

*Liaisons, Clerks, and Representatives: Please share this epistle widely. Thanks!*

Hello Pacific Yearly Meeting Friends! And farewell!!

After eleven years (!!!), the time has come to bid you a ‘see you around.’ Today is my official last day as the PYM Youth Programs Coordinator, a role I’ve been in since August 2011 and an initiative I’ve been part of in various ways since spring 2008. I’m writing to make sure everyone knows I’m leaving and to take this opportunity to share some reflections.

(For those sitting on the edge of your seats right now..., Yes, there will be a new YPC. The Youth Programs Coordinating Committee will be making an announcement about that shortly. At the end of this epistle you’ll find a list of contact people for the interim.)

When I sat down to write this letter, I was thinking a page or two would be plenty to cover a goodbye-for-now and a few parting comments, maybe a list of accomplishments and acknowledgments. Instead you’re getting a little bit of handing-off, some reminders, a large pinch of reflection, a dash of celebration, and a record of waypoints—a draft of a map still in the making.

I certainly did not fully grasp what I was getting into when I said yes (or ‘fine’ or ‘um ok’) to being part of all this YPC business. While I can’t predict the future, I can try to tell a true story from where I sit today (in a blue roller chair at a desk in my home office with a view of mid-May stormclouds over the middle of California’s Central Valley, enjoying a reprieve from pollen-permeated air, stringing together prepositions....).

Some of you might at this point be ready to skip to the last page for some announcements you can put into your newsletters. For the rest of you, and for me, let’s travel back together:

### **A not-so-brief history and retrospective**

To start, I’d like for us all to acknowledge and thank Sarah Beutel (IMYM), who filled the role of PYM’s first YPC and endured being PYM’s first regular employee from April 2010 to August 2011. Sarah’s foundational work in her year and a half of service made a lasting difference for the YPC initiative. It was hard work figuring how and where to start on such a big endeavor, made even more challenging since many PYM Friends still stung from the difficult process of deciding whether to change how PYM had done (or not done) these things in the past and to raise the money to pay for something scary (or exciting) and new. On top of that, PYM was barely ready to handle the responsibility of being an employer (I was Clerk of the “YPC Supervisory Committee” at that time, so I speak for myself on that one).

Now, almost 45 Youth Programs committee members (thank you all), 11 JYMs, 7 YAF Pre-AS-Retreats, 6 YPCC clerks (moi, Kate Watkins, Mary Klein, Jim Summers, Bertha Peña, Rebekah Percy), 5 PYM Presiding Clerks (Joe Franko, Marilee Eusebio, Steve Smith, Diego Navarro, Sandy Kewman), 4 YPC Supervisors (Elizabeth Boardman, Mary Klein, Steve Leeds, Barbara Babin), 2 YPCs (Sarah and me), and 1 trip half-way around the world later, here is what I can say:

### ***Why me, oh lord....***

In 2008, I was invited into a process that was already underway to create that paid YPC position. I had attended PYM Annual Session a few times in 2000-2002 as a new Friend and young adult in La Jolla Meeting; six years later I received a call from then-Clerk of PYM's Ministry & Oversight Committee, Laura Magnani, saying "so I hear from Darcy Stanley that you have experience working with teenagers." At that time I had just finished a PhD program in Geography during which I had worked with a youth group in a small farmworker community near Davis, CA, doing youth-led community-based participatory action research and mural painting. I was a few months away from accepting a job as Co-Director of a Sacramento/Oakland-based nonprofit that promoted youth-led research for community and organizational change. I had long given up on attending Annual Session, instead joining Davis Meeting and taking up occasional wider Quaker opportunities like the World Gathering of Young Friends and the AFSC Mexico Summer Service Project.

### ***Why youth?***

By the time those PYM Friends reached out and pulled me back in, they had already discerned that a 'youth coordinator' was their desired solution. Solution to what? Well, even as an eventual co-creator of the formal proposal to create the YPC position, I never heard a concise problem statement. There was certainly a fair amount of worry about younger Friends growing up and leaving disillusioned, that their spiritual needs had gone unmet, and that the leap from youth to adult within PYM and local Meetings was seen by some as an unappealing route.

