At a Bend in the Road: *The Meeting School*[1]

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Educational debates have proliferated for centuries around the good, the bad and the ugly in education. One debate rarely discussed in more traditional educational circles is the topic of Quaker schools. Yet, Quaker schools still exist in the United States—their presence a quiet one.

Despite secularization of society, distortion of values and preoccupation with materialism threatening Quaker education today, students still flock to these schools throughout the USA. Students are drawn to these schools not because of Quaker religion but more because of an espousal to the philosophy of the Quaker schools: one of education of the whole person for the sake of building up the community of "others". Quaker education embodies global education; non-violence; and values. It is for these ideals that students come as well.

Quaker Schooling

Quaker schools do not happen by chance. They result from explicit attempts by certain individuals endowed with the Quaker philosophy to put in place arrangements and opportunities that will bring about a certain nurturing of mind and spirit. These individuals believe that student freedom or rights must be in harmony with the greater communal good because social values are the glue that binds one person to another.

During the schooling experience, students are exposed to the assumption that a mature individual develops out of group experience. Therefore, the process of education does not abandon too readily its customs and institutions in response to the demands of its individual students. The critical mass found in a good Quaker tradition is: a) a coherent community based on respected teachers and students; b) a sharing common values and attitudes about the means and goals of the community. However, Quakers do believe that every person contains an "inner light" which is part of God. Therefore, spirituality is a basic construct embedded within the schooling process and for this the individual is encouraged to grow by the nurturing of his/her Inner Light.

George Fox founded the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) in northwest England in 1647 when he had a Christian insight: "There is one, even Christ Jesus, who can peak to Thy condition" (Cary p. 4). However, the Society did not become an organized movement until 1652. George Fox and his followers believed that "Christ has come to teach His people Himself" which is to say, "When two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." These gatherings were called "Meeting for Worship". A Meeting for Worship is a planned coming together of those who seek to discover for themselves the will of God. Worship begins upon entering the Meeting room and ends when two people, usually pre-assigned, shake hands." (Lelchworth, p. 3). During the Meeting silence is observed and meditation is practiced People are encouraged to share by spoken word and inner compulsion they have to offer the message they receive. Primary is the Light Within, the direct revelation of the will of God speaking to the individual. ." The Society of Friends speaks about "the light within" which is not conscience but the vehicle through which conscience shines. This belief and the absence of rigid doctrinal prescriptions and hierarchy distinguish them from other Christian bodies " (Cary, p.5).

Their social witness is commitment to pacifism. Life has sacred dimension and therefore cannot be destroyed, debased, or exploited for any reason or under any circumstance. But since they believe in the sacredness of the individual all people must be helped. This has led them to undertake humanitarian relief in time of war serving the hurt and bereaved on every side. As a result, "...you will find in a Friend's school a lively concern for social justice, strong debates over policy, voices raised against capital punishment, a commitment to diversity within the school, an interest in service projects, and a deep respect for the integrity of individuals (Cary, p.8).

Quakerism embraces both the individual and the community. The Meeting is an effort to experience a divine corporateness. Meeting provides one of the rare opportunities in a student's life to learn how to listen inwardly to become spontaneously responsive to the inner life (Heath, p. 25-26). Quakers have always distrusted bigness and the inevitable impersonalization that it produces. If a Meeting for Worship becomes too large, it divides into smaller Meetings.

Friends value direct and responsible individual participation in communal affairs. By so simplifying one's life, they hope one's central values will emerge more clearly and forcefully. The power of the Quaker tradition to give a distinctive character to a school is effectively diminished when the school becomes so large it no longer is a coherent community. What makes a coherent educational community is a basic core of respected teachers and students who share common values and attitudes about the means and goals of the community (Heath, p. 9).

A Quaker education should:

- Be a deeply reflective experience that confronts students with themselves and their values;
- Be a corporate experience in which a person senses he is part of a living community that values and respects him and other persons as persons;
- Encourages its students to shape their basic identity around the values of integrity and honesty. (Heath pp. 18-21)

Inner silence is paramount in Quaker education. Silence is central and they teach the strength of silence. So the Quaker moment-of-silence speaks to a desperate need for outer and inner quiet. A quote from Elizabeth Mosley, a teacher at Abington Friends Upper School in Pennsylvania sums up the essence of this statement regarding silence as it relates to the Quaker school: "A Quaker school is the busiest world I have ever known. It makes superhuman demands on time, energy, thought, emotions; we ask almost too much of each other and of ourselves. We need that 'still small voice of calm' that can reach through the 'earthquakes, wind, and fire'. At the very center of a Friend's school, we are reminded:

'Be still and know that I am God.' " (Reflections, p. 28)

Since 1668, *The Society of Friends* (*Quakers*), have believed that education is intended to be distinctive and unique. Important educational qualities are: competence and a special kind of faith. (Competence to analyze problems, grasp language and social organization, and competence to know where to begin to do these things. Faith to rise above basic nature and respond to stimuli other than fear, threat, and power with enthusiasm, persistence, courage, humor in order to reconcile, to confront evil, and to change.) The following ideas make up the cornerstone of a Quaker school:

Fostering a sense of Quaker community: students form close emotional relationships with other students and faculty and deeply sense belonging to their school. They then feel personally responsible for its continued vitality and life. How decisions are made is a unique process. It isn't that rules about meeting attendance, smoking, drugs, alcohol, social relationships, class attendance, and homework are not imposed, but there are processes such as "Meetings," "Clearness Sessions," "Communal Decision-Making" that can reduce anarchy.

