

Winter Words from the House of Peace



Though it is winter, winter bleak
With all this world's un-flowering
Flowers, flowers fall from the sky,
An impossible thing
Unless, in worlds beyond those clouds,
Who knows, it could be spring.

Snowfall 9th C. Japanese

Some might rightly call this Ipswich winter “an impossible thing” for it has broken all records for snowfall, ice, wind and cold. A Spring beyond these worlds of clouds is barely mentioned, only vaguely hoped for as blizzards of crystal flowers fall upon our lives. Schools close, transportation systems falter, fires threaten, accidents multiply, store shelves empty, shelters fill. Yes, such an unprecedented, historic winter might seem an impossible thing.

“What can this all really mean?”, we ponder by the crackling woodstove fire. As we struggle to shovel roofs and paths, the world’s wars rage on, an earth-embracing inferno. Is our small snow-drifted enclave somehow a lens into a vast icy universe — the bleakness of the “world’s un-flowering”? Must we finally, consciously connect with the change to a climate of vicious violence, drones of deadly destruction, migrations of uncountable masses, and always, everywhere the sufferings of the mother and children? The urgency to penetrate to the significance of this temporary entombment in caves of snow presses upon us. What is this season telling us?

As always the wisdom of the Ancients can offer prophetic insight:

As the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return to it without watering the earth and making it bud and sprout, producing seed for the sowers and bread for the hungry, so the word that goes forth from my mouth does not return to me empty without carrying out my will and succeeding in what it was meant to do. Isaiah 55:10

And so — snow has profound meaning, connected as it is to bud and sprout, seed and substance for farmers and those who must be fed. But what of the enigmatic “word” that flows from mouth to earth, mandated to return only after fulfilling its own task?

From our snow-shelter, so reminiscent of Celtic cells of monks and mystics, we meditate the mystery. What word? Many come to mind, like Light and Life and Love and Bread. Whose will to be carried out? “Not ours but yours” seems to echo with a paradox that can paralyze or empower. What task? Firmer ground here, for doesn’t every word have the task to bear the essence of truth — the spark of light — the heart of life?

A snowfall can perhaps become then a language — a living communication between that world beyond the leaden clouds and all of us who would tend the sprouting, the growing, until Heaven and Word of Earth succeed in their work and all the hungry are fed.

Carrie Acheuchard
February, 2015



Barbara

On Friday, January 30, 2015 Barbara Baker quietly and radiantly slipped into the realm of the greatest Peace. As in her lifetime of 57 years, so in her dying and death Barbara offered a great teaching for all of us.

There is a wonderful legend and old custom that we practice here at the House of Peace. It has to do with Saint Barbara (3rd C. Turkey). If you go out on December 4th, her Feast Day, and snip a little branch from the cherry tree (forsythia works too) and bring it into a warm sheltering place, and tend it with water and care, it will burst into blossom on Christmas day. This we always do, marveling on Christmas Morn at the flowering branch in our festive kitchen.

And so now we speak of Barbara – brought in twelve years ago from winter’s cold, tended with love and care, watered and warmed until she put forth her buds – a flowering branch by the kitchen hearth.

How often in our all too ambitious, aggressive and repressive world do we encounter those who describe a disability or handicap as a tragic, sorrowful abnormality – a disrupting inconvenience – a bleak **Winter** tree, as it were, with dull, dead branches? And how seldom – but gratefully – do we meet those who, through personal experience, know: “Just that which seems to be tragic can become tremendously enlightening for the deepest secrets of life.” In the case of people like Barbara with Down Syndrome, such secrets have to do with their “particular mission, bringing the gift of their own heart forces unhindered by intellect and the ambition to compete. Their very posture when in repose is like that of the Buddha.” (*Rudolf Steiner*)

Barbara – to all of us a Buddha-like, budding branch – was an archetype of the struggle faced by family, friends, teachers and advocates who, against all odds, bring to the world a consciousness of the fundamental needs, unique possibilities and unassailable rights of people in need of care.