Early on, before PYM made the final decision to proceed with hiring a Coordinator and during the time when Vanessa Julye from the FGC Ministry on Racism was regularly traveling in the ministry at PYM sessions, I spoke up in plenary (maybe it was ministry) to challenge PYM to recognize that the effort to address brokenness among the ages of PYM must run in tandem with other ways that PYM has struggled and needs to keep trying to be a truly welcoming and inclusive community. That if we were going to put effort into this one strand that we not forget or diminish the others. It was interesting to me at the time that focusing on youth seemed easiest for PYM (and those of you who were there know it was not 'easy' at all).

### ***A vision of what?***

Thanks to an inspirational visit from Emily Stewart, the then-FGC Youth Ministries Coordinator, and Betsy Blake as her elder, to the 2009 Spring College Park QM, we on the Youth Programs committee adopted the language of "a vision of a vibrant, intergenerational Friends community." We also eventually ended up buying many copies of FGC's book, [Build It! A Toolkit for Nurturing Intergenerational Spiritual Community](#), and gifting them to every Meeting and Worship Group in our YM and to the JYM Committee.

### ***But how?***

What ensued was an effort to make youth more visible and central within the community, to provide resources to nurture and support novel ideas, and very practical things like advocating for the registration process to adequately take into account the needs of the

young adult, teen, and (eventually) children's programs. We worked on things like creating systems to help the volunteers on high-turnover committees learn and remember what their tasks were without having to reinvent them each time. Also things like teaching young people how to use email for Quaker business and do conference calls (sorry, kids), and older folks how to use social media (sorry, not sorry), and everyone how to learn and practice the kinds of spiritual deepening that are prerequisites in the search for Unity within Diversity. There was a lot of awkward stumbling along the way, and eventually some lasting changes. I'm admittedly regretful in retrospect that there was probably some propping-up of dysfunctional systems that would have been better to let wither or metamorphose. On the other hand, there are also some goals left far from unmet, such as figuring out how to support all the Monthly Meetings and Worship Groups to have their own local vibrant youth programs and solid intergenerational community. I will certainly remember fondly the visits, for example: worshiping and presenting among the Calaveras Big Trees with Delta Meeting, facilitating activities at the Orange County Meeting's retreat at the outdoor center in Julian, leading games and walking the Sundial Bridge with Redding Friends, provoking creative skits on outreach at Humboldt and Grass Valley, helping Sacramento Meeting start a middle-school group, and getting Berkeley Friends to be silly.

It still could be useful if some folks could look back and recreate a problem statement apropos to the beginning as a marker of where the PYM community started, but at least the current YPC Committee will try to capture in words where we are now when they publish their recent program evaluation.

Let's all applaud the ~60 PYM Friends who have participated in one or more of the 10 "FRAP Trainings" or "Becoming at Adult Allies to Youth Workshops" put on by Sarah Beutel or me. Sarah and Mary Klein's original training agenda and role-play scripts served as an evolving backbone for these experiential workshops. Participants went on to join the rolls of Friends who serve on children's and teen committees, programs, and camps at the YM, QM, and MM levels. Some of these folks contribute not by direct youth-work, but by finding myriad ways for their Meetings and themselves to understand and meet the needs of younger Friends, and striving to make the whole Friends community more welcoming and inclusive.

### ***Money is a tool, not an end...***

The generous gift that created the PYM Bob Vogel Endowment and thereby the "Youth Programs Fund" in 2013 is proving itself to be essential in creating the conditions for change. The YPCC and I have worked to create and fine-tune the application and administration processes that have provided opportunities to a (low) estimate of 250 Friends and friends over last 5 years. While we can count the dollars spent and activities conducted, it is the qualitative description of the impact on individual youth and intergenerational spiritual community that is the most compelling and is still coming to be understood.

