

Starting With Dying

Because I've worked with many groups of Friends internationally, it's easy for me to see each one's relative strengths. I think of these as the spiritual gifts of the community. It makes sense that our yearly meetings would have different spiritual gifts. We're meant to be helping each other, all around the world.

One of the strongest gifts I see among Australian Friends is death. I know, I know, that's a funny thing to write front and center in this, my first blog as your Communications and Media Assistant. But it's the truth. How people handle death—how they cherish each other in that final transition and honor one another's memory afterwards—says a lot about how people relate to one another. Do they want to pretend that hard times don't happen? Or are they prepared to engage in hard times lovingly? From what I've seen, Australian Friends are prepared for hard times.

As I read through the AYM website, I found many indications of this. For example, included in the resources for regional meetings is [this guide](#), entitled "Information to Include in a Testimony." By the time I came across it, I'd read several newsletters containing such testimonies, and I'd treasured getting to know the recently departed Friends. I like, too, that there's [this document](#) to be prepared during life, in which Friends can record basic information about themselves and give it to their regional clerks for safekeeping. So many times, when a Friend dies, those still living wonder: would he want us to contact his daughter, who was estranged? Does anyone know the name of his wife who died so long ago? Friends want to honor the wishes of those who have died, but we don't always know how to do so.

A little more digging on the website, and I found [Quaker Biographies](#), a database of many Australian Friends who have died, going back nearly two hundred years and in many cases including biographical details and even audio recordings about the person's life. And finally, [this comprehensive guide](#), in which I especially like the section on "what to do in the first days after the death of a loved one." Sometimes, when we're grieving, we're at a loss for how to move forward, and I can imagine it being incredibly helpful to have a step-by-step map, especially one that gives explicit encouragement to slow down and take our time.

I'm grateful to know about this gift that Australian Friends carry. In the future, when I hear from Friends struggling to know how to engage with death well, I'll tell them, "Go look what Quakers in Australia have to say."

My hope with this blog, in the next few months, is to keep highlighting the strengths that I see among Friends in Australia and to remind you of some of the available resources you might have forgotten. For now, I'll end with a quote:

“Are you able to contemplate your death and the death of those closest to you? Accepting the fact of death, we are freed to live more fully. In bereavement, give yourself time to grieve. When others mourn, let your love embrace them.” - Advices and Queries No. 32

*Contributed by Emily Provance
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