FROM THE DEAN’S (D. ELTON TRUEBLOOD’S) DESK

It is not often you get a glimpse of your place in history. It is not often an historical item comes to you with all its significance and “weight.” At our faculty retreat this year, Stephen Angell, teaching faculty, reminded us of the great significance D. Elton Trueblood had on Earlham and the Earlham School of Religion. As the theological patriarch at Earlham and ESR, Elton lived on the edge of campus and took willing learners under his wing. He was essential to ESR’s beginnings in the early 1960s. The current Barclay Center where our offices are, was the family home of the Truebloods beginning in 1946.

Sam Trueblood, the only remaining child of D. Elton Trueblood, called at the suggestion of alum and friend, Mickey Edgerton, to say he had his father’s desk, and the family would like to return it to ESR if we wanted it. Oh, yes! I was so excited.

Sam and I talked about my office once being Elton’s office. The desk, a replica of George Washington’s desk, was in the very same office for 12 years. Teague Library became Elton’s office and remained so for the next 30 years. Standing in very large footprints, I am humbled to serve as dean and to receive such riches, growing out of a long history and commitment to theological learning.

The desk, purchased in San Francisco in 1936, was Elton’s primary workspace until his death in 1994. A prolific writer, he wrote all or parts of more than 30 books, countless articles and handwritten letters—all in long hand with a fountain pen.

Sam used his father’s desk in his law practice near Philadelphia for over 28 years. In 2023, Sam, an Earlham College graduate, also gifted a beautifully refinished desk and chair to the Earlham School of Religion in memory of his father.

ESR retains Elton’s memory in many ways, and I appreciate the significance of this desk carrying Elton’s love of the Religious Society of Friends with it.

At First Friends in Richmond recently, the worship leader read a quote from one of Elton’s books. Many stories followed by Friends who knew Elton, including this story of his desk returning home to ESR. How grateful I am to be part of this long history. How beautiful to carry Elton’s memory into the present. How sweet to have such a beautiful memento of all he gave to ESR and to Quaker thought. May it continue.

With gratitude,

Gretchen Castle
Dean ESR
“So, what are Friends to do when a single life, broken in a very specific way, is laid at our feet? And the nature of the brokenness is fraught with deep misunderstanding and can inspire fear? When differing levels of direct and indirect experience with the underlying issues greatly influence how we, as individuals within the community, hold the tensions around them?”

— Tammy Forner ’22
ESR Alumni

Forgiveness, trust and safety

by Tammy Forner ’22

Over the past three years, my local Quaker meeting has supported a man who, in 2012, was convicted on federal charges of crossing state lines to solicit sex from a minor female. In this instance, he engaged with an undercover FBI officer carrying out a sting operation, so no child was actually harmed. He also confessed to the federal crime of possessing and sharing child pornographic images via his computer, though prosecutors agreed not to pursue those charges in his plea agreement.

With release from prison approaching in mid-2019, he appealed to us for spiritually grounded support for himself and his family as he was repatriated into society and expressed his hope to rejoin in worship with this Friends meeting.

His request represented a genuine moral dilemma.

He says that he has never actually "touched" a child. He defined his issue as sex addiction, and pointed to completion, while in prison, of a self-study using 12-step addiction recovery materials. After his release, he entered professional counseling to address his issues. In one letter to the meeting, he stated that he believed he was "cured" of the issues that brought about his imprisonment.

The meeting community underwent a wrenching yet robust, 3-year-long discernment process, calling on professionals that understand child sexual predation to aid in understanding the issues and risks involved. During this time, the man and his family were tenderly cared for by those who were clear to join them in worship and fellowship. Ultimately, the meeting opened its First Day worship to him in 2022—first in a hybrid setting and, more recently, admitting him to attend in the meetinghouse. He is always accompanied by both a court-mandated, trained escort and a meeting-designated monitor. He is also barred from entering spaces occupied by the children. The meeting’s precautions come as close as possible to eliminating the risk of further harm.

