

# AS IF WE ARE PERFECTLY SAFE

## On Fear, Faith and Destiny

Marti Matthews

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### **Introduction of Marti Matthews, by David Finke**

Our Friend Marti Matthews brings a richness of experience into our midst, as any who have spent but a moment with her are well aware. She grew up in Michigan. Like a majority of us here, her life began within another religious tradition. During 1964-66, Marti lived in community as a Novice, studying to be a nun. Then she went to DePaul University, graduating in 1968, and was married in 1969. While a Roman Catholic laywoman, she served as a director of Religious Education in parish churches, and earned a Master of Arts in that field from Mundelein College in 1980. She also was raising her children, Tom Dix and Anne Marie Dix, while with her first husband whom I was privileged to meet as a musician, welcoming people into their home to share singing.

But since 1979, Marti has sojourned and worshipped among Friends, to the benefit of countless numbers of us. Her formal membership dates from 1988, when she joined Evanston Meeting. She now belongs to Northside Meeting. It was during this time that she met Tom Forsythe, with whom she was married in August 1995, and in their shared home many met to hear their poetry. Marti lost her second husband after 2 1/2 years of their living creatively with Tom's paralysis. We heard his memorial yesterday. Reflections on some dimensions of that experience were shared with us in Metropolitan General Meeting this February, when Marti spoke on "The Spiritual Opportunities in Caregiving, in Service, and in Dying."

If I listed all the service that this Friend has rendered among Friends, I'd be taking time from her presentation and our worshipful reflection on it. But we must mention that she edited our magazine *Among Friends* from 1990-94, has served on our Ministry and Advancement, works hard on our Faith and Practice committee, represented us to New Call to Peacemaking and edited their newsletter "Called to Be Peacemakers." Most recently, I have watched in awe as we worked together in IYM's Quaker Volunteer Service and Training Committee, for which she was treasurer of the recent national conference. Marti was a vital part in drafting queries for use at the

conference, and also the Epistle of that gathering, which I urge you to read prayerfully -- the mode in which she always writes.

Marti Matthews' gifts as a writer may be best known since the publication of her widely-acclaimed book, released in 1991 -- *Pain: The Challenge and the Gift*. I urge you read the tributes inscribed on the covers, by Drs. Bernie Siegel and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, indicating her inspired ministry far beyond the circle of Quakers. However, it was the Friends center for study and contemplation, Pendle Hill, which recently has awarded Marti a full-year grant, the Kenneth Carroll Scholarship, to work on her next book. "Desire is the Prayer of God Within Us" is the tentative title of what may emerge from next year's disciplined efforts in Wallingford, PA.

## **As If We Are Perfectly Safe**

Most Beloved friends,

I have only one thing I want to tell you this morning. I know you want to hear more from me - and I *will* tell you more - but there's one thing that arises within me spontaneously: I want to tell you how much I love you.

People have asked if I felt nervous about giving this speech; I really didn't, and I pondered if something's wrong with me, or I'm not being truthful or awake because I didn't seem to feel nervous. I finally realized what the situation is: how could anyone feel nervous talking with such loving people? You are family; I feel surrounded by love and upheld here at Yearly Meeting.

I have seen you all do amazing feats of love toward each other. Whatever we feel our shortcomings are or have been, I've seen you reach across incredible chasms trying to love each other when we disagree and when we're disagreeable - and succeeding. The spirit of this Yearly Meeting has been one of great gentleness toward each other. I know that all you want from me is that I give you the best I can from the experience of my life and you will be content and love me no matter what. And so - No, I'm not nervous, and I tell you all again: I love you very much.

Last night I stood on the dormitory porch absorbing the gigantic prairie night sky all around our beloved fields and woods, this beautiful little corner of the earth which God has given us in Illinois Yearly Meeting. I was still feeling unsure that what I'd planned to say was the most helpful I could offer from all the things I might share. I looked up at the stars and the Universe and asked "What should I say to them?" The answer came immediately: "Tell them they are surrounded by love."

I will share with you now from the riches that Life has given me. My life HAS been rich, though full of the Unexpected and not quite at all what I had thought I wanted.

Garrison Keillor described this condition in his inimitable way by saying "Some luck lies in not getting what you thought you wanted but getting what you have which once you have got it you may be smart enough to see is what you would have wanted had you known." Or to put it more simply: "Experience" is when what you thought would happen, doesn't.

