

*Quaker Theology #9 -- Fall-Winter 2003*

**Friendly Healing in Frampton and the Forest**

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Frampton on Severn was around before William the Conqueror and his Normans conquered England. It is an old village on the edge of the Royal Forest of Dean. Still, no one knows for sure just how old Frampton is. It was in Frampton where my Ol' Gran taught me the Old Ways and the traditions and ways of the Forest. She also taught me a lot about Healing and the history and traditions of the Religious Society of Friends, the Quakers.

In our family tradition, from the Forest, there is a special number, which is thirteen. At Friends General Conference, annual Gathering 1999; I had a chat with some Guatemalans. In their forest, the special number is 13 as well. They were part of a group which spoke to the Gathering on the significance of the Mayan Calendar. The number 13 has special significance to this ancient calendar. The gender of this number is female in both forest cultures. There are some other similarities that I will tell you about later. Strange how there can be similarities in indigenous cultures around the world.

**The Forest of Dean--The village of Cinderford is just to the right of "OF". The Severn River forms its border on the right; the town of Frampton is near its sharp U-shaped turn, or "hook."**



In Frampton, there is a house that is well into its second millennium as the Christian calendar goes. It looks its age. It is more like a cave than a house. This house is called "The Old Thatch." It is cut out of time. You know that it has severed the bonds of time as soon as you see it. Our family tradition ties into the process of removing time as a barrier for existence and for faith. One goes into the space where time ceases to exist. It is sort of the space between moments. You can walk in the Light of the Holy Spirit there.

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The Old Thatch is as close to being at one with the earth as any dwelling on the planet; it melts right into the ground. It hasn't a straight line or even part anywhere. The space is all scrunched up. The doors were built for the shorter folks who lived back when the world was younger. It is a house which is hard for us more recent folks to get into and to get out of. To really see it properly, you have to "Ken" which means to look at it with a Spiritual vision that focuses on what often appears to science, to be peripheral realities. This is where the Inner Teacher, the Seed of Christ resides.

Those who live in The Old Thatch and in Frampton in general, make do with the various odd quirks. Folks don't appear to be too eager to leave either place any time soon. It is a good healthy place that acts like it expects to be around for awhile longer yet. There is healing energy in its midst and it has a loving soul. Healing happens more readily in a space cut out of time and healing is attracted to a loving soul wherever it resides.

My Ol' Gran lived the majority of her adult life as part of a small Quaker enclave in Cinderford, which is more or less in the center of the Forest of Dean. When I spent time with her she was living in Frampton and we made day trips to Cinderford. For most of my youth, I addressed letters to: Jubilee House, The Street, Frampton on Severn, England. I always wondered what it was like there. Over the years, I came up with all kinds of Jubilee sorts of houses. Some of the houses were quite grand, some were small, but all were uniquely different from houses in my hometown in rural Michigan.

When I finally went there in my late teens, Jubilee House was even more magical and mysterious than I had ever imagined it to be. It too, like The Old Thatch, had managed to sever some of the bonds that tie us down and keep us in our place. Jubilee House looked like it was half of the time, somewhere else. It could have been hanging out at the ocean side or in the exact middle of the Royal Forest. It just didn't seem to be all there at any given time. It was definitely having fun, wherever it was. It was just possible that it was off "Kenning" in some mysterious way of its own. Kenning as part of the Old Ways involves the intense stretching of one's senses to discern God's Holy Spirit or, its absence. The belief that God is fully everywhere, and in equal doses at all times, is not a belief of the Old Ways. Although it is true that God's energy is everywhere, sometimes it is only a faint echo.

When I first got a glimpse of it, Jubilee House was covered in blooming flowers of all sorts. There were lots and lots of crimson roses climbing up trellises. There were also several special nooks formed by the growth of older lush plants. Perhaps, because Jubilee House might have been in more than one place, at any given time, it was hard for me to look it straight in the eye, so to speak. It was more than it seemed to be and you had to use your Kenning knack to see what was what. All of the plants everywhere, both outside and in, made the house look like it too was growing and alive. We don't have any places like that in Michigan that I've been able to discover; although we have some lovely orchards.

