



# Germantown Monthly Meeting

of the Religious Society of Friends

47 West Coulter Street Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19144 (215) 951 2235

Newsletter  Winter 2017 & 2018

“There’s two disasters in life; when you’re born and when you die.”,  
Jim Hart while sharing a walk home from Meeting.



**In this issue:**

Pg 2-3 **Morocco** by Jessica Hobbs-Pifer

Pgs 4-5 **Advent Again** by B.J. Elder

Pgs 6-7 **Birth of a Nation** by Ed Nakawatase

Pgs 8-11, cont’d 14-15 **My Friend, Jim** by Candice Price

Pg 13-14 **Intro to Cary Anne Kane’s Newsletters from Boston!** by Cary Anne Kane

**This issue is** a reissue of some of the articles in the Winter Issue from 2017 and a new addition from our very own Qvs’er Cary Kane. She has started a Newsletter of her own to share her QVS adventure in Boston. If you want to subscribe to her mailing list, I’ll put a link to 2 whole issues and her contact so you can write to her!

The intention of this Newsletter and the Communications Committee is to bring us together in peace and friendship; to exemplify the love we have for each other; to know each other well, and to appreciate the beauty we all have to share. Thank you to everyone that contributed to this issue. We hope that you will enjoy it. ~ Editor—Candice Price, and the Communications Committee. Please send feedback to [Candice Price](#)



## Young Friends

### Morocco Trip

By Jessica Hobbs-Pifer

This past summer, I had the opportunity to study Arabic in Morocco for 6 weeks through the National Security Language Initiative for Youth program, or NSLI-Y. While there, I took Arabic lessons at a local school, lived with a host family, and was free to explore the city of Rabat, Morocco. Between lessons and spending time with friends, I tried to write about my experiences in Morocco. I wrote this piece after the last day of Ramadan, the holiest month of the year according to Islam.

July 7, 2016

As we finished up dinner tonight I lingered in the family room a little longer than usual, prompting my host parents to turn on EuroNews (the only TV channel in English) before they left for the Mosque. I don't like to admit it, but since I've been here in Morocco I have definitely used my limited internet access as an excuse to avoid the news. But when my host family wants to turn on the TV in English for me I still haven't learned how to tell them "No thanks, what's going on in the world right now makes me sad," and tonight was no different.

Yesterday was Eid al-Fitr, the celebration marking the end of Ramadan, the holiest month in the Islamic calendar. I have only been in Morocco long enough to witness a week and a half of Ramadan and, unfortunately, I never ended up fasting with my host family as I originally intended. Despite not fully participating in this holiday, I still felt it around me and I have learned more about Islam in this week and a half than I have in the past 16 years of my life. My host family is rather religious, and one of my host brothers (who knows a little English) has been more than happy to share with me about the beauty of Islam at any chance he had.

Although obviously after only a week and a half here in Morocco, I am nowhere near being an expert on any aspect of their culture or religion, (hopefully by the end of my summer here I will be a little more versed than I am now. But, as I sit here in front of the TV tonight watching newscasters explain that this was one of, if not the, bloodiest Ramadan in history, I truly feel as though some of the experiences I've had over the past week and a half need to be shared.

On my first day in Morocco, we hadn't even gotten home before my host brother (the one who knows English) began pointing out mosques to me. "There are two between my home and the school I attend." Once we were home, he asked if I believe in God, what religion I practice, and if I practiced it regularly. Following some subtle suggestions from a past student as to how I should respond to those questions, I told him, "Yes, I am Christian, and yes." This got an "Alhamdulillah" (God bless) and a quick explanation of their family's concern for all of the students that they've hosted who haven't believed in God or practiced a monotheistic religion. My initial reaction was a frustration that came from my personal belief wherein everyone has a right to their own personal beliefs.



## Young Friends

I eventually realized that my host family's intention was not to discourage others from practicing different beliefs, but rather a desire for everyone to be at peace, both in this world and in whatever may follow it. As my host family understands, it is through monotheistic religion that one reaches this peace.

The next time my host-brother and I spoke about Islam was before heading out to iftar (the meal at sundown that breaks the daily fast during Ramadan) at his house. As we waited for everyone else to finish getting ready to leave, he sat me down and began telling me about Islam and its relation to other religions. He told me that Islam is the third and final religion given by God, following Judaism and Christianity. He explained that to be a true and faithful Muslim you must recognize both Judaism and Christianity as true religions, as well as Islam, and believe in their original religious texts, as well as the Qur'an. Lastly, he explained to me that regardless of what happens in the world, regardless of the bad people who call themselves Muslim, and regardless of even the good and faithful Muslims, Islam is so much bigger than all of them. Islam is about peace; Islam is about community; Islam is so much more than what the news is willing to share with us.