I'm going to start off with a bit from Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland, as I often identify with little Alice in her confusing adventures. Two things grab me in her story: her constantly changing sizes, and her getting used to the unexpected. She finally gives up on trying to define who she is and just goes with the flow of the weird things happening to her; she lets THEM teach her who she is and what Adventureland is all about.

After one foolish mishap drinking from a bottle that wasn't even marked "drink me", Alice grows so big her head is bumping against the ceiling of the house she's in:

"It was much pleasanter at home," thought poor Alice, "when one wasn't always growing larger and smaller, and being ordered about by mice and rabbits. I almost wish I hadn't gone down that rabbit-hole - and yet - it's rather curious, you know, this sort of life! I do wonder what CAN have happened to me! When I used to read fairy tales, I fancied that kind of thing never happened, and now here I am in the middle of one!"

And so I will tell you about a few of my adventures - just a few. But first, I'd like to explain this story with a comment: you know the common definition of an optimist and a pessimist: as they both look at a half cup of water, the optimist sees the cup half full and the pessimist sees the cup half empty. Well, when I look at this cup, it just looks TOO BIG! So many things in my life have always seemed too big for me to handle, and I have felt inadequate and confused much of my life. Learning to live with Mystery has been something I've become accustomed to; I've searched to solve the mysteries, but also learned to wait patiently; time does eventually reveal the resolution of the mysteries that life presents. Out of this humbling position I've received great riches, and I will tell you about the riches after I tell you the tale.

There once was a girl born in the orchard country of western Michigan, in a town of 500 people, the oldest of four daughters. Her loving French-Canadian father was strong-willed with much *joi d'vivre*. Her gentle Swedish mother was strong in her own way but shy. As there were no boys in this family, many of the unfulfilled desires that the father would have projected to a son got shared with his eldest daughter. This was an advantage and a disadvantage. She had encouragement to do things other girls growing in those times might not have had. At the same time, it was confusing because the society around her didn't have this same vision for girls.

The girl's mother was encouraging to all her daughters, but her background made her fearful of doing anything that might risk the disapproval others. She had grown up the daughter of a state senator and occasional preacher; her childhood had been shadowed by fear of how her behavior looked to others, so as not to embarrass her senator/ preacher/ father.

These parents of mine also taught me a love for the beauties of nature, thoughtfulness toward others, and joy in life. I never doubted that I was loved at home and I and my three sisters experienced a rich family life.

There was a third strong influence in this girl's life, also an influence both positive and negative: for five years she spent the summer at a camp "for the training of Christian leaders." This camp gathered girls from all over the U.S. and encouraged them to be more than society thought girls could be, to excel in such things as athletics and leadership. The camp motto was "My own self

at my very best, ALL the time." Maybe some of you who were raised Quaker know how hard it can be to grow up under the highest ideals. Those who can succeed at approaching the ideals gain in self-confidence; those who fall short can feel like miserable failures. [Incidentally, Elizabeth Watson went to this same camp before I was there, and Elizabeth has the same mixed feelings about it.] For a girl raised with no brothers in a small town with no sports at all for girls, the constant athletic competition was an impossible standard; each summer my self-confidence shrank.

There were pluses at this camp, however, that began to form my spiritual growth. There was the awesome experience of evening vespers: every evening for five weeks all 500 campers and leaders would climb a sand dune overlooking Lake Michigan and spend a half hour in worship while watching the sunset over the beautiful Big Lake. This peaceful time of day was respite from the overwhelming challenges here. The sense of the presence of God in this beautiful setting gave me hope and succor. This camp was the first of many life experiences that would seem too big to handle and would force me to look to a larger Source for help. And the Presence did seem to be there over the great waters in the sunset; whatever it was that had created this incredible large beauty surely must be loving and powerful.

Vespers also was the first experience that I had as a Catholic of worshipping in the manner of Protestants and would be the foundation for the large step I would later take after receiving all I could from the Catholic faith (growing too large for this house, as Alice would say). Being one of few Catholics among Protestants all summer, I experienced constant questioning: I would go home hungry to understand the faith I was representing. A life of theological and philosophical questioning and seeking began here at this camp.

Another tiny but most significant seed was planted there at "Miniwanca, camp by the shining waters": for one week in only one summer I sat in the woods in a poetry class taught by a gentle, beautiful Quaker woman; her name was Louise Griffith, who I have heard only lately attended St. Louis Meeting for a few years. Her smiling quiet rosy face was an oasis of peace in an environment of incredible competition, pushing, and stress. Louise "haunted" me in a positive way, years later leading me to the phone book to find "The Religious Society of Friends" when I had hit bottom spiritually.

