

THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE 1996

# Our Children, our Partners

A new vision for social action in the 21st century

Elise Boulding

## **The James Backhouse Lectures**

This is one of a series of Lectures instituted by Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends on the occasion of the establishment of that Yearly Meeting in 1964.

It was delivered in Melbourne on 7th January 1996, during the annual meeting of the Society.

James Backhouse was an English Friend who visited Australia from 1832 to 1838. He and his companion, George Washington Walker, travelled widely but spent most of their time in Tasmania. It was through their visit that Quaker Meetings were first established in Australia.

The two men had access to individual people with authority in the young colonies, and had influence in the British Parliament and social reform movement. In painstaking reports and personal letters to such people, they made practical suggestions and urged legislative action on penal reform, on land rights and the treatment of Aborigines, and on the rum trade. James Backhouse was a botanist and naturalist. He made careful observations and published full accounts of what he saw, in addition to encouraging Friends and following the deep concern for the convicts and the Aborigines that had brought him to Australia.

Australian Friends hope that this series of Lectures will bring fresh insights into truth, often with reference to the needs and aspirations of Australian Quakerism.

Patricia Firkin  
Presiding Clerk  
Australia Yearly Meeting

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## About the Author

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Born in Oslo, Norway, she is the widow of Kenneth Boulding, mother of five children, grandmother of sixteen and a member of Boulder Meeting of Intermountain Yearly Meeting, of the Society of Friends.

A sociologist with a global view, Dr Boulding has undertaken numerous transnational and comparative cross-national studies on conflict and peace, development and women in society. A scholar-activist, she was international chair of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom in the late 1960s, and has served on the board of the United Nations University, the International Jury of the UNESCO Prize for Peace Education, and was a member of the Commission recommending the establishment by Congress of a US Peace Institute. A futurist, Dr Boulding has conducted workshops on Imagining a World Without Weapons, and is currently writing a book on the Culture of Peace.

### AMONG HER PUBLICATIONS:

*Image of the Future*

a translation from the Dutch of Fred Polak's classic

*Handbook of International Data on Women* 1977

with Carson, Greenstein and Nuss

*Women in the Twentieth Century World* 1977

*From a Monastery Kitchen* 1976

*Children's Rights and the Wheel of Life* 1979

*Building a Global Civic Culture: Education for an Interdependent World* 1990

*One Small Plot of Heaven* 1989

*Peace, Culture and Society: Transnational Research and Dialogue* 1990

*New Agendas for Peace Research: Conflict and Security Re-examined* 1992

*The Underside of History: A View of Women through Time* 1992

*Building Peace in the Middle East: Challenges for States and Civil Society* 1994

*The Future : Images and Processes* 1995 with Kenneth Boulding

## **ABOUT THIS LECTURE**

Elise Boulding has spent her life researching and encouraging new ways to achieve peace in the world. In this Lecture she explores the idea of involving today's children much more intensely in the pursuit of new ways to produce a peaceful world for their future.

Elise Boulding believes that we are the losers if we do not utilise the potential in our children, listen to them and consider their ideas as we undertake social action. She describes instances where involving children has produced exciting results, and she challenges Friends everywhere to consider how they too can make their children more truly active participants in the life of their Meetings.

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## **Introduction**

**I**T IS A joy to come to Australia Yearly Meeting and speak with you about a subject close to your hearts and mine -bringing children and adults into a closer partnering relationship, not only in the Society of Friends but in the larger world as well. You were the courageous pioneers who brought the concern to the Friends World Committee for Consultation Triennial Meeting in August of 1994, that children be included more fully in the life of the world body of Friends, and be enabled to participate in all FWCC activities. I cheered aloud when I heard about it!

From the account in the FWCC minutes, kindly forwarded to me by Asia Bennett of the Section of the Americas, it seems that some Friends caught the spirit of your proposal and spoke passionately about the value of inter-generational participation, while other Friends focussed on the problems of facilities for child care and differing financial resources for family travel. The issue of children as delegates does not seem to have been clearly enunciated. While the Minute adopted noted the yearning of Friends for Meetings to be more inclusive of children, the emphasis was on the impracticality of such inclusiveness in the near future. Clearly we have a challenge to develop this concern in a way that does not make the participation of children seem to be an impractical luxury.

## The Segregation of Children and Youth

The problem of inclusiveness goes well beyond the Society of Friends. The tragedy is that we are living in a world which is becoming less and less inclusive of children and youth in all spheres of life - in work, in civic activity, even in play. Let us examine this general problem before we consider new and more encouraging developments.

Do you remember when it was fashionable to refer to this century as the Century of the Child, and to use phrases like 'the child-centered society'? Philippe Aries' book *Centuries of Childhood*<sup>1</sup> was one of many to call attention to the fact that children are not just miniature adults, but small human beings whose physical, social, emotional and intellectual development gradually unfolds over the first two decades of life until they become fully adult in their twenties.

