

Perhaps the biggest change in my life since I have retired is my relationship with time. In my working years, time had always seemed in short supply. I was frequently racing against time; I tried not to waste time; I wanted to make the most of my time. Now that I am no longer tied to a salaried job with constant deadlines, I find that I have the time to savor time: to relish the moment, take delight in the hour, hold dear the cycles of the year. I have time to dream, to remember, to think about how I am living my life and who I am, while recognizing how small I am in the grand plan of the universe.

There is a certain irony in all of this, because I have the time to ponder the important questions at the end of my life, rather than in the middle years when I was living in the thick of things. But then, I see that as a child my perspective on time was not unlike what I'm feeling now. Time was slower then, too. I could enjoy the long summer afternoons spent with my friends. I took time to marvel at the raindrops dancing on West Maple Avenue, the street in front of the house where I grew up in Pennsylvania. I loved the long conversations my family had over leisurely evening meals. In those early days I had plenty of time to explore the world around me: the woods, the fields, my own back yard.

When I stop to think about it, I realize that as a young girl I was mulling over the same questions I continue to ask myself today. I keep circling back to essentials, checking to see if I have the same answers to my fundamental questions, or if I have somehow changed over the years. I have to admit that from the start I was not drawn to the existential question of why I am here on this planet. I do not ask the meaning of life or become excited by theological debate. I have always accepted my life as a brilliant gift and do not worry about why or how I came to be. I am kin to the lilies of the field, sharing a beginning, middle, and end to life. I am simply thankful that I am.

The two central questions that I do ask myself are: How do I want to live my life? And, who am I? I realized early that I had a choice in how I wanted to live, and that I did not want to live by default. The "how" or "the journey" is more important to me than the "what" or the "destination." I could have pursued any number of different paths, but I was clear that whatever I did, I wanted to do well.

I was fortunate to be raised by Quaker parents in a Quaker community. I was filled with ideals at an early age. I lived among tolerant and enlightened elders who taught me the virtues of simplicity, harmony, cooperation, and loving kindness. The sense of my local meeting was not unlike what I feel here in this caring and inclusive community of St. David's. My early focus was more outward than inward, on learning to live peacefully with my family and my neighbors, on helping those in need. I remember traveling to the Philadelphia warehouse of the American Friends Service Committee where we packed wool sweaters and blankets and shoes to send to those suffering in war-torn Europe. I remember learning to sew and to "be prepared" and to "do my duty to God and my country" as a Girl Scout. I helped my mother make "disaster soup" for the Red Cross. Yet, I hasten to say that Quakers are as prone to problems as anyone else. We had our disagreements, our frustrations, our shortcomings, but the important thing is that we worked to develop the skills to solve our problems: we learned patience, clear thinking, non-violence, and when necessary, passive resistance.

What I have brought with me from my Quaker childhood is the answer to my first question: how do I want to live my life? Quakers have no creed, but they preach what they practice. And they practice what Christ preached on a mountaintop 2,000 years ago. When I came to the point where I consciously asked myself how I wanted to live my life as an adult, I decided that the Quaker values I had learned in my first eighteen years were what I would strive to practice throughout my life. I have not changed my mind on this.

The challenge has been in learning to show compassion for people who do not practice these values, for people who have had radically different upbringings than mine. It takes intense listening to understand why some people resort quickly to violence and abuse. I am tested when I must respond to the impatience or anger in others, as well as within myself. Since I am fortunate to have been born into a peace-loving community, I have not felt the need to rebel or to cast off the burden of a difficult childhood, as many people I have met have had to do. I recognize that I myself have not been tested by personal hardship or hunger or injustice or poor health; I have never been homeless or imprisoned or forced to live under tyranny or among warring populations. As the Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh teaches, it is important that we recognize the suffering in others, that we show compassion in our interactions with people in all walks of life.