While this camp was "too big" - an overwhelming experience that stole away much self confidence - it also opened me to feel part of the wider world and to feel responsible to do something with my life beyond the vision that my small town had for girls - to get married and raise a family. Actually, neither of my parents clearly valued the work of mothering; they both wanted their daughters to go to college and do something "interesting." My mother would NOT let us cook or do housework! She was an intelligent woman with her own unfulfilled desires; she would do the housework so her daughters could read and study about the truly interesting things in life. This family value again encouraged me to break out of the molds around me but would also have a down side: sooner or later most girls, including this one, DO become mothers, and it would be further confusing to find myself doing work that *felt* very important but had not been valued by the major influences in my life.

So my father and mother and the summer camp were all pushing me out there saying "it's a big and interesting world, you can do anything you want - go do something big and interesting." At the same time I was getting messages not to stand out, don't ever do anything possibly embarrassing, be normal, date and "catch a guy" as the phrase went. To "catch a guy", it seemed a girl had to pretend to be dumber than the guy, don't assume any leadership, pretend to be less. In high school, my friends were not experiencing the opportunities I was and their values did not encourage interest in the world outside our town. And so my size again never felt like it fit - I felt too small at camp, too large at school.

These pushings to get out there and pullings to hold back were hard to deal with. Then there was the strange admiration for suffering that was typically Catholic at that time: we meditated excessively on the sufferings of Jesus and then listened with admiration to stories of the sufferings of the martyrs and saints. Not complaining seemed to be a sign of spiritual greatness, so seeking to get out of suffering seemed to fall into something like "selfishness." And so I felt I always had to keep a face that looked competent and happy. I hid whatever in life felt too difficult, from others and from myself, because that was "heroic."

All these forces created a most unusual spiritual guide for me for the rest of my life. At the age of sixteen I was washing dishes in the kitchen and was holding myself up by my forearms as I stood at the sink. I finally said to my mother "There must be something wrong. It's just too hard for me to stand on my feet." We went to an orthopedic doctor who was shocked by what he saw. My backbone had almost completely fallen off my pelvis. I had a tremendous curvature in my lower back - where no one had seen it - and I was in great danger of basically falling in half. The doctor did a then-experimental surgery in which he grafted my pelvis to my backbone; this did not straighten the back but kept me "in one piece" and able to continue on through life. This hidden limitation had already been holding me back all these years without my knowing it while I was trying to do athletics at camp, march in bands at school, and other normal activities of young people.

Many years later, I can tell this story with gratefulness. I've come to see that the early years of our lives are the empty cup that will give us each the unique blessings of our destinies. Everyone's childhood gives them unique questions and problems and then we have the rest of our lives to find the answers to our unique questions. This is the normal setup, it seems to me. And Life will, in fact, give us the opportunities to eventually unravel our mysterious experiences, though it may take thirty years or a lifetime.

As many of you know I have a published book called "Pain: The Challenge and the Gift" in which I develop this idea: that every pain, both emotional and physical, has a gift in it for us. The way out of the pain is to change in some way, to be guided by the wound, to open up to a new learning or a new way of being. We each have unique contributions to make and we find our unique importance in creation by working out the destiny given to us, shaped first in the positive and negative experiences of the early years of our lives.

"The river's injury is its shape" said Wendell Barry, a poet.

This hidden curvature in my back has formed the spiritual growth of my life, given me tremendous benefits, but not without cost. It often feels like reins on a horse, telling me I cannot do something my spirit wants to do, telling me to go in a direction I would not have freely chosen. For example, inside me is a dancer, a great energy and enthusiasm perhaps given from the *joi d'vivre* of my father, as well as my cheerful outgoing maternal grandfather. But my crooked back limits that expression and directs me towards contemplation as my focus and contribution in life. But the joy of this dancer inside me is the great energy that keeps me going when doctors say they don't understand how it is that I can still walk.