This modest insight has had some unfortunate consequences. In the One-Third World it has produced whole industries that have grown up around 'the child', not only producing elaborately designed clothing and toys, but specially designed children's spaces. It has also led to an increasingly complicated set of social arrangements that leave children so finely age-graded that they are rarely exposed to other than their age-mates from pre-school on, except in their own families. Somewhere between the ages of 18 and 21 this segregated youth is abruptly tossed into the adult world and expected to take on those very adult roles from which they have been so carefully segregated.

This practice of exclusion from adult civil society is based on three concepts:

- (1) children are weak, unformed human beings who need protection from environmental hazards and exploitative adults,
- (2) children's experience and knowledge worlds are so limited that they have no information or skills of use to adult society,
- (3) society is so complex that only specially demarcated spaces staffed by professionally trained adults can prepare children to live in it.

The underlying view is that children must be protected from victimage. In the United Nations *Declaration of the Rights of the Child* only three out of ten



principles refer to children's **rights**. The other seven refer to constraints and protection against possible harm.

The irony is that harm against children is growing exponentially in the very century that was supposed to be dedicated to the creative flowering of human childhood. Children are indeed victims. They are subject to increasing levels of violence within the family itself - the one place in which we would like to think they were safe. In every world region there are growing numbers of street children, many of whom have no families at all.

The latest UN reports tell us that children are sinking deeper into poverty on every continent. Closely related is the continuing ruthless exploitation of children in field and factory, particularly (but not only) in the Two-Thirds World. The rates of social violence in neighborhoods and between neighborhood gangs are rising, along with increased rates of participation of children in the drug traffic. Even schools are combatting violence within their walls, often, ironically enough, by increased use of physical punishment. Over all the other violence hangs the great dark cloud of war - guerrilla war, civil war, interstate war. Landmines and indiscriminate bombing and shooting in countries saturated with weapons result in far more deaths of children than soldiers, wherever there is war.

And still we continue to try to develop and maintain age-segregated spaces for children in education, from pre-school to the university. In churches and Friends Meetings we strive to replicate that age-grading in the name of quality religious education. Children's clubs, services and special programs are all age-graded right through the teens. And the habit persists. We have groups for young adults, for young parents, for middle years folk and on through the Golden Age years.

I am not arguing that age grouping per se is bad. There are certain sequences of learning that are useful for children, and identifiable sets of common needs in different stages of life. The problem is that the practice has been carried to an extreme, leaving very few common social spaces in which child-adult friendships can develop.

Ask the children in your Meeting who their adult friends are, and what they do together. (Some Meetings actually make a point of encouraging this, praises be. But many Quaker children have never had a serious conversation with an adult who was not a relative, a teacher, or having special responsibility for children.) There are exceptions, of course, to the practice of segregation,

particularly in rural areas where farm families interact across generations in both work and play. And there are other exceptions, particularly in religious and ethnic groups.

Friends historically have practised a mixing of generations in their activities. It was taken for granted that very young children could sit quietly through an entire Meeting for Worship. (There are delightful stories told by older birthright Friends of how when they were small, understanding grandparents would quietly demonstrate little tricks to absorb restlessness, such as a rhythmic twiddling and reverse - twiddling of thumbs, or folding and refolding of a handkerchief.) Then there is the story of the children of Reading Meeting from the early days when Quakers were considered seditious. When the adults of the Meeting were jailed en masse for unauthorized gathering in public, the suddenly orphaned children of the Meeting not only took care of each other at home, but carried on forbidden worship in the Meeting House, in spite of beatings by the authorities.

Our Society has a powerful tradition and witness to equality of persons, respect for the seed of God in everyone and for the capacities within each person. This means that in this age of increasing segregation Friends have a special calling to re-involve children and youth not only in the ongoing work of the Society of Friends, but of the larger society of which we, and they, are a part. There were teenagers in that first Quaker Band known as The Valiant Sixty, and no generation since then has lacked gifted teenage ministers, as I read our history.

However, our witness faces a serious challenge. We must confront an underlying attitude, particularly in the One-Third World, that contributes to the pervasive separating out of children and adults - an attitude of disrespect for children and their capacities, masked by the provision of a lot of specialized attention in carefully designated settings. Some of this disrespect comes from patriarchal authority patterns, some from a dislike of the unexpected - something children can be guaranteed to introduce into adult settings - and some from a basic social denial, a refusal to face a future different from the present, a future that will belong to and be shaped by those who are now children.