Attendance at Community Meeting for Worship and Business: In most schools this occurs once a week. Meetings are begun with a period of silent worship. This is meant to guide them to see "the light within." It prepares all participants to reconcile the freedom that comes from individual meditation that leads to being able to listen to others." What type of concerns would the business meetings consider? Issues related to conflict in basic values; questions relevant to development of maturity in the students; issues for which members have competence to deal with and are immediately involved i.e. not personal issues among particular individuals;

Attendance at Quaker Meeting: Different from *Community Meeting* in that it is primarily for worship alone and no business attached. Its purpose is to seek "the still small voice within." In other words, find the spirit of God within self. Meetings are often daily before the beginning of a day but always at least once a week and generally on Sunday.

Fostering of Curriculum of global literacy for global order and peace: Down through the ages Quakers have been known as Pacifists. One of the strongest Quaker testimonies has been nonviolence. In fact, some literature claims Peace Education to be the greater calling of Quaker schools. Others say that developing a social conscience is an intricate part of the reason for curriculum.

Teachers are hired for a sense of spiritual being as well as academic and intellectual ability.

Students need not be Quaker but must agree to embrace and attend all functions.

This snippet enframes the essence of Quaker education and schools. The next snippet enframes *The Meeting School.* The snippet is not intended to debate to what degree the school is "Quaker" or to its educational foundations, however, it is meant to give a little history of the school and what it is.

The following is a snapshot of The Meeting School based on my rather cryptic 1990 notes made during a research course in which I was enrolled. I do not pretend to do justice to the school since I only had, at best, eight weeks to do any data collection and observations. However, I do my best to give you, the reader, and my current audience a small picture of this school. My notes are nearly eight years old now and the memory of information somewhat faded. Therefore, I apologize up front for any information given without credits to exact sources. The faux pas is not intentional. Notes were dusted off from my archives and many resources long returned to the school. To begin, I discuss what I learned about Quaker schooling ; I move to a description of The Meeting School; I then move to "a day in the life" at the school; and end with some summative views.

The Meeting School

Founded in 1957 by a group of Quakers concerned for the education of their own and other people's teenagers. The Meeting School is located in southern New Hampshire on 132 acres of farmland and forest. Its practices are based on the traditional Quaker values of respect for each individual, simplicity, honesty, nonviolence, group decision-making and stewardship of the earth.

(from an introductory pamphlet: *THE MEETING SCHOOL*: A Quaker Boarding School for Grades 9-12.)

George and Helen Bliss and a small group of concerned Quakers founded the school as a self-sufficient, agricultural, Grades 9-12 Quaker boarding school.. This small group was dissatisfied with public schools for many of the same reasons some people are dissatisfied today:

inability to meet individual needs;
process of teaching and the mechanics thereof defective in some way;
traditional methods of teaching and presentations need more motivating stimulus;
traditional settings not acceptable to the learning styles of some children.

These dissatisfactions were the catalysts for the group to forge out on its own to find its own school. The idea to begin a new school came up in 1955 or 1956 at a Quaker retreat in Wolfboro New Hampshire. They wanted to stay in New England so looked at land in New Hampshire, Maine, Vermont, Massachusetts and Rhode Island. They wanted a school that emphasized agriculture so the land had to be just right for a school, houses and a farm. The group believed that this dirt-in- he-hand method would enable the student to prepare for life and its demands for self-sufficiency. George's father lived and worked in Troy and told the group about a farm available in Rindge. On visiting the property in Rindge, the group believed it to be the ideal setting to make their vision happen. George became the first headmaster or "Clerk".

From 1957 until the 1970s the school remained totally self-sufficient growing its own crops for food, and tending the farm animals. Students cooked vegetarian meals (Quakers encourages

vegetarianism) and baked bread. Students were up at 4:30 AM tending to farm chores . Learning to plant and tend crops; can and preserve food; bake and cook were learned survival skills going along with the idea of self- sufficiency. Parents signed release forms allowing their child to work the farm and even drink raw milk. Life was simple but in many ways rigorous to grassroots survival.

In the 1980s, after a general audit of the finances, it was found that the ideal of self-sufficiency was costing the school more in valuable financial resources than could adequately support the school and its programs. It took a great deal of money to house, feed, and educate students and support faculty. Minimum tuition and some donations would not , it was found, be able to continue carrying the full cost of the agricultural, housing, and schooling.. Instead of closing the school down, the school administration decided to cut back expenses on maintaining the farm. Small gardens flourished, but the days of the self-sufficient community garden were gone. Students continued to can, preserve, and bake, but items for these activities were gotten elsewhere.

The decision to reduce the agricultural side of the school, however, bothered the administration. Something did not feel right. By the late 1980s, the feeling that doing away totally with the self-sufficiency was doing away totally with the founding mission of the school. So, the school administration tried to figure a reasonable solution while still maintaining a sound financial footing. They hired on a family to work the farming in order to re-commission agricultural. In exchange for board and room, the farm family was expected to build up the agricultural resources. Having the farm-family was the least expensive way to maximize the work.

Testimonies

The Meeting School Handbook declares "Our purpose is to create continuously a school/community based on Friends' testimonies of peace, simplicity, individual worth and personal integrity; to let our lives speak truth and love to the world; to foster education which values human life, dignity, and creativity… to work toward consensus, that unity of heart which comes most surely from our common center, which is God." This is enhanced by what they call the *testimonies*.

The *Testimonies* of Community life center around:

Simplicity: "At TMS we strive to live simply, in harmony with the land and its resources, neither taking more than we can use, nor using that which we take in an irresponsible way."

Truthfulness: "We are a community which lives by agreements, and to do that requires a high level of trust and personal integrity of each of us."

