He summarizes the teachings of the founders as "(t)hey interpreted the Christian life to be not so much the inward experience of the grace of God, as Luther did, but the outward application of that grace to all human conduct, and the consequent Christianization of all human relationships."

Mennonites have spread throughout the world, usually to avoid persecution. Prussian Mennonites established colonies in Russia starting in 1788 (under special terms which included military exemption, their own schools and language), and many of their descendants came to

both North and South America in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Dutch, German and Swiss Mennonites came to North America starting in the mid 1600s. Among the first were twelve German Mennonite families who accepted William Penn's invitation to come to America and settled in what is now called Germantown (part of Philadelphia) in 1683. Most of them became Quaker.<sup>2</sup>

Friends and Mennonites share a peace testimony (although non-resistance and non-violence are not exactly the same), a practice of simplicity, and an assumption of honesty. Early Mennonites chose their unpaid ministers by lot — I suspect this was not too different from recorded ministers among Friends. Both groups have struggled with the meaning of non-violence in the context of war, with many of both faiths becoming conscientious objectors (in the U.S. this meant risking prison during the first world war and serving in the Civilian Public Service during the second). The American Friends Service Committee and the Mennonite Central Committee, if I have my facts right, were the only two US groups allowed in North Vietnam during the Vietnam war.

In my experience, the main difference between Friends and Mennonites has to do with the understanding of our role in the world. Mennonites, in part because a history of persecution led to close-knit communities isolated from the societies in which they lived, have not tended to view social activism as part of their spiritual life but rather as a distraction from it. A recent email from my father quotes from an article saying "it is a betrayal of Anabaptism to reduce Christian faith to social activism." Marj's brother Dennis, a pastor in Spain, wrote in his newsletter<sup>4</sup> that "I tend to see politics ... as basically irrelevant to what is really important ..."

Quakers have a tradition and a commitment to working toward justice on earth in our time. I strongly believe that our greatest contribution as Friends is through our values — and Spirit-based action in the world.

I promised you some family stories.

Marj's maternal grandfather moved to Saskatchewan, Canada, to homestead and to establish a church. Her mother Anna was the only girl and the youngest of five. The family moved to South Texas when she was in high school. Marj's father Frank was a farm boy from Ohio who had to pay the "hired" man's salary so he could go to college. Marj's parents met in Goshen College and discovered that they both intended to be missionaries in Argentina. They married and traveled with their eldest son by ship to *la pampa* of Argentina where Marj and her three younger siblings were born and grew up.

My father's mother was born in Switzerland, and her family came to Kansas with a group of Mennonites in 1883, when she was a baby. My father's father was born in Kansas. His father came from Switzerland to New York to work for a cousin and then moved to a Mennonite/Amish community in Pulaski, Iowa, in the 1880s where he married my great grandmother who was a member of that community.

The Swiss Mennonite Church in Whitewater, KS, worshiped in German until 1926. The community language was Schweizerdeutsch, Swiss German. The first world war created uncomfortable dynamics with the "American" community, in part because of the German

language and culture of the Mennonites, and in part because of their pacifism (which was not absolute!). So they began 'fitting in' and started using English at home and at church.

Two of my father's older brothers were part of a Gospel team that traveled around the country preaching and singing, sponsored by a wealthy industrialist (R.G. LeTourneau). Pete and Orrin were killed in a car accident in Tennessee in 1937. This accident, which occurred while my father was in high school, changed the course of his life. He felt the calling to do what they might have done, to be a missionary.

My mother, Harriet, grew up a Methodist in Paulding, Ohio. Her family struggled to make a living on a small farm. My parents met at Wheaton College.

My parents and Marj's parents grew up during the Depression. Frugality and simplicity, which were already part of their rural and cultural background, have marked their lives.