Thich Nhat Hanh is one of the heroes I have revered over the years. The very first who captured my attention was Gandhi, that frail man who taught the modern world the art of passive resistance against an oppressor. I can still see Gandhi, dressed in white muslin, leading his people on the march to the sea to reclaim the salt themselves, thus breaking free from the stiff British salt tax. My second hero was Albert Schweitzer, whose philosophy is summed up with the phrase "Reverence for Life." He practiced what he preached in his hospital in Equatorial Africa when he said, "Until he extends his circle of compassion to include all living things, man himself will not find peace." As a girl, I admired William Penn and his determination to build a "greene Country Towne" of Brotherly Love just a few miles from where I lived. As I grew older I was emboldened by the courage of Martin Luther King in standing up to severe abuses with non-violent protest, and I watched in amazement how Nelson Mandela focused all his strength on freeing his people from the tyranny of a privileged minority. And a woman? My earliest female hero was Marion Longshore, a Quaker spinster who lived down the street of my childhood and who made many of the abstract Quaker values real for me.

Now to return to the question: Who am I? I was very young when I was taught in First Day School to "love thy neighbor as thyself." That was the first time I remember confronting the notion of self. Even in the silent meditation of my early Quaker meetings, I was thinking more about others than about myself. What could I do for other people, how should I interact with them? In time, I began to realize that my self must be as important as the self of others, if I was told to love myself as much as my neighbor.

It must have been during high school when I first heard of the inscription over the ancient Temple of Apollo in Delphi, Greece. The two words that captured my attention, translated into English, were: Know Thyself. How simple, yet profound! I was so attracted to those two words that I carried them with me wherever I went. Whether I was sunbathing on a rock in the Poconos, or walking the

sands along the Atlantic beaches of New Jersey, or joining Quaker weekend workcamps in the slums of Philadelphia, I would ponder the command to discover myself, to know who I was. In my college years I studied in Europe, and it was important for me to make the pilgrimage to the remains of that temple in Delphi. One day, I stood before that ancient font of wisdom cradled in the mountains of the Peloponnese under the bluest of skies, and I contemplated the eternal mystery: Know Thyself.

I think I am, for the most part, still that adventurous, inquisitive self who started life back in Pennsylvania. Though I have known loss and sorrow as anyone my age knows, I still love the challenge of the new day. I think I know myself now in a more mature way than when I contemplated self as an adolescent teenager. As I've grown older, I have come to adopt another inscription on that Delphic temple: nothing in excess. Moderation is the key for me. Moderation instilled with passion and compassion. Balance. I strive to live the Apollonian life—that Delphic temple again—rather than the Dionysian.

I imagine my essential self is unchanged. I still try to respect that divine spark that inhabits all people and all life, as George Fox and Thomas Berry have taught us. I tend toward cooperation rather than competition. I don't have the killer instinct to win and never made the varsity hockey team. I am inclusive rather than exclusive. I love and respect diversity. I am most comfortable with a group decision made by consensus rather than a win/lose vote. I do not condone cruelty to others in the name of religion. It pains me that the dark side of religious doctrine has so often been used as an intolerant tool to oppress others. I am quick to discard the use of harmful tactics in pursuit of some perceived good. I admire the physician's motto: Above all, do no harm. I take as my personal icon the tree of life.

In my various travels I have worshiped in churches, meetinghouses, cathedrals, synagogues, and mosques of the three major monotheistic religions—Judaism, Christianity, Islam—as well as in temples of polytheistic religions—Hinduism and the religion of the ancient Greeks. I have prayed in Buddhist stupas in Nepal, with a Quechua shaman on a Peruvian mountaintop, in the remains of a Jain monastery in the desert of India, under live oak trees at a Wicca wedding, under pine trees at a Menominee ceremony. In all these places I have felt the presence of the sacred, and I rejoice that people of different religions have much in common.

I remain forever thankful for the tolerant childhood that cradled my self. As so many before me, I feel the tug of those early days still influencing my later days. I'm pleased to have the time now to reflect on these things, to enjoy the present, and to work toward making a good future for my grandchildren and all the children of the world. There is a lot to do out there. Praises be!