

2015

THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURE

This we can do

Quaker faith in action through the
Alternatives to Violence Project

SALLY HERZFELD AND
ALTERNATIVES TO VIOLENCE
PROJECT MEMBERS

THE JAMES BACKHOUSE LECTURES

The lectures were instituted by Australia Yearly Meeting of the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) on its establishment in 1964.

They are named after James Backhouse who, with his companion, George Washington Walker, visited Australia from 1832 to 1838. They travelled widely, but spent most of their time in Tasmania. It was through their visit that Quaker Meetings were first established in Australia.

Coming to Australia under a concern for the conditions of convicts, the two men had access to people with authority in the young colonies, and with influence in Britain, both in Parliament and in the social reform movement. In meticulous reports and personal letters, they made practical suggestions and urged legislative action on penal reform, on the rum trade, and on land rights and the treatment of Aborigines.

James Backhouse was a general naturalist and a botanist. He made careful observations and published full accounts of what he saw, in addition to encouraging Friends in the colonies and following the deep concern that had brought him to Australia.

Australian Friends hope that this series of Lectures will bring fresh insights into the Truth, and speak to the needs and aspirations of Australian Quakerism. The present lecture was delivered at Queen's College, the University of Melbourne, on 5 January 2015.

Julian Robertson
Presiding Clerk
Australia Yearly Meeting

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Front cover: Sally Herzfeld with
grandchildren and great-grandchildren.
Photo: John Herzfeld

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The AYM Backhouse Lecture Committee for its commitment to the publication and delivery of this lecture.

About the author

Alison, the second of five children of Elsie and Cyril Gare, grew up in the hills near Perth in the village of Darlington. Once staunch Anglicans, Cyril and Elsie became Friends in the mid-1940s and their children gradually became members with them. Alison's name changed to Al, then Ali and finally, Sally.

With parents supporting the United Nations, Aboriginal welfare and several Society of Friends' projects, it is no wonder that Sally became involved in some of these, too. But she was also a keen Girl Guide, who earned the Queen's Guide award and later was a Guide leader of companies in four different places.

She qualified as a teacher of Early Childhood, but has taught all grades since then. Her first appointment was for two wonderful years at the Forrest River Mission (now Umbulgurri) in the far north of Western Australia. Here she gratefully received the gift of a primus stove from the Friends Service Council (FSC). Later, while teaching back near Perth, she was involved with her parents at the Allawah Grove Aboriginal Settlement. Here the FSC had a project to help improve the people's living standards.

Her next appointment in September 1959 was to start a school in Port Hedland for Aboriginal children who hadn't attended school before and couldn't speak English. During the following two and a third years she was again welcomed into an Aboriginal community and learned to love these people and plenty about their culture before alcohol and drugs intervened.

Marrying Tom Herzfeld in 1962, Sally had to follow the rule of the day and leave teaching to be a good wife and mother. Tom was a civil engineer with the Water Supply. While travelling the state they had three children, John, Wendy and Andrew before settling back into Darlington in 1969.

Three years later she and Tom bought a small private school in Darlington. The newly-formed school council gradually bought the block and classroom from them, with Sally as principal for ten years. The primary school developed and in 1988 she became the coordinator of a new high school on a different campus. Her involvement with Helena College still continues.

Sally's AVP journey started in 2002 when she trained in Acacia Prison for men, to become a facilitator. She considers herself very lucky since then to have been able to facilitate workshops in schools, prisons and with different community groups around Australia and in other countries.

Although family time with the three children, nine grandchildren and four great grandchildren takes priority, Sally is chair of the board of a women's refuge, joins refugee women for cooking and handcraft activities, and is treasurer of AVP WA. She is grateful for her very full and interesting life.

Prologue

The changing use of the Backhouse Lecture

One of the joys of serving on the Backhouse Lecture Committee is seeing the variety of people and the issues they care about brought to the Committee for consideration, and recommending one of them as the nominated lecturer. We learn something of their background, their work, and why this has attracted the attention of those nominating their names. Once a recommendation is made, the Committee begins to accompany the lecturers on their journey reading drafts, giving comments and assisting when requested. It is a journey of about two years.