A brief history of this fund and endowment: in 2013, PYM and the YPCC accepted (with some strain to find Unity in accepting the terms and responsibility) this large gift of money from Pacific Friends Outreach Society (PFOS) when it laid itself down and offered its

holdings to be known as the “Bob Vogel Endowment” to be used at the discretion of the YPCC. Thus the “Youth Programs Fund” was born, receiving interest from the Endowment. The YPCC uses this to fund internal initiatives of the committee as well as selected proposals from external applicants. PFOS asked that the endowment be named after Friend Bob Vogel, in honor of his lifelong work for peace and justice, commitment to young people, and service to PYM and f/Friends widely.

***... and we've done some pretty cool things thanks to that money ...***

Interest from the Bob Vogel Endowment fills our “Youth Programs Fund” with approximately \$8,000 of interest twice a year (in this recent economy), giving us financial resources to support a variety of ministries, leadings, and skill development. Since inception in 2014 through early 2019, the Youth Programs Fund has awarded over \$75,000 of its \$81,000 interest earnings so far for youth and adult allies to attend events (e.g., camps, Quaker Center workshops, Pendle Hill workshops, White Privilege Conference, Western Young Friends New Year's Gathering, California Indian Conference, El Salvador Service Learning Trip, Quaker Earthcare Witness, Mystics Retreat); for intervisitation between Quarterly Meetings and Yearly Meetings (including CPQM, SCQM, Intermountain YM, Australia YM, Pacific YM, and Reunion General de los Amigos en Mexico); for young adults to organize retreats before Annual Session and workshops (e.g., clerking, leadership, AVP, couple enrichment); as seed funding for the Quaker Oaks Farm Spring Youth Service-Learning Camp and Summer Peace Garden & Documentary Film workshop, both with the Wukchumni Tribe; and to take action (FCNL Youth Lobby Day, School of the Americas Watch in Nogales, Selective Service hearings testimony, racial justice trainings for Pacific YM Friends, including the "Right Relationships with Native Americans" workshop); and to provide resources for spiritual accompaniment (eldering).

I'm personally grateful for a recent donation of \$5,000 to the Vogel Endowment from Davis Meeting a couple months ago in honor of my nearly eight years of service as the Youth Programs Coordinator. In adding to the endowment, gifts like this increase the interest generated from the investment into the indefinite future and thereby the number of projects and activities the YPCC will be able to fund and support.

FYI Application deadlines for the Youth Programs Fund are June 20th, September 20th, December 20th, and March 20th (near the equinoxes and solstices):

[pacificyearlymeeting.org/youth/resources-funding/](http://pacificyearlymeeting.org/youth/resources-funding/)

***... such as Spring Camp: A vision of peoples gathered on the Land***

One thing I was not at all expecting to get to do as YPC that became a core piece work and one of my favorite projects is the Spring Youth Service-Learning Camp with Quaker Oaks Farm (QOF) and the Wukchumni Tribe. Spring Camp brings together Native and non-Native, Quaker and non-Quaker, youth and adults, creating relationships with each other and with the Land. This project began as a convergence of Bill Lovett's vision of youth gathering at his beloved Quaker Oaks Farm in Visalia, a commitment by Elizabeth Boardman as the first YPC Supervisor to have us help make Bill's vision a reality, the Wukchumni Tribe's relationship with their ancestral Sacred Land and willingness to partner with awkward but well-intentioned Quakers while staying focused on their own

cultural resiliency, and what would become the eventual QOF nonprofit organization's mission "to support and strengthen our community by providing a learning environment for acceptance and tolerance, an appreciation of our many local cultures, and the stewardship of our shared land," with members of the Wukchumni Tribe, Visalia Friends Meeting, Visalia Unitarians, and others serving on the QOF Board. YPCC has provided both financial and people-power to develop and sustain the camp, contributing \$3,000-\$4,000 nearly every year from the Youth Programs Fund to supplement camper fees and donations, as well as my time as YPC in planning, participating, and bringing in interested Quaker youth from afar. Other current and past members of the committee have participated as planners and staff, including Barbara Babin, Elizabeth Boardman, Jim Summers, Julian Garrett, Mary Klein, Melissa Lovett-Adair, and Stephen Myers.