The next weekend, we took a class trip to Chefchaouen, an absolutely stunning city in northern Morocco. While on this trip, we hiked up the mountain facing the city to an old abandoned Mosque. After arriving at the top, and as we sat there watching over the city, the call to prayer began. From the top of the mountain we could hear the calls from every Mosque in Chefchaouen; the sound overlapped like beautiful wind chimes and filled the silence in the most peaceful and soothing way. After listening to the call to prayer, I went on a walk around the mosque to where our tour guide was sitting, talking to other people who had hiked up to the Mosque as well. While sitting there, he explained his disappointment in humanity and the lack of respect he believed people have anymore. He wished for us going out into the rest of the world that we could find a strong community like that in Chefchaouen, where people understand respect. It was refreshing to hear how much pride this man had in his community and how much he wished that sense of community on the rest of the world.

And finally, I just wanted to touch on the fact that the humanity, respect, community, pride, and love in this country doesn't come only in those large and obvious examples, but it also comes in so many small moments too. I saw it in the old woman who while walking stopped and waited for me as I obviously struggled with my keys to get the door of my house open after dark. I saw it in the shopkeepers who were not only interested in selling things to me and my friends, but also in helping us with our Arabic as we desperately tried words from any other language we knew to get the point across. I know Morocco isn't everywhere, and I know I'm still just beginning to learn about it, but even now I already see so much of the beauty in this country.



## Creative Writing

### Advent Again

By B.J. Elder

Advent again. What was, in my childhood, a period of delicious anticipation has now become a spasm of frenetic activity. I think of Scrooge wistfully as I make out gift lists and write grocery lists, revisit the supermarket, bake pizelles and cookies, cakes and pies and casseroles, clean house, make beds, scrub bathrooms, wrap gifts, mail packages and put out our collection of family decorations. My mother, now in her nineties, and our daughters, one with a husband and one with an “almost fiancé” will be coming for several days. I am excited at the prospect of the family being together. But my preparations are accompanied by a pervading sense of guilt, because one is supposed to feel joyful and loving doing these happy tasks. I don’t. I feel frazzled.

Guilt. It is guilt that has gotten me into this. It is guilt that makes me say “yes” during Advent. “Yes, I will play for the carol sing. “Yes, I’ll bring a dish for twelve for the potluck supper.”, “Yes, I’ll get a gift of no more than fifteen dollars for the Pollyanna at work.”, and “Yes. I’ll bring a loaf of my home-made Christmas bread, too.” “Yes, we will lead the neighborhood carol singers and serve cookies and hot cider beforehand.” “Yes, I’ll bring food for the homeless.” “Yes, I’ll help sign and mail cards to all the children in our Meeting.” The doorbell rings. It is the very large lady whom I see only at Christmas-time. For the past twenty years she has appointed herself the neighborhood dispenser of good will and here she is again. “Yes,” I say to her. “I will donate ten dollars again for a party for poor children.” Privately, I wonder for the twenty-first time where my ten dollars will go. But I say “Yes.” I suspect I’m too gullible. I feel guilty about my guilt.

It all started when the Virgin Mary said “Yes” to the angel Gabriel. This thought occurred to me last January as I dragged out the desiccated Christmas tree. What a wimp she was. Just like me meekly cleaning up after everyone. I shoved the nozzle of the vacuum cleaner viciously over windrows of pine needles and German Shepherd hair in the front hall as I thought over the story of the Annunciation and reviewed the interaction between Mary and Gabrielle. What if it didn’t happen that way? I switched off the vacuum cleaner and sat down on the couch in the living room, my feet on the coffee table. Suddenly I felt tired. The Annunciation, as described in the Gospel of Luke, took place almost two thousand years in the past. What would it be like if it happened today? What if I were Mary?

Mary is busy vacuuming the front hall when a very large lady comes to the door, panting slightly from climbing up the porch steps, rings the bell. She smiles broadly at Mary through the window in the door. With a mental sigh, Mary switches off the vacuum cleaner and opens the door.