## Respecting the Life Experience of Children and Youth

We as Friends need to open ourselves more fully to the actuality of the rich and multidimensional knowledge and experience worlds that children and youth inhabit (unless they belong to that sadly deprived group who live glued to a television set or a computer screen). This is the only possible basis for better partnerships within our Meetings that can also expand into the world outside. A young birthright Friend from Philadelphia who is now a busy mother of three, when I asked her about her memories of the Meeting in which she grew up, recalled that from a very early age the experience of the indwelling holy spirit was very real to her. However she felt the adult Friends around her only talked about the spirit, but didn't really know it. She was convinced then (and still is) that they **did not know what she knew!**

Take a few moments to reflect on your own childhood. Can you recapture memories of inward journeys that could not be explained to adults? If you keep searching, you will find such memories, not only from childhood, but from early and late teens... Did not each of us experience frustration over uncomprehending adults? But I hope we can also remember adults from our childhood who spoke and listened to us as if we were real persons ! Bless their memory.

Who knows how different today's world would be if an older generation had started listening to young people such as the students at the first International School in Geneva, children of the diplomats serving in the new League of Nations in the 1920s and 1930s ? The youth who participated in that early inspired effort at education for a new and more peaceful world were all killed in World War II. Not one graduate survived.

We do not lack evidence of the value of listening to the young. A 1979 study by geographer Robert Kates <sup>2</sup> of hazards for children, involved consulting a multiracial cross-class group of 3 to 6-year-olds. These children could not only identify all the adult-listed hazards in the experimental room in which they were placed, including 'dirty air', but they went on to identify hazards that the adult participants in the experiment never noticed. They also gave more realistic hazard ratings for each problem than the adults did. How could this be? For one thing, 3 to 6-year-olds live at a different eye level than adults, and therefore see things adults never see. Living at different eye levels becomes a powerful metaphor for what children see that remains invisible to adults.

The young not only have their own keen powers of observation, they

respond to what they see and help change their environment, deal with problems, in ways adults rarely notice. They are in fact co-shapers of their families and of their society, noticed or not. In my studies of the memories of college students about how they nurtured their parents through difficult times, I found that they remembered devising strategies to help suicidal mothers and fathers through serious depressions. They thought of ways to help fathers, who had lost their job and self-respect, feel loved and needed. They comforted mothers grieving over the loss of their own mother. Some of these memories went back as far as the age of four. Rarely did the parent being helped have any idea of the actual role their child was taking on.

The mistake adults make is to fail to appreciate the complexity of the knowledge and experience worlds of even very young children. In the first couple of years of life they have observed and taken in information about their physical and social environment at a staggering rate; their 'learning curve' might be thought of as a straight vertical line. The learning rate gradually slows down in the pre-teen years. By the time we are adults it is more like a learning crawl than the high-speed intake of the very young.

Compare, for example, adults and children at a lakeside or ocean beach in the summer. Most of the adults (not all!) are sprawled in the sun in a stupor, or have their eyes fastened to a book. The children are creating magic worlds in the sand at the water's edge, collecting every conceivable kind of shell, pebble, bits of debris and seaweed to decorate their miniworld, perhaps engineering small streams around towers and walls. Of course it's alright to lie in the sun, Friends, but respect what children are getting out of their play !

Anyone who seriously observes children at play in neighborhood settings would not underestimate what they know; but in our ordinary life we don't observe children that way. When Roger Hart <sup>3</sup> did a two-year study of children in a small Vermont town, getting permission from the young ones themselves to be with them in their own spaces, he found that the children had a competence in mapping and knowledge of local land use that considerably exceeded adult knowledge of the same terrain.

These were working class and middle class children. When the same types of observation are made of street children, in the big cities of the Americas, Asia and Africa, their knowledge of how to survive in an extremely hostile and sparse environment is awesome.

Precisely because of the complexity of children's experiences and their cognitive processing of those experiences, stage theories of cognitive and moral development, such as those of Piaget and Kohlberg, oversimplify the maturing process. Children's thinking and social responsiveness is not that different from adult thinking and responsiveness, except for the actual difference in the storehouse of happenings in their lives. While the significance of the accumulation of lived experience must not be underestimated, neither should the capacity for reaching sophisticated and mature judgements on the basis of whatever knowledge store is available, be underestimated. In short, we must respect the capacity of children to **think!**

It is useful to remember how arbitrary our demarcations of childhood, youth and adulthood are. In general, the term children is used for those under 12 or 14, youth for those from age 14 or 15 to 18 or 21 or 25. This means that in some societies youth become legally adult with full citizen's rights at age 18, in others not until 25. That is a long time to wait to be heard.

However, rites of passage in most societies honor milestones along the way for children in their acquisition of know-how for living. In Tibetan Buddhist cultures, children go through a Shambala rites-of-passage ceremony at age 8, when they formally take on responsibility for the feeding of animals and other work relating to care of the earth and provision of food. A second ceremony comes at age 16, when they take responsibility for the spiritual and social wellbeing of others - in other words, civic responsibility. These ceremonies have become very important in the lives of American Buddhist families, and I have been moved by the solemnity of the ritual for 8-year-olds.