Non-violence: "One of the strongest Quaker testimonies through the centuries has been the denial of all "outward" forms of violence—the absolute refusal to offer physical harm to another human being. …we affirm the testimony and extend it into the non-physical realm as well (lying, cheating, gossip, backbiting etc).

The integration of these testimonies is found in the academic core of learning as well as the family-type living arrangements. The community living and family living process allows students and instructors to develop close relationships. Each class meets for 1.5 hours per day, four days per week and includes, Science (especially Biology and Chemistry), Literature, American History, Social Studies; English, Math, and independent studies. The fifth day is left for *Workstudy* explained in the following.

Two unique extensions of the curriculum are *Workstudy* and *Intersession.* Workstudy takes place on Wednesdays. Wednesday mornings are devoted to Meeting for Worship and Wednesday afternoon is devoted to Workstudy. Students choose or are assigned a job around campus. They work at this job for approximately four hours. *Intersession* is a four week program in March when students often leave campus to engage in a documented program approved by parents, school administrators, and teachers. Students choose from a variety of self-initiated projects they then get approval for them.

Workstudy

The following two excerpts from the campus newsletter explain *Workstudy* from the students' eyes.

Workstudy

On a typical Wednesday afternoon at The Meeting School, students may be tuning up the school van, playing Monopoly with faculty children, pruning raspberry bushes, or cooking an exotic meal. They are participating in workstudy, a twice-weekly program which 'involved students directly in the work required to keep the school community functioning," according to Steve, workstudy coordinator.

"The workstudy is to be an educational experience in which workmanship and a sense of accomplishment are learned along with the specific skills of that particular type of work," Steve said. Each term students choose or are assigned a workstudy in which they participate four hours a week in one particular area.

The community dinner workstudy, headed by Kim, prepares a supper for the community every week. They decide on a theme for the meal—recent favorites have included Mexican and Japanese dinners—and look at different cookbooks to come up with ideas. The workstudy then cooks, serves, and cleans up after the meal.

Food distribution workstudy keeps the commissary and community food storage space clean and organized and also distributes fruit, vegetables, meat, frozen juice, and cheese to individual houses. Skip is the supervisor.

. Childcare workstudy is an important support for faculty parents during meetings and workstudy times. Junior Kim, childcare worker for a ten-year-old child said "I like child care because it's a good time to have fun. I enjoy [the child]and I'm amazed by some of the interesting things he knows…"

Student ('90)

Strolling through Workstudy

The cold wind whips savagely across the near sub-arctic wasteland of southern New Hampshire. The grass has been frozen to diamond-stiff needles, and every smooth surface is coated with ice. No one is about but for these two roving newsletter workstudy reporters, who are furtively debating how much melodramatic schlock their supervisor will let them get away with; otherwise, the campus appears quiet.

In actual fact, though, there is a busy hum of activity going on within the houses, for this is workstudy time, and students and staff alike are going about their appointed tasks.

We begin in the kitchen of Thomas House, where the community dinner workstudy students are chopping vegetables and talking about the complications of daily life at TMS. These students plan and prepare a special Friday night dinner for the entire community. In the dining room, a newsletter artist busily sketches a classroom scene, while a childcare worker tosses a ball back and forth with her two-year-old charge.

Meanwhile, downstairs, a group of food distribution workstudy students stands knee-deep in boxes of bananas, oranges, and broccoli. "We're orgistically [sic]cleaning the milk room, " one of them comments.

We travel across campus over solid slicks of ice toward Bliss House. In the basement commissary, more food distributors are hard at work, storing flour in large bins and filling jars with honey and soy sauce.

Over in the barn, library workstudy students are sorting through crates of books and carting them off to a used book store. "It's too cold in the barn!" they complain.

The roving newsletter reporters agree, so they finish up their work and head over to Aurora House for a delicious, delectable, and dazzling dinner prepared by the community dinner workstudy.

Student('91) and Student ('90)

Workstudy appears to be a very interactive program where students can engage in jobs that need to be done around the campus. They are jobs that appear to help the whole community in some positive way. Had there been more time, I would have liked to hear more about this piece of the curriculum and how it fits into the overall general education of the students and if they get school credit for it.

Intersession

Intersession can best be understood through the eyes of participating students. In the campus newsletter, one reads

In the middle of February, when students at most New England schools are just settling into the grind of second-semester classes and gearing up for a good case of cabin fever and mid-winter blahs, students at The Meeting School are busy packing, planning, and making last-minute phone calls in preparation for an adventure.

For four weeks in March, TMS students leave campus and carry out individual, full-time Intersession projects. Students design and set up their own projects according to their own interests and needs. Past projects have included making tie-dyed T-shirts; teaching on an Indian reservation; working back-stage at a theatre; weaving; and working in soup kitchens.

'It's a kind of personal Odyssey,' said one senior who camped out with women protesting nuclear weapons at Greenham Common in England last year. This year another student is working with an artist in New Mexico.

In 1989, one student who is participating in Outward Bound this March, worked for an adult tutorial program in Keene last year. 'Teaching adults is incredibly different from teaching kids," she reported.

Intersession is more than just working in the field for a month. Students are required to document their projects—which they do in a variety of ways, including writing papers, keeping journals, and producing photographic essays—and present them to the community upon their return to campus.

'Intersession is an incredible learning experience, beginning with planning and setting up a project, following that project through and presenting the experience to the entire school,' said (name) last year's Intersession coordinator. 'I think it's one of the most exciting programs the school has to offer.'