Since the first Backhouse Lecture in 1964, the committee has usually recommended one name, though on five occasions, when there were two names, reflecting joint involvement in a specific concern, a joint lecture was presented. However, in 2010 there were many Backhouse Lecturers as Young Friends wrote and presented their journey in finding their voice among Australian Quakers. The published booklet listed fifty-four names as authors, and in presentation and its recording, many of those named declared that they were the Backhouse Lecturer. Most recently, Tracy Bourne, urging us to bring children into the centre of Quaker life and worship, drew her husband and children into the lecture as an example of how that could be done.

In February 2013 the committee hoped Sally Herzfeld would be the 2015 lecturer because of her deep knowledge of, and experience with the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) in Australia and overseas. She would speak powerfully to the peace testimony at a time when Australians would be commemorating the impact of World War 1 on Australia. Sally was clear in her response that, given the strong tradition of team work in AVP, she wished to include the voices and contributions of others in writing and speaking about the transforming effect AVP has had on many lives. The committee welcomes this development.

Elizabeth Kwan

Coordinator, AVP Darwin

Member, Backhouse Lecture Committee since 2011

1. Quakers and the Alternatives to Violence Project

'There is good in everyone.'

'Look for and affirm the good in self and others.'

'We're all teachers and all learners.'

Friends, do these statements sound familiar?

Can you imagine that George Fox would have thought this way?

We all have a power for good within us. There is no need for intermediaries.

Founding philosophy

Quakers have held one very clear philosophy since George Fox's time: that there is 'That of God within everyone'. This belief can be considered as the foundation of many Quaker commitments, such as pacifism or the continual striving for social justice, and the search for nonviolent methods to work things out while still maintaining integrity and respect for self.

Is it any wonder that Quakers had a big influence on the beginning of the Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP)? The statements above form part of AVP's philosophy and guidelines.

Quakers' Peace Testimony reflects a 'vision of the world transformed by Christ who lives in the hearts of all'. Quakers tried

... to make the vision real by putting emphasis on Christian practice rather than primarily on any particular dogma or ideological system. Theirs was a spontaneous and practical religion. They recognised the realities of evil and conflict, but it was contrary to the spirit of Christ to use war and violence as means to deal with them.¹

Quakers and prison work

Quakers from the early years were closely involved in working with prisoners. Elizabeth Fry's example in the nineteenth century is well known, and there have been many other Quakers since then. For Elizabeth, when she wrote in 1827 about her work,

Much depends on the spirit in which the visitor enters upon her work. It must be in the spirit, not of judgement, but of mercy. She must not say in her heart, I am more holy than thou, but must rather keep in perpetual remembrance that 'all have sinned and come short of the Glory of God'.²

The Alternatives to Violence Project started in a New York prison in 1975, and the humility Elizabeth wrote about has marked the manner of most AVP facilitators since then, as they enter prisons to conduct a workshop.

Since George Fox's time, many Quakers were imprisoned for their beliefs and supported by Quaker prison ministers and visitors. Quaker prison ministers in Britain, recognised like other religious prison chaplains, used to conduct Meetings for Worship within prisons. Hence Quakers (whether as inmates or outmates), and prisons have been closely linked for centuries. They have committed civil disobedience in defending human rights, protesting against the government of the day, and promoting civil rights and environmental concerns. Jo Vallentine, a well-known Australian activist, uses the positive descriptor of 'Holy Obedience'.

Jo is Western Australia's own present-day Quaker activist. She recalled her experiences in the Alice Springs jail, after committing Holy Obedience. Although she knew a little of what prison would be like, she found the actual experience of being a prisoner pretty shattering and dehumanising. She meditated a lot, but was still 'really angry that our government was allowing Australian soil to be used to further the nuclear war fighting plans of another nation'.³

However, as she explained in 1991, she thought about

... the other message that was Gandhi's very strong message, which is the transforming power of love. And that has to come through in a public sense, because if you're involved in working for peace, there's no point in looking really angry about it, even though the anger might be part of your motivating force. But you really do need also to think about why other people have a very different view from yours. You have to try to understand it and, really, think very much as you do with a child: 'I don't like your behaviour, but I can still love your being'. I constantly remind myself that our call is to passion and action – you see, the two things are close together, but they've got to be underpinned by love. Otherwise, you're really not making any sense at all. Unless that spiritual and loving element is there, what are you doing it for?