Gran's theory was to let a plant grow mostly where it wanted to grow. She was not very big on intervention in terms of pruning. Her plants had personalities, likes and dislikes. Her idea was to give the plant what it liked. Gran would rather encourage it to grow where it already wanted to grow, and to then see what happened. She didn't like forcing it to grow or forcing it not to grow,

as the case may be. Her most beautiful plants were like that and you learned to go with the flow, so to speak, when residing at Jubilee House. This was part of the ancient ways in which I was trained. Healing is to discern what, if anything, one is led to do as an intervention. Sometimes the intervention is more psychological or spiritual than it is physical, (physical, in the sense of the use of herbs or whatever). Gran's specialty was in healing plants; which was a challenge she said, because what plants spoke was always faint.

Her plants were her friends and allies; they helped her to do her work in life. Nowadays, we are beginning to see herbs as our friends and allies. We could expand that to include other plants as well. A plant can be a friend and yet not be healthy to consume. Some plants can do energy work; or provide protection, companionship, or solace. The Guatemalans were big in seeing Forest plants as allies as well. Sometimes plants can heal, sometimes they can foretell future tendencies in the natural realm as well as in the realm of human affairs.

Gran believed that you just don't violently attack your friends and allies, no matter how much better you might think that they would be if they had a major overhaul. Work with nature and work with energy, not against either one, was her rule. Always, you had to Ken just what, if anything, you needed to do. The Friends, Quakers, call this "Expectant Waiting" or, in some cases, "Way will open." Gran said that Quakers excelled at this type of Kenning. Friends acted out of unity and from the Holy Spirit producing that unity. For Quakers, Kenning is therefore, corporate and is called a Gathered Meeting, a meeting for worship where the Holy Spirit is so strong that it is palpable.

Jubilee House never looked quite the same way twice. It was always growing, evolving, and shifting. It was 500 years old, and the light always glimmered around it. It did what it did, *just so*, in order to help Gran in her Quaker healing work. There were such beautiful smells from those blooming plants. Out back, the smell of Rosemary could be so strong and clear at times, that it almost made me swoon. Jubilee House was an unusual and, at times, an overwhelming place. Yet it was old, and, friendly; with a secret celebration all of its own going on. Plus, it was in Frampton; and the village naturally aided the house in its Jubilee work. Often, the Friends stopped by, and sometimes they came over for "Healing Prayer" which also had its element of celebration. I now offer Healing Prayer to Quakers in the U.S. who want to know of our traditional way of Healing. The Holy Spirit moves mightily in our worship as it did when George Fox, James Nayler and Isaac and Mary Penington were healing folks.

My Gran said that James Nayler was a more successful and powerful healer than was George Fox. She said that George was jealous of James' gift and that at one point George even made James kiss George's foot. Gran was the first Friend to tell me about George Fox's Book of Miracles and what the Foresters thought about it. She said that George wrote the book, in part, to make himself look better than James. Gran said that James could bring back the dead and George couldn't do that. Nonetheless, George was a really good and great Quaker, but he was human like the rest of us. James, on the other hand, so listened to the Holy Spirit that often he didn't know where he was going or what he was doing from moment to the next. The Spirit led him and he followed. James Nayler walked in the Light a lot, but he was human, too. For the Foresters, folks were folks.

Outback of Jubilee House, near the large Rosemary bush, was the herb garden. Faeries actually lived in this garden. They especially liked the Rosemary for a home, Foxglove as well. They weren't visiting or just there now and then; this was where they lived and resided. I never saw them myself. When I visited my Gran during my 20's, I had received a Bachelor's degree. At the University, I had been taught not to believe in such stuff as Faeries anymore.

Most of what I encountered with my Ol' Gran conflicted with my education; yet something was going on! I decided to put off accepting much of what I experienced; in order to figure it out at a later date. Some 30+ years have passed since first learning from my Gran. I have even more of a University education today; yet now accept what my Gran said and did. She was an honest and a wise woman. With all of our education, instruments and fancy stuff, we still don't know more than what the 'Old Ones' did. We just know things differently; we do not necessarily know more. Most folks can't even Ken decently. Certainly the Guatemalans weren't all that impressed with the gewgaws of modern western culture. They were happy to visit and happy to leave to go back home.