In the late 1940s the General Conference Mennonite Church founded a boarding school in Cachipay, Colombia, for children whose parents were suffering from leprosy. My parents were founding members of the school. The idea ~~medically sound at the time~~ was that by reducing the children's exposure to the disease, they would avoid contagion. In fact, none of the children who attended the school developed leprosy. My first memories are of the *finca* which is set in the coffee and banana producing mountains of Cundinamarca. A fast-flowing mountain stream (almost a river) on the edge of the pasture drew my companion (now my brother in law) Paul and me for adventure. There were several horses that my Dad rode for hours on mountain paths as he visited small congregations he had started in neighboring villages with magical names like Anolaima, La Esperanza and Peña Negra. Many of these congregations are still active today.

In April, 1948, Colombia, and especially the capital city of Bogotá, erupted in riots protesting the assassination of a popular young lawyer and political leader of the left. This marked the beginning of the violent period known as *la violencia* which in many ways continues to this day. Wikipedia gives the number of deaths due to *la violencia* at over 200,000. Bogotá was under curfew when I was born there a few months later. My father was required to carry a police permit (a *salvoconducto*) to visit my mother at the hospital in the evening.

When we moved to Uruguay in 1956, the country prided itself in its democracy and public welfare. Uruguay is a tiny country nestled between Argentina and Brazil, and its population is predominantly of European ancestry. The executive power was shared by a five-person *colegiado* (collective) which included a woman. The export economy and welfare state had served the middle class well. But poverty existed and social tensions were growing.

My father, and later Marj's, were professors at the newly founded Mennonite seminary in Montevideo. Most of the students were German-speaking Russian Mennonites from the colonies in Paraguay, Brazil and Uruguay.

By the time I began my university studies in 1968, a strong but divided left was advocating for social justice, land and banking reform. Meanwhile the traditional parties were moving rightward and beginning to militarize social control. Those of you my age may remember 1968 as the year

of student uprisings — starting in Paris and Germany and quickly spreading. Many university students in Uruguay were caught up in the same fervor and despite ideological differences we participated in "anti-imperialist" demonstrations calling for such things as the abolition of the International Monetary Fund on the one hand, and subsidized bus tickets (a benefit we had as students) for workers, on the other.

Long assemblies late into the night debated and planned actions. These meetings tended to include a radical fringe that believed in Molotov cocktails, but most of us believed that showing our numbers by marching and chanting slogans would make a difference.

One Friday we occupied the medical school and hung banners from the roof. I volunteered to hang two loudspeakers from the top floor of the four story tower on one of the corners of the building, so I crawled out on the ledge and attached and wired the speakers. Down below I could see that the police, including a group of mounted police, had surrounded the building. Shortly thereafter we got an urgent call from the police commander. He asked that we turn off our speakers — a high pitched sound was driving the horses crazy! As I recall we refused.

Thousands of University students were arrested in demonstrations that year and three killed. I grew a mustache as my personal and private remembrance to those who died, and I haven't cut it off since. Radicalization of the left and militarization of the government (encouraged by the US) continued over the next several years, not only in Uruguay, but all over Latin America.

Then came an overland trip from Buenos Aires to Kansas, spending a year at a Mennonite college, visiting Marj in Michigan and realizing that we were falling in love, and returning to Uruguay in violation of my US draft orders, committed to help with the expected revolution.

The overland trip is one of my family's sagas. We drove a 1930 Model A Ford for two and a half months through Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, Ecuador, Colombia, and Central America. The poverty and injustice I saw as we traveled reinforced in my mind the need for radical structural change. I had been active in the Student Christian Movement and had tried to reconcile the political and social changes we saw as necessary with the non-resistance I had been taught. At a conference in Brazil I asked a Presbyterian minister how a pacifist could be part of the revolution. His response was "accompany us as far as you can." There did not appear to be a Gandhian alternative in Latin America at that time, and I made the choice of the "lesser" violence. We were going to overthrow systemic violence even if that meant supporting violent means. You know the saying, "the end justifies the means." We read Marx, Engels, and Lenin. We organized, and sometimes acted.