Jo Vallentine was the main driving force behind getting AVP started in Western Australia.

The beginnings of AVP

AVP began in the Green Haven Maximum Security prison in New York in 1975. A group of inmates who were mainly of African descent, calling themselves the 'Think Tank', was concerned about the violence between youth gangs and the way some young prisoners were coming in and out of jail several times. Steve Angell, as a Quaker visitor and professional social worker, later reported that the 'Think Tank' inmates were not having much success with the scare tactics they were using: 'You keep going the way you are and you'll end up where we are. This is what prison is like' and so forth.⁴

The first workshop devised by the prison inmates drew on the help and experience of several organisations, programs and individuals, including the Movement for a New Society and the Children's Creative Response to Conflict Program.⁵ However, the most important of these were two groups: the Quakers, who had trained the marshals keeping the demonstrations against the Vietnam War peaceful; and those committed to the peaceful struggle for civil rights. Steve Angell explained:

... because we had a Quaker worship group there in the prison they knew that during the Vietnam War years they'd heard that we had trained thousands of marshals to go into demonstrations and help keep them nonviolent. So they said, 'Could you come and teach us something about how to teach nonviolence?' So the first workshop was born at Green Haven at the request of inmates.

Quakers had begun nonviolent training in 1960 with the New York Yearly Meeting

Peace Action Program. Its organisation was the Quaker Project of Community Conflict, headed by Lee Stern.⁶ A founding director was Lawrence (Larry) Apsey, who after World War II had become a pacifist and a Quaker, influenced by the thinking of Mahatma Gandhi. Invited to Green Haven prison with Stern in 1975, Apsey aimed to help youth break out of their psychology of total violence and benefit both the youth and the community to which they would return.⁷

Also influential during this time was Bernard LaFayette, a Baptist minister who devoted his life to nonviolence and civil rights. He was one of the Freedom Riders of the anti-segregation movement who travelled through the South in the 1960s and became famous in Jackson, Mississippi. He has continued to lead nonviolence training and activities to this day. Faye (Honey) Knopps, a Quaker prison reform advocate, involved LaFayette in devising a nonviolence workshop for inmates after riots broke out in the prison at El Remo, Oklahoma. They were able to include both sides of a riot and the prison guards in the same workshop. More riots occurred in other prisons and Apsey contacted Knopps because he wanted the help of skilled people to enable him to bring nonviolent methods into New York prisons. Knopps referred Apsey to LaFayette, and that is how he came to be on the first team to facilitate the very successful workshop in Green Haven in 1975.⁸

Apsey, also a retired attorney, went on in 1979 to form a corporation of the Quaker Project of Community Conflict and invited Angell to become a member of the Board of Directors. Angell believed that it was Apsey's effort 'that led to the expansion of the nonviolence training program in 1980 [when it] was officially launched as the Alternatives to Violence Project.' By 1981, Angell noted, the program had trained 1900 men and women in 19 prisons in New York and New Jersey, with 300 going on to the Advanced level and 120 becoming facilitators.

The program that was first developed began with sessions designed to build self-worth within each participant and community within the group. It concluded with strength-building discussions of twelve guidelines for the use of a power which can transform people and situations. Apsey described the nonviolence about which he spoke as 'being very firm and sometimes very aggressive in a nonviolent way'. Material was also taken from programs such as the Movement for a New Society and the Children's Creative Response to Conflict Program. LaFayette, who was Martin Luther King's co-ordinator of training, commented on the importance of role play, which was 'crucial to achieving nonviolent responses to violent outbursts that irate folks holding

white supremacist views focused on civil rights protesters at lunch counters and on buses throughout the South'. He explained:

In our trainings we first strove to develop a grounding sense of the Blessed Community, one that includes overt racists and white supremacists. Then we had trainees take on the role of enraged people with racist views, even go so far as to strike the protesters, while the protesters tried to maintain an attitude of love and goodwill toward their attackers. This worked very well so that there were few inflammatory reactions when protesters experienced actual racial violence directed at them personally. Role playing was one of the facilitation skills I was quite familiar with. Perhaps my contributions helped to establish it as part of the AVP workshop experiences.⁹

Australian Quakers also used role plays in the 1970s in training for peaceful protesting during the Vietnam Moratorium marches. My Dad, Cyril Gare, led several Vietnam Moratorium marches in Perth, Western Australia, and I know he did some training to make sure that the marches would be as peaceful as possible. One day after coming home from a training session, he upset Mum by saying that he had been 'tickled all over'! I imagine that this was some kind of trust building exercise within the group or it might have been to practise resisting if someone tried to break up a human barricade of people with linked arms. We do not do this one in AVP!!