This year students are canvassing for Greenpeace, protesting at the Nevada Nuclear Test Site, apprenticing on a crisis hotline,...working at a drug and alcohol treatment center, and making a video movie, among other projects.

(From campus newsletter)

And as March turns into April, the snows of New Hampshire begin to melt, and students at other schools are just coming out of their mid-winter slump, TMS students will be excitedly rolling back to campus with a collection of new perspectives, anxious to share their experiences and ready to dive into a new trimester of academic work.

The general life at The Meeting School has interesting vignettes that we will take a look at in the next section, *A Day in the Life at The Meeting School.* But the academic and family-living components give a number of opportunities for students to broaden their living horizons as well as collect some of the juice that comes from the fruit of the *testimonies* mentioned above.

A Day in the Life at The Meeting School

> *Here I dig into my 1990 notes and share observations as I made then. I admit that changes might have taken place in recent years. But this is how I saw and heard it in 1990. I first bring you to the environment and then move you to the people. Some of this data might be repetitive but is repeated in the light of historical significance so the reader does not have to go back to in the paper to refresh memory.*

The school is set back about three quarters of a mile off of Route 202 in Rindge, NH. The campus consists of the original farm buildings, several houses and three buildings built in 1965 called "Yurts" (octagonal shaped buildings used for housing and classes).

A large green and white sign at the end of a country road off Route 202 reads: *THE MEETING SCHOOL.* One cool September day in 1990 I took a right turn onto this country road in search of this mysterious school. As I turned at a bend in the road I noticed that I was driving through a heavily wooded area. After driving approximately a half mile through the woods, I came to a stop sign and a smaller sign for the school. In a few minutes the scene changed from heavy woods to several buildings on either side of the road. They varied from antique to modern. The first were three cape-style homes: red, blue, and white ones on the right. On the left was a long, modern ranch with a large green barn about 100 feet from it with an open pasture and a soccer field next to it. Further up on the right was an old, but elegant two-three story white farm house with *office* sign at the foot of the walk. Next to the farmhouse stood a large, nondescript multi-level red house.

I parked my car in the gravel parking lot next to the farmhouse where I had seen the office sign. I got out of my car, and noticed young children's toys and a lonely swing attached to a large tree branch. "Well, there are little children here!" I said to myself. Rounding my car, I walked up a little stone walk-way and entered the large green, scruff-marked front door of the farmhouse. Pushing the door with my shoulder (it was stuck), I came into a long hall. Narrow stairs going up to a second level faced me. "Where is the office?" I wondered almost aloud.

The entrance area with faded wallpaper and scuffed door entries told me this was a-well used and had had many enterings and exitings over the years. The hallway definitely had the cozy air of a lovely, well-used farm house hallway. The *office*, I decided, was in the room to my right because through a partially closed door I could see files and office-type desks. Though there was no sign that said *office*. To my left was a large entry way framing what appeared to be a living room filled with three well-loved couches, several over-stuffed chairs, a faded rug, and a lovely bay window framing a backyard.

While surveying the living room, I heard a voice and looked up to see a man standing in the hall near me. I introduced myself and he told me his name. (Let's call him "Tim" for the sake of the story). He had been waiting for me, he said and offered to show me around campus.

The Tour

We left through the front door and turned right down the walk. We were headed towards the nondescript multi-level red house next door. Tim explained that this house had a dorm upstairs and an apartment downstairs. We did not, however, go inside the house. We continued past the red house down a dirt path. Part way down was the "potters' shed", Tim explained, and further down, he noted, was a converted chicken coop that was now the science lab/classroom. We would later enter this building to observe a class in session. Tim pointed out a large gas-tank-type structure that provided heat for the building. At this point, Tim saw something about the tank that concerned him. Something was wrong with the tank but he didn't know what just then. He went on to explain that this was their back-up heat system for this building. Generally, they used wood stoves in the buildings. (several cords of firewood sat next to this building and along the sides of the path leading to the building confirming this). He worked with some nozzles on the tank but declared he would check into the problem later but at least, he noted, he was aware of it.

After a brief look around the outside of the chicken coop turned science building, we moved further along the path to the Yurts. There was one large Yurt and two smaller ones. The large Yurt housed the farm-family hired to maintain agricultural at *The Meeting School* (TMS). One smaller Yurt was a guest house for an older son of the family who did not reside on the campus and would occasionally come to visit. The third Yurt was a "conflict resolution" classroom. Conflict Resolution was a course provided by the school curriculum to help students learn to work through difficulties.

Three geese waddled towards us as we turned to leave the yurts (we did not look inside the yurts). Tim explained the geese were pets of the farm-family and very protective of their territory. The geese were large, one gray one and two white ones. The white ones attacked us somewhat and began to peck at our feet. They showed their displeasure of our intrusion by loud honks and strong pecks. We moved quickly out of their way though they traveled close behind until they were confident that we were going away.

Back up the path behind the science building was an electrically fenced-in area. Here romped two brown/black colored sheep. Later, I learned their wool was used to make yarn that some students would spin and make a variety of things from.

Taking a left on the path behind the farm house, we came upon a small enclosed area made of Chicken-fence. Enclosed were herb plants and berry bushes. In addition, eight chickens were in there to work: get rid of bugs and fertilize.

Passing the enclosed area, we came upon an old two-stalled-carriage house . Several students were cleaning out what appeared to be "stalls". The students told me they housed two horses there. I(don't recall if the horses were nearby or not.) Outside the stalls were piles of hay and manure.