Meanwhile Marj spent several years working with and organizing migrant workers in Michigan and Texas under the auspices of the National Council of Churches. Immigrant stories haven't changed much in these 37 years. One of her most unforgettable stories is of trying to find a hospital emergency room in Michigan that would attend to a man with appendicitis. None would receive him and he died in the back seat of her car as she drove to yet another town in search of a hospital. She and her friends were physically attacked and their car vandalized for holding organizing meetings with migrant workers.

Marj and I were married in Uruguay in 1971. We chose to have an informal ceremony, outdoors, with our church community from the Timbúes slum, all sitting in a circle. Marj and I stated to the group that we wanted to be life-long companions and exchanged rings with that message engraved inside. Our friends and family then took turns speaking. One of the songs we sang that evening has the words of the Spanish poet Antonio Machado: "*caminante no hay camino, se hace camino al andar*" (which is a lovely way of saying: there is no path, we make the path as we go). Friends will recognize that this was almost a Quaker wedding!

We soon joined the Frente Amplio — the "broad front" coalition of leftist groups and parties. The Frente was organized locally into *comités de base* (base committees) in the barrios. Our group had all ages and parties, Communists, Socialists, and younger independents like us.

We were active in a Mennonite community in the Timbúes *cantegril* — the slum created by the immigration of the rural population to the capital city. The founding pastor, Dan Miller, a dedicated colleague of our parents, left for a year and set up a "pastoral committee" which was meeting regularly at our little apartment. One afternoon a neighbor who I didn't know approached me and warned me in a friendly way that we were under surveillance because of these meetings, and that it might be prudent to stop. Solidarity like this is rare, and I learned from it.

On a clear Saturday morning the Frente had called for a last-minute demonstration to be held that afternoon in protest over the death by torture of a Frente activist at a military barracks. I rode my motorcycle over to Hugo's furniture finishing shop where our group held its meetings. Hugo and others were busy painting signs to be put up announcing the demonstration. I joined in and when we finished, Hugo and I took the signs down to a busy intersection a few blocks away. As we were putting up the signs, a jeep with soldiers came by, saw us, chased us into a café and arrested us. We were taken to a barracks, blindfolded, interrogated, and kept standing with our hands against the wall. Hours later we were put in a truck, still blindfolded, and to our surprise dropped off on a deserted street and told to wait. When we took off our blindfolds we realized that we were free and no more than a kilometer or two from home! Meanwhile, Marj and her father had been going to every military office, including the high command, to ask about our whereabouts. Others spent years in prison for similar offenses. So this story ended well. Our friends were already planning to go out that night to paint signs on buildings and walls asking for my release! (The painting of walls is a time-honored tradition in Uruguayan activism, and we had it down to a science.) But even better than not having my name plastered all over Montevideo, was the fact that we made it to Mercedes Sosa's first concert in Montevideo that night. Since few of you will have heard Mercedes Sosa sing, suffice it to say that one of her records came with me in the Model A as a gift to Marj.

Miguel Brun is a Methodist minister and was a young colleague of our parents in the Seminary in Montevideo. He taught Bible at the Methodist high school that Marj and I attended, and was a significant mentor to me in my teen years. Later, he and his wife Katia hosted the *asado*, the BBQ, at our wedding. Katia and Marj both worked at the same school and the four of us became close friends. They had three children: Elba, Pablo and Anita.



In 1972 Elba was perhaps 13, Pablo about 10 and Ana maybe 7. One Friday night when Miguel was out of town, in Paraguay, at a church meeting, Marj and I went to visit with Katia. We ate carryout pizza and while the kids played downstairs with a group of neighborhood children we sat upstairs with Katia who was in bed with the flu. Suddenly three soldiers appeared at the bedroom door. We were each taken to a different room for interrogation. They were looking for someone using the pseudonym of David and I had a very difficult time persuading the lieutenant that if my ID showed my name as David it could not be my alias! After several hours Katia and Elba were taken away, Pablo and Ana went with the neighbors and Marj and I were allowed to leave. We called Miguel long-distance over a wiretapped phone. We knew he would be arrested if he returned, but he feared for Katia and Elba. So he returned on Sunday and we met him to tell him what we knew, and followed his taxi as it dropped him off at his house. He was arrested at the door.

