

## Report on Yearly Meeting Gathering held at Warwick.

This was my first YMG for many years at which I hadn't had responsibility for a child and it gave the event a very different tone for me. I didn't have to rush around immediately after sessions, giving the whole event a much more spacious, less time-pressured feel. In part, this was also designed in – interest groups were scheduled into the timetable rather than crammed into breaks.

This allowed time for proper deep conversations to be held. I decided before the event that I was going to just talk to whoever I found myself next to – I had lots of stimulating encounters and a sense of real connection with the Friends I came across. For me, it built a wider sense of community.

I had high hopes of YMG this year – I was hoping that Friends would unite around the theme of Movement Building: Living Out Our Faith in the World. The introductions to the main sessions, themed around Heart, Head, Hands and Feet, were moving, insightful, useful in providing a frame for the broad ranging theme. I went to the first session full of anticipation – George Lakey, the American Friend introducing the session, is a renowned nonviolence thinker: I was, as ever, looking forward to being told how to change the world, how to do God's work. His introduction was not what I had expected – he spoke of his own grief and broken-ness, very powerfully. Our action in the world is not an intellectual exercise – it takes the whole of us. Our connections with others are based on empathy, equality, being with, sharing our common humanity with all of our grief as well as our hopes. Our work is on this basis – doing with, not to.

In a follow-up session, George Lakey talked about doing things 'on our edge' – outside our comfort zone. He exhorted us all to be 'on our edge' to avoid complacency, to push ourselves, to experience new ways of being. When we are 'on our edge', we become more dependent on each other, opening up, building stronger community and connections with each other.

It was my sense that the Meeting did not unite clearly – we were challenged by the theme, but an overall response did not seem to

emerge. We are well aware of the immense, inter-linked challenges of economic and environmental injustice, of war and poverty. We are still throwing our hands up in despair collectively, whilst there are multiple examples with in the Yearly Meeting of excellent work.

During the Gathering, I watched a film called 'Demain (Tomorrow)' – it demonstrated the immense challenges of climate disruption and the structural systems that are preventing meaningful action on it. It was a positive film, looking at lots of community actions that if adopted more widely, could make an impact. For example, community growing in Detroit to produce jobs and a sustainable food supply. After the Gathering, I saw a film by Al Gore: 'The Inconceivable Sequel'. This too put the emphasis on us, within our communities, taking action – power systems are too entrenched at the present time to make significant change. But we can put pressure on, we can instigate community level systems – like Sheffield Growers, like Regather, like the real Junk Food Project.

To me, this challenge of community is what I take from YMG. It was present in Tim Gee's address as well – how do we nurture, include, build, grow, act within our communities? Can we take a George Lakey approach and be truly present for each other, pain, grief and all, I challenging each other to be 'on our edge' and acting as a community together? What would this look like for Sheffield Central Meeting, so big it contains lots of micro-communities, but can feel intimidating and excluding? For Sheffield and Balby Area Meeting – how can we support and reach out to each other?

Kiri Smith  
August 2017