“Yes?” she raises her eyebrows politely. The lady says “Hello! I’m Gabrielle. Are you Mary the Virgin?”

“Yes.”, replies Mary. This time her sigh is real.

The lady slips her toe in the door. “Well, congratulations!” she exclaims. “Have I got news for you!. The Lord thinks a lot of you. In fact, he thinks you’re about the most outstanding young woman around, what with you being a virgin and all.”



## Creative Writing

“Uh oh.” Thinks Mary, looking at the lady’s toe. “She must want something big.”

“What do you mean?” she ask the lady apprehensively.

“Don’t worry!” the lady replies. “If you accept our offer, the Lord is going to do you a great big favor.”

She points her finger at Mary.

“While still a virgin, mind you, you will get pregnant and have a baby boy who will grow up to be King of the Universe.” She steps back proudly. “Now what do you say to that?”

Mary looks at her. “I say you’re out of your mind.”, she replies, and shuts the door

I opened my eyes and sat up. I was surprised at how good I felt. Fatigue, frustration and self-pity has vanished like dog hair up the nozzle of the vacuum cleaner. I got up and finished vacuuming the front hall. If the Virgin Mary chooses to say, “You’re out of your mind,” I thought, so can I. I started on the living room. In fact, I decided, sometimes I will just say “No.”. As I dusted the piano I realized that I do enjoy playing the piano for the carol sing, so I would do that again if I’m asked. I emptied the load of sheets from the dryer and found myself thinking that it had been a good Christmas. I wished the family could have stayed longer.

I thought over my story again. I especially liked the part when Mary shut the door on Gabrielle. But after some consideration, I decided that the story didn’t end there. After thinking a moment, Mary opens the door again and speaks to the Lady before she starts down the porch steps. “I’m sorry,” Mary says. I’ve been feeling frazzled. Would you like to come in and tell me more about your proposition?”

So Mary and Gabrielle sit down over a cup of coffee and in the end, Mary decides to accept the offer. “I’ll probably end up feeling even more frazzled,” she thinks, “but it will be worth it.”

That’s exactly what I now think about Advent. But, like Mary, I reserve the right to say “no”. And, to change my mind.

*(Submitted Winter of 2016)*



## Movie Review

### The Birth of a Nation

By Ed Nakawatase

Organized quickly in late October at the suggestion of Anthony Stover, members of the Racial and Social Justice Committee (RSJC) and other members and attenders of Germantown Meeting communally viewed the controversial film, **The Birth of a Nation** at the Main Street Theater in Manayunk. A few days later some of our group met at Penny Colgan-Davis's house to discuss the film further. The ensuing discussion was lively and engaging. What follows is a personal response to the film, not a summary of the conversations. But my response is certainly informed by the exchanges that we had.

The film was produced and directed by, and stars Nate Parker, an African American actor who devoted years to bring this project to fruition. The film is a retelling of Nat Turner's life from his youth on the Turner plantation up to the slave revolt that he led in southern Virginia in 1831. While some of the brutal results of the revolt have been recorded, there is much that is unknown about Nat Turner. The historical record is sketchy, leaving much to the imagination. As with many feature films based on historical themes, **The Birth of a Nation** takes liberties with absolute historical truth. It is after all, not a documentary. Meetings and dialogue are imagined; some events have probably been invented and characters may be composites or altogether fictional. But the filmmaker's intention is clearly to pursue a larger truth: What is the meaning of Nat Turner's rebellion, especially for us now?

We see Nat Turner initially as a precocious and predestined young slave who learns to read using the only book accessible to him, the Bible. Armed with charisma and his knowledge of the Bible, Turner becomes a preacher who is soon hired out by his master to preach docility to other slaves on neighboring plantations. As portrayed in the film, Turner's compliance as a slave sharply erodes as he takes stock of his condition and those of his fellow slaves, and shatters completely as his wife and the wife of a compatriot on the plantation are raped. He rebels personally and is whipped accordingly. But his rebellion becomes political with freedom now becoming the goal for himself and his fellow slaves. Armed with the local implements available and inspired by his vision of a just and righteous God, Turner organizes an armed revolt. Within a two day period Turner's rebellion results in the killing of over 50 whites, primarily plantation owners and their families. Retribution was swift, merciless and overwhelming as indicative of a system based on violence and terror. Over 60 slaves, including women and children, were quickly put to death. Turner remained at large a little longer but was executed by the state of Virginia before the year was out.

