

Yearly Meeting 2013 Epistles

EPISTLE TO FRIENDS EVERYWHERE

From Australia Yearly Meeting, 5th to 12th days, 1st Month, 2013

Greetings from Australian Friends in Canberra (*meeting place* in the language of the Ngunnawal people, traditional custodians of the land). Summer School study themes, climate change, sustainable living, the role of elders, and compassionate communication, provided the ambience of the Meeting—along with 39°C heat and the faint smell of bushfires.

Friends are concerned about the excessive use and depletion of the earth's finite resources, and our need to care for the earth. More than 30 Friends held a peace vigil at the gates of the headquarters of the Australian Defence Force Joint Operational Command near Canberra. In an amiable exchange, they presented to a senior officer a statement calling for a renewed focus on building peace. We recognise our responsibility to offer spiritual as well as practical leadership at local, regional, national and international levels.

For us the relationship between earthcare and peace work is central, as is the extent to which we will continue to fund our Peace & Earthcare Office established in 2012. When we as Friends are most passionate about issues but are vigilant in following proper Quaker process, we move more easily to unity. Division and conflict arise when we neglect deep silence in the Meeting for Worship for Business. A vibrant group of younger Friends took up the challenge of earthcare by imagining, designing and constructing Australian towns for 2050.

A significant shift in thinking led the Meeting to establish a Children's Fund as a resource for developing programs for children and Junior Young Friends (JYFs). The move addresses a long-felt need to nourish our children and bring them more fully into the life of the Meeting, possibly by appointing a paid coordinator. We delight in the fact that children and JYFs make up about 17% of this year's gathering. Australians attending the 6th Friends World Conference admired the great diversity among Friends across the world.

Recommendations from a comprehensive review of Quaker Service Australia (QSA), Australia Yearly Meeting's aid organisation, were largely accepted. They encourage a closer relationship between QSA and Australia Yearly Meeting by more fully involving Regional Meeting appointees. They also suggested ways to enable the organisation to be more effective.

Jocelyn Bell Burnell, British Quaker and professional astronomer, in her Backhouse Lecture, explained how—in billions of years—the physical universe is getting colder, darker, emptier. Three days later, with Friends aged 6 to 17, she explored the Mount Stromlo Observatory, the home of major scientific and astronomical discoveries.

Our challenge now is: how to continue to believe in a loving Spirit, which can guide our actions; that is, how to use intuitive knowledge and experience to balance scientific logic. We need our hearts as well as our heads.

Children's Epistle (2 – 12 year olds)

Good morning everyone, we're going to read to you the 2013 Children's Epistle. At the start of the week, we were just getting to know each other. We were practically hiding in the corners. Soon things started to warm up with the cooperative games such as getting into height order without talking. Maya was the tallest.

Early in the week we attended Summer School where we learned about climate change and what life would be like in 2050. This is how we started to construct our cardboard cities from

our brainstorming that were scattered all over the board. Lachlan was very into it. Many parents came and saw the city and made comments like 'When can we move in?' and 'The houses are very recycled', seeing as they were made of egg cartons.

People enjoyed playing games like table tennis and cricket. We played some card games like spit and solitaire. In the afternoon times we normally went outside and played a group game like cricket. Eli was very disappointed when we had to go inside.

During the week, Emily encouraged us to do many craft activities. We did papier-mache which Saskia got all over her shoes, and somehow Casey got it in her hair. We also wrapped sticks, made friendship bracelets, made masks and built a cubby house. Josh and Eli started a cubby outside with sticks, bark and dirt. They were very protective of it. It's actually still outside if anyone still has a chance to see it. We also cooked chocolate crackles, pikelets and moulded chocolate on biscuits. Wyatt made a new creation which no one can explain.

As all of you may know, this week was HOT and I mean HOT! All of us were practically panting when we came in. It was Emily's FANTASTIC idea to have a water celebration. That's right, a water celebration, not a water fight! It was almost safe!

We also had lots of fun with a rocket which was demonstrated on Friday night. Everyone tried to catch it and I'm sure most of the boys, especially Andrew and Alex, had bruises by the end of it.

On Thursday the 5 to 11 year olds went to Mt Stromlo. Everyone was interested about the telescopes that were burnt down in the 2003 fires. Someone pointed out the 3D movie we watched had an incorrect fact, which was the Pluto isn't a planet. Jocelyn Burnell also accompanied us and did a talk and answered lots of questions. Our excursion was very eventful as it included climbing trees and running races and a rather unfortunate soap fight which was started by the boys.

