

Creating a Quaker Arts Camp

by Rebekah Rice

While I was growing up, neither my parents nor anyone else in our Meeting ever said anything about the desire to create as coming from the Creator. No one in our Meeting ever shared any type of message from God other than the spoken word. Until I was an adult, I was never exposed to a message delivered as song or music. As someone who has always had a better set of tools for building things than for putting ideas into words, I was disappointed but not surprised that I sat through Meeting for Worship for well over 30 years before being moved to speak.

But had I known I could share something else, some odd thing I'd been moved to make, some garden flowers I'd grown, what then? What will our earth be like, I have wondered for years, when we bring up our children knowing their gifts as God given? How will our worship be different when each of us is given all the tools we need to have in order to share the messages we are given to share?

This past year I was given the opportunity to birth a camp that has the potential to answer these questions. In December I was unexpectedly sent an invitation to apply to become the director for Quaker Arts Camp, a new camp within Baltimore Yearly Meeting. Although I had moved to upstate New York six years earlier, I had never moved my membership from Roanoke Monthly Meeting. Friends from BYM remembered me, and had suggested I be approached. Perhaps it is fortunate that I hadn't a clue how much work would be involved.

For several years, the Arts Camp Subcommittee of the Religious Education Committee of Baltimore Yearly Meeting had gathered information on whether families would be interested in sending their children to a week-long arts camp program. It was clear that families were indeed interested, both in an arts camp and in a shorter than two-week long sleep-away camp experience. Baltimore Yearly Meeting has an active camping program with wonderful programs based on outdoor challenge. When the Camping Committee was approached about expanding their offerings to include a shorter arts-based camp, they felt that it was outside their area of expertise and declined to oversee it. The Arts Camp Subcommittee continued to independently pursue their vision of building Quaker community based on the arts. In January 1998, I was hired as camp director, with the charge to move the Arts Camp from idea to reality in six months. With support from the committee, from Sandy Spring Friends School where Arts Camp was held, and from staff, volunteers, campers and families, our camp has become a reality.

Are you wondering what it's like when nine talented staff and thirty-six excited artistic campers get together? It's fun, and busy, and a week is really not long enough to stop and savor the experience. Campers had their choice of four week-long morning workshops this year: Weaving,

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Dramatic Improvisation, Dance, or Music. Each afternoon, campers could choose activities from a varied array.

In the course of the week we worked with clay, silkscreened t-shirts, worked on costumes and masks, made books, shared stories, dammed a creek, made a water slide, swam, went rock climbing, did the low ropes course and lots of new games and other outdoor activities. In the evenings we had visits from a storyteller, a puppet theater, and a potter who did an outdoor firing of our pottery. We had a wonderful talent show in which every single camper participated. We had a half-hour Meeting for Worship twice a day, and found it to be deeply rewarding. We sang together a lot and yearned for even more singing. We put on a performance at the end of the week which brought the strands of the different workshops together for the first time.

Campers had a wonderful week. Some were thrilled by the opportunity to deepen in an area they hadn't expected, some wished they could try absolutely everything. It turns out that Arts Camp is a safe and nurturing environment for children with physical disabilities, children from inner cities, and children from non-Quaker as well as Quaker families. One non-Quaker family wrote that the most positive aspect of camp for their child was the "chance to be a true friend."

Next year, we expect to hold two sessions of Quaker Arts Camp. The specific workshops we offer will depend on the gifts of the staff. We'll have a two-week camp for campers 10-13 and a one-week camp for 9-12 year olds. Each session will be limited to 40 campers, and will be held at Sandy Spring Friends School. The following year, we hope to hold additional sessions as needed, and as space permits.

2001 Update:

This camp has grown into Opequon Quaker Camp, a residential wilderness camp with an arts focus near Winchester, VA. Our programs are founded on Quaker values of equality, simplicity, stewardship and nonviolence. We promote positive community living, spiritual growth, creative exploration and challenge.

For more information contact:

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or visit the camp's page on the [Baltimore Yearly Meeting website](#)

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