What precautions and plans cannot do, however, is prevent the involuntary, visceral reaction his presence triggers in those who have been victims of psychological and physical abuse, including child and adult sexual abuse. In my case, the circumstances around his arrest and prosecution trigger PTSD, a physiological stress response over which I have little control given my personal history as an abuse survivor. I flush, begin shaking all over, my heart races, my blood pressure skyrockets and have to stop everything I am doing to collect myself.

A number of Friends, including some with no personal history of abuse, have for various reasons discerned that they must separate from the meeting over this issue. In my case, I carry no doubt that I forgive him, but I cannot, at this time, find my way to trust him or his words, nor to feel safe again inside this community of people that I love.

A primary issue when considering sex crimes perpetrated—or contemplated—against children is the tendency to identify the essence of the offender with their actions. There is a strong sense that we view whom we each are attracted to, sexually, as an innate part of our identity as a person. In the case of many other criminal offenses, we can, both cognitively and emotionally, separate the crime from the soul-sense of the person who committed it, and our fear of re-offense is not visceral. But when a crime committed is one that forever alters the self-concept of its victim, and that victim is among those who have the least chance of resisting or defending themselves, finding that psychic separation becomes infinitely more difficult. It is particularly so if one carries past wounding that reverberates with the pain and soul-level diminishment that is carried by the victims of child sex abusers.
So, what are Friends to do when a single life, broken in a very specific way, is laid at our feet? And the nature of the brokenness is fraught with deep misunderstanding and can inspire fear? When differing levels of direct and indirect experience with the underlying issues greatly influence how we, as individuals within the community, hold the tensions around them?

Is forgiveness framed only by an expectation that all within the community will come to agree upon a single discerned response, whatever that is?

Or, is there the capacity in Quaker discernment and the ideal of forgiveness to respect, as grounded in the Light, both the community response and the discernment of individuals who find that they must step away—and by doing so create space for the wounded soul seeking support?

Lived experience tells me that both outcomes are equally grounded in the Light—as leadings of Spirit.
There is wholeness here, right here in the fragments, the brokenness. This is what life is: wholly whole when the pieces are gathered, and holy. For it is a sacred truth that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The wholeness is the cord which laces the cored parts back together like pearls on a string. Healing comes when we examine our pearls and decide which we need to let go of and which are worthy to pass on to the next generation. We must discern which pearls best compliment the continuum of our beautiful wholeness, the sacred thread of stardust that slid us into being. Healing through ancestral traumas and honoring the wholeness of those experiences (and not passing on the broken pearls of past generations) is hard work, important work. I am whole, in that I am an emanation of the Divine Source. My core is a glowing ribbon which is always whole, despite myriad ways my light is refracted and reflected and divided; despite the imperfections of my pearls.

I was raised in silent meeting for worship. My father, born of a Jewish mother and a self-identified quasi-Buddhist father, was raised in the Quaker community in Bucks County, Pennsylvania. My mother was raised in a Brethren household in California and joined the Quakers before marrying my father. They met and married in Washington, D.C. My father was a conscientious objector and worked for the Friends Committee on National Legislation in Washington, D.C., having been invited from his studies at Earlham College to be mentored by Wilmer Cooper there.

Attending ESR was a healing journey of circling back to my roots: Quaker, Brethren and Jewish. By completing a path of education begun by my father, I was able to tie up loose ends, facilitate healing in my family lineage, and in the process, make my family proud.

While initially I began the M.Div. program at ESR as part of the board certification process for chaplaincy, I found that the theopoetics program was precisely the avenue I needed to strengthen my writing skills and explore the intersections of all the things that make my soul come alive à la Howard Thurman. My final portfolio project was the design, implementation and documentation of Code Dandelion, a program that integrated mindful breathing, art-as-process and poetry as pathways of healing namely for those suffering from moral distress and moral injury in healthcare during the pandemic. I am especially grateful for the opportunities that ESR provided to strengthen my knowledge of Abrahamic traditions and grow in my pastoral authority as an Interfaith chaplain.

