To Friends Everywhere, from Southern Appalachian Yearly Meeting and Association meeting at Warren Wilson College, Swannanoa, North Carolina, June 19-22, 2014:

Our theme of “Spirit Rising: A Revolution in Practice” was woven into our plenary sessions, workshops, business sessions, and worship sharing. We attempted to fly by asking ourselves how tuning into the Spirit can help lead humanity safely out of our impasse. Can diving deeper into the Inner Light open our eyes to our connection with the entirety of life, move us to a new understanding of our place in nature, and liberate us from complacency and confusion over how to meet the challenges of the 21st Century?

Our first plenary speaker, Ronald McDonald, reminded us that God sneaks up on us (wow), God is important (that's peculiar), and that we can emphasize God in what we do (silence). Our spirits rose in amazement as Ron played the William Tell Overture on hammered dulcimer. We were asked to close our eyes, and enjoyed the Junior Yearly Meeting surprising us with their joy as a demonstration of these principles.

Our second plenary speaker, Shelley Tanenbaum, General Secretary of Quaker Earth Witness (QEW), shared her personal journey of discovering the Spirit, her Meeting's struggle to become aware of damage done to the earth, and ways in which she sees the wider Society of Friends evolving to take collective action related to eco-justice. We heard that while it was encouraging to find support from early Quaker prophets, we need to spread support amongst ourselves. It was suggested that living with Integrity to our shared values was about knowing where to start, and feeling supported. As individuals, as Monthly Meetings, and even as a Yearly Meeting, it was nice to be reminded that we are not alone.

Lucy Duncan, visiting from AFSC, asked us if the Spirit drives our work, or if our work feeds the Spirit, or if they are one in the same. Lynn and Steve Newsome, from Quaker House, Fayetteville, NC, told us that members of the military are prisoners, and this might explain their high suicide rates.

In worship sharing, we explored questions like “what does Spirit rising mean? How do we know when Spirit is leading us in everyday life? How does nature connect you to Spirit?”

The natural surroundings of Warren Wilson College, embraced by the beautiful Blue Ridge mountains, provided the hospitality we have come to enjoy with the added twist of changing the room numbers of our worship sharing and workshop locations. Soups and salads were fresh made with campus-produced organic meat and produce, plus there was plenty of ice cream. The cool, sunny days lifted our spirits, such that even mighty thunderstorms did not dampen them.

The Spirit rose to work in our business sessions as we wrestled with the ongoing concerns surrounding our relationship with AFSC about which we were unable to reach consensus, but we look forward to
continued dialogue with AFSC. Spirit led us to seek more substance, and less argument by working more closely together as a family. We also revisited the desire for a Minute addressing the Israeli treatment of Palestinians. The Southern Appalachian Young Friends (SAYF, our teenagers) asked that we take a Minute from Berea to our individual Monthly Meetings for further seasoning.

SAYF invited all ages to participate in their “fish bowl” where life’s important questions were asked and answered. An inter-generational “let’s get moving” choice of seven activities re-energized us in the late afternoon, and those of us doing Qi Gong enjoyed hearing Spirit rising from the drum circle across campus. Children of all ages (8 to 80) entertained us with a talent show before supper, and danced together afterward. We raised our voices in song, and sat in silence on many occasions.