Walking on past the carriage house we came to a greenhouse in much need of repair but Tim said they used this as a biology lab. Inside were some plants in process. Tim admitted that the greenhouse was in sad need of repair . He hoped that alumni contributions could shore up this building in the future. It had been used extensively in the early days of the school to grow the seedlings for the community garden, but with that project gone the building did not get the care it should get. The farm-family had built a little solar greenhouse and a root cellar elsewhere on campus. So the greenhouse was something that would need a great deal of work. It was, however, a sturdy looking building and I felt it had promise if someone would just donate the money to help fix it up a bit.

In front of the bio lab was a small home-made bench. A student was sitting quietly on it. Behind him, in the distance was another small garden of tomato plants. Tim and I headed back towards the farm house and it was here that we parted company. Tim needed to get to a class. And thus ended the tour of the campus.

This next section is where I dialogue with a few staff from the school. Each spoke highly of the school and each held different perspectives. Due to time limitations and lack of proper equipment, no taping of interviews was done. The dialogue you read comes from extensive notes I took and re-wrote as soon as possible after the interviews.

Interviews

Tim and his wife, Sue are from Colorado. Both are Quakers. They have two children, boy and girl and a dog. Tim taught school in Colorado and his wife had been a manager (perhaps an office manager) for a large oil company laid off in a downsizing. For several years they entertained a thought they really never believed would happen: to work at a Quaker school. They appeared to have job security where they were so they never capitalized on their dream. When Sue's layoff came, this opened the door for them to

consider other interests. Primary interest was to find a Quaker school that both husband and wife could work at. After spending the Spring doing research and sending off resumes, they were notified in July that The Meeting School needed house parents and teachers. Tim and Sue were hired as house parents and science and math teachers respectively. (Tim was the staff member that met me at the door of the farmhouse and was my tour guide of the campus.)

Tim: Tim and I had an informal conversational interview The interview took place in late September and Tim had only been at the school a few weeks so he was in a transitional period and state of mind. He had a need to talk about his initial experiences.

I had the opportunity to spend three segments of time with Tim: (9:30-10:15 Interview; 10:15-11:00 class observation and discussion; 12:00-1:00 lunch at the house where he is a house parent.

Me: Tim, I'd like to get some information on The Meeting School. I'm a summer resident of Rindge and have known that the school was here but know nothing about it. Tell me something about it from your perspective.

Tim: Well, Helen Bliss, a Quaker, was founder. A group of Quakers were dissatisfied with the public schools pretty much for the same reason people are dissatisfied with them today:

> didn't address needs, defective mechanics, some kids couldn't function in regular schools, Sputnik in 1957 had changed the regular school standards, and classes needed to be formulated in a way that interested students.

They found this farm in Rindge and wanted the school to be self-sufficient. It was up until a few years ago. There are 134 acres here and much of it was farmed. Animals raised for milk, eggs and work. Most Quakers are vegetarian and we eat vegetarian here. Sue and I are only moderate vegetarian. The land was farmed for vegetables. A few years ago, a financial audit was done and found it was costing more to be self-sufficient—feeding animals, cost of seed, and taking care of the land. So the directors decided to stop the farming and except for small patches of gardens. However, when that stopped it stopped a very important part of why the school was founded in the first place so it is being re-examined. Schools like this are always living on the edge anyway. They hired a farm-family last year to bring the farm aspect back. In exchange for board and room they give service hours and are bringing the farm up. Things are beginning to be noticed. They built a green house and root cellar on the edge of my house which the kids love. We've got broccoli and a few other things in there right now. He's doing organic farming with the latest equipment and he has four horses.

We have a student body of 21. In its hay-day it had 45 or so. We would like to have more but are comfortable. There is a discussion going on whether we are just an alternative school, alternative/therapeutic or therapeutic. The students come with so many needs. Should we be bringing in psychologists and social workers from the community or what? There is no answer yet but we still want to maintain that alternative status.

The houses are heated by wood furnaces with some backup. We don't know what his winter with the Mid-East Crisis will bring in the energy cost.

In 1965 the school built three buildings called "Yurts" for more space but I really don't know why.

Monday-Tuesday-Thursday-Friday we have regular classes. On Wednesday we have Meeting and Work Study.

We have a wide variety of students here from some with LD problems and some very gifted. But many live different life-styles and adhere to different ways of adapting which is why they would choose a place like this. Acceptance is the key. Everyone is encouraged to accept and respect one another.

We want to be more active in the Rindge community. Last year the students went down to town and helped build the playground at the school. It's part of being self-sufficient, too.

Our classes are English, Science, Math, Social Studies. Courses are structured for students to go at own rate but they also know if they want college they have to complete their studies. They have to have two sciences and two social studies but six credits in social studies and science so they have to choose the other two credits in social studies and science.

They need math and it's conceivable that a student will stay in Algebra I his entire stay here. But usually they have a full year of Algebra and half year of Algebra II and half year of Geometry. We are bringing in Business Math too.

We are looking for a chemistry teacher right now. Our building does not meet the specs for a chemistry lab so we are limited in the type of chemistry we can now have. But hopefully we can build a lab in the future.

The students have chores here and take turns cooking. A tradition held over from the self-sufficient days is making bread. Once a week bread is made here and the kids make it.

> *Cryptically my interview for now ends here. Later, I spoke with Tim at the house where he and Sue are house parents but for the sake of this paper, I am only looking at the school more than the living arrangements. I admit that the living arrangements are part of the total picture of schooling here but this would take another chapter to write about.*

My next interview is with Ed. Ed does some teaching, tends the library , and does some maintenance, some all around work. He has been at the school three years now.

Interview: Ed
Date: Sept. 27, 1998
Time: 10:15 AM

Me: What are the comparisons between this school and public schools?