Nat Turner's Rebellion was defeated but its impact was immediate. By shattering myths of docile and contented slaves, Turner's Rebellion frightened slave oligarchs to their very core. Sharp limitations were placed on the education of slaves and freed Blacks, as well as restrictions on the right of assembly and the dissemination of anti-slavery materials, with other harsh measures by Southern leaders to quell possible slave rebellion, and restrict the overt challenges to slavery in the South. The possibility of violent slave revolts, however remote their



prospects, remained the nightmare of many slaveholders up to the very end of slavery itself. By the same token for many, Nat Turner is now a hero, a righteous prophet, and a martyr to Black liberation.

**The Birth of a Nation** is among the most recent of a number of media treatments of the slave experience. **Twelve Years a Slave**, a film based on the true story of Solomon Northup, won the Academy Award for best film two years ago. A fantasy film, **Django Unchained**, about a slave's vengeance has been a recent popular feature. A remake of the highly successful television series from the 1970s, **Roots**, was produced for cable television earlier this year as was **Underground**, a series set in ante-bellum Georgia chronicling the lives of runaway slaves. The film, **13<sup>th</sup>**, now available on Netflix, explores the relationship of current phenomena like mass incarceration to slavery itself. We are clearly in the midst of fuller explorations of the American slave experience. They now include, in Parker's **The Birth of a Nation**, explicit rebellion.

**The Birth of a Nation** has been fraught, inevitably, with controversy. The original **Birth of a Nation**, produced in 1915 by David W. Griffith, was a landmark film, both in its advancement of the storytelling power of film, and its vicious racism. Griffith's film popularized the full range of racist stereotypes and gross historical untruths. Griffith's film glorifies the Ku Klux Klan and the movie's popularity aided the revival and growth of the Klan after its initial release. In using the title of the 1915 film with the theme of Nat Turner's rebellion, Nate Parker has clearly sought to deconstruct totally the original film's mythic power and its long term impact.

But, contentiousness has also accompanied the current rendition of **The Birth of a Nation**. While a college undergraduate, Nate Parker had been accused of sexual assault. While Parker was cleared of the charges, the ensuing publicity has clearly had a negative impact on the film's box office. After initial enthusiasm for the film before its national release this year, there have been sharp critiques of the film from various quarters, including African American feminists.

Whatever its flaws, **The Birth of a Nation** should be seen and discussed. . We know some about the inequities that slavery embedded in our social and political structures and in our everyday lives. We do not know enough about the long term rage and trauma that slavery has induced. We must grapple with the profound emotional truth of that experience. In bringing that truth to the surface, this version of **The Birth of a Nation** performs a great service.



## Interview with a Friend

### My Friend, Jim

By Candice Price

Recently, I got the chance to spend some time with my friend, Jim Hart, and I asked if I could record it to “interview” him. He’s one of my absolute favorite people in Meeting and one of the most misunderstood, I’m afraid.

When I asked him if I could do this, I asked him what would be a good day or time and he told me any day between 6am and 2am and giggled in the way only Jim can. When I showed up unexpectedly in the late morning one day, he was surprised and said, “Well, I guess we had an appointment, but I must have forgotten. Please come in.”, and that was how we started our very interesting, as always, comfortable chat.

When Jim and I get together, the conversation takes on a life of its own. There never is a linear conversation with Jim. Amongst what appears to be a steady stream of consciousness, Jim says the most poignant and prophetic things. But, you have to be willing to listen.

It’s more of a meandering scenic journey through hills and valleys of politics, philosophy, and silliness. We laugh and laugh. Jim is so self-deprecating in the most lovable way. He is so willing to laugh at himself, even about the things that most people would be mortified about. He loves to bring up the time in Meeting when he wanted to show his community the way a community should be – open and metaphorically naked for each other. Well, that didn’t go over the way he had hoped. We laugh about that as if it were a great joke.

I told him that I was going to record our interview and showed him my handy, dandy new gadget: a thumb-drive that records. He was thrilled by it, and I told him soon he’ll forget that it’s here and he’ll tell me all of his secrets and he said, with cheek,

**Jim:** Oh no, I will vet my words very carefully...nothing like me. \*giggles\*, (but then with an introspective tone), It’s interesting; you can’t be unlike yourself. If you try to be somebody entirely different from yourself, it kind of highlights exactly who you are. It sets it in relief.