A little history

My childhood was magical. The first pearls I collected of my own volition were plucked from the glistening web of existence. From high in the yoke of the bay tree I heard the doe whisper to her fawn. Laying in a perfumed patch of vinca vines, I tasted the sparkling dust of sunbeams. Crouched inside ancient redwood circles, I felt the song of a thousand ferns tingle through my being. Years of being infused with redwood-filtered sunshine set the tone for a life of hearing, feeling and seeing the many dimensions of beauty around me. Sap, or “tree blood” as I called it, regularly anointed my grubby palms—pitch spots that turned black from my work of playing in the shadows of the redwoods, the sentinels of my childhood.

At twelve, a teacher introduced me to tarot and Kabbalah, the same year my parents divorced. Their split prompted me to make a bold move. I secretly applied to George School in Pennsylvania, which my father attended. There I met...
Jewish people who welcomed me into their homes and invited me for shabbat dinners. In hindsight, perhaps I was gathering together pearls of self that had been unstrung and left behind before I even came into existence. I was a wallflower, observing Jewish and Quaker communities dancing together. With Jewish roots having been truncated two generations before I was born, I didn’t identify as Jewish and didn’t feel I belonged anywhere. I turned to books on all things esoteric and learned more about magick, Kabbalah and healing. I graduated high school in 3.5 years and attended one year of college before starting a family. As a young mother, I returned to the local Quaker meeting, trying once again to reconnect with familiar pearls. I didn’t find the sense of belonging I needed and sought. After a couple years of trying to forge friendships, I decided that I and my family needed something closer to home. Our family settled into a UCC church for 12 years, where we raised our four children and I sang in the choir.

When I turned 40, a series of events prompted me to turn my focus inward to reconnect to the sensitivity and awareness I held as a child connected to nature. Divine orchestrations led me to complete programs in energy healing, hypnotherapy, EFT, spirit-releasement, and past-life regression. In 2015, I entered the Chaplaincy Institute’s Interfaith Studies Program (Berkeley, California) which culminated in my Interfaith ordination in 2016, during my second unit of clinical pastoral education, CPE. The hypnotherapy training and interfaith studies helped to give meaning to my multisensory experiences. I began exploring ways to bring art, music, poetry and ritual into ministry. I completed four consecutive units of CPE, got a job as a hospice chaplain, and applied for a second round of seminary at Earlham School of Religion which, as you know, cross-pollinates with Bethany Seminary. My application was accepted as an exception, as I had never finished college.

ESR gave me a place to belong. The education I received at ESR was the wind beneath my wings that enabled me to fly. I’m especially grateful for the guidance of Michael Birkel, Ben Brazil and Scott Holland for seeing and encouraging my creative engine. The experiences at ESR became special pearls that provided contrast and balance to those I already collected. In May, 2022, I graduated with both an M.Div. and an M.A. in theopoetics and writing. In April, 2023, I earned the title of board certified chaplain (BCC).

I’m excited to share that I’ve just taken on more hours as sole chaplain at my local trauma hospital, while remaining part of the larger hospital chaplaincy services department I started in, in 2019. My work is my calling where I get to sing, pray, share art and poetry, listen between the words, offer mindful breathing moments and facilitate healing, even beyond a cure. I am continuously striving to balance work, self-care and care for my extended family. In my spare time I enjoy sifting through inherited, chosen and earned pearls, stringing and restringing them onto the glowing ribbon of my wholeness. It is quite the necklace.
I’m Kurt Cadena-Mitchell. I’m a gay, mestizo-Latino, new ESR Access student who lives in the Texas hill country with my fiance, Zack. A child of the southwest, I grew up in a devoutly Catholic, Mexican-American family in San Antonio, Texas. Though I was an active leader in my local Unitarian Universalist Congregation for many years and am now a member of the Friends Meeting of Austin (SCYM), I derive much of my spiritual practice from the Catholic tradition that formed me, in particular the example of the Sisters of Charity of the Incarnate Word. They first came to San Antonio during a cholera epidemic in 1869 and went on to found our first public hospital, which is the hospital where my grandmother drew her last breath. They also founded and taught at the schools that educated three generations (so far) of my family. Their spirituality is described as “incarnational,” and they taught me to “put some skin in the game” by serving others.