Ed: Well, I never had much to do with public schools. I used to work in libraries. I guess I'm prejudiced to the type of learning that goes on in libraries—volunteer learning. People come to libraries at their own choice.

We ask the students (at TMS) to take responsibility for their own choices—to use their power to change things. We make sure they understand the consequences of their choices. They have a chance to plan. Class planning and academic planning meetings

are open to students. Faculty is more likely to come but it's important that it is open.

Class is evaluated at the end of the term by the students. Some direction is based on students' interests—we try to help them focus. We want them to know there is a deadline where do they have to be at mid-way if they are to complete a project? Where is the intermediate and final goal?

Me: Would you speak about the mission or philosophy of the school?

Ed: Well, I'm doing a class right now on *The History of The Meeting School*. It was founded in 1957 by 3 families and two single people. So eight people altogether started it. They looked at land in Jaffrey New Hampshire; Putney, Vermont; Farmington Maine, Cambridge Massachusetts. They wanted to stay in New England.

George Bliss was first Clerk. He worked at the Cambridge Office of Friends' Service Committee. In the 50s he was vocally dissatisfied with public education. The idea to found an alternative school crystallized at a retreat in Wolfboro, NH 1955-56. A decision was made to do something.

In 1956 he visited alternative schools in England and the United States. He left his job at the Cambridge Office and began looking for different places in New England. He looked at some in Maine and Rhode Island. Maine was too far away for the people involved and Rhode Island was too urban. He decided on Rindge.

George Bliss' father worked and lived in Troy New Hampshire and gave him the info on the farm available in Rindge. George wanted a school that emphasized agriculture, farming and taking care of farm animals. He was interested in setting up a school where students would be preparing self for life—making things happen for the better.

The primary goal is not college but life, however, college is possible. Once a student is here a year or two they are self-confident and willing to express that. They come in with poor self-images. They learn that what they say and do makes a difference. Consequences are clear and quick.

Me: Would you address the scope of the admissions policy and the type of student who is drawn to this type of school?

Ed.: I really think Kate, who does admission would be better able to answer.

My interview with Ed was brief. He introduced me to Kate and Kate and I spent some time chatting. Being involved with admissions she had a different perspective from Tim and Ed.

Kate

Me: Kate, Ed felt you would be best at describing the admission policy and the type of students who come here.

Kate: Generally, we turn very few down. Most students who really want to come here have already come to that decision by the time they make application. They must come here and spend at least one full day (24 hours) if not longer.

They must agree by the 'Minutes' (rules that TMS has) we already have. We discourage people who can't go along with the 'Minutes' for everyone is different once they get here. They must make a commitment (to abide by the rules).

We had a student who came and agreed to the 'no drug' policy. However, when she saw some kids with long hair she felt inside herself that somewhere were drugs. When she started inquiring about getting some drugs she was shocked to find there were none and the students encouraged her to live by the commitments. It took her awhile but she was pleased she could live her style with others and have it drug free.

Some kids went to a nearby school and took part in a Pot Party. They had a hard time living by the 'Minutes' on campus and when off they found drugs. They changed one night after coming back and finding they couldn't relate to their friends who were not on pot. We go a lot further than some Quaker Schools in bringing traditions, we share in the Quaker process and require students to do also. Some students seek The Meeting School on their own—one third find it on their own—word of mouth, students or ex-faculty.

Me: Would you give your opinion on what makes students successful in this type of environment?

Kate: Well, my sense of who could benefit is: those who are independent; those who need a small place; some have learning disabilities; some need emotional support; some need freedom from factory schools; some need family living; some students are bright but frustrated with laying down of the law; and some are peace and ecologically oriented.

We have our fair share of recovering addicts who come here and do much better in the living situation. We encourage weekly AA meetings—a good one is held at Franklin Pierce College.

We rarely turn down a student. They confront stuff here they've never confronted. We 'sponsor' a student when they need assistance. If they have trouble adapting we take a student on and follow through with him/her individually. Sponsoring is taking on a student personally and being available to them until they show signs of making it on their own. This takes A LOT of energy but it works.

Me: Well, I don't want to take up any more of your time. I told Ed this would take about fifteen minutes and here it is an hour and fifteen minutes later. I would like to be able to come back another time and talk to students and other staff.

Kate thought his would be fine. She took three books off the shelf about Quaker Schools that I could borrow and handed them to me.

In this next section I tell you about what I saw in the classes. I was not looking for anything specific just to see what I saw. I did not set up an evaluation agenda, but I did notice that the traditional classroom settings were not found in any place that I could see. Certainly the chicken coop and living room were not traditional. However, each observed class was very unique. Defining "unique" is really left up to the eye of the beholder. I did notice

that interaction and dialogue with instructor and other students were greatly encouraged. I noticed that students were pretty well versed in the language of the materials and most were attentive. I now move on to the observations.

Observations

Science class: General Science

Time: 10:15—11:00 AM

Grade: (I cannot remember as I write this however it might have been 9th or 10th)

Text: The Way Things Work by Davic (?) MacCauley, Houghton-Mifflin, Co.

Tim and I entered the shed (Science Classroom) around 10:10 AM. Another female teacher came in about two minutes later. She was dressed in flannel shirt and faded jeans. Her hair was done in a French Braid. She and Tim co-teach so they began to discuss the assignment. She said she had outlines so she agreed to do the class herself. (Tim and I stood up back and as the female teacher proceeded. Tim briefed me on the lesson as it progressed.)