I did notice though, even back during my period of doubt, that the old, large, deeply green Rosemary bush quivered noticeably every time Gran talked to a Faerie there. But I never saw anything, except the odd quivering. However, there was that overwhelming smell of Rosemary and all those things that Gran told me that the Faeries told her. We did our daily activities based on the weather report provided by the Faeries. They were never wrong. The Guatemalans do a lot based on the information from their Good Folk as well.

My Ol' Gran learned a lot from the Faeries, she said. When folks ask me how my Ol' Gran learned the 'Old Ways.' I don't rightly know how to answer. She did learn a lot from her grandmother, Rose Edith, but then Rose Edith was a Hindu from far off India. She learned quite a bit from her mother and from her Welsh mother-in-law and from a host of relatives in the Forest. The Old Ways were as much a process as they were a set of learned pieces of information. Likewise, Quaker ways are often a process rather than a stated set of theological doctrines. The Guatemalans also have a way of listening, learning and doing.

Gran said that George Fox, the first Quaker, learned a lot from the Wise Ones of Old. He learned stuff from the folks at Pendle Hill. He also learned his herbal lore in Nailsworth, a short distance from Frampton. Gran learned herbal lore from her mother and she studied herbalism with a "man in Gloster." She also studied for awhile with a French Chef. Most of what Gran knew, the Faeries must have taught her. I know that the Foresters taught her a bunch, too. Our family have been healers in the Forest for a lot longer than The Old Thatch has been leaning into the earth. We pass on information to each other, but we learn new stuff as well. Quakers keep learning too. We Friends know a lot of stuff beyond our wisdom in being the first organized resistance to the great evil of slavery.

You see, I think that my Gran learned from all sorts of sources. She was even known to hang out with Gypsies! My mother says that back when they lived in Cinderford, she never knew who would be camped out on the sofa when she came home from school. A neighbor in Cinderford volunteers that if the police ever found anyone homeless, they took them to my Gran. Each of these folks were grateful for the love, food and care that was bestowed upon them. My Ol' Gran

naturally listened to what folks had to say. She expected people to be as truthful as she was; and I think that grateful people seldom lie to those who love, heal and help them. She learned a lot from the outcasts of society and from those who are marginalized. She also learned, through worshipping with Quakers, some of whom are also outcast and marginalized.

While Ol' Gran had lived in Cinderford in the Forest of Dean during most of her adult life, during those years I wasn't yet born. When I went to Frampton in the late 1960's, she had been there for about twelve years and my grandfather had been dead for about three of those twelve. Gran seemed to have been there much, much longer though. This no doubt was because she had been born and raised in that village. Also, our family had been there for longer than anyone could remember. In good Quaker fashion, though, most of the family graves remain unmarked.

Frampton was a place where time was hard to reckon. It often felt like the whole village was cut out of time, just like The Old Thatch was. Indeed, time seemed to be irrelevant in some ways. Folks could reckon when Frampton Feast was for the coming year, but it was hard to know just how many years there had been a Frampton Feast. Now-a-days, Frampton is a bit more integrated into today's world. Yet . . . when you walk down the lane between the line of ancient beech trees that lead to the church . . . it is quite possible to lose all track of time, place and condition. Guatemalans in their forest reported a similar quality. They also have the same tradition that healing is unique and therefore different for each individual. There is no standard pill or Chemist's dose for ailments in either Forest culture. The Guatemalans also really liked Healing Prayer when they worshipped with us. I remember their gentle and yet steadfast way of being in worship with Friends.

Those ancient beech trees in Frampton leading down the lane to the church are huge and have an immensely patient quality to them. The air is very fine and the lane is shady and quite. You can walk back into times that used to be, if you want to, while you are there. It is a good place to think deep thoughts and to figure out life. Elves hang out there all along that lane during full moon, but I don't think that they live there. My Ol' Gran did say, though, that it was best to leave them a crust of bread or a spot of milk, now and then, if you went down there often. She also had firm advice on how to harvest Elder flower during a full moon. Elder is a very special plant in the Forest tradition.

When my mother, as a child, used to visit her grandparents in Frampton in the 1920's and 30's she used to go down that lane too. It hasn't changed much, the ancient gate is still there with the same little roofed-over entry. My Mum doesn't much care for Elves or Faeries or anything to do with the 'Old Ones'. She doesn't believe in that stuff, even though she never got a college degree. My Gran raised eleven children beyond the ones she gave birth to, trying to pass on "the gifts". None of these thirteen were the one that was meant to receive the gifts in our tradition. When I showed up in the 1960's, it was clear that I was the one. Our family tradition has a tendency for the gifts to switch from the female to the male every seven or eight generations. I am a seventh generation, so it swapped to me. I am expected to pass on the gifts to a female in our family before I pass on.

