

Pendle Hill Spring Term 2023 Epistle

To dear Friends everywhere,

The Spring Term Sibling Cohort of 2023 trickled onto the Pendle Hill campus around the first of March. We arrived in varying states of trepidation and exuberance from our co-housing community in the Pacific Northwest, from snowy Ottawa and bustling New York City, as part of our travels in the ministry from Nairobi, and fresh out of Quaker Voluntary Service in Massachusetts.

We arrived as elders and also somehow much younger than anyone really anticipated; some of us arrived as members of Quaker meetings and some of us not; we arrived grieving losses, discerning “next steps,” painting, print-making, singing, playing the guitar, taking photographs, and writing memoirs, poetry, and short stories; we arrived as parents, grandparents, parents-to-be, and caretakers of parents and grandparents; as students applying to return to school; as tired healthcare workers, peace activists, courageous healers, pastors empowering women and children all over the world; we arrived with a divinely-inspired desire to reconnect with Mama Beech, ourselves, and each other. Each of us co-conspired with Spirit to lay aside our responsibilities, to leave our families and homes in order to be here together in our impassioned uncertainty. We arrived with curiosity towards our unique relationships with God in order to dive deeply exploring our spiritual gifts, our messiness, our leadings—in other words, precisely as the Divine intended.

What developed while we were here was a siblinghood woven together by our collective faith and practice, prophetic witness, and nurtured creativity. The magic that wove these three strands together, that turned five strangers into siblings over ten weeks of intense study, deep worship, and joyfully relentless community work, was a commitment to Spiritual Playfulness. Our days began with Meeting for Worship where we held one another and all of you in the Light, served on tech ministry and on facing bench, offered our vocal and sung ministry, and practiced radical hospitality with newcomers and returners to our beloved community. We deepened our faith by taking turns leading an epilogue each evening, learning from the Pendle Hill podcast and three First Monday lecturers, and exploring Exodus during Thursday Bible study lunches with Benigno Sanchez-Eppler.

For three weeks with our teacher Marcelle Martin we learned and practiced walking in step with Spirit during her course called Discerning Our Calls. We formed Faithfulness Groups, held worship sharing sessions and a clearness committee, discussed our dreams—the silly, the serious, the confusing— and the role of mysticism in both early and modern Quakerism.

To complement our learning from Marcelle’s course, our faith and practice was strengthened by the community that developed through our conversations and work in the garden and kitchen in the mornings, and in the woodshop every Tuesday afternoon with Tom Janek and Hans Franke. While pruning peach trees, chopping vegetables, and refurbishing chairs, we learned such spiritual lessons as discipline, patience, letting go of urgency, how to be our authentic selves in community, and how to balance activity with rest. We discussed God’s pronouns, shared the stories that shaped us, and some of us got radical haircuts.

Our faith and practice was deepened further still when our siblinghood of five grew to eleven, encompassing new honorary parents and siblings in the form of Pendle Hill Scholars, Friends in Residence, and their partners. We are grateful for their fireside songs and gentle eldering, soothing knitting and vulnerable sharing, rides in their cars to our field trips, their passion for convincement stories, and their immersive skits and spiritual accompaniment—as well as physical accompaniment during our many walks around this beautiful campus.

One place where our joint Spiritual Playfulness could get a consistent tune-up was in the art studio with our teacher Jesse White every Saturday. How did we nurture our creativity? Through our intuition, messily, and with a paintbrush in hand; in a haven of our own designs; by painting our loved ones in the Light; by creating self-portraits of how Spirit sees us; by trusting ourselves to co-create with the Creator. The Pendle Hill art studio was the location where the five siblings first planted our five unique and fabulous seeds of our leadings. We tended to our leadings with our hands and hearts.

Over the past ten weeks we strengthened our identities as prophetic witnesses for social change. During the latter half of our time together we explored conflict (Guess what? It's inevitable!) with our teacher Dwight Dunston in a sanctuary that honored each of us, our stories, our fire, our ancestors. We learned from nonviolence practitioners from yesterday and today and their prophetic heartbrokenness. We didn't just read the six pillars of Kingian nonviolence, we sat with each of them, we embodied and even challenged them. We heart-listened. We witnessed the impact of hate and the power of imagining evil-doers as their child selves needing loving care. We learned to attack the forces of evil, and not those doing the evil. Some of us learned that we might need to keep learning that last one.

We shared the unique opportunity of helping Pendle Hill to host Quaker Institute where these learnings were amplified and enhanced by our F/friends from near and far. Now the five siblings are preparing to venture out to our own corners as Agape's witnesses for an equitable world. The arc of the universe is long, but it bends towards justice; we vow to push and pull that arc with all our love and might.

As a conclusion to this epistle, each of us would like to share what we will be taking with us (in the order in which we appear in our picture from left to right).

Galen Schram: I am leaving the spring term with three Learnings that are forever ingrained into my DNA: the prioritization of my spiritual health, a sturdy discernment practice, and a loving, grace-infused relationship with integrity.

Campo Larrick: I am carrying the blessing of being held in the Light and holding others in the Light through our spectrum of grief and joy.

Caroline Wildflower: I am returning to have fun re-connecting and deepening with my beloved community, and to continue living into sacred creativity and prophetic witness.

Lilia Fick: As I leave this place and this dearly beloved community, I am carrying with me a greater sense of clarity about what God is asking of me at this time, and a strengthened courage to be exactly who I am and who I am becoming.

Judith Nandikove: The gift I am carrying with me is helping others to discern their leading through sharing knowledge and faithfulness committees.

Bind us together, Lord.

Bind us together with cords that cannot be broken.

Bind us together, Lord.

Bind us together with love.

Bye! We love you!

In global f/Friendship,

The Spring Term 2023 Residential Students