This past April we held the 6th iteration of this camp, this time on the theme of Sacred Fire / Inner Light / Spark Within. YPCC intends to continue as co-sponsor into the indefinite future, as it's a particularly special relationship in part because of the legacy of the YP Fund and Bob Vogel Endowment being put into the YPCC's care by PFOS after it decided to lay down itself and the gave up the dream of a permanent site for PYM at QOF. Much of that money came to PFOS –and thus to the YPCC— as a donation from one Friend who was inspired to contribute a large sum after visiting the Farm and hearing Bill Lovett's vision. [quakeroaksfarm.org/portfolio-items/spring-service-learning-camp/](http://quakeroaksfarm.org/portfolio-items/spring-service-learning-camp/)

### ***From Visalia to Oz and back again***

Receiving the call to be an invited guest at Australia Yearly Meeting's 2016 session and to travel for six weeks among Friends and Meetings across the continent felt like a huge affirmation of the work that I and we had done here. To get to have Thistle West and Cathy Walling as elders and co-ministers (trans)formed my understanding of what it means to carry a concern, to minister, and to elder. I continue to stay connected (thanks, Facebook and Facetime – amazing technologies!) and to hear about ways that what we brought has nurtured AYM's own work, including the adoption of our "FRAP" term, ha! With Thistle's help, I was also able to offer six Becoming Adult Allies to Youth workshops there with some minor but significant cultural adjustments.

In return, I received a great gift of learning about the work of AYM's First Nations People's Concerns Committee and various Aussie Friends' experiences of being allies in the struggle for indigenous rights and justice. One piece of evidence that this intervisitation has planted seeds back home in PYM-land is a new addition this year to the Visalia Meetinghouse and Quaker Oaks Farm of a certificate that reads:

*"In Witness and Friendship, We respectfully acknowledge the Wukchumni People as the traditional caretakers of this land, and honor their elders of the past and present, and their emerging youth."*

Unbeknownst to me before-hand, Friends and Wukchumni Yokuts who prepared this land acknowledgement used the very phrasing given to me by David Carline (Google him), an AYM Friend and recently-deceased elder of the Kooma/Gwamu People (with one translation of the Aussie 'custodians' to 'caretakers,' more accurate to Wukchumni and US language and culture), that I've used and shared about since returning from that trip. Now printed, signed by witnesses, and waiting to be framed in wood from the fallen namesake

Quaker Oak, this sign, I'm certain, is a pointer something else as well: A metaphor that perhaps some of you will help articulate?

***Respecting elders and resurrecting the practice of eldering are related but not identical***

I have personally grown in important and not always easy ways from participating in the unique experiences of Spring Camp and traveling in the ministry in Australia, as well as the general work of supporting our PYM, QM, MM, and Quaker organizations to develop greater capacity to be their/our/my best selves. As Jim Summers in particular has helped me to see through our collaboration with the Wukchumni Tribe, a vibrant, intergenerational community also respects and honors its elders: in that context, a person doesn't become known as an elder only due to their age, wisdom, and life experiences, but also because of their respectable character that has been nurtured, tended, and pruned along the way. I long for the PYM community to be one where that level of deep respect pervades all gatherings and interactions together, a place where, as Cathy Walling has taught me, we name, nurture, and affirm the many gifts amongst us. A place where young Friends and newcomers and wayward Friends can consistently find patterns and examples of Integrity to follow, and where when we each inevitably stumble, there are loving arms of accountability and care waiting to catch and to guide us. Where we collectively have the courage to refuse to allow dysfunction to reign in the name of tolerance.

***Interconnection and intersectionality are also related but not identical***

Over time, the language of the vision YPCC had early on has evolved to specify "a vibrant, *diverse*, intergenerational Friends community." There's still plenty more work to do, and we can also celebrate our journey of learning and unlearning thus far. Through it all, it is the relationships with folks committed to the inseparable necessities of being good caretakers and friends of one another, of our communities, of our fellow beings, and of our collective home that have kept me going and that stand out to me as I transition from this particular ministry into the as-yet-unknown. Thank you especially to all you teens and young adults, now one to eleven years older than before, who mentored me to understand what it is that you need, what you have to give, and what it is that we are and can become together in community. And so much gratitude to the Quaker, Wukchumni, and other elders who have patiently put up with and even appreciated my burrs... and seen through the armored veneer to know that I, too, need gentleness and affirmation.