My Great-Grandparent's house is still there, at the top end of the village away from the Beech lane. It is owned by other people now. It sits directly across from the large, imposing manor

house. This was, until recently, the home of the Clifford family. The Clifford who owns the manor is a Quaker now. We sat next to her in a Meeting for Worship in Oxfordshire. Strange how two Quakers from the U.S. end up in rural Oxfordshire, next to a Clifford from Frampton, who has turned the grand manor house into a free nursing home, for old folks from the village. Strange and marvelous Kenning on that event!

The Cliffords are about as old as Frampton. Some folks say that, like Frampton, they were around before William the Conqueror arrived. Others say that they came over with the Normans. What is surprising though is that they have managed to stay around all these years.

Maybe William left the Cliffords alone because Frampton is on the Severn River and close to Wales. Maybe, somehow the Cliffords managed to keep the Welsh at bay. Perhaps it was because the Clifford women were known to be great beauties. One of the Cliffords, Rosamond, was a rare beauty and Henry II's mistress. In the movie, "The Lion in Winter," Eleanor of Aquitaine, as portrayed by Katherine Hepburn, has choice words to say about Rosamond, Henry and sheep. I don't really know how they did it, but the Cliffords survived and there was always a male heir.

My family had been in service to the Cliffords off and on over the centuries. My Auntie Maggie was for many years cook to the old colonel at the manor. She made me the most delicious duck dinner that I have ever had when I visited in the mid 1970's. She talked a lot about the days gone by when she was cook at the manor. Maggie was a Millard by marriage. My Ol' Gran was a Millard, too, at least until she married my grandfather who was Welsh. There is more than one way to keep the Welsh at bay in the Forest, you can always marry one! Auntie Maggie wasn't a healer, but she was an excellent and loving cook.

My Ol' Gran loved the Welsh. She loved the Irish, too. She also loved the royal family. She loved the Jehovah Witnesses and the Methodists and the Hindus and the Buddhists, too! She never met a religion that she didn't like. Gran never met a religious person that she didn't like! Come to think of it, she never said anything bad about any individual. She did say, though, that the Nazis, as a group, had been 'bad', but she also thought that we all bore some of the responsibility for all that. She thought that the healing from the Second World War had only really just begun.

She said that she learned about God and about healing from our tradition, all of the religions; and she learned a bit from the Faeries, too. When I said, from my freshly educated point of view, that the different religions seemed to contradict each other all the time; my Ol' Gran simply said that they didn't really. She felt that mortal folks just didn't quite fully understand yet what God was saying. She was convinced that one day we would all understand God, but meanwhile we would just have to keep on trying. Most importantly she believed that we should give each other a hug whenever we disagreed. Hugs were healing. The Guatemalans gave me a hug, each one separately, not as a whole group. They are smallish folk and speak a language tied to the Mayans, (Ichu, I think), so we had ample time for hugs as stuff was translated from English, Spanish, or their own language and back again.

My Ol' Gran especially liked Quakers and was seen as a Quaker Healer. My Ol' Gran was the first one to help me to understand the healing message, "There is that of God in everyone." We were standing next to that large deeply green Rosemary plant and I suddenly knew that she was right and that the spark of God was indeed inside of each and everyone of us. I could feel the truth in it all. She also said that Quakers worshipped in a circle because the Old Ones taught us to do that when we were just starting up. When George Fox was just starting his ministry, he worshipped with folks who were silently sitting in a circle waiting upon the Holy Spirit. Many of the folks, especially the women, were Kenning in that circle as they strove together to listen to what God had to say.

My Ol' Gran was well known as both a healer and an herbalist. As far as I could tell, being one, almost automatically made you the other. She was, also I think, a 'wise woman'. I'm quite sure that she was considered to be a wise woman in some sense by the villagers, because they were afraid of her. I remember going to a small shop to buy some eggs and a loaf of Hovis. When I was asked where was I staying in the village, I responded that I was the grandson of Mrs. Morgan who lived on The Street. Suddenly, everyone went silent and a few folks put greater distance between themselves and me. It felt very strange.