Spontaneously, he asks me if I’d like to see the rest of the house. I realize I haven’t been in this house in over 30 years, since he and his family moved in. They actually replaced my childhood best friend’s family when they moved away.

He shows me his collection of interesting things on his chest of drawers; small objects from nature and his son’s childhood art. I notice a stack of notebooks at the end of the bed that stands 2 or 3’ tall and I ask,

**CP:** “How often do you write in your journal?”

**Jim:** “A lot.”

We pass through a room, briefly, off the hall; a sitting room, now, that used to be my best friend’s bedroom; bringing back memories of sleepovers and makeup trials gone very wrong.

**Jim:** (turns to the TV), I came in last night and watched about a half an hour of football. I like football. But I don’t watch a whole game.





## Interview with a Friend

**CP:** I would not have guessed that you like football.

**Jim:** I do. I get into it. But, if you asked me how the game is played...I mean, I know how it's played: some guys line up on one side like this and some other guys on the other side. Somebody jumps back...is there to catch it, and somebody knocks him over and the ball goes tumbling out of the field. I got the general sense of things.

\* giggle \*

Then, he shows me into the adjoining room; the backroom of the house overlooking the backyard garden that he loves, and in years past, meticulously groomed for hours every day. This, room, as well as his garden, seems to be his sanctuary of his own treasures.

Gardening is actually the way that Jim and I became good friends and not just friendly neighbors. I have had a deep respect for his garden and he for mine, even though we have completely different styles. He has an obsession for weeding, and even on the street, he weeds. So, when I told him several years ago, that I was so overwhelmed, because I was being judged in a week or so for the City Gardens Contest, but I had at least 5 other gardens to tend as a professional, and life, in general, keeping me occupied, he just showed up in my garden one day, on his hands and knees, weeding my lawn and beds. It cemented an already deep fondness between us.

The little office is cramped, but very organized with a desk, a computer, and a large cabinet with thin drawers like an architect would use to keep drawings flat. He shows me many of his drawings and sketch books he seemed to have forgotten existed. He shows me a pen and ink drawing; thought provoking, dark, and somewhat chaotic.

**Jim:** That's my soul. Scary, huh? (Actually it was quite beautiful.)

**Jim:** I had a lot of work in my life. I was a welder at one point; I didn't just do childcare all my life. (I knew, from past conversations, that he used to work with pre-school children, which doesn't surprise me, as gentle and kind as I know him to be) I worked in industry... (you can surely tell by his hands how much hard labor he has done in his life. Gnarled and calloused, larger in proportion to the rest of his body.)...This could be in Arizona when I lived there. I abandoned Philadelphia and decided to move west and be a cowboy.

**CP:** How old were you then?

**Jim:** 30 or something like that.

Then I notice another stack of notebooks, only this stack is about 5 feet tall!

**Jim:** I journalize endlessly.

**Jim:** *"Lord, tell me about the world. The world I know, and a great portion of it scares me, and that which doesn't scare me, is my normal life, which I live in a kind of dullness and routine, doing the same things over and over." ...* \*with a slow melancholy introspective tone and demeanor\*, that's true. The army has a saying that speaks of army life in similar terms: *"It is boredom interrupted by rounds of absolute terror."* Yeah, boredom



## Interview with a Friend

by rounds of terror. What is a soldier's life? Cleaning up the barracks and rifles and machine guns, and other high class weapons they have these days, and then all of a sudden, they're on a plane and shipped to some country and it's just devastation; there's no food, being in the desert or jungle and people are without arms; kids are begging for food you can't give 'em. Ya know, there's a rule. But they do, the soldiers do, anyway.

**Jim:** My plants. (with a glance at the potted plants a quick change of subject.)

**CP:** I know you love your plants...

**Jim:** This is a blessing of God (pointing to a beautiful potted plant in the same window that looks over the garden.)

**Jim:** So I love quotations, you know. (another quick change of subject, as he notices something else in the room.) *"The fundamental fact of human existence is neither the individual, as such, nor the aggregate, as such."* This is from the *Way of Response* by Martin Buber. I'm a fan of Martin Buber. *"Genuine Religiosity is DO-ING. It wants to sculpt the unconditioned"*. That is to say, what exists everywhere, pop out and jump at you, call you in some fashion. The "unconditioned" - what happens in your body for that matter. *"The unconditioned out of the matter of the world"* - matter of the world. Ya know? What's around: all this jumps out at you. *"The countenance of God reposes, invisible."* That's true, *"in an earthen block" the countenance of God reposes invisible in the earthen BLOCK "it must be wrought - carved - out of it. To engage in this work means to be religious - nothing else."* In other words, you have to take what is; that appears and however, whatever presents itself and work with it. Martin Buber in his thinking... while I can't draw quotes, except for these old papers in my wallet. I'll have things in the wallet. Old quotes and things like that - it deepens the mind, accept the past, the whole bit (giggles with deprecation).

