



Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Additional resources 98.A



Engage

How do Quakers live adventurously?

After telling these or other stories that you choose, pause and then ask some questions like: I wonder what you liked best about the story; I wonder what you thought was most important; I wonder if there is anything in your life like this story. Next ask if anybody has any questions at all.

1. About slavery and a Quaker called Ben Lay

There was time when people would be stolen, taken by soldiers from places in Africa, put on ships, chained together and taken to countries like ours or America. They became slaves doing horrible, hard work without enough food or drink.

Lots of people had slaves to do work. It was an ordinary thing to do. There were Quakers who had slaves. Most people bought things that had been made by slaves – cloth and sugar for example. Cutting the big plants, like bamboo, to make the sugar was very hot and hard work. However, making and putting the colour into cloth was even more dangerous because the chemicals and different things used to make the colours were very poisonous (and it wasn't just adults doing this – it was children too).

Many Quakers bought the sugar and the cloth.

Now, there started to be some Quakers who said that this was wrong and that Quakers, and other people, should stop buying these things.

One of these people was a man called Ben Lay. He lived in the country that we call the United States of America. He was tiny man – just 1 ½ metres (4ft 1”) tall. He spent much of his life living, with his wife (who was also tiny) in a comfortable cave in a wood.

He was very upset about Quakers buying things made by slaves. He believed very strongly in the peaceful teaching of Jesus and the stories about him in the Bible.

One day he got a copy of the Bible. He cut out all the inside of the pages so that it looked like a book but was hollow. Inside he put a sort of balloon, an animal bladder, which he filled with red ink and then tied up. He also found a very sharp knife that he put in his pocket.

He went in to a big Quaker meeting where people were talking about all sorts of things to do. He walked to the front of the meeting and said something like:

'Friends it is my belief that owning goods produced by slave is like a knife in the heart of the Bible (and everything we think it says that is important).'

As he said this he took out the knife and stabbed it into the book. The balloon burst and what looked like blood poured out. Quakers in the meeting threw him out of the room. They were very upset but maybe because Ben had made them feel very, very uncomfortable. In the end Quakers everywhere stood up against slavery and helped end the buying and selling of people in this way.

2. About the First World War and a Quaker called Harry Stanton

Harry Stanton lived in a town called Luton in our country. His dad was a blacksmith. He was a Quaker and agreed with them that war was wrong. He knew that most people thought differently but this did not seem to matter to him. He wrote that what people said or shouted out in the street and in the papers made him stronger. Harry tried to persuade his friends not to join the army. They agreed with him that war was evil, but they thought that England had to fight the Germans and go to war.

In 1916, when Harry was a 21, he was conscripted, made to join the army. When he asked not to join the army he was told no, he had to go. He had just three minutes in a special 'court' to say why he didn't want to go. He was taken away by force to join the army, where he refused to obey orders. He, with others, was sent to prison.

After the authorities had tried to break the spirits (*make them change their minds and what they felt was right*) of Harry and his friends the conscientious objectors (COs), or 'Conchies', around fifty of them were taken from prison and sent to the Front Line of the war, where the fighting was, in France, so that they would be said to be "on active service". This meant that they would have to obey the same orders as soldiers and so could be shot for not doing as they were told.

Harry was one of these men. Harry and two or three others were taken to a special punishment prison for twenty-eight days. Harry described what happened next – a punishment known as 'crucifixion' (like Jesus in a way). This involved being tied to a post and being left like this for up to two hours. This was repeated every day. This hurt them a lot. After Harry tried to stand on some boards to stay out of the mud under his feet.

This is what he says happened next: *"We were ... placed with our faces to the wire of the inner fence and tied in the usual manner at the wrists and ankles. ... and I found myself drawn so closely into the fence that when I wished to turn my head I had to do so very slowly and cautiously to avoid my face being torn by the barbs."*

Very little is written down of anything Harry Stanton said but another of the group, Howard Marten, said later: *"We were forever being threatened with being hurt or even killed – over and over again – all done with the idea of frightening us. The army didn't know what to do...we couldn't be bullied into it...we were never prepared to do things in an army way. We never saluted anybody, we never stood to attention"*.

During much of this time they were locked up in cells – it was horrible. They talked or whispered through tiny holes in the wooden walls, and some of the men held a Quaker meeting. At other times they sang. Saying quiet prayers helped. One day they were stood in a huge square of 1,000s of soldiers – they thought something really bad was going to happen. Lots of people back in England – many Quakers - had been trying to get help to Harry and his friends and to stop them being hurt. They were hurt more but Harry and his friends were sent to different prisons in Britain.

When they arrived home a British crowd pelted them with eggs and tomatoes. Harry was sent to a special camp in Scotland where the men were put to work breaking rocks which could be used, for example, in road building. After a while Harry thought that even this was wrong and he should not do anything which might mean other men would then go and fight. As a result, he was sent back to another prison.

Harry and his friends didn't give in or give up. Harry lived to be a very elderly man.

