

*On Being a Spiritual Nurturer, 2006-2008*  
*Final Integrative Project*

Mixed Metaphors

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In a recent video, Carrie Newcomer introduces the song, *There is a Tree*,\* by explaining that she sees her song writing as an attempt to put into language all the things that we experience that have no words. The song contains the words,

*I am the fool whose life's been spent between what's said and what is meant.*

My wall hanging is an attempt to express in metaphor and symbol aspects of my School of the Spirit experiences that have no words, to be foolish enough to try and reflect the gaps between what I can say and what is meant behind those words.

The wall hanging contains multiple and layered metaphors including water, trees, songs, flight, hearts, and spirals. At the bottom of the hanging, there are streams. Three small streams combine to form one larger stream. There is a figure at the conjunction, representing in part my coming to accept the many streams that have fed my spirit over the years and an increasing willingness to step into the liminal spaces where traditions elide - not blurring one another but in those spaces where Truth overlaps even when language separates.

The figure also reflects my experiences around the gospel song *Wade in the Water*. Shortly after reading and being deeply affected by Lucy McIver's *A Song of Death, Our Spiritual Birth. A Quaker Way of Dying*, I attended a performance of the Alvin Ailey Dance Company. The show ended with their signature dance *Reflections* and during the section using *Wade in the Water*, I realized that I was seeing her words in dance. Later we sang the song at one of the residencies, and still later that song was running in my head as I followed a difficult leading. The leading involved speaking out about work conditions. Two friends gifted me with their presence in prayer just before a meeting and one offered me a vision of my walking into and standing in Living Water. That prompted the song to accompany me.

The star by the figure is also tied to that leading. The original of that star was part of an exercise at a weekend retreat (organized by fellow members of the School of the Spirit). Attenders were asked to pick up an item from a table. I found myself drawn to two objects and going against a sense of not quite following the rules, I took both. One was a rock that represented grounding to me, the other a small fabric star. I soon realized the star was to be given to a co-worker as a reminder of God's love. That same star was loaned to me for the meeting mentioned above, a tangible reminder of the support of co-workers.

Above the water are 2 trees. The larger one represents Quaker heritage, the smaller my own Quaker faith. The acorns reflect the transmission of Quaker faith and practice. They also remind me of Julien of Norwich's contemplation of a hazelnut and seeing in it the care and concern of God for all things and of her saying "all shall be well and all shall be well and all manner of things shall be well." The largest one also recalls another Carrie Newcomer song, one that has been important to me throughout the School of the Spirit, *The Fisher King*. The song's refrain,

*Just down the road and to the left, It's never been any further,  
To find the thing you never lost, who serves, who serves the grail*

speaks to my experience of continually finding in spiritual terms, that which I've never lost. Perhaps the most notable example is finding Friends' meetings, but in smaller ways I am daily reminded of my connectedness to the divine.

The wall hanging has another instance of a road with small jogs to the left. The second turn to the left leads to a little yellow house. Our meeting owns and uses a little yellow house for meetings and potlucks. The placement of the house toward the end of this part of my journey represents my returning to my meeting community after this program. The house is encircled by a ring of people, again symbolizing the meeting community. Not quite at the center is a heart which symbolizes the School of the Spirit and an aspect of my application essay. I wrote of wanting to move from purely intellectual spirituality and service without deep contact into a spirituality and service from the heart. The books surrounding the heart represent the readings and writings that have helped to transform me - even as they are transformed into a dove, flying into the unknown but bearing God's grace.

Inside the heart are symbols of the School of the Spirit: my K-Group and my care committee. There are also coins that represent the topic of my first research paper, stewardship, and a circle of beads for my second research paper on kinetic forms of prayer, including prayer beads. There is also a cross to reflect my new understanding of Christianity, and in particular, the meaning of bearing a cross as a way of integrity.

The swirls appearing throughout the hanging symbolize grace and the way that it turns you about and then places you in the center and my realization of how much grace there is in my life and spiritual journey. The yellow in the top right corner refers to George Fox's ocean of light.

The metaphor is not a specific image but rather the imperfection of the whole. For years I've wanted to make this hanging but always stopped out of a fear that I could not make it as perfectly as I would like. I have learned in these last two years that it is okay to be spiritually messy, to free myself a bit from lofty expectations and relish a little messiness and play in the name of Love.

\* *There is a Tree*, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u2ISYPAqF5k>, 10 November 2008.