Later that afternoon, we returned to check on Pablo and Ana and discovered Marj's mother sitting in their 1948 Hillman in front of the house. Frank was nowhere to be seen. We stopped, and Anna said: "he's been in the house for more than two hours!" After quick deliberations we decided that I would knock on the door and if I didn't come out in a few minutes Marj and Anna would drive home and start making phone calls. The soldiers inside had set up what we called a *ratonera*, a trap for unsuspecting visitors, so of course I didn't come out! Frank was sitting on the sofa talking to the soldiers about Jesus and salvation. He had their grudging attention. At some point he asked permission to do jumping jacks for exercise. When they finally let us leave after extensive questioning, it was dark outside. Frank got his only ride on our motorcycle to get home.

Katia signed a confession under the threat that Elba would be tortured and raped. Elba was then released. Miguel signed nothing, but was tortured almost daily for a month. One day, for instance, he was shocked with a cattle-prod for hours to provide all the information he had about me. He gave none. They repeated this with a long list of names, mostly pastors and teachers, one per day. Years later, in France, his urologist was preparing to remove what appeared to be a rare tumor on the bladder, until they discovered that it was simply scar tissue from the electric shocks he received during his torture.

Katia spent a year in a military barracks, Miguel eighteen months in the penitentiary. They have lived in France ever since, and Miguel has had a successful career as a Protestant minister. Their children and grandchildren are all French citizens.

Miguel was one of the first theologians to use the term "liberation theology." The Gospel teaches social justice, and through this optic, our Christian obligation is to bring about justice in our time and on earth. This still requires transformation, so we worked on becoming *el hombre nuevo* — the new man. (Clearly our gender awareness was not what it should have been!) It was our obligation to bring this message to the people — *concientización*, the raising of awareness. This theological language was not only used in the religious sphere, it was also part of the secular vocabulary of change.

Just before the CIA-assisted overthrow of President Allende in Chile in 1973, the figurehead president of Uruguay closed parliament using the excuse of the "sedition" of the left. The real

reason was the regime's fear of loss of power to the people. We had been expecting this outcome, but it completely violated the self-image and myths of the country ~~we had been taught in school that Uruguay was the "Switzerland of America."~~ Thus began years of hopelessness. ~~The University was forced to close (and many schools did not reopen for many, many years). We moved to Argentina. As a US draft evader I couldn't renew my US passport and I didn't have a Colombian passport since I didn't do military duty there, but as a Uruguayan resident married to an Argentine I could live in Argentina legally. Our son David was then 8 months old. The same forces were at work in Argentina, and 16 months later the armed forces removed the president~~ our second coup. Mark was born a few months later. Repression in Argentina was ruthless — 20 to 30 thousand people were "disappeared" in the course of the 7 year dictatorship. Patti Erb, the daughter of Mennonite missionaries in Buenos Aires and a student and activist, was a "disappeared person" for several months. She was tortured and finally released due in part to pressure from Senator James Abourezk of South Dakota on the US Embassy in Buenos Aires. (The senator's daughter was my sister's classmate, which may help explain the connection!)

In our small town our search for a spiritual community led us to a friendship with another family that had also left Uruguay. Ricardo and Ana were Catholics who felt alienated from the church because of its support for injustice. We soon fell into the habit of a shared meal and conversation every Saturday evening. That became our church and our community, based on trust and shared experience, protected from the repression outside.

In Argentina I worked and attended the University. Marj taught English and did most of the childcare and housework. After five years I had completed a *licenciatura* in math and so it was Marj's turn for school. We decided to move to the US, now possible for me thanks to Jimmy Carter's amnesty of draft evaders. Marj was accepted by several graduate programs and we chose New Mexico because of proximity to my brother Bob.