Inspired by these and other examples, after high school, I initially discerned a vocation with a Catholic religious order before becoming a social worker instead. Over the years, I’ve been a school social worker, coordinated public health interventions, administered disaster relief and led political advocacy efforts. However, I kept hearing that still, small voice calling me to a different kind of ministry. In looking at seminary options, I knew I wanted a school where I could develop both spiritually and professionally. I first looked at Earlham in 2015, and despite looking at lots of different options, Earlham was the only school I actually proactively contacted for information and was the only place where I (finally) submitted an application. I applied for and was accepted into the M.Div. program in the fall of 2022 and began my first class in January of 2023.

Leonard Cohen wrote the lyrics, “God is alive

Magic is afoot . . .

Magic would not tarry
It moves from arm to arm . . .

It cannot come to harm
It rests in an empty palm
It spawns in an empty mind
But Magic is no instrument
Magic is the end . . .

This I mean to whisper to my mind
This I mean to laugh with in my mind
This I mean my mind to serve ‘til
Service is but Magic
Moving through the world
And mind itself is Magic
Courting through the flesh
And flesh itself is Magic
Dancing on a clock
And time itself the magic length of God

I chose ESR because I believed ESR lived out the idea that God is alive; magic is afoot. . . . Now that I am ‘here’ I’ve been ecstatic at all the opportunities to connect with and learn from classmates and professors who are all deeply committed to the ESR ethos of ‘being in this world–seeking to make it whole.’”

— Kurt Cadena-Mitchell
ESR M.Div. Student
Graduating from ESR in 1988 sent me on an adventurous, meaningful and worthwhile pathway for the rest of my life. I had wanted to go into the ministry for some years but in the area of peace and justice studies. As a Lutheran, I learned that there were no graduate programs in that area in Lutheran seminaries, so my pastor, Elizabeth Waid, a graduate of Earlham College, recommended applying to ESR for an M.A. in peace and justice studies. After two years of classes and one year to write my thesis, I graduated at age 50. For the first part of my life, I taught high school English, was married, and raised a family. Now I was ready to move out further into the world.

In 1988 I was hired (I prefer to say “called”) to lead the South Dakota Peace and Justice Center, a statewide nonprofit organization started by Benedictine nuns in Watertown, with local groups statewide. We were ecumenical, including many Christians disaffected with the organized churches. Our board of directors had as members Black and Dakota and Lakota leaders as well as whites.

With the help of member Harold Iron Shield and journalist Tim Giago, we were able to convince then-governor George Mickelson and the nine tribal leaders, to declare a Year of Reconciliation in 1990, the 100th anniversary of the Wounded Knee Massacre in South Dakota. At that ceremony, held in -20 degree weather, the Wounded Knee riders completed their ride from Sitting Bull’s home on horseback. The ceremony was moving beyond words and brought reporters from all over the world as the memories were laid to rest.

Working with Native American leaders, both women and men, filled in for me a piece of life’s puzzle that had always been missing. At its best, I found a traditional culture that followed the ways Jesus taught, whether with or without church influence. They shared at giveaways. They tended to work tribally. They did not run on strict clock time but began when they were all there and ended when they were finished. They could be silent for long periods of time. I found my experience at the Clear Creek unprogrammed meeting to be very helpful. It was explained to me that the difference between the Indian and European cultures was that the Indians were dedicated to living and giving, and the Europeans to controlling and getting. As I reflected on my life as a well-educated, middle-class white woman, I saw how individualistic we had become and how acquisitive. I saw our culture with new eyes and also saw how the tribal cultures were becoming more like us, which was our goal from the start once we had taken all the land and killed those who defended it.