**Can't this be summed up in a more tidy way?**

To make a long story short, I've recently found myself explaining to people that if my job as YPC has been to do XYZ, then I've also had to do A-through-W, often invisibly in the background, in order to make it possible to even attempt the main objective. (Like spreadsheets that track the Youth Programs fund cash flow; and another spreadsheet that serves as a detailed checklist for planning JYM; and training members of four committees every year how their budgets and travel reimbursements and attendance assistance happen; and promoting organized chaos as folks learn how to make use of online technologies like Google Docs; and and and.... Oh, and that time Sally Kingsland and I brokered a peace deal about 13 year olds –also known as the Great "Transitions Policy" of 2016— between Children's Program and JYM.)

## **The only way out is through**

### **Or, Conflict is not avoidable. Let's deal with it.**

So here are a few points of advice that many of you have heard already, either when I visited your Meeting or Worship Group, led you through an Adult Allies to Youth workshop, consulted with your committee, or held space for your worries and joys and lamentations and hopes. However, I probably couldn't have written this list a decade ago:

- Before we can heal the world, we have to start with tending to the pain in ourselves and our own community.
- Don't do for others what they can do for themselves. (We heard cautions from the beginning about how professionalizing PYM might let volunteers off the hook or encourage false beliefs that money could really buy us out of our problems, and I have certainly been tested in this area.)
- Find the strengths, gifts, and potential that already exist, and build on that foundation. (Like the fact that we already have five QM gatherings plus annual session plus camps, so let's really commit to supporting them.)
- Ask for help to fill the gaps. Don't try to do it all alone.
- Be ok with messing up. As I heard someone say recently, perfectionism is oppressive to self and others. This is complementary, not contradictory, to having high standards. (Note to self...)
- Make space for others. Take a healthy risk. "Step up, step back."
- Focus on being our best selves with one another. If it's obvious that the Meeting community/ies have something special going on, then people will be attracted. If the Meeting community/ies have done their work to become truly open, welcoming, and affirming, then the newcomers will want to stick around. (Contentious plenaries and bureaucratic committee meetings are not a huge draw. ... Gathered meetings full of faithful silent and spoken ministry, on the other hand, and fellowship and activism along with people who know and care about one another and are committed to shared values, can be the balm that someone didn't even know they needed.)
- Deal with conflicts rather than avoiding. This is the only way to conflict transformation. A seeming lack of conflict is either because we're in the shallows or there's a plank in the way.
- Remember that young people sometimes need to travel far far away to know that home is where they came from. Some find 'home' elsewhere, and that's more than ok, it's a good thing.
- In youth work, focus on the young people of NOW, not just the 'future leaders.'
- Many of us adults who fear working with young people share the commonality of having some sort of trauma in our own youth or in our past experiences as parents or caretakers. While a few of us probably shouldn't take on youth-work (or need to do a lot of self-healing and growth first), most of us could use a little encouragement to try it out, and knowing we're not alone in our fears and past hurts can make all the difference.
- Get plenty of sleep. Every day. (JYM, I'm *not just* talking to you.)

### **Now for a short-story prose-poem**

*Once upon a time the YPCs intended to send out quarterly-ish epistles.  
There was no central PYM communications database or mailing list.*

*So the YPCs created one. And now it's co-managed with the PYM Assistant to the Clerk (thanks, Sharon!).*

*Then along came Facebook, a place for young adults! Today it's become the land of many older adults (and election interference...). 'Pacific Yearly Meeting Youth Programs' has a page: are you a follower?*

*Meanwhile, Insta[gram] is apparently where it's at for teens.*

*The PYM website became a usable hub, too (thanks to Don Bean and George Mills and me, et al.).*

*So if you look at the YPCC's new page on the website, you'll find all the past epistles (and reports and other stuff): Number XII was from April 2015 (omg)!*

*The "Calendar of Youth and Intergenerational Activities" that used to be a core part of these epistles also moved online and is printable from there. Plus it can be updated throughout the year. (Registrations for summer camps now open!!! Registration for PYM Annual Session about to open! There's plenty of funding for everyone to attend who wants to! Regional gatherings are essential for young Friends' sense of community, belonging, and what it means to be a Friend in today's world!)*