A more common practice for most social groups is that the first rite of passage comes at puberty and the second at marriage. In most western societies the puberty rite involves very limited recognition of a new stage of responsible participation in society. Among Friends, since we have neither the baptismal nor confirmation rites of other Christian churches, we need to give even more attention to how we encourage and recognize the taking on of responsibility for the community by our children. The amazing thing is how much responsibility and how many worries children and young people carry, in spite of the care we take to segregate them, and in spite of our lack of respect for them. Children and youth in any society have many problems today. A study just completed of youth concerns in 75 communities in my home State of Colorado by the Department of Human Services, lists the following most frequently reported concerns

<b>Concern</b>	<b>Percent of Youth reporting</b>
Substance abuse	76.5 %
Youth violence / gangs	53 %
Teen pregnancy	53 %

High school programs for 14, 15 and 16-year-old mothers to complete their education, learn child care and job skills, is now one of the major features of many high schools in urban areas of the United States, including my own town of Boulder. The teaching of aikido, a set of physical techniques to be used in case of unprovoked attack, involving non-violent deflection of blows, is not yet taught in schools but is being discussed.<sup>5</sup>

The children of the Boulder Meeting, when asked to share their concerns with the adults of the Meeting in a forum hour, made it very clear that they live with a daily fear and anxiety about coping with violence on the way to and from school each day. This was very startling news for many adults in the Meeting.

An encouraging number of youth do not live passively with their fear. They do form partnerships with adults to make problems visible and work for solutions. One impressive example of such partnership based in the United States is the Children's Express. I quote from a recent report.

*Created in 1975, Children's Express (CE) is an international news service reported by children and teenagers for audiences of all ages. For almost 20 years, reporters (8-13) and editors (14-18) have examined critical children's issues and brought them to national attention. CE news teams... travelled on assignment all over the United States, and Cambodia, Thailand, Hiroshima, Chernobyl, Israel, Zambia and post-war Kuwait, reporting with the zeal and honesty of youth. Its young reporters and editors (over 3000 to date)... have interviewed senators, congress members, presidents, and prime ministers, as well as high school drop-outs, homeless youth, cancer survivors, and children of war.<sup>6</sup>*

They are advised and financed by a far-seeing group of distinguished editors and publishers who understand the importance of intergenerational work. Their most recent book, *Voices From the Future* (1993) is a moving series of interviews with gang members, skinheads, homeless teens and otherwise 'at risk' teens. Many of these teens have found ways to develop safe places and support systems for each other, with the help of caring adults, that will make a better

future possible for themselves and their peers. If they can do so much with so little, what are we doing to empower the invisibly struggling children and youth in our own cities?

Generally adults waver between accusing youth of being indifferent to the world they live in, or condemning them for raging at it with whatever weapons they have at their command. Sometimes youth are indifferent. Sometimes they are murderous. But how do we explain the courage for change in street children that Children's Express interviewers found; the courage that all those who work with children and youth in the most violent settings, do find? And how do we explain the 110,000 young people who recently poured into Paris from 30 nations in Europe, East and West, North and South, Catholic and Protestant, to meditate and pray with the ecumenical monks of the Taize community who arrange this youth prayer annually - filling five huge exhibition halls for five days of devout, intensely spiritual search?

'We need this. At home we are at the end of our rope. All we hear is war' said a young Serbian participant after a night of prayer with fellow Serbs and Croats.<sup>7</sup>

How do we account for Iqbal, the Pakistani child sold into slavery at age 4 by his parents, who after six years of being shackled to a carpet-weaving loom most of the time, tying knots hour after hour, was freed with the help of the Pakistani Bonded Labour Liberation Front. Where did he find the strength to help lead the crusade against child labor which brought him to Sweden at age 12 to address an international labor conference in 1994? What was going on in his mind, and in his spirit, in the years from age 4 to 10 when he was chained to the loom, and where did he find the words to speak of it?

Yes, we underestimate our children.

Let us confess the miracle that so many children manage to grow up socially and spiritually whole. The God-seed is already present at birth. Some children are in environments where the seed gets loving care and tending. We hope this is true for the children of our Meetings. Many more somehow find nurture in less supportive environments. Children can be sensitive to precious moments of beauty and caring opened up by an adult or another child in situations that might not even be noticed by others on the scene. Children can see beyond surfaces, and find hidden caring when it is there, including the caring of an often out-of-control and abusive parent. That capacity for in-depth seeing on the part of

the abused child becomes a resource for breaking the often vicious cycle of abused children becoming abusing parents.