The hiddenness of this handicap is both a blessing and a hardship. Others don't visually see my problem and so treat me as normal - a plus - but I and the world expect me to do normal things and that's tricky. I myself don't know exactly what I can and can't do - I CAN do most anything, but some activities take way too much out of me and I hear a sudden unexpected "No" from my body. But the spiritual gift in this is that it keeps me walking in union with The Inward Presence. Many of you know that I often refer to God as "The Fox"; this seems related to this dance I live between my own will and unpredictable forces outside and inside that shape me, as if Someone had a great longing for my life to keep me on a path that doesn't come naturally to me. I feel as if I'm a very large ship trying to keep up with an unpredictable fox who zigs and zags in its own plan.

Some doors of opportunities have opened to me wide and others have closed suddenly. When I was a junior in high school an opportunity to go to Sweden as an exchange student was dropped in my lap by our school board; later in college I spent a summer in Mexico doing social work. These doors that opened wide to me have marked my destiny as much as the doors that closed. They pushed me into an even bigger world view and sense of gratitude for being given so much, as well as a sense of responsibility to give much back to the world.

But again, the wider my vision of the world got the smaller I felt, like Alice amazed at her impossible size. My vision became to spend my life saving the whole world from its suffering and problems. My sense of what I was responsible for was way out of proportion, and the search to find the boundaries of my responsibility has been another major search of my life. No one had yet taught me how to define my TRUE self or how to be sensitive and respectful of myself, and I can't say that anyone outside me ever DID teach me about this. But Life has, as well as my crooked back; they have had to pull me back over and over and show me what I truly can and cannot do.

While my vision for my life's work was ever expanding, as I was leaving my teens the pressures increased to do the normal things women were supposed to do. Here I'll quote Alice again, my archetype.

"The Caterpillar and Alice looked at each other for some time in silence: at last the Caterpillar took the hooka out of its mouth, and addressed her in a languid, sleepy voice.

"Who are YOU?" said the Caterpillar.

Alice replied, rather shyly, "I - I hardly know, Sir, just at present - at least I know who I WAS when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

"What do you mean by that?" said the Caterpillar, sternly. "Explain yourself!"

"I can't explain MYSELF, I'm afraid, Sir," said Alice, "Because I'm not myself, you see."

"I don't see," said the Caterpillar.

"I'm afraid I can't put it more clearly," Alice replied, very politely, "for I can't understand it myself, to begin with; and being so many different sizes in a day is very confusing."

Well, at this point of my life I was pretty confused. I had not been taught an iota about *truthfulness*. What I'd learned so far was about wide potentials and ideals and responsibilities set against experiences of failure and fear of standing out from cultural ideas. How could I DO all this great life and Christian leadership stuff in this cultural setting? I saw one door open to me - I went into the convent to become a nun. It turned out to be the turning point of my whole life. Many of you have heard this story, but I will repeat it for the great lesson I learned.

Convent life didn't fit me in many ways. My back curvature made long kneeling really hard. I didn't like being separated from the world: I couldn't for the life of me see why one had to live so separate in order to be holy. I even had a classic Maria Von Trapp experience: in a moment of forgetful happiness after apple-picking I was whistling in the hallway and my novice mistress stopped me to tell me that "nuns don't whistle"!

But I was caught in a trap here of bad discerning processes. There was the understanding which we Quakers would agree with that one doesn't choose such a big commitment as being a nun - God calls you to it. The fact that you've come here to try it indicates you probably have been called to this. But then comes the place where their understanding of discernment failed: If God isn't calling you to be nun, they would say, God will give an external sign - you might get sick, or your parents might die and you have to leave to care for your siblings. I kept watching for signs of sickness, but none came. I was never happy, but that also didn't matter, as suffering was an expected show of your dedication to God.

The discernment of elders could be another exterior sign, so one day I asked if I could go and talk with a nun in another house who was known to be wise and holy. My superior said I could, so I went to see holy little Sister Ancilla. She asked me, "Do you like to pray?" I said "Yes, I definitely did." She asked me "Do you want to spend your life serving God and helping other people?" I said "Yes, that was exactly what I wanted to do with my life." "Then," she said, "it seems like you're called to be a nun." In that Catholic system of beliefs, lay people were called by God to populate the earth and carry on commerce; if you liked to pray and wanted to serve God you would become a nun or priest or monk. So I went back and tried again but still wasn't happy. Eventually I met another nun that I thought was wise and holy and asked if I could go talk to her about my vocation. "Sure" was the answer. This nun asked me the same kinds of questions: "Did I like to pray?" "Yes," I said. "Did I want to give my life to serving God and helping other people?" "Yes," I answered. "Then it seems you're called to be a nun," she said. I'm not sure how many more wise and holy people I went to after that, but periodically I would ask again until I finally met a wise holy person who asked me only one question: "Are you happy?" he asked. "No," I answered. "Then it seems clear to me you don't have a calling to be a nun," said this TRULY wise priest.