Other philosophies that I've heard or read about which we DO practice include:

- We will not use or return violence, physical or verbal, towards any person or property.
- We will not bring, or protest under the influence of, alcohol or illicit drugs.
- We will use a consensus decision making process to reach agreement within our group/s.

Dad, when running a training weekend, stirred up the participants by telling them that men and women had to sleep in different dormitories. Some were married couples and they were quite angry about this dictatorial decision making. He let them rant and rage for a while and then, after dinner, shocked them all by calmly saying, 'That was your first test!' The rest of the weekend was mainly role plays about possible violent situations that could arise during protests.

In AVP we use role plays to demonstrate and practise strategies and help participants gain confidence. They experience empathy when acting the role of someone who might have been their opposite in a conflict, and according to one inmate participant, 'We get to see what people behaving badly look like!' He had just watched a role play and

asked, 'Do we really look like that when we're drunk on the train??!'

In Melbourne, Frances Newell devised a program from her Quaker background and what she had read about Gandhi. Role playing was involved and I also understand that Quakers gave support and supplied a venue for gatherings at Melbourne Friends House, Orrong Road. They assisted a considerable number of conscientious objectors who were being pursued by police.

AVP development beyond the United States of America

Steve Angell later reflected that he had wondered how this program could ever work in a prison and did not know then that he would become so involved. He did not consider himself to be a violent person in need of that sort of training. After becoming a member of the board of directors and doing his first workshop, like many of us since then, he found out things about himself that he did not know before. In spite of his professional work, he realised that he wasn't really as in touch with his own feelings as he should be, to conduct even his own personal relationships in a better way. In 2006 at an AVP gathering in South Africa Steve told us that the program was called a long name until one day a prison officer met the team as they were leaving the workshop and asked how their alternatives to violence meeting went. That team thought that would be a very simple and descriptive name for their workshops so the Alternatives to Violence Project became the official name.

For some years the focus was on prisons and the major effort was to help people reduce the level of violence in the prison environment, to survive it and at the same time to deal with the violence in their own lives. Waiting lists grew in the prison and it wasn't long before it was realised that there was just as much violence in society and people began to request this same type of training. So AVP spread to communities and schools. The first official community workshop was held in Owega, New York at the instigation of two local probation officers. They wanted to help probationers cope with the problems that led to their delinquency, but also to create understanding of those problems within communities. The participants of workshops were a mixture of people who had been in trouble with the law and those who had not. As in all workshops now, community was built within this mixed group.

Angell, as a main team member, later took AVP to many parts of the world. I met him at an AVP International Gathering near Johannesburg in South Africa. With him, he had a tall Afro-American man, Robert Martin, who had travelled to many

places helping facilitate workshops with Steve. Robert told us about his initiation into AVP. He had had an unfortunate childhood, been a street kid and done all sorts of bad stuff. During his second time in prison, he thought he would try this program, so he went into the room with the other guys. He was lounging around waiting, feeling a bit cynical that anything would work for him, when in walked this group of Quakers, men with their baggy shorts and pink knees. 'Oh my God!' he thought. 'What am I doing here?' He misbehaved during the workshop and was really disruptive. At the end of the day, as he was leaving and deciding not to return the next day, this short man, Larry Apey followed him out and said something like, 'From the few contributions you have made, I understand that you have had a hard life. What's happening for you now?' They talked for a while and the tall man said that he went back to his cell, took down the girlie pictures he had and replaced them with the handout about conflict resolution that he had received. He finished that workshop and the next two levels, then after release from prison, he joined Steve and facilitated with him in many different places around the world. Waiting lists grew in many prisons in the US then to communities, schools and prisons in other parts of the world.



Steve Angell and Robert Martin at the International Gathering in S. Africa 2006. Photo: Sally Herzfeld.