

Peace and young people

By Ghee Bowman, Exeter Quaker Meeting

My theme this morning is peace and young people.

It seems to me that we grow up with conflict and war - it seems the norm. My father was born in 1911 and remembered the Germans ships shelling Scarborough in 1914. His father was gassed in the trenches in 1916. My mother came here from Germany as a 12 year old girl to escape the Nazis. Her father fought against the British in the trenches. Growing up in the 60s I read Victor comic and watched war films – it was a post-war world. Since 9/11 we have grown used to seeing war on the news every night. Every single night.

And yet young people are the future, where we turn to for hope. There is of course an easy copout there – let's leave the young people to clean up the mess we've made, we don't need to do any more. But even though children and young people *still* learn a very partial history in schools – how many books on peace have you read, or even seen, for example? – even so, they know that peace is something good, to be strived for, to be worked at.

As well as being a Quaker, I am member of the Woodcraft Folk, a national organisation for children & young people with about a dozen groups in Devon. Every week young people gather and play together co-operatively, make things and sing songs of peace. It's no more *natural* for them to fight than it is to play together peacefully - they learn from what they see and hear around them – they learn from adults. Show them peace, they will learn peace.

As my teenage daughter said "Peace means calm, happiness, equality - if everyone's equal, there's no need to be jealous, there's less to argue over".

And as some wise Quakers from New Zealand "Reject the clamour of fear and listen to the whisperings of hope."
(QF&P 24.10)

BBC Radio Devon, 4 October 2011

Ghee Bowman