I was out of there in less than twenty-four hours. At first I thought I was just obeying the priest, but as my first days at home passed I could feel my body and my spirit lightening. It gradually

dawned on me that I had known all the time inside that this was not right for me. God was speaking inside me; God was speaking INSIDE me! This has changed my life forever. It was well worth two years of suffering to discover my Inner Guide.

And along with that great gift was the realization that happiness is a sign of doing the right thing! I still have to work to get over my habits of long-suffering and to feel free to pursue the things that make me happy; I still sometimes make mistakes of discernment by doing things I think I "should" do, or sticking with projects when The Spirit has left and they no longer give me joy. Not only my Catholic upbringing but the Protestant work ethic and cultural ideas of the hardworking serious responsible adult pressure me to do more than I can or things I don't feel truthfully called to do.

Over the years since my conversion to inward obedience my challenge has become to listen less and less to the world outside me and try to faithfully obey the true guidance that comes to me from The Source of My Life. The cornerstone of this has emerged as the challenge to be TRUTHFUL. And here I find myself again at the image of Alice trying to find her correct height as well as an answer for the caterpillar about who she really is. I think of this process like a sculptor chopping away at a block of marble, getting rid of all that is not the real statue buried somewhere within. I see the goal of this as what I call "self-possession": finding and embracing all that is truly me, letting go of what belongs to others.

Truthfulness is freeing, but I find that it requires tremendous flexibility to allow my self-image to change over and over. It seems to me that to reach our full potential, we must choose with courage to be *unfamiliar to ourselves*. I have found that "I" am bigger than my ego identity! I don't really know how to define "I" but "I" can control the use of my ego's reactions, of my rational mind, and my intuitions; there are many parts of myself that I can choose to keep in my service and not become their slave. Perhaps "I" am simply consciousness/eternal spirit...

There are many negative things said about the ego in spiritual advice, but to me the ego is simply an organizing organ of the spirit with a positive function. The ego takes all our life learnings and tries to hold them together in a coherent whole as we respond to the moment-by-moment challenges; the ego gives us continuity with our past learnings. The danger in the ego is rigidity: if we allow ourselves to be defined by our past learnings we cannot be led to newness in ourselves. The ego functions best when it's fluid and changes as experience changes.

The ego also seems to have a protective responsibility - to look out for our welfare - but this too has dangers. Truth is the only safe place to stand.

Nakedness has become a very positive image for me. My goal feels to become as naked as I can, to myself and to others. In proportion as my childhood taught me to hide my true feelings behind my back where neither I nor others could see them, I feel my back grow healthier and stronger the more I free it from this hiding. Jesus said it in a nutshell: "The truth shall make you free." And later:



"When you have become willing to hide nothing, you will not only be willing to enter into communion but will also understand peace and joy." (From the Course in Miracles which, it is claimed, is also the voice of Jesus.)

Truth makes us free; it also make us strong. Self-possession means embracing our true power and size. Again, I'll tell you where Alice began to get this: her neck had grown incredibly long and a pigeon accuses her of being a serpent.

"But I'm NOT a serpent, I tell you!" said Alice. "I'm a - I'm a -"

"Well, WHAT are you?" said the Pigeon. "I can see you're trying to invent something!"

"I - I'm a little girl," said Alice, rather doubtfully, as she remembered the number of changes she had gone through that day.'

Eventually, after Alice gets used to not defining herself as a "little girl" and handles the many difficult situations she encounters, she finally encounters the formidable Queen of Hearts, who intimidates everyone around her with orders to chop off their heads at her whim.

"Hold your tongue!" said the Queen, turning purple.

"I won't!" said Alice.

"Off with her head!" the Queen shouted at the top of her voice. Nobody moved.

"Who cares for YOU?" said Alice (she had grown to her full size by this time). "You're nothing but a pack of cards!"

I would like to suggest that one of the natural goals of our lives is to increase in power - power as Gandhi defined it - satyagraha, or Soul Force. Power is simply creative ability, and absolute truthfulness will require that we reach our power. Humility is not pretending we are small and unimportant, but rather it is simply being faithful to honesty - not to pretend to be whatever we are not. When we find our gifts (which we all have and must uncover) then truthfulness will require that we lead and exert an influence on the world around us as we share our gifts.