The Peace and Justice Center job required a great deal of state-wide travel, and I began to need to be based in one place. I resigned and accepted the job of director of united ministries at Black Hills State University, a position funded by a consortium of churches. BHSU has the highest percentage of Native Americans in the state system, so I fit into the job well with my experience. Here I worked with most of the mainline churches, including Catholics, and was the advisor of the International Student Association, a most rewarding job.

United Ministries set up a food pantry in my office, and I set up regular experiences for students to serve in the community. For spring break one year, I took the students to downtown Denver to serve in a homeless shelter. It was an eye-opening and amazing trip.

ESR was the foundation that made me fit to do this work, and as I near the age of 85, I am eternally grateful for the time spent at the Earlham School of Religion.

— Legia Spicer ’88
ESR Alumni
Rooted in the Christian Quaker tradition of contemplation that inspires action, Earlham School of Religion prepares theologically diverse students for a pluralistic world. Our curriculum unites spiritual formation, academic study, social engagement and vital ministry.

— ESR Mission Statement

## FACULTY UPDATES

### COLLEEN WESSEL-MCCOY

On the MLK Jr. Day, Colleen led a virtual reflection with the ESR community on MLK Jr.’s last sermon, “What are Your New Year’s Resolutions?” Colleen’s book, *Freedom Church of the Poor: Martin Luther King Jr.’s Poor People’s Campaign* (Lexington, 2021), was released as a paperback. You can find it here [here](https://rowman.com/ISBN/9781978710245/Freedom-Church-of-the-Poor-Martin-Luther-King-Jrs-Poor-Peoples-Campaign).

Colleen will attend the Social Ethics and Organizing Work Group Summer Gathering in Nashville, Tennessee.

### JULIENNA SMITH

During the inaugural Quaker Leadership Conference in April, Julianna led one of the facilitated conversations on *Scattered: Quakers Without a Meeting*. Using personal narratives, this presentation explored some of the “push-and-pull” factors that lead to Quakers choosing to no longer worship among Quakers.

### JULI DISHMAN

Julie’s two photos were displayed at Cope Environmental Center for their Wonders of Winter Art Show. Julie’s photos have also been used in other ESR publicity materials, and one (early morning sunrise) hangs in the ESR Barclay Center building with the caption, “Images like the early morning sun shining through the mist, casting long dramatic shadows, often stop photographer Julie Dishman in her tracks as she drives from her home in rural Hagerstown to the Earlham school of religion. Healing light and life-giving water, as well as trees, are Julie’s favorite inspirational photo subjects.” Julie is the director of recruitment and admissions at ESR.

### GRACE KIM


She will also Speak at the Wild Goose Festival, Union Grove, North Carolina, in July 2023. In May 2023, Grace gave a talk at Princeton Forum on Youth Ministry at Princeton Theological Seminary.

In March 2023, Grace was the main speaker at the 52nd Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, Oklahoma.

### JULIA N E DISHMAN

Julie’s two photos were displayed at Cope Environmental Center for their Wonders of Winter Art Show. Julie’s photos have also been used in other ESR publicity materials, and one (early morning sunrise) hangs in the ESR Barclay Center building with the caption, “Images like the early morning sun shining through the mist, casting long dramatic shadows, often stop photographer Julie Dishman in her tracks as she drives from her home in rural Hagerstown to the Earlham school of religion. Healing light and life-giving water, as well as trees, are Julie’s favorite inspirational photo subjects.” Julie is the director of recruitment and admissions at ESR.

### JIM HIGGINBOTHAM

Jim was invited to participate in the Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) Religion and Foreign Policy Workshop in May of 2023. This annual gathering of leaders and academics from diverse religious traditions meets in New York City at the CFR headquarters to engage policy and NGO experts as they examine critical issues of the intersection of religion and foreign affairs.

Jim is completing a 4-year term on the Steering Committee of the Society for Pastoral Theology (SPT) this June, the last two years as Chair and Treasurer.
This professional guild of professors of pastoral care and related professionals holds an annual conference, this year focusing on the training of chaplains. SPT also sponsors and oversees the Journal of Pastoral Theology (JPT), an internally known academic publication focused on theological issues pertinent to spiritual care and ministry. Jim continues as one of the editors of JPT.