And then there are the children who apparently live in utterly barren and loveless settings, yet the seed of the spirit comes to flowering as the child matures. Somewhere in that child's life a word of love has been spoken. With that word, the seed can flourish in barren soil, like the tree that takes root in a rocky crevice of a steep mountain side. The tree will grow toward the sky, nourished by the barest minimum of crumbled forest debris that winds have swept into the crevice, and by occasional trickles of water from passing storms.

Robert Coles<sup>8</sup>, the psychiatrist who spent a lifetime studying and working with seriously troubled children, came to see after 30 years of this work that he had been ignoring a profound spiritual sensitivity that kept coming through in children's responses to his very secular questions about their lives. Realizing that he had been missing something basic about how they were dealing with their lives, he then devoted several years to interviewing 8 to 12-year-old Muslim, Christian and Jewish children as well as children with no religious identification, about their faith and belief. These were all youngsters with serious problems. Discovering an awesome spiritual maturity and self-insight in their answers to his questions about the meaning of life and their views of God, good and evil, he came to understand that children coped with their lives at a far deeper level than psychiatric analysis alone could reveal. They were being nurtured by sometimes very fragmentary sources of which the adults around them would not have been aware. A word of love had somehow been spoken to them.

It is never too late for that word of love to be spoken. When I was exploring the motivations, life experiences and decisive moments in the lives of the women who all across the United States went out to 'strike for peace' in response to the Berlin crisis of 1961, ushering in a new phase of the international women's peace movement, I found a variety of paths to that moment. Some women had been raised from childhood to care about the world by activist parents. Others referred to teachers, ministers and community leaders - or read a book, or saw a movie - that inspired them in their student days, or as young parents. Some were now in their sixties or older, suddenly 'reached' by a new word about the world after a conventional, non-activist adult life. The seed had lain dormant, but it had not died. If I seem to be going far afield here, it is only to emphasize how powerful that seed is in every newborn, and how urgent it is that we recognize, respect and nurture it.



## Examples of Partnering

I have been talking both about partnering and about nurturing in what I have said so far. Do the two modes conflict at all? We partner, whether with other adults or with children, on the basis of shared responsibility and shared respect, in a relationship of equality that does not preclude alternating roles of leading and following, teaching and learning.

Is there room for nurture in this relationship of equality?

The answer is a resounding yes. A good partnership relation implies mutual nurturance whether the relationship is marital, parent-child, work-related or civic. So now let us consider some examples of nurturant partnership between adults and children / youth.

First let it be said that there have always been adults who have instinctively related to children in a nurturant partnership of mutual respect - in every age, in every culture, no matter how age-graded or patriarchal or authoritarian the society. But as I have already indicated, the developments of this century have largely been in the direction of one-way care and protection rather than cooperation in a spirit of mutuality.

Nevertheless the UN *Declaration of the Rights of the Child*, paternalism aside, has done for children and youth what UN Conventions on women's rights have done for women. In both cases the UN has provided a platform for the public working out of otherwise ignored concerns relating to a fuller participation by these traditionally excluded categories of persons, in the societies of which they are a part. From the UN side this has been facilitated by the 1979 International Year of the Child as well as the World Youth Assemblies of 1970 and 1980, the 1985 International Year of Youth, and the 1990 World Children's Summit.

From the side of emerging global civil society and the world of international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), we have witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of INGOs relating to children and youth. The 1993-94 *Yearbook of International Organizations* Volume 3, lists 859 INGOs

focussed on children, 47 on adolescents and 458 on youth. However when we ask which of the children's INGOs involve actual **participation** of children as members and initiators of activity, only 22 or 6 per cent, fall into that category. In the case of INGOs focused on adolescence, 10 or 21 per cent, involve their direct participation; for youth INGOs, 191 or 42 per cent, are fully participatory. This means that most of these organizations are **advocacy** organizations **on behalf of** children and youth. While advocacy has an important role to play, especially in dealing with the suffering of the young, in terms of developing actual intergenerational partnerships for social change, the INGO world still has a long way to go.

On a grassroots level however, things have been happening in terms of children and youth activities with adult partners, particularly since the 1960s. Since older youth already have a long history of organizing, I will focus here primarily on the pre-teens and younger teens.

By the 1970s that extraordinary musical theater format, the Peace Child <sup>9</sup>, had evolved. Peace Child productions involved taking a musical score around the world and having local children, pre-teens and teens, create their own play about peace in their own language, built around the musical score. Thus hundreds of versions of the Peace Child were performed by children on every continent, for several decades. These productions served to conscientize and to mobilize both adults and children, not only against war, but for a greater visibility and participation of children in public life.

Other initiatives developed in various countries, and by 1990 the Coalition for Children of the Earth was in its early stages, based on a high level of networking activity among children and youth and their partnering adults.

The deteriorating condition of the earth itself aroused children on every continent. The resulting children's movements are a startling demonstration that children are more aware of the condition of their immediate environment than many of the adults around them, and are able to project in their own minds what this meant for the world.