There are times when we must stand tall and alone and be a beacon for others. Like Alice, Life will push us at times to stand up and be our true size. It's scary to stand tall and alone, but if the alternative is to get our heads chopped off we may be forced to find our power! What a blessing!

The greatest challenge we have in regards to power is not to have control over others but first to take possession of ourselves. I'm trying to do this by growing in truthfulness and nakedness and self-responsibility. Once we have accepted responsibility over ourselves, then we can accept the responsibility to share with others from what we've been given.

We are each born with potential to contribute to the ongoing creation of the world in some unique way. This is what I call our Destiny. It has certainly been my experience that Our Inner Guidance and outward circumstances will lead and push us to keep faithful to our unique potential.

How do we get the courage to do this - to stand alone in our uniqueness? Courage is not an entity that one can "have"; courage is simply an option, like right or left. Every time we make a choice we can choose to be faithful and true to Life or to hide and betray.

There's an image in an Indiana Jones movie where the hero is cornered at the edge of a cliff. He senses that there might be a bridge from the cliff, but it's dark. His options are to be captured or step out onto this bridge that he thinks is there. He takes a step, and with each step the next step is visible in the dark. Of course, he's shaking in his boots, which is also part of the definition of courage. (Excuse me, I'm wrong - Indiana Jones doesn't shake in his boots. But I know that REAL people do!)

Faith is nothing more than an interpretation that frees us to choose courageously. It's a point of view, much as one artist views and paints a landscape in one way and another artist sees the same landscape differently. We often see as much evidence that we are NOT upheld by Life as that we ARE. The practice of Gratitude keeps our sight on the positive evidence, and so increases our confidence to follow the Guidance that is truly there. The seemingly negative path is built by walking alone.

I recently saw a delightful Japanese movie called "Shall We Dance?" - the story of a responsible, weary Japanese businessman who is led against his rational mind to take up ballroom dancing. He's very awkward, of course, and his story involves many other people. One is a lovely young instructor who eventually tells how she danced in high competition and experienced a disaster: she and her partner bumped into someone and fell flat on the floor in front of the judges. She's never been able to deal with this crushing event. Among other confusing aspects of it, her partner - in gentlemanly fashion - should have fallen under her to protect her, but he didn't.

As she tries to teach this awkward businessman how to lead in dancing she also has to explain how the partner follows, and she has to try over and over to follow him correctly so he can learn to lead. It suddenly dawns on her what that great moment of failure on the competition floor was all about. She says, "*I was really dancing alone!*" She and her partner had been moving together on the floor for months in practice, but she had never totally abandoned herself to his leading. "I never totally trusted my partner," she says, which is also why he couldn't protect her when they fell.

I guess I saw myself in this analogy: that when I make decisions out of fear, I'm still holding back and dancing alone, trying to be safe by trying to control things myself. I'm trying more and more to relax and TOTALLY TRUST whatever is happening and where Life is leading me.

Part of interpreting life through the eyes of faith requires willingness to stand at times in Mystery, to not jump to conclusions but wait in Unknowing until the purpose of an experience reveals itself. I've had to do this in these last years since Tom's stroke and death, but I have confidence from past experience that even this great mystery will open into something life-giving if I wait without judgment. There is a story that saw me through this last adventure:

An old man and his son lived in an abandoned house on the side of a hill. Their only possession of value was a horse.

One day the horse ran away. The neighbors came by to offer sympathy. "How sad; what bad luck," they said. "How do you know it's bad luck?" asked the old man.

The next day the horse returned, bringing with it several wild horses. The man and his son shut them all inside the gate. The neighbors hurried over. "Wow! What good luck!" they exclaimed. "How do you know it's good luck?" asked the man.

The following day the son tried to ride one of the wild horses, fell off, and broke his leg. The neighbors came around and sympathized again: "What bad luck," they bemoaned. "And how do you know it's bad luck?" asked the man.

The day after that the army came through forcing the local young men into service to fight a faraway enemy. Many of them would never return. But the son couldn't go because he had a broken leg...

Waiting without judgment allows us to continue acting effectively, not paralyzed by fear and depression.