Barbara’s biography begins in New Jersey with a **Summer** season of happy childhood, surrounded by close family who firmly rejected the prevailing practice of institutionalization for children with Down Syndrome. Barbara’s early years created for her a joyful garden of memories.

A rich **Autumn** season saw the ripening and harvest of Barbara’s many gifts (swimming, dancing, music, handwork). But the winds of change began to blow as she suffered the death of her Grandmother and, later, her beloved Mother, for whom she had become a vital care-giver.

The Winter of Barbara’s life saw her world collapse under the heavy burden of sudden family changes, loss of secure, familiar environments, confusion and depression, hospitalization and medication.

Through it all her devoted sister, Suetta, suffered and searched, longing for a bridge to a new life for Barbara. In her words at Barbara’s funeral Suetta recalled meeting the House of Peace: “a new community which could envision the flower that Barb would become as they sang and prayed and loved her back into this world. This would be her beloved community... her **Spring**.”

And Spring it was! Through trials and transitions, serious illness, Alzheimer's and more, Barbara emerged. She was firmly and gently supported with the skill and compassion of a powerfully committed team which included her day program at Petalworks, her shared living advocates at The Polus Center, her Sisters in spirit at the Convent of Notre Dame, her family and House of Peace community. Barbara woke up! She came to see a world that was "fantastic! delicious! gorgeous!" Together with her beloved House of Peace companions – Joseph, Mary Ellen, and Geraldine – she made each day an Alleluia day.

Of her dying days we can dare to say very little for they were cloaked in a mysterious and serene beauty rarely seen or felt this side of Heaven. One is reminded of one teen-aged girl, who, in the unique eloquence of her Down Syndrome language, once proclaimed, "I like God's finest whispers."

As blizzards raged outside her window and her Hospice helpers heroically struggled to come, as prayers and songs and stories and meals and never-ending cups of steaming Irish tea were shared, Barbara came ever closer to her true birth, finally crossing the threshold, all in the hush of God's finest whisper.

Her funeral was on Sunday, February 1st, the first day of the Celtic Spring – Imbolc – the quickening of the year. We walked behind her simple coffin in procession from the House of Peace to the nearby First Church, astounded at the warmth of the radiant sun we had not seen for so many snowy days. The funeral celebration of Barbara's life was truly sun-drenched as this sister of our soul soared to her spiritual home, leaving behind the mantle of her special needs and sufferings and sorrows.

Of course there is a tender loss in our lives, our household, her family and community. But her friends at her workplace know better than to be limited by loss. When her friends at Petalworks were asked to describe how that Barbara-place in their life now feels, they smiled and responded, *"She sings to me... I listen to her... She keeps me nice and warm inside... Now she still watches me and makes me feel good... I can feel her in my heart."*





For many years the House of Peace has welcomed children from Iraq. First came Abbas, followed by the unforgettable Baby Mariam. Then Ali, and later Mohammed arrived, both receiving life-saving surgeries at Boston hospitals. Many other children accompanied by a parent or relative lived with us while receiving intensive treatments for burns at Boston's Shriners Hospital. Through the Iraqi Children's Project and the heroic efforts of cooperating colleagues this work continues as children severely wounded by the devastation of war live at the House of Peace for the duration of their treatments at Boston hospitals.

Our latest guests came to us in September 2014. Youseff, age 12, tall and strong, had his right arm above the elbow, and leg near the hip, taken by a bombing in Baghdad. Arriving with his Grandmother, he made it clear from the beginning that he has met this life-changing catastrophe without self-pity and with enthusiastic courage to walk again.

Little Zahraa, age 7, was also a Baghdad bombing victim. Both her legs were

taken, above her knees. With her mother at her side, Zahraa pushed her own wheelchair towards us at the airport, raying forth a beautiful smile, immediately impressing us with her will to heal.

