

Pastoral Care *Newsletter*

*For Member Care Committees,
Ministry and Counsel, Overseers,
and others who provide pastoral care
in unprogrammed Friends' meetings.*

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Families have experienced Quaker-directed camping in various forms and in far-flung places over many generations. Their personal stories—finding acceptance, learning to respect and care for one another, forging lifelong friendships, savoring the joy of being oneself, and finding inner spiritual growth—all testify that this aspect of Quakerism can be life-changing in profound ways. In this issue of Pastoral Care Newsletter, we look at Quaker-directed camping located within the regions of the Baltimore, Philadelphia and New England Yearly Meetings (BYM, PYM, and NEYM). More specific information about the camps is available on their websites, noted on Page 6.

—Carol J. Suplee, editor PCN

Baltimore Yearly Meeting:

Camp Programs Form BYM's Most Dynamic Outreach

by Tasha Walsh

Baltimore Yearly Meeting has a large youth population and for many within BYM, the camping program has been instrumental in supporting children as they become Quaker adults, and as adults, strengthening their experience as Quakers. As a parent, I see the program as providing our children with experiences in living Quaker testimonies that have strengthened our family as well.

When our kids were young, they attended First Day School and enjoyed the stories, sharing and activities. As they grew, we experienced something common to many families: kids saying that Meeting for Worship was boring, arguing about “what’s the point?” and sometimes saying they felt different from friends at school.

We labored to help them understand the idea of listening to that voice within. We taught them mindfulness exercises, hoping they would experience the peace that worship brings and at the very least be quiet for 20 minutes. We struggled in helping our

children understand how to be Quaker.

It wasn't until our oldest son went to BYM's Shiloh Quaker Camp that we found the missing piece. He spent two weeks in the Blue Ridge Mountains of Virginia and returned a different kid, a Quaker kid.

In the decade since, all three of our children went through five summers at Camp Shiloh, then two summers at Teen Adventure. The two oldest now work as counselors and the third hopes to at some point. The BYM camping program has taught them Quakerism, as George Fox said, “experimentally.” It became the centerpiece of my children's spiritual development, a cornerstone of our family and a contributor to the life of our monthly meeting.

Camps for young people have been a part of Baltimore Yearly meeting since 1922. In the 1960s, Barry Morley became the camp director and coined the term “Fire at the Center” when he described what happened as campers gathered around a campfire: “People sitting in a circle around a flame, form a powerful living metaphor for an individual

looking inward toward the Light. People can hardly resist sitting around fire. ... In fact, for the young people, it will become a form of Meeting for Worship.” (*Fire at the Center: A New Look at Religious Education*, See resources page 6.)

Over the years, the program attracted a growing number of youth. Today it includes camps for youth ages 9-14 at locations in Maryland and Virginia, as well as Teen Adventure and Teen Adventure Bike experiences for 15- and 16-year-olds. (Camp Cacocin in Maryland is featured in a 1996 Pendle Hill pamphlet, see Resources, p. 6) All properties and programs are totally owned by BYM and receive support through the yearly meeting’s annual budget. Other support comes from BYM staff time on several levels. Jane Megginson, BYM Camping Program Secretary, says, “Camping is the largest program conducted by BYM. Many people believe that the camps are our greatest and most successful outreach in terms of bringing new families into Quakerism.”

The Quaker testimonies aren’t just taught at camp, they are lived on a young person’s level. Camp is a simple place. There are no computers or electronic entertainment. The activities center on creative expression, proximal development challenges, building community, and engaging in service. The directors and staff focus their energy on creating a safe, caring, expressive community where people of all ages can let go of the everyday “stuff” and find “that of God” within themselves and those around them.

The counselor’s model and the campers experience the pure fun of simple play. They challenge themselves as they experience connection with nature on off-site backpacking and canoeing trips. They learn to live lightly on the earth. They grow in confidence while climbing up a cliff, feeling the support of the belay as well as their fellow campers cheering them on while holding them in the Light. They sing and swim and, like George Fox, learn that they can go through the darkness and come to the light.

I was asked to join the Camping Program Committee not long after my oldest started attending camp, and it was at one of my first committee meetings that I heard camping described as “Outdoor Religious Education.” At camp, Meeting for Worship happens daily around a fire pit. The use of queries is introduced and often used to give the campers a focused way to reach inward. Campers, counselors and volunteers of all ages share in a sense of worship deepened by birds singing, wind blowing, and sunlight shining through the trees. It gives them time to reflect and integrate their experiences and interactions and to become more familiar with that inner Voice.