As time went on, I also noticed folks coming and asking my Gran for advice about all sorts of ailments and then going away in a sort of fawning fashion. I didn't rightly know what to make of it all, but Gran seemed to have a spot in the village that was carved out for her from times long, long before Frampton, the Cliffords and William the Conqueror. She also knew about May Hill and she had a few things to say about the "Old Ones" and May Hill. I think that all that probably makes her a wise woman. Certainly, I listened to learn all that I could, even if I didn't fully accept what she said.

May Hill is closer to the environs of Cinderford than it is to Frampton. But, on a clear day, if you walked down the grove of those ancient beeches . . . when you got up close to the church, and looked to your right, you could catch a glimpse of it. May Hill dominates the region and can be seen in different areas throughout Gloucestershire. It still has its ring of trees. My Ol' Gran says that the trees were never cut or burnt unlike other rings on other Holy Hills in England. She said that the folks who did the cutting and burning were too frightened to go to May Hill to do the deed. May Hill had a special power all its own and folks in the region recognized it. The Guatemalans liked high places as holy places as well. Their calendar was created on a high holy place.

My Ol' Gran talked about the persecution of the healers and the wise women of long ago. She said that when George Fox climbed Pendle Hill and had a great vision that the vision was due to the fact that Pendle Hill was a Holy Hill. She also said that it was fear that mostly caused the trouble and the burnings of the Holy Trees, so it was odd that fear somehow managed to save May Hill. Of course, the month of May was the time when May Hill was at its peak. It was a time of rebirth and renewal and a time when everything was fresh and green. It was an excellent time for healing and Kenning.

Sometimes everything was fresh and *blue*, because the bluebells in May could turn the green to blue overnight. I saw the bluebells in the Forest of Dean, over by Speech House, and air itself

was very, very blue. It was not just that the ground was blue, the air above it was blue. There was a misty blue that came in the special sunlight which was filtered through the trees. This pale, glowing, robin's egg blue mist floated and it could take you places if you let it. It also could take you out of time and into God's Spiritual realm.

Frampton, too, had been well within the Forest environs when the Forest was much larger than today. But this was long ago. The Forest dialect still remained, but it was different from the ways the Foresters in Cinderford spoke. Stan, who was a distant relative by marriage, said that everyone outside of Frampton spoke sort of funny. He thought that the folks close by over in Stroud, spoke extremely "quare" or "queer" as we might say. Not too long ago, the way one spoke used to say a lot about a person in England. The old dialects seem to be gradually dying out with the spread of cars and TV's and stuff. In the sound of the old speech, Kenning and wisdom is quick to appear.

The Foresters have an oral tradition that has lots to say about Quakers, but then the Foresters say a lot because that is what an oral tradition is like. Actually, The Religious Society of Friends is really more of a blip on the Forest Oral radar than say, the Celts or the Romans, that is if you look at the quantity of information. Most of the Forest lore involves the Romans and their attempts to build a road through the Forest, which the Foresters say didn't happen. Instead, they say, "We kept the Romans out and we built the road to connect to Rome in order to make some money." Of course, the Foresters also claim to have kept the Welsh out of the Forest, and I know for a fact that my Ol' Gran married one of those Welsh guys and then lived in the middle of the Forest of Dean. In fact, my grandparents also lived in Littledean, for a few years, before moving to Frampton.

I often travel in my mind's eye to Frampton, Jubilee House and the Forest of Dean. I yet walk with my Gran in her garden and hear again her voice telling what she knew I would one day need to know. I also enjoy reading *George Fox's Book of Miracles*, as reassembled by Henry Cadbury. I also have fond memories of the Guatemalans and their special Mayan Calendar as well. Mostly, I love being part of Meeting for Worship for Healing and helping folks to find Healing in Gathered Worship with Friends.

While journeys continue, paths cross, paths diverge, times change and opinions may differ, the Holy Spirit yet remains true in the Forest wherever the Forest may be. Healing is always close at hand, all we have to do is look, as we walk along our various paths in God's good creation. It also helps if we can give, or receive, a hug now and then, on our walk in the Light, on whatever path God has set us upon.