What an exceptional team assembled to begin the process of prosthetic production, fitting, and rehabilitation! And how that team grew as the magnetism of these brightly beaming children drew in many other friends to share the fire of their determination. After several intricate adjustments at the famed United Prosthetics in Dorchester, Youseff and Zahraa were ready for the intense challenges and obstacles of rehabilitative therapy at Shriners Hospital for the effective use of prosthetic right arm and three legs.

It was literally breath-taking, the moment of "first steps" an indelible picture for all who worked for it, witnessed it, wept over it – a dizzying joy, a more than Olympian achievement – and surely the most tender and challenging beginning of the life-long ordeals ahead for these most innocent of war's uncounted victims.

Both Youseff and Zahraa had painful fears and questions about returning to school in Iraq to face rejection and ridicule. Some form of reassuring intervention was urgently needed, especially for Youseff. Help came breaking through when Youseff was invited to the Sixth Grade Class at the McCormack School in Dorchester. Teacher Ethna Riley, HOP alumna and founder of the ever-growing Steven's Circle, carefully arranged for students to welcome Youseff and ask sensitively prepared questions about his life in Iraq. With the help of a translator, Youseff shared a vivid picture of family and friends, school and sports. The atmosphere was electric – 12-year-olds meeting each

other in open, honest dialogue. The interest and empathy between Boston and Baghdad was stunning. A cheer rose up when Youseff responded to the universal “What do you want to be when you grow up?” question with a hope-filled smile, “A professional soccer player.”

In the final go around the circle of wide-eyed, engaged city students, many of whom suffer wounds of a different kind of shooting war, each was asked to offer Youseff a hope or wish to carry home. The most poignant, because boldly real: “I hope you do grow up to play professional soccer and that some day we can all come see you in a game.”

Zahraa and Youseff are home in Baghdad, walking, attending school, surrounded by grateful families. We share their experiences remembering and mourning the torn asunder limbs of ever mounting hundreds, and now thousands, of other children who will not have opportunity for prosthetic limbs. How can we ever cease from crying out for the abolition of the guns and bombs and technologies of all kinds that dismember the bodies and souls of such children and families?

Yet, the spirit, smiles, and first steps of Zahraa and Youseff, must renew our own continued first steps.



Against every new outrage and every fresh horror, we shall put up one more piece of love and goodness, drawing strength from within ourselves. We may suffer, but we must not succumb. And if we should survive unhurt in body and soul, but above all in soul, without bitterness and without hatred, then we shall have a right to a say after the war. Maybe we are an ambitious people BUT WE WOULD LIKE TO HAVE JUST A LITTLE BIT OF A SAY AFTER THE WAR. Etty Hillesum 1943

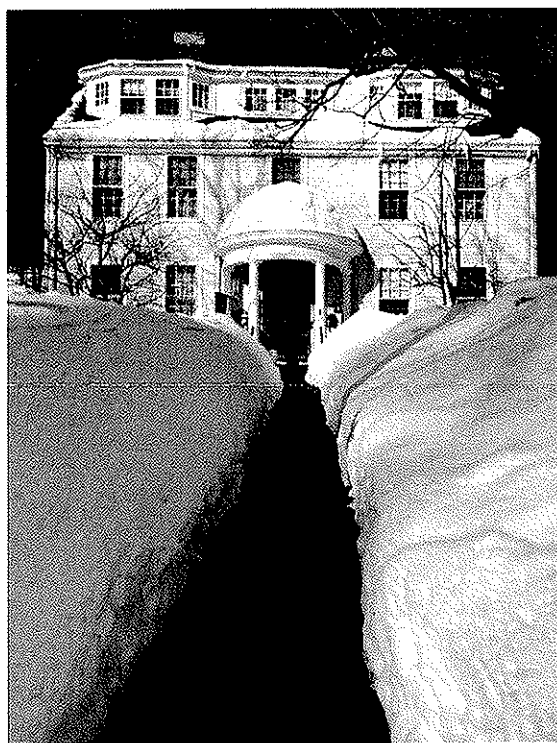
As We Turn 25!