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I began volunteering as a cook when my youngest started attending and experienced the “magic” of camp for myself. I was honored to witness the interactions of the staff, counselors and campers and felt pulled into the community that was created.

Equality is demonstrated as counselors and campers from all age groups work together to get chores done. Discernment and deep listening is used to deal with difficult issues or situations. Conflict is handled peacefully with respect for all involved.

Most meetings within the BYM community actively encourage their young friends to attend camp. Many provide financial assistance. Going to camp with a friend from meeting can increase a child’s connection to the monthly meeting. Campers and volunteers often return from camp eager to share songs and stories. Some religious education programs use this enthusiasm to kindle the First Day School experience.

Every summer when I dropped my kids off and picked them up several weeks later, I once again realized the service camp provides. They each had matured in their own way and returned home a bit deeper, a little more aware of who they are and how to express themselves.

Our family became infused with these experiences, as we were more able to apply Quaker principles to our own family interactions and

choices. The camping program was critical to my own development as a Quaker also. I experienced how important and effective it was to create a space, light the fire and give permission to be oneself.

To me being an active Quaker involves creating space for experiencing that of God within and acknowledging that in others as an experience of oneness. Where there is light in the center, there is warmth, nourishment and opportunities for heartfelt sharing and quiet connectedness.

This is what monthly meeting does for us throughout the year, and camp deepens the experience for our children in a joyful way.

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Tasha Walsh directs BYM's Teen Adventure-Bike program. Her professional background includes running counseling programs for teenagers, coaching young leaders, and facilitating outdoor adventure groups. Tasha is a Licensed Clinical Social Worker and Professional Coach who runs a national leadership development program and has a virtual company (www.corehappinesscoach.com).

Philadelphia Yearly Meeting:

Dark Waters and Onas Experiences Transform Lives

by Carol J. Suplee

Camp Dark Waters, Medford, NJ

Camp Dark Waters nestles on a branch of the cedar-tinted Rancocas Creek near Southern New Jersey's storied Pinelands, a unique eco-system.

Founded in 1928 by devout Quaker, Sam Matlack, the camp's mission was to serve the First Day School children of PYM. While that elemental mission has continued without interruption, the facilities are improved and expanded, the population is more diverse and outreach has broadened.

Director Travis Simmons tells a favorite story that exemplifies for him what the camp has meant to generations of CDW campers. A father, who had just dropped off his son, stopped Travis to say, "Thank you."

"I was losing my son," the father told him. "And no wonder, I was just yelling and scolding at home. He has learned at camp how everyone should treat each other. It changed him and it changed me. Our relationship has blossomed. I have my son back. Thank you." The story is not unusual. Parents often report that their children come home more calm and more kind and that impacts the family as a whole.

The SPICES that every First Day School child learns—Simplicity, Peace, Integrity, Community, Equality, and Stewardship—are posted in every cabin and used by campers and staff alike to measure

their interactions with others. Children, who might have had to keep their guard up at school or in the neighborhood, realize they need no facades. They need not fear bullying and can truly be themselves. With a high percentage of returnees and those who become counselors and staff, the culture is self-perpetuating.

"They simply grow up with these values," says Travis. "They get it."

Working at camp means far more than a summer job at a fast-food restaurant. "This is the hardest job you'll ever love," the director tells new staff. Before camp opens, the diverse staff undergoes a week of orientation and team building. Sometime during the week, as Tim Eager, assistant director, points out, "wise Quakers" come to visit.

Their individual messages may vary but the essence is simple: "Dark Waters does not exist in order to make Quakers out of you, the staff, or any of the campers. We simply believe that in this place, we together can model a peaceful, just, and compassionate world."

The camp's diversity among both staff and campers is vigorously intentional. The effort is largely supported by a long-established Campership Trust Fund, as well as by donations. Partnerships with meetings and public schools also help to increase the diversity. Campers particularly enjoy the international mix on staff. It's another way to model a peaceful world.

In 2000, the camp was purchased from private

owners and was changed to an independent non-profit corporation with a Quaker-directed board. While an official relationship with Philadelphia Yearly Meeting has not been in effect for many years, the camp has always enjoyed strong bonds with individual Quaker meetings in the region.

