

Epistles to all Friends
Intermountain Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends
June 10—14, 2015 (with early days June 7-10)
Ghost Ranch, Abiquiu, New Mexico, USA

Dear Friends Everywhere,

We arrived at Ghost Ranch this year—329 strong. Some of us drove over mountain passes wrapped in clouds. Others crossed rivers flowing high and fast with the runoff from late spring storms. Meadows and pastures were greener than usual. The cottonwoods lining the fields here at Ghost Ranch were vibrant with singing birds, many yellow warblers among them.

Friends contributed music of their own. Soon after we gathered, one of our seasoned musicians invited us to join in the singing of a song celebrating the 40th Anniversary of Intermountain Yearly Meeting. “It’s a fine thing to gather as Friends,” his lyric reminded us. “Where the silence that holds us, and love that enfolds us, are treasures on which we depend.” That same evening, the all-Quaker Contra Band began to rehearse for Dance Night. The next day we had an especially song-filled Meeting for Worship after Diego Navarro’s plenary address. Later that evening, a multi-generational campfire chorus gathered for a spirited sing-along. Though music has always been a part of our yearly meeting, it was especially so this year. Some of us wondered if we had wandered into a Quaker musical.

There were, of course, quieter moments. We gathered under the big cottonwoods for worship sharing each morning and afternoon to consider the practice of discernment. In his keynote address, Diego Navarro from Santa Cruz Monthly Meeting, explained that discernment was less about knowing and more about not knowing. The process of opening to the Light in discernment requires radical vulnerability—a willingness to abandon our comforts and welcome our despairs. It is disappointment, he explained, that often leaves us tendered and more open to guidance.

Diego then led us into worship with several queries: How does your comfort get in the way of your connection with Spirit? Have you given yourself over to God at any one point, and if so, what was going on in your life at the time? When have you experienced deep connection with the Spirit? What did it look like? We continued to explore these queries in worship sharing.

Discernment, Diego reminded us, is also a collective adventure. Who are we as a community? How does our faith and practice wake us up from the trance of dominant worldviews and beliefs? How do our collective actions embody Quaker values?

Later, in a spirit-filled threshing meeting, Friends brought their collective discernment skills to the question of the yearly meeting’s budget, focusing on a possible deficit and how that should be handled. Some Friends wondered if we had strayed from the traditional notion that a yearly meeting is primarily meant for doing the business of the Religious Society of Friends. Others maintained that Intermountain Yearly Meeting has evolved into its own model of what a yearly meeting can be, which includes an expanded array of interest groups and seminars. (There were 67 different offerings this year!) Some Friends sought out ways to trim the budget. Others agreed that recent projects taken on by Intermountain Yearly Meeting—such as creative retreat

opportunities during Early Days (for which two thirds of our attenders came this year), support for Mountain Friends Camp (which continues to expand and grow), and sustaining relationships with Friends General Conference and other Quaker organizations, clearly reflect our values and priorities as a yearly meeting. Still others suggested ways of raising revenues such as a sliding scale for yearly meeting registration fees. During this gentle and reflective session, many useful ideas were gathered and meeting priorities were clarified.

One of those priorities is to nurture a vital community of younger Friends who make up almost a third of our attending population. It was fitting that Diego Navarro's ministry support team included three younger friends from Pacific Yearly Meeting: Kylin Navarro, his daughter, Thistle Mackinney, and Elena Anderson. Deepening relationships between older and younger Friends has been a renewed intention at Intermountain Yearly Meeting in recent years. This year, a cross-generational listening session helped both Adult Friends and Senior Young Friends share their experiences of grieving and loss. As one Friend pointed out, leaning on one other in difficult times isn't limited to yearly meeting.

As the yearly meeting nurtures relationships that sustain us throughout the year, so too it is a center from which peace and social service concerns carry the Quaker way well beyond Ghost Ranch. How can we best accompany immigrants and indigenous cultures in their struggles for justice? How can we live into the principals set forth in the Kabbarak Call for Peace and Ecojustice? We bring these queries back to our monthly meetings for ongoing discernment and action, along with the good cheer, community warmth, and spiritual insights that we experience here at Ghost Ranch every year.

As the song says, "It's a fine thing to gather as Friends."

With Gratitude,
Intermountain Yearly Meeting of Friends
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Senior Young Friends 2015 Epistle

Often pain and adversity divide us as a community and the Quaker process grinds to a halt. This year we came together in the wake of a great tragedy; we lost a cherished member of our community, Brianna Wells, this past December. When we arrived at Ghost Ranch, NM, we hung up a wind chime in memory of Bri, so that every time the wind blew, we knew she was with us. The melodic ring of the wind chime was a near constant sound, seeing as this has been an unusually stormy week in New Mexico.

Rain in the high desert is both a blessing and a curse, bringing both the water that keeps the entire desert ecosystem alive, and causing destructive erosion and flooding. To watch a storm at Ghost Ranch is to watch life flow into the parched ground, to be buffeted by wind and dust, and to watch the sky grow dark. The incredible scene surrounding us reflected our inner landscapes as we mourned the loss of Bri but rejoiced in having come together once again.

This year, the Senior Young Friends were graced by Diego Navarro's presence. In his years of working with young Friends he has discovered that a leading/inkling often comes with a feeling of profound discomfort. Pain is the constant companion of growth, just as the desert cannot survive without disruptive storms. His words helped us discern the relationship between pain and the leadings that shape our lives; he provided us with even deeper insight in his Keynote Address.