Here the rational mind must not rule but serve us. The rational mind cannot see all that the intuitions can. I was led to learn about the safety in intuitions through funny repeated experiences when leaving for trips. As I'd walk out the door I'd have a thought for something like "bring an umbrella". As the sky was clear, my rational mind would talk me out of it and then, sure enough, later I'd need the umbrella. This became such a pattern that I decided to experiment: in these small moments I practiced shutting off my rational objections and followed the irrational leadings that came to me when I left the house. I've learned so much from this! I've greatly increased in confidence that from somewhere strange inside me, there is foreknowledge for even small practical situations. The Fox knows so much more than I, and Divine Guidance can lead us safely in small events as well as in the grandiose choices of life.

There is only one slavery in life - it is life lived in fear. Again, we must become conscious of other people's garbage here. Our country was built on a lot of fears, like excessive control of others over us, and of poverty. We must come to conscious awareness of fears that belong to others, because they slant our vision when we're observing our own true experience. Fear and faith are both interpretations, but fear denies us so much. Faith is not blind optimism, it sees all that happens, but simply chooses to base decisions on the positive evidence because that opens to greater life.

I do believe that we are not puppets and God hears our evaluation of things. But the safest way to walk through life is to choose with courage to practice on the bridge of faith until we can learn to stand regularly in Holy Trust. The more we choose to take steps in faith, the more we discover that there IS solid ground to stand on - The Source of our Lives upholds us with every breath we take and will lead us down the safest path - if we allow ourselves to be led.

Alice began to feel unafraid of the oddness in her life: "So many out-of-the-way things had happened lately, that Alice had begun to think that very few things indeed were really impossible." She stopped resisting the irrational and uncontrollable and began to flow. She eventually found herself in the same confusing little hall she'd started in, by the little glass table. "Now, I'll manage better this time," she said to herself, and began by taking the little golden key, and unlocking the door that led into the garden. Then she set to work nibbling at the mushroom

(which she'd kept in her pocket) till she was about a foot high [You see, she was now willing to do the illogical but effective things required by the situation]: then she walked down the little passage: and THEN - she found herself at last in the beautiful garden, among the bright flower-beds and the cool fountains.

This reminds me so much of a favorite quote of George Fox: "And though ye have not a foot of ground to stand upon, yet ye have the power of God to skip and leap in if you are standing in that which is your life that is everlasting."

Here Fox refers to the image Jesus often uses: "The kingdom of heaven is within you." In other words, we don't have to wait for life-after-death to reach a state of peace, unity, joy. We can experience this wonderful place at all times: it's a point of view; it's the interpretation of faith that reveals our true security; it's walking (or running!) in the state of oneness with our loving Source!

I have named this talk "As if we are perfectly safe." This title came to me from a dream, which is another way I'm often guided. I understand it as this stance of faith: while being aware of all the factors that we're experiencing - walking in Unsureness - we choose to act on the positive interpretation; we give the negative little power and watch with gratitude the positive evidence. By choosing courage, acting "as if" we were safe, this bridge of faith leads us to discover what has been there all along - The Fox leading us, loving us, towards our unique fulfillment and contribution - our Destiny.

Some might say that Destiny is also an interpretation: the backwards view when things have turned out well and someone seems to have made lemonade out of the lemon that was their life. I say that when the sufferings of life turn into good fruit it's because that potential was there from the beginning, just as the opposite potential was also there - to stay stuck in our wounds and mysteries and never bring them to anything positive.

To call the positive outcome a Destiny means to believe that Life itself has desires for us; Life is not indifferent to whether we make lemonade or not. It's my observation that forces both positive and negative, inside and outside us, will continue all our lives to push us in particular directions. It drains a lot of energy to dig our heels in and fight the direction Life is trying to carry us. Why not - I say to myself - just give up fighting and say "Okay! I'll be what I was born to be; I'll stop holding back; I'll be my true size, whatever that is, I'll use all my power, whatever *that* is. I'll be all that's in me; you don't need to push and torture me anymore!"

Life is not a problem to be solved or a punishment but an opportunity; an opportunity with a preferred direction, towards growth and expansion and creative contribution. I have found that the forces of Life lean in a positive direction even in Mystery, if we will be led. And we can have less and less suffering in our experience the more we are willing to trust and be led.

I want to end by reminding you of the solid ground we stand on in this beautiful and holy world, what the stars and galaxies over the prairie told me:

You are surrounded by love.

And then - in the simple and beautiful words of William Butler Yeats:

"Everything in life blesses us: everything is a blessing."