Not all people were there for the whole week, but those who were listened to many presentations from people who came into our class. Gabby and Liam came and told us about their trip to Africa which was both exciting and inspiring. David Liversidge came and told us about China in an awesome slide show and the 5 to 8 year olds gave us a presentation on their floating city which was full of pirate ships and submarines.

We would like to give special thanks to all teachers, parent helpers and all the kids for making it so enjoyable.

Thanks 4 listening.

Junior Young Friends' Epistle (12 –17 year olds)

On Sunday 5 January 2013, many Junior Young Friends from around Australia gathered in friendship to celebrate the 53rd Australian Yearly Meeting on the University of Canberra campus.

We came together using theatrical games or 'theatre sports' to bond and get to know each other. Some JYFs already had strong connections with others and some JYFs were experiencing their first Yearly Meeting. Soon enough we had formed amazing relationships with everyone.

After that morning, we tumbled into Summer School, learning and re-enacting stories from 'Adventures in the Spirit' about Australian Quaker history. Being from separate states, some of us found Canberra's weather challenging, and with no air-con in the JYF space, there was no question that we should all cool down with a water fight. The following day we all went to both the old and new Parliament Houses. We participated in a very special 'behind the scenes' tour of new Parliament House with Jo Vallentine. We headed to the Aboriginal Tent

Embassy where we heard from David Carline, an Aboriginal Elder, about his culture and we walked around the sacred fire.

Due to the heatwave and catastrophic fire warning, Scottsdale was deemed unsafe. This led to an impromptu camping trip to Gundaroo Park, which the locals kindly made available to us. However, we didn't escape the extreme heat even there. We were soon surrounded by smoke from horizon to horizon. Luckily, the fire was 70 km away. Exhausted from the extreme heat, we retreated to the river for hours on end. During our time in Gundaroo, we painted the public oval fence, talked to an Aboriginal rainmaker named Rod Mason, threw spears, did archery, lay under the stars and talked about the Backhouse Lecture, and visited the Toyne's house which had burnt down two years ago.

Following the camp we went to Mount Stromlo Observatory with world-renowned astrophysicist, Jocelyn Bell Burnell, before visiting the Canberra Meeting House for a night of pidge and movies.

All in all, we had a great time, and we met some wonderful people. We deeply thank the people who made this possible.

Young Friends' Epistle (16 – 30 year olds)

Fourteen Young Friends met at Silver Wattle Quaker Centre between 29 December 2012 and 5 January 2013. We came by motorcycle, train, car and plane; from diverse locations; some for the first and some for the umpteenth time. We were excited to have amongst us three Burundian-Australian Young Friends, who shared their Quaker experiences, refugee stories, card games, and remarkable spirit. We were also fortunate to share the company of an inspired and joyful soul from New Zealand.

We pioneered the new camping area within Silver Wattle, and set up the camp circle. Our arrival coincided with that of the new directors who nurtured and supported our camp. Real camping for once and spending the majority of our time outdoors pushed us to connect more with the land. We watched the moonrise and were in awe of the open night sky. The early morning trek to the top of the hill enabled us to witness the sunrise over Weereewa (Lake George) and we were moved into silence.

The old toilet structures provided fascination in the form of a giant spider family. One afternoon was spent netting fruit trees and then juggling the plums, already ravaged by birds. We enjoyed conversations around the nightly circle, and considered our role as young people within the society. An early morning session simultaneously built community and compost. We found inspiration and laughter in an unexpected visitor, who helped us farewell the old year by leading improvised dancing.

Perspectives from previous, current and new Young Friends taught us more about how we interact with each other, and will hopefully enable us to connect better with new individuals.

We remembered our good friend who passed away earlier in 2012 and appreciated the Testimony composed by a group of Young Friends and recently moved on Young Friends. We were reminded again how infrequently we meet and discussed ideas for connectedness and continuing pastoral care throughout the year.

The concurrent family gathering at Silver Wattle allowed for sharing of epilogues with non-Young Friends and we finished the week with an evening of games, a shared meal and songs. It was refreshing to informally interact as a group with Friends of all ages, and introduce them to some of the ways of bonding as Young Friends.

We leave camp not unlike the sunrise, with clear skies and a bright future, growing into the coming year and feeling free to dance our song and spread our Light on the world.