Moorestown, Westfield, and Medford Meetings provide help that may take many forms—board leadership, financial donations, camperships and volunteer time. Moorestown meeting has long provided camperships through its Friends Enrichment Project, (featured in the September 2011 issue of PCN).

Westfield Meeting sponsors several campers with full expenses every summer.

When a disastrous flood in 2004 forced CDW to be evacuated, Medford Meeting opened its doors and welcomed everyone—more than 100—to move in. They “camped” in the meetinghouse for three days until all the kids could be picked up. Medford has also given financial support for many years.

Because many CDW alumni live right across the creek at Medford Leas, a Quaker-led retirement community, interaction among campers and residents enriches both communities. The camp is also a popular place for meetings to hold retreats, FDS events and social gatherings.

Jane Weston, a member of Medford Meeting who attended CDW as a child, says her most profound Dark Waters memories were forged in outdoor Meetings for Worship, a treasured tradition since the founding.

“I am grateful that in these challenging times, Dark Waters can still offer children a sense of spiritual awareness,” Jane says. “By supporting Quaker camping programs, meetings open a way both to come together and to reach out.”

Travis confirms that camping is a revelation to many children. For some, the natural world is a mystery. Some have never experienced deep woodland darkness. Others are startled by stars or wildlife noises. For many, the stillness becomes a new source of peace and inner strength.

Camp Onas Ottsville, PA

Camp Onas, with a 90-year history, is owned by The Friends Camp Association of Pennsylvania, Inc., and is governed by a Board of Directors consisting of two members from each of the 13 member meetings of Bucks Quarter. Apart from tuition, the camp is supported by meetings in the quarter as well as by corporate partners, non-profit funds and donations from families and alumni.

Camp Onas Director Sue Gould (who is also the Executive Director of the Association) believes that Quakers are not necessarily unique in how they transmit deeply held values through camping programs. In general most quality camps hold values similar to the

“SPICES” posted in the Onas dining hall.

But there is no doubt in Sue’s mind that the Quaker experience is a special one. As generations often have attested, time at camp can be transformative and life changing. Children thrive, socially, emotionally and spiritually. They carry new personal insights back to their family life and peer environments.

Year after year, “graduating” campers say Onas was the only place they were fully accepted and could be themselves. Both campers and staffers gain lifelong friends; others find a spiritual center they had not reached before.

When a senior staff member’s young daughter died suddenly, Sue and camp friends stepped up to provide help and guidance for a funeral Meeting for Worship and other arrangements. The staff member’s camp experience had given the staffer the only spiritual center she knew, and it was where she found solace.

Quaker values and Quaker process are communicated at Onas partly through formal staff meetings but mostly by experience and example. Returning staff members communicate the community’s values to their newer peers in many ways so by the time campers arrive, new staffers are

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well grounded in the camp's values and mission.

Issues addressed in staff meeting, in twice weekly Meetings For Worship and in daily life are common to all: bullying, relationships in the tents, the building of community, conflict resolution and the Quaker testimonies of peace and equality. Children develop skills that they can put into practice in their world of school, family and relationships.

About 40 kids a summer benefit from a diversity effort, ranging from children who receive full tuition aid and expenses to those with varying grants, according to Sue. Inner-city kids are reached through partnerships with Urban Friends Schools and meeting members, alumni, parents or staff may recommend others.

Thus, children from different backgrounds meet and learn to accept each other in a nurturing atmosphere, where conflicts can be resolved and understanding can grow.

Caring for others is an integral part of a camp's life lessons. An environmental/stewardship project that featured a frugal lunch of fruit and water, with no bottles or paper allowed, also gave an opportunity for service. Campers decided to share the event's \$1,000 savings, donating \$500 to their own camp and another \$500 for Camp Dark Waters after it had suffered a flood.

Scott Hoskins, a member of Newtown Friends Meeting and the Onas board, says a care relationship

with Newtown Friends School has helped produce a robust FDS program at NFM with about 85 kids and counting. As a natural progression, many meeting kids attend Camp Onas.

Scott, a long-time member of the George School arts faculty, explained that families might see the overnight camping experience at a Quaker summer camp as a good way to reinforce Friends' values for their kids, even if a private Friends' education isn't affordable.