We felt a sense of liberation coming to the US, and decided that we wanted to be active on the issues of peace and human rights. That is how we met Dorie Bunting, a Quaker peace activist, one of the founders of the Albuquerque Peace Center, of one the first Amnesty International local groups, of the New Mexico Peace Conversion Project, and a leader of many other initiatives. She has been arrested numerous times for opposing nuclear weapons and the storage of nuclear waste in Carlsbad, NM.

We had known Dorie for about a year, when one day we received an unexpected postcard from her inviting us to dinner. At dinner, she invited us to come live with her. She had a large, incredibly interesting home built by her and her husband who had recently died. We lived with her as an extended family for about five years while both Marj and I continued our graduate studies. For our boys Dorie is a mix of friend, aunt, and grandmother. Through her they were exposed to some of the most interesting people and conversations since our home with her was always at the center of peace and justice activities in New Mexico.

We began attending Friends Meeting with Dorie, and quickly found a community and an accepting spiritual home. The boys found friends that remain so to this day, both young and old. Soon we were asked by the Meeting to lead the 1983 bilingual Quaker Youth Pilgrimage in the Southwest. This out-of-sequence Pilgrimage had Mexican and US young Friends and we visited

sites of spiritual importance in the Southwest, camped in the wilderness of the San Pedro mountains and concluded with a work-camp in Corona, NM. The Pilgrimage deepened our attachment to the Meeting and soon thereafter we requested membership.

The Albuquerque Meeting soon became involved with the Sanctuary Movement. Quakers from Tucson called Dorie. Could they spend the night at her home with a group of refugees? Could we help by driving the refugees to the next stop? Over time the 'next stop' came to mean Santa Fe or Amarillo or Salina. Several Meeting members did the driving; often in our old rebuilt VW van — a part of the underground railroad of the 1980s.

The Sanctuary movement sprouted in many places during the wars in Central America. In the Southwest it began in Tucson where a Quaker, with the help of his Meeting and a Presbyterian minister, began practicing the ancient tradition of using the sacred space of a sanctuary to protect those fleeing from the authorities. Similar things were happening in Chicago, where participants were more overtly opposing US policy in Central America.

In May, 1981, Jim Corbett, a Friend from Tucson, loaned his van to our good friend Jim Dudley, a Friend from Albuquerque, to drive to Mexico to take supplies to a joint AFSC and Mexican Friends Service Committee project. On his way back, Jim, who speaks fluent Spanish, picked up several hitchhikers. One of them, the last one, told him about fleeing the war in El Salvador. A few miles later they were stopped by the INS and the refugee was detained.

Back in Tucson, Jim Dudley told Jim Corbett what had happened. Corbett tracked down the Salvadoran refugee to a jail in Nogales, AZ and then to a detention center in California, just as he was being deported back to El Salvador<sup>5</sup>. That is how Jim Corbett and the Tucson Meeting came to decide to protect refugees.

I'll tell a small personal story of the Sanctuary underground railroad. Manuel ~~this is my best recollection of his name~~ had crossed the border once before, fleeing for his life. He was a school teacher and a *catequista*, that is, a lay Catholic leader in the highlands of Guatemala. His first language is not Spanish, but a Mayan dialect. Catholic sisters in Salina, Kansas, offered him and his family sanctuary at their convent. So he returned to Guatemala and came back across the border with parents, in-laws, wife and children. Thirteen were a lot to fit into the VW van! We left Albuquerque early on a Saturday morning in January, and when we got into Kansas a blizzard was closing all roads. Phone calls from payphones got us the welcome of a Catholic parish in Liberal, Kansas. I left the family there to be picked up by the sisters from Salina, and headed back home to teach my Monday class. The most vivid memory I have of this trip was the question Manuel asked me: "¿cuantos años has estudiado?" (for how many years have you been a student?). I was embarrassed to admit my privilege to him who probably had at most an 8th grade education, while I had been in school, sometimes seriously, sometimes not, since I started first grade!