There were, however, breaks in the clouds, and we enjoyed every drop of sunshine to its fullest. On Monday, we enjoyed the beautiful weather as we kayaked, canoed, swam, and cliff-jumped on Lake Abiquiu. Our spirits were as buoyant as our life jackets as we played the day away.

On the following day, two of our Friendly Adult Presences, Erica and Andrew, led us in teambuilding exercises that offered transformative insight into Quaker process. This year, we had the pleasure of welcoming a young friend from Pacific Yearly Meeting, Thistle, who accompanied Diego in his journey at Intermountain Yearly Meeting. As angry clouds rolled in during our teambuilding, Thistle frolicked through the rain and reminded us of the Light in the storm.

On Thursday night, we gathered in our common area to remember Brianna. We sat for three hours in the candlelight, sharing our love and grief. We could have spent the whole night reflecting on her life, but soon the silence dissolved into singing and a spontaneous hug circle. We realized that pain is a part of the healing process, and that crying among friends is, in fact, a sign of strength. We shared our grief and healing with the wider meeting in the listening session we orchestrated the next day.

The Senior Young Friends group is notorious among the greater yearly meeting for sleeping very little. We lived up to our reputation by beginning our Senior Young Friend's worship sharing at 10 PM and staying up every night until the wee hours of the morning, playing games, laughing together, star gazing, and forming closer bonds both as individuals and as a community. Worship sharing has been cited by countless Senior Young Friends as one of the most meaningful and enlightening experiences of Intermountain Yearly Meeting. The joy and hilarity only increased

as the hours ticked by, and the clouds dissipated once again, allowing us a perfect view of the flawless night sky. Our strengthened cohesion as a community became apparent during our business meetings. We experienced an uncharacteristic surge of productivity, and our decisions on annual business were made with little contention and great unity. We chose two new co-clerks, a new Friendly Adult Presence, and selected members for multiple committees, not as a collection of disparate parts, but as a harmonious whole.

This week we shared rain and sun, laughter and tears, joy and sorrow. Our time together passed all too quickly, but the memories and love we shared will last us a lifetime.

With love and hope,
The Senior Young Friends of Intermountain Yearly Meeting

P.S. to Strawberry Creek Meeting:
Please send Thistle back next year. She's awesome.

Junior Young Friends 2015 Epistle

Hello Friends,

We the Junior Young Friends (24 strong) have had a great time at Intermountain Yearly Meeting and we would love to share some of our favorite memories with you.

Every morning at Intermountain Yearly Meeting, we had anchor groups. Anchor groups are small groups of people, where we have several queries that we can choose from and answer if we feel lead. Some of the Junior Young Friends joined the Senior Young Friends and some adults for the intergenerational worship sharing. Everyone who participated really enjoyed it.

We also joined the Senior Young Friends for the listening session, although sad, it was still very enlightening.

When Diego Navarro, the keynote speaker, and Kylin joined us, we had fun playing The Big Wind Blows, and experiencing an awareness exercise.

For many activities the community of Intermountain Yearly Meeting was bonded closer. During the dancing, friends were able to learn more about each other. At the campfire, multiple friends became one.

Over the last week, we have enlarged our teamwork skills. For the ropes courses we used our teamwork skills to assure the safety of others. At the waterfront we used teamwork to control the boats on the water.

At Intermountain Yearly Meeting the Junior Young Friends spent a lot of time at the cantina. Among the activities we liked best were group games. The Junior Young Friends have a great sense of community, so that's why we liked to hang out at the cantina. The cantina was filled with great people so that's why we are comfortable there. Overall, the cantina is a great place for the Junior Young Friends in the community.

Hikes are a great way for Junior Young Friends to connect with the spirit. The Junior Young Friends liked going up Box Canyon and Chimney Rock as they felt in tune with nature. The hikes helped us reflect with ourselves as we walked.

By the end of the week we had learned so much about each other and ourselves. We diversified our knowledge about Quaker values and can't wait till next year! Thank you for making Intermountain Yearly meeting such a great place to be.

Sincerely,

Junior Young Friends

Co-Clerks: Rafa Grenier, Charlotte Whitney, Stella Lovelady and Recording Clerk Camila Espinosa-Short.

Children 2015 Epistle

Dear Friends,

We had a great year at Intermountain Yearly Meeting this year. We went hiking. We played together. We made skits. There was a campfire with singing and s'mores, and so many more great things.

We hiked half way to Chimney Rock. We went on another hike to a creek. It was fun because we got to go in the water.

We went on a walk to the farm. We got to feed the chickens and plant some seeds. We found a gopher skull. We put it in the Children's Yearly Meeting museum. The museum also has rocks and sticks and a picture.

We had a scavenger hunt. We had groups with Children's Yearly Meeting, Junior Young Friends, and adults working together to find clues. We had to find a lot of things like trash, water, and things that make us smile. Someone caught a lizard. We named the lizard Spike.

We liked all the people. They were nice to everybody. They were fun to play with. The counselors played with us a lot.

We made two creativity night skits. The little kid's skit is a fairy tale. If you call a Mexican restaurant, basketball players, animals and dragons a fantasy, then the other skit is a fantasy. We loved practicing our skits with the Ghost Ranch staff.

We have a question we couldn't answer. Which came first, the chicken or the egg?

Signed:

Hudson

Sophia

Harper

Ian

And all the children of Intermountain Yearly Meeting