For kids unfamiliar with Quaker practice, the experience of silent worship at Camp Onas may feel quite alien, but the high percentage of kids coming from Friends meetings inevitably makes that activity easier to try, and easier to benefit from.

"And when the meeting's Onas campers come back," Scott says. "they bring the awareness that Friends' practices are not unique to one meeting. Rather they are broadly shared among monthly meetings in the quarter, the yearly meeting, and other yearly meetings.

"Those families who wait until their kids are 'old enough' to sit through an hour of silent worship may weaken or even lose the opportunity to raise those kids with a clearly articulated sense of Friends' values. Camp Onas and other Friends' camp experiences help to explicitly teach and strengthen those values at an earlier stage of childhood."

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New England Yearly Meeting:

Quaker Camping through Lens of Another's Faith

**by Bucky Rogers
(with Kate Fussner)**

Friends Camp Waterville, ME

Unitarian religious educator Sophia Lyon Fahs described children as flowers: children need only soil, water and sunlight to grow into beautiful and healthy adults. As a prospective Unitarian Universalist

minister working at Friends Camp since 2006, I have regarded much of what goes on there through this lens of liberal religious education and history. As a small and simple community, Friends Camp fosters an atmosphere that truly nurtures the moral and creative development of young people.

In the mid 20th Century, the ideal of self-actualization was still very much confined to self-improvement. Fast forward to early 21st century Friends Camp, and you see a different picture:

campers are encouraged to explore who they are in a variety of ways. While counselor-organized workshops teach campers to question societal norms and traditional views, introspection is nurtured during nightly vespers. Thus, another layer is added to encourage genuinely free and supported growth.

Within that broader landscape, children are able to grow into who they are with greater freedom than ever before. At Friends Camp, campers have more liberty to define themselves, and to not be defined by a narrow set of parental or social expectations. Campers are celebrated for their innate capacity to find joy in trying new things, to forge life-long friendships and to live away from home.

For many, summer camp is an inherently formative period of their lives. With a central focus on acceptance, an abundance of creativity and a deep commitment to Quaker testimonies, the Friends Camp effect is long-lasting and greatly felt.

This experience of new-found freedom manifests itself in different ways. Acceptance and freedom may lead campers to build identities very different from their peers and from the messages they receive in the dominant culture.

Others are relieved to feel normal, and to know that they are worthy of peer friendship. For many campers, it may be the first genuine experience of feeling as if everyone can fit in.

This encouragement for acceptance and growth of each child is an important ideal for me, both as a Unitarian Universalist minister and a Friends Camp counselor. The growth inspired by a community committed to these values is novel and not immediately self-evident to its participants.

Thus, the daily periods of reflection and contemplation are the most important part of Friends Camp pastoral care and its translation into life-long character-building. We pause before each meal to join hands in a moment of silence. We have periods of Quaker worship and vespers each morning and evening.

We hold a final campfire the night before campers leave; this is crucial to the process of self-

Resources

Featured camp programs:

www.bymcamps.org
www.campdarkwaters.org
www.camponas.org
www.friendscamp.org

Morley, Barry, *Fire at the Center: A New Look at Religious Education*, BYM

Morley, Barry, *Beyond Consensus: Salvaging Sense of the Meeting*, Pendle Hill Pamphlet 1996

http://www.cqcoralhistory.org/Thesis_DavidBAnderson.pdf

Brandwein, Michael, *Super Staff SuperVision: A How-To Handbook of Powerful Techniques to Lead Camp Staff to Be Their Best*, 2002

_____, *Training Terrific Staff*, Vols. 1 & 2
Louv, Richard, *Last Child in the Woods*, Algonquin 2008

Ford, Dr. Phyllis, *What is a Camp Counselor?*, http://www.prm.nau.edu/prm280/what_is_a_counselor.htm

Note: Nationwide, Yearly Meeting web sites may offer camping specifics for their regions.

discovery and reflection. Each camper has the chance to throw a stick into the fire and reflect openly about their time at Friends Camp.

Even as the last hours of their time at camp tick down, the headlong rush to squeeze the most out of new and exciting friendships is put on pause. This reflection is central to the process of internalizing and embodying the valuable lessons gained in an accepting and loving camp community.

Ultimately, the importance of pausing for contemplation is the greatest lesson learned: no matter the community, no matter the space, each of us can blossom when the spirits of all individuals in the community are intentionally nourished.

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