He walks every day. Always has. He's told me about his days when he was part of a speed walking group. Now, he's slow and methodical, bent and a bit rickety in his gait, but just as willful to keep going. He jokes about that, too, a lot, bending over with exaggeration, wiggling his cane like he's an ancient relic and says, in a shaky raspy voice, "I'm such an old man!" and then laughs with me. The truth is, in a lot of ways, he's in better shape than I am 30 years younger.

**Jim:** I have 4 titanium rods in my back. The operations failed earlier this year. I had one of them; it failed, and then I had another. They put 4 titanium rods to keep me able to walk around. But I'm worried about those rods, because I'm beginning to feel my back, and that's not a good thing. I think I've broken another rod or something.

**Jim:** Not good. But life is that way. It's one disaster after another, really. The successes come along. You acquire stuff and you lose stuff, and you do drawings, or whatever it is you do. You have 10 children or you have none... Things go on.

**CP:** When did you start drawing? When did that become an interest?



## Interview with a Friend

**Jim:** Oh Geez. It went back. I guess... I went to art school, but took many courses, and drawing amongst them, and sort of took to it and the teacher praised me...

**CP:** \*giggling\* that always helps.

**Jim:** One of my teachers was in a woodworking shop, or no, a ceramics shop. Marcus Aurelius Renzetti! Renzetti was a character. He had one eye. An ample man and he was insightful. He praised. I did a sculpture. You take a piece of concrete, liquid concrete, and put objects in it and draw them out or something like that, and you leave the images there, the shapes, what have you. It was about yea big and when it was finished he takes it in front of the class and he holds it up and he says, "What do you do?" "Well, I'm a clerk." I was a clerk with the Nabisco Biscuit Company, in the mail room there. I ran the mail all around the company. So there was a woman there that did the mimeographing-*mimeographing!* That era, (we both laugh) and there was a Xerox machine! The first ever, ya know; they were huge! So, anyway...Yeah, so he takes this thing, this little sculpture I did, and holds it up in the class and he draws everybody in, "Everybody come here!" and he holds my sculpture up and says, "A clerk! A clerk!" He says, "What do you do?" I say, "I'm a clerk." He says, "A clerk, a clerk! (We laugh) He really celebrated what was good and lifted you up. I still feel good from that.

**CP:** So what age was that?

**Jim:** Oh, I was about 30. An old man. I mean, these days

**CP:** So you were married, and you had Brett and everything by then?

**Jim:** Uh, not quite, yet. Brett is 39 now. He's married and he has two kids! I'm a grandfather, for God's sakes! (whispers) a queer who's a grandfather??

**CP:** (laughs) it has been known...

**Jim:** and the kids are normal. Praise, ya know, things can happen. Right now, it looks like they are gonna be two geniuses. Achievers. They're not gonna be kids who don't do something in the world 'cause mother's a doctor and she's smart. My son is no slouch.

**CP:** So what did you do straight out of school? Didn't you tell me that you got a degree?

**Jim:** That was later. First job out of *school*. I worked at Nabisco Biscuit Company

**CP:** Ok, that was the *first?*

**Jim:** Boom! Yeah, like I said, just ran around the floor. Every day, four times, delivering inter-office mail; did the Xeroxing. And there was this woman who did the mimeographing all day long

**CP:** You said at one point that you got your degree in Education, and you had been in the classroom. When was that?

**Jim:** Geez (thoughtfully pauses)...I am certified as having dementia and if my memory fails...Actually it's the old memories that should stay intact, I think, with dementia. Uh, I don't feel like I have dementia mostly. What I feel in my life is that I'm... except for the back quasi-collapsed, I feel that I have yet to actualize, to do all that I