Young Carolina Garcia Travesi<sup>10</sup> in Tamaulipas, Mexico was 9 when she first started worrying about the contamination all around her in the air, soil and water of her town. She started a local ecology club with her classmates, and is today at 15 an international leader in youth initiatives to save the earth. One of hundreds of children who by sheer determination and ingenuity got to the Rio

Conference on the Environment in 1992, her energy, imagination and articulateness attracted the adult partners (including her own rather surprised parents) necessary for the development of continuing organisational structures and communication networks.

Many parallel initiatives emerged independently, and then became interlinked as groups found out about each other.

The Peace Child organization gave birth to Rescue Mission Planet Earth<sup>11</sup> in response to the tremendous opportunities for networking at Rio, and began publishing *Global Network News* to help connect children and young people. This successor organisation has published a Version of Agenda 21 prepared by children under the title, *Rescue Mission Planet Earth*, and has collected manuscripts from its young members for a History of the United Nations. The organisation's current project is the preparation of a *Rescue Mission Cabaret* on the model of the Peace Child production - scripts to be created locally around a core set of songs. All of this is done by young people from 8 to 18-19 years of age, with Peace Child founder David Woolcombe serving as a key adult partner.

The organisation, Rescue Mission Planet Earth, is now co-directed by Woolcombe and 19-year-old Cecilia Weckstrom. Its *Global Network News* publishes activity reports from around the world by children and youth; it also works with Voice of the Children, a 40-country network started in Norway in 1991 with children aged 12 to 15, to promote the civic participation of children in local, national and world governance. Some of you may have been present at a memorable civic event in Sydney in 1992 when 35 young Australian members of the Voice of Children gathered in Parliament House to tell the listening politicians, business leaders and media what they were concerned about.

These and other international networking groups such as Lifelinks, which works on school twinning between continents, all co-operate in the very loose Coalition for Children of the Earth<sup>12</sup> to promote an Annual Day of Access around the world for children to discuss with local, national and international officials and leaders their thinking about threats to human survival. Children gathered at the 1995 World Summit of Children in San Francisco prepared a request to the UN General Assembly to declare such a day, and also presented a proposal for an ongoing General Assembly of older children of non-voting age and youth, to provide a voice at the United Nations for the one-third of the world's population that are legally 'minors'.

Children are not waiting for the United Nations to act. With the help of the national Voice of Children groups they are learning how to hold hearings on important social issues in their local communities, preferably in the local town hall.<sup>13</sup> Reports indicate attentive audiences of local and state councils and legislators, business people and media. Many towns in Europe already have a Day of Access when young pre-voting age citizens join local governing councils for the day and speak of their concerns.

The United Nations, in spite of its key role mentioned above in providing the framework for addressing the concerns and needs of the young, is very resistant to actual participation of children in its affairs. Sad to say, it refused to admit the several hundred children gathered at the World Summit of Children in San Francisco in the summer of 1995 to the ceremony celebrating the signing of the UN Charter, an event the children had counted on participating in. This action was of a piece with the UN's refusal to have a child address the first UN World Summit for Children in 1990. Old patriarchal habits die hard.

## **Quaker Partnering**

Having given this very rapid overview of children and youth initiatives around the world facilitated by creative youth-adult partnerships, I would like to encourage and honor all that Friends in Australia Yearly Meeting have done to facilitate such partnering within your Meetings, at the Friends School, and at the 1994 Friends World Committee Triennial. We need to share stories of how cross-generational cooperation works, to encourage the timid! Most of us will have such stories, since each decade of this century has had its own crisis calling for dissenting voices and public witness.

I have an especially vivid memory of a witness led in the 1960s by our high school Young Friends group in Ann Arbor, Michigan. This was at the height of the civil rights movement in the South including rising violence in Selma, Alabama, and at a time of escalation in Vietnam. Young Friends, with the full support of older Friends in the Meeting, wanted to call attention to the connection between these two apparently separate sets of happenings. They announced a one-day fast and made signs for those fasting to wear that said, 'I'm hungry for peace in Selma and Vietnam'. The idea spread through the community with the speed of light. Eighty-year-olds fasted and wore those signs. Whole elementary school

classes fasted and wore those signs. It was a great day for the peace movement in Ann Arbor.

I have followed the careers of those feisty Quaker teenagers (yes, there was a Boulding in the group!), and they are now in turn partnering the next generation, and the next, in more sophisticated forms of peace action than either they or we thought of in the 1960s.

It is a good thing to think in terms of overlapping life cycles and overlapping generations as we move through the decades of our lives. We keep gaining new insights, new skills, new understandings of the many aspects of the task of peace building, sharing with and learning from those older and younger than we, and still at it in the last years, months and days of our lives.