The Albuquerque Friends Meeting publicly stated that we would offer sanctuary to refugees from Central America after many, many months of deliberation. This was one of my first experiences in Quaker process, and I learned of the power and the pain of such careful decision making. At least one Friend left the Meeting over this issue.

The Meeting provided refuge for an older man who called himself Jesus and a teenager, Juan Carlos, who had joined him in their travels. Jesus told us he was a Coca-Cola labor union leader in Guatemala and told stories of repression that we knew to be true. However, just before a scheduled press conference both of them vanished.

Juan Carlos called me from Los Angeles a few days later, and we flew him back to Albuquerque. Through him we discovered that Jesus had appropriated others' stories. F/friends (including the family of a high school classmate) looked after Juan Carlos for several years until he moved on.

It is now two decades later. We have grown in many ways, spiritually and professionally. Marj battled cancer and is a survivor. We live in Chicago and London. Our sons are men with their own stories to tell. In the course of one generation, the spiritual practices of my nuclear family have spanned evangelical Mennonite, universalist Quaker and Buddhist. Mark and David have found homes in the contemplative and structured life of Zen monastic practice. Mark is a priest, with a leadership and teaching role in his community. David is beginning a year of monastic retreat and study. I am proud, as a parent, that they have made choices that honor life. Both remember being introduced to Buddhist meditation when their First Day School visited a small Buddhist community in the Jemez Mountains of New Mexico. Silent worship among Friends and deep Zen meditation touch the same depths of our spirits. Both traditions search for the "unmediated presence of the absolute" (to quote Mark) which for Friends is the Light and for Buddhists is nothingness. Martin Buber had it right with the image of the I-Thou relation.

Dave shared with me the insight that, deep down, Quakers and Buddhists trust experience and practice more than theory and theology. In both traditions there is recognition of the mystical and unknowable.

What is most valuable to me is that both of our sons are teaching me to pay attention to deeper spiritual issues. They challenge me to look at my life and to ask, "Is it seamless?"

I've been speaking about my family and my history. What have I learned?

I have talked about poverty and injustice in Latin America in the late '60s. The present is even worse. A colleague, Renny Golden, and I took a group of students to El Salvador three years ago. In the village of Jayaque, a town hit by the earthquakes five and a half years ago, Father Oscar took us to talk to people working in the *maquilas*, factories set up by multinational corporations in the duty-free zones paying the lowest possible wage and exploiting workers' vulnerabilities. Their stories remind me of the stories we read of slavery. And yet, they are glad to have a job, because those who don't suffer even more.

Marj's work in the strawberry and cucumber fields with migrant workers in the late '60s was in solidarity and was an effort to organize for just wages and humane conditions. Things haven't changed much for immigrant workers. Many immigrants in our midst have had the courage, this year, to tell us through public demonstrations that they deserve our solidarity. Last summer three friends and I rode motorcycles from Chicago to LA on back roads. We were amazed to see so much hidden poverty in this rich country. Poverty isn't limited to Central America and the US: we know from what we read in the news that great numbers of people in the world do not have

the resources to live a decent life. A recent book<sup>3</sup> tells us that over one billion people, one in six of us, now live in slums.

Our globalized economy is governed by greed. Short-term profits take precedence over human need and damage the environment. The bright side of globalization is that it gives us a connected world. For example, Marj's work in Amnesty International connects people from all over the world in organization and dialogue about human rights. And like AI, many other NGOs are working for change.

Our cars and trucks contribute 50% of the carbon dioxide that is causing global weather change. The five percent of us that live in the US use 30% of the world's energy. Most scientists believe that we have done irreparable damage to our ecosystem. Weapons of mass destruction are hair-trigger targeted at many, many cities. As a mathematician, I am used to thinking asymptotically, that is, to follow patterns and see where they lead. I see that to continue on our current path will lead to more poverty, injustice, suffering and environmental degradation. What we need urgently, again using mathematical terminology, is to find a bifurcation that changes our course.