For all that has been – thanks.

To all that will be – yes!

A 25th anniversary is usually associated with silver. How appropriate that we reach this milestone encased as we are in an ice-scape of challenging beauty and at times rather precarious wonder. Yes, silver days press upon us and we gaze into a lustrous globe recalling events of years past, taking the pulse of the present, pondering the call of the future.

Later in the Fall of this year a special Newsletter will offer a review of our history – the people and events that have formed the substance of our community life. For now the process has a deeply inward-turning quality. Winter insists on that, for underneath the layers of silvery snow the seed is germinating, the sprouting is anticipated, the future is waiting to break forth.



Midst all the silver of celebrating our 25th Birthday we are permeated by a sense of Gold, a vibrant, glowing “glory” that seems to emanate from our residents and guests, our colleagues and collaborators in this vocation of “waging peace.” The steady stream of young volunteers and interns this past year has carried us through in so many ways. Seamus and Paul, Freia and Michael, Krista, Ruta, and Mari have enlivened, enriched, enchanted our community life. No job seemed too big or too trivial for them. Such variety for the projects too! Assembling Geraldine’s art for her great show last spring at Camphill Ghent, preparing Mary Ellen’s 75th Birthday Celebration, battling summer’s woodchuck and weeds, shoveling roofs, walks, driveways for each of the Winter of 2015’s unprecedented, ceaseless blizzards, playing English/Arabic games, cooking, cleaning, tending chickens, and witnessing for peace in parades and vigils,

sharing news and views and plans with the groups meeting regularly at the House of Peace – on it goes, this rhythm of lives cherished and shared. We are so humbled and thankful for the generosity of the life-giving help of these inspiring young co-workers who come to strive, seek, sacrifice and celebrate.

Through each day and week, Shawn (now two) and his beautiful Ugandan mother continue to deepen bonds of human mutuality with all they meet, daily contributing gifts of spontaneous joy to all in our household. Other volunteers too are constant, helping companions. Lives intersect in marvelous, sometimes mysterious/magical ways. Each day truly holds an element of Gold.

Looking ahead, the Calendar becomes creatively crowded with coming events connected to different aspects of our work. Please let us know if you wish to be notified of House of Peace offerings. We are always happily honored to welcome you!

In Memoriam

If we are really serious about life in community we must be serious about humbly and honestly deepening our bonds with those who have died.

If we would work with all our strength and compassion to carry the suffering and dying of the world's wounded people, we must then daily connect with the life-giving stream that flows with hidden healing force from the other side.

And if we really long with all our being for an end to the wars of this world we must implore those beings, powerful in the Peace, who live beyond the threshold.

Feel how we in love are gazing
To the heights which call you now
To a different way of action.
Give the friends you left behind
Your free strength from spirit realms.
Hearken to the plea our souls
Sends to you in confidence.
For our deeds here on earth
We need strong power from spirit regions
Which we may receive from the friends who have died. *Rudolf Steiner*

...And from our friends who surround the House of Peace as neighbors, colleagues, volunteers, care-givers, distant supporters – all sharers in this community both near and far – also do we seek that strong presence and power for our work of welcome and healing. The needs of this House of Peace are many, varied, often urgent. Your support is always a multiplying force, creative, immediate. Thanks beyond all measure we offer you, all of you, who in countless ways encircle and enliven our every day, our every deed.

Enclosed is my gift for the House of Peace:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Amount: _____

978-356-9395 1 High Street, Ipswich, Massachusetts 01938 thehouseofpeace@yahoo.com

House of Peace, Inc. is a therapeutic community serving victims of war, in companionship with adults with disabilities, and offering education for peace and moral awakening, incorporated in Massachusetts in 1990 as a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt charitable and educational corporation, supported by voluntary contributions.