## Our very own QVS'er in Boston! Cary Anne Kane!

### Introduction to Cary Anne's First Newsletter from Boston's QVS program

By Cary Anne Kane

Hello dear friend! I am writing you because this year I have embarked on an adventure and as you have had an impact on my life in the past, I would like to include you in my story by sending you a brief newsletter every month or two. So what am I doing this year? As I finished my time at university, I felt that while my academic education had flourished for four years, my understanding of social justice and personal spirituality had not. Therefore, I applied to join the Quaker Voluntary Service (QVS) 2 for my first post-grad year. In late April I was not only accepted into QVS's Boston program, but I was placed at Boston Health Care for the Homeless Program as my work site. I have actually dreamed of working for BHCHP for almost three years and I was overjoyed. On September 3rd, I packed two small suitcases and my mother kindly drove me to national QVS orientation at Pendle Hill, a small Quaker retreat outside Philadelphia. After four days of amazing food, inspiring lectures and conversations, and a truly 3 spectacular talent show night, my seven wonderful housemates and our fantastic city coordinator boarded a plane for Boston. I cannot believe I have been in our home (fondly nicknamed Veggie House) for only two months. I already feel incredibly relaxed and at home. I am very excited to see where this year takes me and I hope you will join me on this adventure!

### Safety Talk (from the December Issue)

During my recent conversations with friends and family I have frequently found myself answering questions about my safety at work. So I decided to address the topic here. My coworkers and I have discussed safety at work fairly regularly since I joined BHCHP. This is particularly significant in my work at MGH, where I am usually by myself with patients in a room off a fairly deserted corridor. We have, of course, taken precautions against any potential danger that might arise in that room. My stool is nearer the door than the patient's chair, there is a panic button under my desk, and the door is left open even when I am working with someone (it would lock from the inside if I closed it).

That being said, last Wednesday I experienced my first threatening moment at work. Before this week, the thought of violence seemed distant to me. I knew that the streets were violent; patients and coworkers (not to mention the media) have told me plenty of horrific stories. But I had never experienced anything beyond the occasional yelled outburst, and I always felt perfectly safe at work. Then on Wednesday, a patient got into a fight with two other patients. All three of them began yelling at each other. The recovery coach I work with was there and he tried to calm them down, but suddenly one of the patients pulled a claw hammer out of her bag and began to move aggressively towards the first patient. Luckily, MGH security had heard the increasing noise and arrived just as the hammer came out. No one was harmed and all of the patients were escorted off of hospital property. The whole thing lasted under five minutes, but I would be lying if I said I was not a little shaken after



## Our QVS'er Cary Anne Kane

the incident.

When I wrote my first draft of this article, I wanted to say that the homeless are not violent. The population I work with is so heavily stigmatized, that I was afraid to say anything in this newsletter that might perpetuate that stigma, which is so harmful and largely inaccurate. However, the situation is more complicated than a simple “there is no violence at work.” Being homeless or having a mental illness does NOT make one violent. But our patients are humans, humans under an absurd, unimaginable amount of stress, and sometimes that stress leads to a violent outlet. I do believe that our patients are not (in general) dangerous. Most of them are truly wonderful humans who are experiencing a terrible time right now. But in reality, whether they live in a shelter, a T-station, or a friend’s apartment, violence is a regular part of many of our patients’ lives, whether they initiate it or are the victims of it. And though rarely, sometimes that violence may enter our office, and that violence is something I must be aware of.

After debriefing the experience again on Friday, a coworker asked me if I was “afraid of being alone” with patients in the room next week. I said no. Granted, part of that is likely the bravado of youth. But it is also more than that. I feel a strong sense of support from my coworkers even when they are not there. I know that I know what to do if a potentially dangerous situation arises. And I have increasingly strong relationships with the folks I work with, which makes work both more enjoyable and safer. Knowing all of that, I am ready to go back to work on Monday.

For more of these articles and whole issues click the links below::

November Issue: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1OccaEvoO8YoVEbQYpeuBCgaTaVuOnhWu/view>

December Issue: [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hfAwaOkTqKDB1o\\_5BtvqP2VUlsQSsKoW/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hfAwaOkTqKDB1o_5BtvqP2VUlsQSsKoW/view)

“ Write Back! I would love letters, emails, or FB messages to hear about all the wonderful things you are doing. I would also love to answer to any questions you have about my year. Please reach out!” , Cary Anne Kane

68 Bailey Street

Dorchester Center, MA

02124

215 837 5373

[Cary.a.kane@gmail.com](mailto:Cary.a.kane@gmail.com)





## Cont'd Interview

can and would have hoped to do. Right now today, I've got the dementia. I forgot that you were heading my way.