Three male students came in and sat around a table that was in the middle of the floor. At this point they were the only students there. The female teacher sat down on the left side of the table away from the students but facing them. By this time, Tim and I had sat down at the table also—I at the head of the table and Tim in the corner to my right. All of us at the table sat chatting for approximately two minutes when a female student arrived and sat down by the female teacher. Student began to engage in conversation.

All students were dressed casually in jeans. One boy had a baseball cap on turned backwards One student had a T-shirt on. Others had various tops on. Though it was late September, the weather was chilly and the room was about 50 degrees. I found this uncomfortable and distracting but the students did not seem to mind. There was no heat on or wood burning in the stove.

The female teacher announced that despite the absence of some students she was going to begin anyway. Apparently, she noted, there were colds and flus going around campus and several students were out sick. At this point in the day, it was unknown who had official medical leaves to miss class.

The teacher asked the class "Do you want to discuss the Boston Science Museum or talk about the assignment first?" The boys agreed, "Let's do the Boston Science Museum!" (apparently they are planning a field trip to the Museum soon.) The teacher began to read choices of programs from some manuals she had received from the museum. She asked them to listen closely to the programs she read so they could make informed decisions about what they would like to participate in while they are at the museum.

The female student asks: " Are other schools going to be there?" "Yes!", says the teacher. The girl shows displeasure with this by frowning and sinking into her chair. The teacher goes on to explain that this is an open program and not a program for TMS students exclusively so there will be other school students and non-school students there.

As this is being discussed another female student rushes in the door and slams it. She sits down in a disgruntled way next to the other female student. Tim looks towards her and says, "You're late, Judy!" "I know that!" she bellows at him. At this point she slams her books on the table.

Teacher resumes discussion. Another girl enters and Tim says, "You're late!:" she says nothing and sits next to the last girl who entered.

As the teacher continues discussion of programs, the boys begin to indicate they like certain ones (programs from the science museum). The girls as a body say nothing. (I heard the teacher call this next student by name)Justin leans back in his chair to the right of Tim's and says, "I like the laser one!" The teacher writes this down. The last girl in says she's really not interested in going and laments, "Do I have to?" and then sulks. The teachers answers her by saying that these are programs for the '90-'91 school year and they don't have to make a decision today but they would have to make one soon so they can put them down in their calendars. Tim looks at the girl that doesn't want to go and says, "I would really like to hear after class your reasons for not wanting to go. If they are of a good reason perhaps we can think of an alternative assignment for you." She looks at Tim and in a somewhat whiny but inquisitive way, she asks Tim, "What's for me to do?" Tim responds in a delay-of-response way, "Let me get something written down. I didn't think anyone wouldn't want to go." The teacher goes on to finish discussion on the museum programs.

The teacher continues with the class. "If people didn't do their homework, we need to revamp the discussion.", she says. "How many read the assignment?" No one answers and then Justin raises his hand. "Well, read pages 22-26 now!" she says. She continues, "I'm not getting down on you I just can't do the discussion if you haven't read it." "How many brought in their fulcrum? You know, your little machine?" she asks.(no one has brought in a fulcrum.)

She announces that they must read the assignment and then she gets up and leaves the building for a few minutes to go get something. She is gone for about ten minutes.

While gone, Justin looks at me from across the table and tells me the book is good. He pushes the book across the table so I can see it. The book is well written for a teenager with good cartoon-like pictures and quips. Each chapter is full of more pictures and cartoons than paragraphs. Though the paragraphs that are there are easy to read and understand. Tim tells me that the book emphasizes cause and effect and describes how machines work. He adds that it costs $30.

The teacher returns after a ten minute absence. The students have read all they are going to read at this point. They start nudging one another and talking so they clearly are restless. To gain back attention, the teacher takes out a finger nail file and shows how it can be used as a lever.

At 11:00 AM I whisper to Tim that I am going to leave. I then tell him I'd like to look around the campus some more on my own. I ask him if I can have his permission to tell the students in the class who I am as no one has addressed my presence to the whole class. He says fine and I begin to explain my course and project on Quaker schools to them I finish and leave the building.

As I move along the path from the science building, I

wonder if I could find another class to observe. The grounds are empty of most people so I assume everyone is in class somewhere. As I come upon the farmhouse I see some students outside and I chat with them a moment. I find that they are on break from an English class. I decided to see if I could sit in on that class. So I proceed inside the back door of the farmhouse.

English Class: Literature
Time: 11:15-11:45
Date: September 24, 1990
Grade: possibly freshmen
Text: Seven Arrows, by Hyemeymosts Storm, Harper and Row.
Story: "The Flowering Tree"
Setting: Living Room of the farmhouse

I went in the back door of the farmhouse just to look around. As I went through the kitchen the students were on break from their English class. Some were talking and others were getting hot chocolate and other hot drinks. The building temperature was about 50 degrees. The inside of the building was not much warmer than the outside was. There was no heat on in the building so it was uncomfortable for me.

I found the teacher among the students and asked if I could observe the class. She said, "Sure, fine, come on in!" I explained who I was and why I was there. She gave me a photocopy of the story they were to discuss, "The Flowering Tree" . The copy was on loan because it was to have been a student's copy but that student was absent.

I went into the living room where class was to be held. It was the same living room I had seen upon entry into the building earlier. The couches, chairs, and floor rug were now about to be filled with students. As they filed randomly back in from the kitchen, they took to the couches, chairs, and floor rug. (nine students: two females and seven males) Several students wrapped themselves in blankets to stay warm. On the couch over looking the back yard, the teacher took a seat. It is a large couch so I join her on the couch but at the other end.