**BEN BRAZIL**

Ben is on sabbatical leave and will be returning to campus in the fall. He is traveling to Bolivia this summer to begin preparations for teaching a class and taking ESR students to Bolivia. Ben was also named the Elton Trueblood chair of the Christian Thought, established in 1967 and rotates every five years between ESR and Earlham College.

**STEVE ANGELL**

Steve presented “Mystics and Evangelicals: The Theological Backstory to Recent Schisms in Quaker Churches” at the Friendly Witness: The Spiritual Ground of Quaker Social Action conference. Steve’s article titled “Sarah Mapps Douglass & Sojourner Truth: Intersection of Religion, Race, Gender and Social Class” has been accepted for publication in *Quaker Studies*.

**PHIL BAISELY**

Phil Baisley’s short story, “The Spoon” has been published in the *Half Hour to Kill* online magazine. Phil’s latest interview was published by Indie Writers Press in a book titled *The Indie Author: Honest Interviews with Self-Published Authors*.

**GRETCHEN CASTLE**

On June 9–10, Gretchen will attend the Quaker United Nations Office (QUNO) 75th Anniversary in New York. She will also be speaking on “Finding Our Way; Through God, All Things are Made New” at the Ohio Valley Yearly Meeting near Cincinnati from June 14–18.

On July 2–8, Gretchen will be at the Friends General Conference Gathering of Friends in Portland, OR, speaking on “Abiding Together in the Life and Power” on a panel with Cherice Bock and Marge Abbott.

On July 27–29, she will attend the annual Western Yearly Meeting sessions, and on August 25–27, she will speak at First Friends Kokomo on “Faith Leads to Works.”

**APRIL VANLONDEN**

On June 15–18, April will lead Bible studies sessions and facilitate workshops on spirituality and art at the Lake Erie yearly meeting annual sessions in Ashland, OH. The Theme for the annual session is “Navigating a new.” April will also lead Bible study and worship sharing sessions on the Theme, ‘Love is the first Movement’ at the Wilmington Yearly meeting annual From July 27–29 in Wilmington, OH.

Earlier this spring, April spoke at the Eldorado Unitarian Universalist Church, West Richmond Friends eeting and officiated her niece’s wedding in California.

Two winter scenes photographed by Julie Dishman, currently on display at Cope Environmental Center for their Wonders of Art Show.
“So, when ESR alumni and friends of ESR ask, ‘What can I do to help ESR?’ my first response is always, ‘Share ESR materials and social media posts whenever you can!’”

— Julie Dishman
ESR Director of Recruitment and Admissions

When we ask new prospective students how they heard about ESR we often hear “From an ESR alum” or “I’m Quaker, so have heard about it over the years.”

We also have learned that ESR applicants feel called to ESR when they have read or heard something about ESR several times in the last few years, either online or in person.

So, when ESR alumni and friends of ESR ask, “What can I do to help ESR?” my first response is always, “Share ESR materials and social media posts whenever you can!”

I also ask if ESR alumni plan to attend upcoming Yearly Meetings or other events, and if so, could I provide them with a packet of ESR promo materials to display on a table at the event? Sometimes we have faculty who plan to attend these Yearly Meetings or other kinds of events, and sometimes I can attend, but with Quaker simplicity and stewardship in mind, we want to be conscious of the resources we use for travel, especially during post-COVID uncertainties.

If you plan to attend or present at your Yearly Meeting or another summer event where you think we should be present, please let me know if you are willing to set up a table of ESR promo materials. You don’t have to attend the table, just display the materials and check on them occasionally. Also, let me know of other events where you think ESR should have a presence. You can email me at dishmju@earlham.edu or call me at 765-983-1523.

Thank you all for your continued support and assistance!
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ESR’s newest alumni, the graduating class of 2023, with faculty and staff.