*Fin....*

*Epilogue: Epistle XIV possibly coming out this summer.*

*Postscript: JYM and Children's Program are seeking volunteers for PYM Annual Session – get your fees waived and make a difference for youth and families. Deadline May 22<sup>nd</sup> to apply: [pacificyearlymeeting.org/2019/documents/ypc/volunteer-jym-children-2019/](http://pacificyearlymeeting.org/2019/documents/ypc/volunteer-jym-children-2019/)*

## **Bye for now**

I am not planning to attend Annual Session this year. I am taking some time to recoup, and I hope that giving the new YPC space will allow for a fresh spin on the work. I hope that all of you will welcome the new Coordinator, support the YPC Committee as they continue to learn how to be both Friends and responsible employers (not an oxymoron), keep on creating the safe-but-not-overly-safe container for this experiment, and get ready and open for the next leg of this journey.

Now that I've shared my own thoughts and memories on my tenure, I encourage individual Friends, Monthly Meetings, and PYM committees to also take a moment of reflection on the past and future of the youth programs, and offer words of support and encouragement to the new YPC and the YPCC.

*~Alyssa*

Alyssa Nelson, Outgoing Youth Programs Coordinator, Pacific Yearly Meeting, May 15, 2019

.... No more exclamation marks .... from me, anyway. (!)

### **Current Youth Programs Coordinating Committee members:**

Barbara Babin (Supervisor), Bitsy/Elizabeth Carr (Children's Program volunteer), Jennifer Carr, Kiernan Colby, Julian Garrett, Stephen Myers, Rebekah Percy (co-clerk), Melissa Lovett-Adair, Bertha Peña (co-clerk)

Ex officio: Sandy Kewman (PYM Presiding Clerk), Gail Eastwood (M&O Liaison)

Three or four of the four youth slots are coming available for next term – inquire via the clerks.

### **Contact People for the Interim, and Beyond, For Youth Programs-related business:**

#### **YPCC Co-Clerks:**

Bertha Peña <bertha.pena@gmail.com>

Rebekah Percy <rebekah.sophia@gmail.com>

## YPC Supervisor and Personnel/Admin Subcommittee

Barbara Babin <b\_babin@yahoo.com>

## Youth Programs Fund

Kiernan Colby <kiernan.colby@gmail.com> (Programs & Resources Subcommittee of YPCC).

See also: [pacificyearlymeeting.org/youth/resources-funding/](http://pacificyearlymeeting.org/youth/resources-funding/)

## Background Checks for PYM Youth Workers (until new YPC takes it back over)

Jim Summers <poozles@hotmail.com> (M&O Co-Clerk, former YPCC Clerk)

Note: The new YPC might have a new @pacificyearlymeeting.org email address, or might continue using the gmail one that Alyssa and Sarah both used. Stay tuned.

## What would the YPC Epistle be without some reminders and quotable bits for your newsletters?

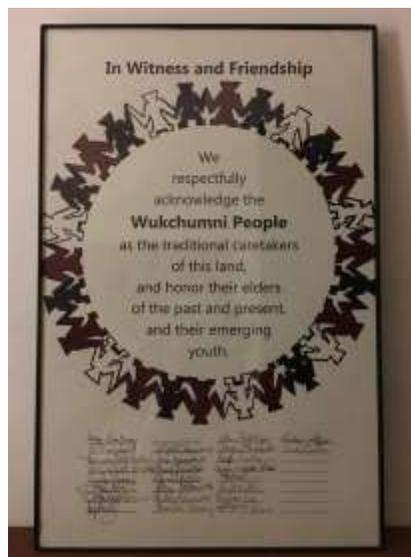
Want to learn more about *your* PYM youth programs and current events?  
See calendar, past epistles, reports and more on our page on the PYM website:

[pacificyearlymeeting.org/youth/](http://pacificyearlymeeting.org/youth/)  
and on our Facebook page: "[Pacific Yearly Meeting Youth Programs](https://www.facebook.com/PacificYearlyMeetingYouthPrograms/)"

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