**CP:** Well, we didn't actually make an appointment. You said at one point just show up

**Jim:** (laughs with relief) So, I didn't forget.

**CP:** No, you didn't forget.

**Jim:** I just feel stuck in this house. But that's not a life.

**Jim:** So my goal today is to get out and go someplace and not downtown. That's dead. All they're doing down there is selling stuff. It's heavy traffic. People going this way and that. And stores that want to sell you stuff. Every so often, there'll be a happening someplace...stand around on a corner...you'll see enough crazy people, ya know, or something will be going on. So downtown has some interest, but it's not going to be intimate, so I'm left with the neighborhoods. And if you walk in our neighborhoods, what do you see? You don't see people. You see cars and houses. Where are the people? Inside watching soap operas or out working or they're driving cars, people on the street just sitting around. Even in the summertime, actually. I've got to go and visit those neighborhoods. Even if I'm a foreigner.

**CP:** Is that why you go to Meeting every Sunday, and it's a big part of your life?

**Jim:** Meeting is a big part of my life. I question it every week. Uh, why am I going? And I guess about a year ago, this question sort of came to me in a way I didn't realize, and I just got up out of my bench and...I told you this story...I got up out of my bench and went to the center of the room and started to strip naked... and that is what Meeting is all about these days. *Not stripping naked*, but the messages; they just come and they go and none of them seem to grab you. And you say, 'For God's Sake, let's'... I didn't have this... I, I just got up and I'm crazy!

**CP:** You're not crazy.

**Jim:** But as I look back on it, I get, why did I do that? I don't... I was called to do that. And I don't know why, but it's sort of like people give these vest pocket messages, um, that... I betcha anything, I'm remembered for what I did. I'll never *hear* the stories... (chuckles)

**CP:** O h yeah, we'll never forget that! (Laughs)

**Jim:** Exactly. People, Quakers used to do... actually used to do that kind of thing!

**Jim:** So I didn't remember that, as I was doing it, and all of a sudden, I was doing what an old Quaker of the 17<sup>th</sup> century might do, out on the street! So, you know, the men at the Meeting gathered me at the door and got me dressed, while I was out on the porch, out front, and somebody called the police. They came to haul me away to the loony bin and the men of the Meeting said, "We've got it under control, everything's ok." I was clothed again. I wandered off home. I wasn't given counseling. Promised to be good. I haven't done that since.

**CP:** I've heard people have been coming to see you on a regular basis.

**Jim:** Oh yeah and conversations are just delightful, (He says it with delight) It's not, they don't get into me or work out my...but we just sort of share. It's just a friendly conversation. Move all over the place, just like this. Well, this is an interview. It's not an interview; it's me doing the thing I typically do; I over self-review. That's a



## Cont'd Inter view

main feature of my life

**CP:** I wouldn't say *over* self-review. I think it's a good thing. I do the same thing and I think some people think that's over sharing or tedious or something and it's a shame, because people ought to know each other deeper and be willing to hear and, I think people are very on the surface and I think maybe that's what you're talking about with Meeting and the messages that they're... sometimes, they're not intimate; they're not personal; you're not really exposing your real feelings.

**Jim:** My messages have begun fewer and fewer. I'm keeping silent these days. I'm not called to say anything.

**CP:** Are you worried about it?

**Jim:** No. I've got to a point where, ya know, why am I going to Meeting? Well, I don't know what else to do. I stay in this house and clean. Well, the piano there is dusty, but no one comes in this room, no one. . .

**CP:** So where do you go when Friends come to visit?

**Jim:** Well, you know it's a very, this thing, (refers to our conversation), we just talk and not about me. It's sort of a very friendly type of thing; I'm not being analyzed or encouraged to change my behavior. You're not going to get that. Even my shrinks don't expect that. Results, ya know, "How have you improved this past..." that was not. All you did was emote and there was some discussion about, ya know, things that you've done or thought. But they weren't out there to wrestle with you. "Now look, I want you to commit to this this week; you will not do thus and so. Or you will do. . ." It was just me emoting and that's not a word I use very frequently. This is an interview! I can come up with a word I don't use! (We laugh) That's about it. I over self-revealed!

We continued to joke and chat for a bit longer about nothing in particular. We talked about things that are too inappropriate to write here, which is typical of our conversations at some point. And then we laugh and laugh so hard! . I finally had to tear myself away and go home; it's hard to stop talking to my friend, Jim.