Violence is a natural response to injustice, so it is only through attending to the causes of violence that we will reduce it. Military structures are in place to sustain the powerful, and war is waged when their power is challenged. Quakers have often had the courage to "speak truth to power" and this is what is needed today. We know war is wrong, just as our spiritual predecessors knew that slavery was wrong.

So, what has come up for me in thinking about what to talk about today? Three themes seem clear.

First, I was born in privilege and good fortune; the physical privilege of always having what I needed (though perhaps not always what I wanted!), and the privilege of having been born into such an interesting life; the privilege of being white, of being male, of being healthy (with the help of modern medicine). I ponder the quote "the more you are given the more is asked of you" and ask myself whether I live up to this responsibility. I suspect that many of us have asked ourselves this question.

A related theme has to do with the question of our role in the world. Do we have a vision today that is comparable to that of Friends who resisted slavery? To think about this I would like to paraphrase two beautiful and common Quaker queries that I cherish and to challenge you with them:

What do I do to take away the occasion of all injustices?

How do I walk softly on this globalized world in solidarity with those who suffer?

Today's news tells of 50 killed in southern Lebanon. The situation in Darfur, as critical as ever, is not in the news.

The final theme is that of hope. My hope is here, with Friends who see a different world built on love. I have hope that we, as Friends, can contribute through our experience of the Spirit and through our practice, to make this world a better place. This may be the only way.

Universalist Quakers understand that each of us has a different experience of the transcendent. Mark told me of the Buddhist image of the finger pointing to the moon. "Don't mistake the finger for the moon," the teacher says, "it only points toward the moon." In the same way, our religious practice may point toward the Truth, but shouldn't be mistaken for the Truth.

The Spirit, the Light, remain a mystery for me. I cannot know the whole Truth. But the idea that we all share in the same Light drives my understanding of my role in the world — my praxis, my action. In our Meetings some are more inwardly focused, others more outwardly. I am more outwardly focused. It is important that both tendencies be in our Meetings and enrich each other.

Finally, not forgetting the theme of this Yearly Meeting, I woke on a recent Sunday morning to a Spiritual on the radio. Maybe you've heard it before; I hadn't. It was at the end of a *Speaking of Faith* interview with the late singer and educator Joe Carter. He sang:

"...When I come to the end of this road  
And I lay down this old heavy load  
Let the work that I've done speak for me ...

Let the life that I've lived speak for me ...  
When I come to the end of this road ...  
Let the life that I've lived speak for me ...

... When I come to the end of this road  
Let the love that I've shared speak for me ...  
Oh, let the prayers that I've prayed speak for me.  
O, yes, let the love that I've shared speak for me."

Let the life that I've lived speak for me.

Blessings!

## References

- (1) Bender, H.S. *Mennonites and their Heritage*, Number I, 4th edition, MCC, 1953.
  - (2) Smith, C.H. *Mennonites and their Heritage*, Number II, 2nd edition, MCC, 1942.
  - (3) Planet of Slums, Mike Davis. Reviewed by Amitabh Pal in *The Progressive*, June 2006.
  - (4) Dennis Byler, Burgos Report: "I tend to see politics from the sidelines, as basically irrelevant to what is really important ... my agenda is to live to the best of my ability as if God is King, which of course God is!"
  - (5) Obituary for James A. Corbett, *New York Times*, August 12, 2001.
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David and his wife Marj Byler (and sons Dave and Mark) became members of the Albuquerque Monthly Meeting in 1984. They met as teenagers in Uruguay (where their fathers were on the faculty of the Mennonite Seminary in Montevideo), married in 1971 and moved to the US in 1979. They led the bilingual Quaker Youth Pilgrimage in the Southwest in 1983 (whose participants were young Friends from Mexico and the US). They have been active in the 57th Street Meeting since 1989. Their sons are Zen Buddhists in California. Marj works for Amnesty International in London and David teaches mathematics at Northeastern Illinois University in Chicago. Their godson Daniel Antonio Freire attends Duneland Meeting (with his parents).