Before the teacher began class, a boy on one of the couches begins to argue with another boy on an opposite couch. "Excuse me," says the first boy, "but I feel the way you are sitting might be a distraction. (I'm not exactly sure what the problem was except that there was probably one too many students on the couch.) Maybe you ought to consider the way you are on the couch." The second boy, obviously upset, says "Why don't you shut up!" Another boy pipes in, "Maybe you can find a better way to say you disagree, than 'shut up'…" the conversations go back and forth for a few minutes until the teacher realizes there is no solutions in the air and says, "Maybe a better way to say all this is 'let's focus back on the class.'"

At this point, she started a discussion on the chosen story of a Native American myth. Dialogue begins among the students guided by questions from the teacher. One boy (with matted hair going in many directions) begins to twist his bush black hair and tear at the knots in it. I, myself, find this terribly distracting as not only doesn't it look good but the action against the hair seems like it should be painful. Despite his appearance and actions, he begins to engage in the dialogue and presents a logical and thought provoking response. He comes across as well versed and in command of his language and ideas.

Another boy, they called him John, gets off one of the couches and sits near a door close to the bay window. He is quite tall and built like a football player (maybe 5'8 and around 190-200 pounds). He commands a presence in that doorway area: his long blond hair and thin beard make him look more artist than football player against the door way. His barefeet dangling at the end of long strong legs makes one believe he is feeling comfortable. John participates in the discussion with ample thoughts but as he sits quietly in the off discussion moments he sits tapping his finger on his legs to a tune only he can hear in his head. Sometimes as he talks, he continues to tap to the unknown tune. I find it distracting but interesting because no one else seems to notice but me.

The teacher is interrupted one more time by someone wanting to observe. A man enters and asks, "Do you mind if I just sit here for a while and observe?" The teacher says, "No, fine!" (She must be used to this because observations don't see to rattle her.). Kate, the Admissions Director, enters about two minutes later and asks if (names man) could observe because he has come to bring a prospective student to observe the school.

The discussion around the story ensued for another several minutes, at the conclusion, one boy noted from his place in the room: "I'd like to do a play of this—act it out!" The teacher confirmed that this would be a good idea. Most students nodded their approval and agreement. Many said "Yeah!" in approval. One student notices that one girl is saying nothing, "Brooke doesn't seem to agree!" But Brooke nods and says it is okay but she herself isn't sure she wants to be in it.

Before the class ends, the teacher asks confirms an assignment she gave them: "Before you go, can I see rough drafts on your myths tomorrow?" As the students file out from their various vantage points in the room, some nod and others say nothing

This is the end of the class observations. Again, the traditional aspects of schooling: desks, blackboards, teachers' desks etc. are not seen. However, seen are : dialogue; interaction; comfort; tolerance; traditional text books. The fundamentals are there just portrayed in different ways.

Summary

I am sure there are a lot of unanswered questions such as: Is the school accredited? What is the percent of students that go on to college? To work? What colleges do they tend to go to? What trades, work do they choose? What would alumni have to say about the school? What do the students have to say about it? Why do they not seem to recruit but rely on word-of-mouth? The list could go on.

However, what impressed me was the fundamental security students and teachers seemed to have in the school. Of course, it was early in the school year but everyone seemed to be settling right in to the expectations. Students appeared to bond together and were relatively comfortable in the relationships. Among each other and with the teachers. My reaction comes simply from what I could see and "feel" in the observations and interviews. The school has been alive and active since 1957. So, while doing this observation in 1990 that was a good 33 years of operation. There is something to the secret of longevity. I was up near there recently and the sign is still there. A new one. Therefore, the school is still there. It is

nearly 40 years old now.

The curriculum appears fundamental with the usual math, science, English etc. The alternative approaches to teaching are not really alternative. They are fundamental: teachers teach and students learn; teachers present and dialogue with students; students do assignments and dialogue. What is alternative is the settings: living rooms, converted chicken coops, sheds, kitchens etc. (I understand graduation takes place in the barn.)

Two days of observations and interviews do not do justice to this unique school set back off a country road in southern New Hampshire. However, the Quaker ideals and testimonies; the family style living; the tolerance of students that are unique and special in many ways; tells me this school has a place in our society. If nothing else, the acceptance is a major paradigm that students like. While they learn non-violence and foster the "light within" they come to realize that everyone is to be treated and accepted for who they are. This is woven in and out of not the curriculum but the teaching methods and living standards.

The spiritual aspect, though liberal in some ways, is also traditional. "Love thy neighbor!" resounds throughout the non-violence testimony. Seeking the "Inner Light" can be embraced by all basic religions. For those seeking and searching for a higher power in life, the Meeting for Worship, can bring a sense of calm and listening to one's inner core, and like George Fox, the founder of the Society of Friends (Quakers), all teachers, students, and staff can embrace the gentle command: "Be still and know that I am God!"

I wish this unique little plateau found in the bend of a country road good luck!

[1] Author's Note

In the fall of 1990, I took a research course entitled: *Educational Research and Evaluation*. The course, an introductory research one, emphasized qualitative research. Our assignment: to do a research/evaluation project on something we were curious about but never had the time to research was an open invitation to peak latent curiosity. My curiosity bent in the direction of a school on a country road in southern New Hampshire. Our summer home is in southern New Hampshire and for thirty years I saw a sign for a place called *The Meeting School* off Route 202 in Rindge. I knew nothing about the school and yet, I had heard it was Quaker. This assignment was an opportunity to visit the school and see what it was all about.

I have also changed names in the picture or left them out altogether to protect privacy. At the time I was collecting data for the assignment, I had verbal permission by the characters to speak with them and to visit the school. However, I did not have written permission so I have chosen to protect the privacy of individuals to the best of my ability.

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