3. About the beginnings of Quakers – a story about Margaret Fell

When Quakers started it was a time of war in our country – not war with people from another country but a war between different groups of people in our country. Groups who liked having a king and people who didn't want to be ruled by a king. When the fighting ended there was no king – he had been killed.

Then, after a time, there was another king. Now, some people believed that they could make their country a better place for everybody (they thought that Jesus would come back) if this king was got rid of. They started to fight but they were beaten by the king's soldiers and many died.

Quakers were scared that the king would think that they were like these other people.

In the part of our country that we now call the Lake District – mountains, lakes, rock and rivers and very wild – there was a Quaker called Margaret Fell. She was a farmer and also had a factory that made iron for tools. She was very important at this time – some people called her the 'mother of Quakerism'. As well as all her jobs and family she also helped Quakers all over the country who were in prison, didn't have enough money or who had their farm animals and tools taken from them because they were Quakers.

Margaret, and other Quakers, wanted to tell the king that they were different from the people who had started to fight again. She wrote a special letter and went to London and take it to the king – she travelled with a friend called Ann Curtis. This was along and dangerous journey by horse or by carriage or cart – of course there were no trains, cars or planes. This was in the year 1660. Here is part of what Margaret said, it is written in the way people spoke at that time:

'We are a people that follow after those things that make for peace, love and unity; it is our desire that others' feet may walk in the same, and do deny and bear our testimony against all strife, and wars, and contentions that come from the lusts that war in the members, that war in the soul, which we wait for, and watch for in all people, and love and desire the good of all... Treason, treachery, and false dealing we do utterly deny; false dealing, surmising, or plotting against any creature upon the face of the earth, and speak the truth in plainness, and singleness of heart.'

It is very interesting that in the same year a group of other Quakers worked very closely together – this came from Quakers deciding all together. Here is part of what they said:

'.....All bloody principles and practices we do utterly deny, with all outward wars, and strife, and fightings with outward weapons, for any end, or under any pretence whatsoever, and this is our testimony to the whole world....'

The Quakers also made a small book out of what they said. At first the king didn't believe them or like what they said and had all of the books destroyed. They made more of the books and, in the end, the king didn't destroy them.

Margaret was strong, brave and peaceful. She did the things she did when women were not supposed even to write down their ideas or speak to people like the king. She visited the king several times and he ended up liking her, her friends and what they said. The king listened and Quakers, who had been treated very, very badly slowly began to be treated better – it took a long time but, in the end, they could even build their own meeting houses and not have them broken down by soldiers and other people.

4. About trying to stop weapons of war – a story about some Quakers and a submarine

On a beautiful summer's evening on 8th June 1999 Ellen, a Quaker, stood quietly with her friends Ulla and Angie at the edge of a Scottish loch or lake – Loch Goil. They had found by the loch 2 inflatable life rafts, which they now inflated. Their hearts beat quickly as, making as little noise as possible, they rowed over to a big barge called *Maytime* – a floating laboratory moored on the loch.

The job of the people who worked on the barge was to make sure that submarines that carried bombs in rockets called Trident were very quiet so other ships or submarines couldn't hear them.

Reaching it at last they climbed out of their rafts and onto the barge through an open window. They switched on their torches and looked around. Inside were lots of computers and associated equipment. They were actually at a place called Faslane Nuclear base.

They unfurled some banners they had brought with them and climbing out of the window again onto a ledge round the barge they fixed them up. One read '*Stop Nuclear Death Research*' and another had a picture of rainbow people pushing Trident into the sunlight and it read 'Bringing Crime into the Light'.

Climbing back through the window they looked at the computers. They knew that if they destroyed them they would be arrested and put in prison but they wanted to make people think about nuclear weapons and the terrible damage they did. They would be doing a wrong thing in order to draw attention to a much greater wrong. They wouldn't hurt anybody by damaging the computers, but nuclear weapons could hurt thousands of people terribly. So taking a deep breath they unplugged the computers and threw them out of the window into the water, where they sunk to the bottom.

Now they had started they grinned cheerfully at each other and began to throw everything else they could out of the window – except the first aid kit – even the kettle which they regretted later when they couldn't make some tea! Equipment that was too big to be thrown out of the window they broke where it was. They worked away enthusiastically for 3 hours. Ellen says that it was a wonderful experience.

Then the police arrived. They realised these were peace protestors so they were quite friendly, as they knew the ladies would not be violent. They arrested them and put them in Corton Vale Women's Prison. After 4 and a half months in prison they went to court where their case was argued before Sheriff Margaret Gimblett and a jury. Their defence advocate, John Mayer, said that these weapons, Trident missiles, were illegal against the law. This meant that though the women had committed a crime they had done so to prevent other, much bigger crimes taking place and so in Scottish law should be acquitted.

After four and half weeks in court and discussion the Sheriff agreed and ordered the jury to acquit the women because they had a right to "disarm" the base. So the three ladies who became known as 'The Trident Three' were set free and there were cheers and applause as they walked free from the court.