Not long before Kenneth Boulding went into his final coma, he smiled and said, 'I love the world'. That love, and the spiritual strength it gave the rest of us, was his active work of peace building which still goes on. I am remembering that Kenneth was your inaugural Backhouse Lecturer in 1964. Perhaps he is listening in now.

The peace-building partnership begins of course in the home, in our family worship, in our hush before each meal, in our family meetings for business, where each child's views are heard, each idea seriously considered. It continues in our Meetings as our children and junior and senior Young Friends share times of worship with us, bring reports to our meetings for business of their activities and concerns, and serve on our committees.

There should be no Meeting Committee, including Ministry and Counsel, without a senior young Friend and preferably also a junior Young Friend on it. Whatever the Meeting business, no child of school age is too young to have ideas worth listening to. I have heard glowing reports of your summer camps for young people at the Quaker family farm, Bega. How much of the intergenerational give-and-take at Bega can also be carried out in your home Meetings, in the gatherings of your seven regions, at Yearly Meeting, and in Quaker Service Australia? I hope your important conflict resolution work with aboriginal groups includes pre-teens and teenagers from both sides.

Friends have of course been active in conflict resolution and mediation since the earliest days of Quakerism, and I note that Australian Friends have been giving significant priority to this. It has been inspiring to see how non-violence and conflict resolution training programs have been developed for children, young

people and adults in various yearly meetings on different continents. It will be an important project to make as complete a listing of these as possible to share within the world family of Friends.

There is the Children's Creative Response to Conflict Program, helping children learn conflict resolution skills in schools and local Meetings, and the Alternatives to Violence Program, helping teens and adults who have experienced much violence and incarceration in prisons, to become socially and spiritually whole persons capable of contributing to community life.<sup>14</sup> Initiated by Friends, these are spreading among Friends and non-Friends across the Americas and in Europe. And Woodbrooke has a fine Responding to Conflict Program, that trains Friends and others from all continents. Then there is the quiet mediation work that goes on at our Quaker UN Centers in Geneva and New York, and at Quaker Service and American Friends Service Committee centres in Africa, Asia and Latin America.

And there is more happening, that the rest of us don't hear about. We need to share information and empower each other with our insights and experiences from conflict resolution and mediation work.

As ethnic and social conflicts multiply around the world, accompanied by a horrifying level of violence, the need for trained nonviolent peace teams in the tradition of Gandhi's vision of the Shanti Sena, creating local spaces for peace building in the midst of that violence, becomes more pressing every day. We know that the UN peacekeepers, certainly doing their best, are not trained for that kind of work.

Many among us have been supporting, and some of us participating in, unarmed non-violent peace teams such as the Peace Brigades and Christian Peacemakers. Now the time has come for Friends to make a more substantial contribution to this important work.

Clear spiritual leadings have brought the North American Friends Peace Team Coordinating Council into being, with the support of eleven Yearly Meetings to date and an office based at Baltimore Yearly Meeting.<sup>15</sup> The Council will arrange training for young and older Friends to work with existing peace teams, especially Christian Peacemaker Teams, and plan joint projects with Quaker Service and the American Friends Service Committee. Eventually we will form special teams as needed to work with local peacemakers in high-conflict areas.

We are working toward making this a truly intercontinental Quaker effort with support from Yearly Meetings around the world, including of course Australia Yearly Meeting. The Friends World Committee is exploring the mechanics of how Friends Peace Teams can come under its care.

In developing the Friends Peace Team concept, we have emphasized strongly that apprenticeship training for this type of work must be spirit-led and must begin in conflict areas in our own home communities, and in our own countries. Local peacemakers who live in the midst of conflict will be our first teachers. Only after this kind of local apprenticeship will peace team members be ready for partnership roles abroad.

These teams will need to be intergenerational in order to reach out effectively to all parts of the communities in conflict. Some will fear to trust our teenagers in these situations. It will be evident from what I have already said that in my view spiritually and emotionally mature teenagers will see what adults might miss, and will find openings for contact and relationship that adults would not think of.

## **A Vision for the Future - How We Work Together**

Australia is a big country, and Friends are few. All the more reason to involve every child and every teenager in the full range of Quaker activity! I have mentioned how much networking goes on among the young, not only within countries but internationally and between continents. Much of it is done the 'oldfashioned' way through handwritten or typed letters by children as young as seven, then compiled in international Newsletters that go out to an intergenerational constituency. Every Quaker family, every Meeting can be part of these networks. Then there are the young who have access to computers and communicate by E-mail, making a whole new level of networking possible. However, we must never forget that the vast majority of people of all ages have no access to computers. The good old Universal Postal Union is still essential. It will continue to be important in the twenty-first century. So will travel, and face-to-face dialogue. The computer isn't much use in helping us to know one another in that which is eternal, the ultimate basis for all our intergenerational community building and peace and justice work.

Australia is on the threshold of a major new role in an ailing international system, with a unique geosocial environment that is attracting peace researchers, conflict resolvers, futures researchers, environmentalists and indigenous movements worldwide. Friends are an important part of each of these movements. What an opportunity to engage jointly with your young people in developing the pioneering activities that will make the twenty-first century more peaceful, more just, more fun to live in !

Australia could be the first country with a pre-teen and teen-age member of every city council, every local citizen's committee, every state legislature and the national House of Parliament. Without continuing infusions of youthful insight we will never get to that peaceful twenty-first century!

We are in danger of missing these opportunities. We are so busy with our existing daily commitments, and they take all our energy. And how can we take time to work for something so different that we can't even imagine it?

Imagination is a key word here. Friends have some serious visioning work to do. To begin, let us take a little time right now to step into 2026, thirty years from now, in our imagination. Let us mentally experience a world in which humans of all ages learn, work, carry out civic activities, play together, create together, in a wonderful variety of shared spaces... What do those spaces look like?... Who is there?... What is going on?...

(Note that there are special nooks for age groups from young to old. Even in 2026 there are times when it is good to be with our own generation!)

What do we notice about earth, sky, bodies of water, growing things?... And buildings?... What are peoples' living arrangements?... What sort of economy is this?... How does community decision making take place?... Are we a more diverse society?... How are conflicts, differences managed?... How does learning take place, scientific exploration?... Where do the arts fit in?... How is the spiritual life nourished?... What is our Meeting doing?...

From now on, from time to time, visit that future in your imagination. Give time to social daydreaming. It is our vision of the future that helps set our priorities, guides our action, in the present.



In closing I will remind you of the beautiful rainbow banner made by the children of Australia Yearly Meeting for the FWCC Triennial last year.

*'And God said, This is the sign of the covenant which I make between me and you and every living creature that is with you, for all future generations. I set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be a sign of the covenant between me and the earth.'* (Gen. 9:12,13)

That rainbow is also a sign of the covenant between you the adults and you the children and young people of Australia Yearly Meeting. Cherish that covenant, for it is the promise of a way to the future.

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## NOTES

1. Philippe Aries, *Centuries of Childhood*, tr. by Robert Baldick. New York: A. Knopf, 1962.
2. D. Noyes, F. Powers and R.W. Kates, *Comparative Assessments of the Environmental and Technological Hazards of Small Children*. Paper presented at the session, Children and Their Social Environments, Annual Meeting of the Association of American Geographers, 1979.
3. Roger Hart, *Children's Experience of Place*. New York: Irvington 1979.
4. Gareth Matthews provides a thoughtful critique of age-related stages and points out the similarities between the thought processes of children and adults in *The Philosophy of Childhood*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1994.
5. Aikido is of course far more than a method of defense. It is a spiritually based approach to violence that aims to rechannel the energies and attitudes of the attacker.
6. Children's Express has the motto, 'By Children for Everyone'. It is located at 1440 New York Avenue NW, Suite 510, Washington DC 20005.
7. A vivid account of the Taize Youth Assembly in Paris by Morlise Simons appeared in the New York Times for January 2, 1995.
8. Robert Coles, *The Spiritual Life of Children*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990. For a Quaker perspective, see my essays on children and family life in *One Small Plot of Heaven: Reflections of a Quaker Sociologist on Family Life*, Wallingford, Pa: Pendle Hill, 1989.
9. The Peace Child theater project and the organization called Peace Child, were started by David Woollcombe and headquartered at the White House, Buntingford, Herts, England SG9 9AH.
10. Carolina Garcia Travesi was so interested in the questions I put to her that she wrote me a substantial essay on her activities in flawless English!
11. Rescue Mission Planet Earth, the successor organization to Peace Child, has the same address (see note 9). *Global Network News* is edited and published from that address.

12. The office for the Coalition for Children of the Earth is at Peaceways, 324 Catalpa Ave. Suite 318, San Mateo CA 94401.

13. The Northern Secretariat for Voice of the Children is PO Box 8844 Youngstorget 0028, Oslo, Norway. The Southern Secretariat is FUNAM, Casilla de Correo 83, Correo Central, 5000 Cordoba, Argentina.

14. Children's Creative Response to Conflict is now affiliated with the International Fellowship of Reconciliation. Materials are available in Spanish and English from the IFOR office in Alkmaar, Netherlands, and from the FOR-USA, PO Box 271, Nyack, NY 10960. The Alternatives to Violence *Basic Manual* is available from AVP-USA , 15 Rutherford Place, NY, NY 10003. I do not know if it is available in other languages.

15. The address for Friends Peace Team Project is c/o Baltimore Yearly Meeting, 17100 Quaker Lane, Sandy Spring MD 20860.