

## Singing into the Silence



Quaker Meetings are defined by simplicity and silence. The Friends House in Little Compton, Rhode Island, is a stark New England structure, Puritanical architecture, with minimal furniture.

No icons or images. No minister. People gather on four sides of a square of pews, a vase of fresh wild flowers the only object in the spacious centre.

No one speaks unless moved to share a meaningful reflection. No idle talk to fill the air.

I'm curious about how my U.S. friends are responding to Trump's brutal actions, the rise of fascism, the genocide in Gaza.

How do they confront MAGA supporters?

How are they are resisting despair?

How are they nurturing hope...?



My friend Mika Seeger and her friend Kate have suggested that their Quaker Meetings need music. They propose gathering to sing before the service. *Rise Up Singing* song books are distributed. Six members arrive early to join them.

For 20 minutes, we harmonize through a few songs in the Gospel section, and end in the Love section with Ewan McColl's "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face."

When I ask if I can photograph our singing group for my Friday Songfest friends in Toronto, Kevin offers to take the photo to include me.

I watch [Mika singing](#) with others "May the Circle Be Unbroken." The way she tips her head upward and sings with such conviction reminds me of her late father Pete Seeger, who would be joining any effort to get people to sing directly into this crisis moment.



When the official silent service begins, I close my eyes and sink into a meditative state, shifting from one crisis to another, as I struggle to conjure up hopeful signs of action in my imagination. It takes about 20 minutes before any human voice breaks the silence.

Over the course of an hour, five or six people are moved to stand and speak. Kevin, our photographer, reflects on how our singing has changed the energy in the room as well as his mood. It reminds him of another recent experience where music offered a way to communicate during this era when many are hesitant to even open their mouths. Two others also wax eloquent about recent experiences or deep cultural experiences with music.

How ironic, I think, that our singing before the silent service provokes more conversation within the silence, testimonies about the power of music punctuating the silence.

After the "official service," everyone rises and greets others in the room, then name people to be remembered in prayer: from a daughter with serious cancer to a son who finally secured a job as well as a girlfriend..!



Announcements follow, revealing more about the political activities of this group. I was most struck by a description of weekly vigils being held in nearby towns in solidarity with migrants threatened by Trump's deportation actions.

Different from protests, the vigils explicitly avoid negative and offensive language, aimed at the perpetrators, rather offering welcoming messages for immigrants. Their signs say "We see you. We hear you. We support you."

Passers-by honk in response, another way to break the silence.



On my way out of the Friends House, I check the bulletin board, and find other resonances.

Not surprisingly, I spot an anti-war bumper sticker, but also a poster declaring “You Are On Indigenous Land.”



We are in the territory of the early colonizers of the Americas, among them my ancestors from the Netherlands and England, who first occupied Indigenous land in New England four centuries ago.

I wonder what efforts of truth and reconciliation have been initiated on this historic coast.

During a hospitality hour held in an adjacent community centre, Kevin tells me more about the presence of migrants in the area, working in local fisheries, farms, health care.

In the spirit of mutual aid, he volunteers to drive migrants to legal hearings in regional cities, at places designated by MAGA to be difficult to access.



At a spot where migrants gather every morning to find work, a Food Pantry offers free fresh food to migrant families in this region. Most are Latinx, as Mika explains, some from Nicaragua.

That is where we first lived together forty years ago, when there was so much hope that, under the leadership of Sandinista revolutionaries, Nicaraguans could move out of poverty, reclaim land, learn to read, and build a new more equitable society.



How ironic and tragic that one of those former revolutionary leaders is now a repressive dictator, who has sent many of these workers fleeing north. Migrants now struggling to remain in a rising fascist state, living in constant fear of deportation.



Kitchen table conversations with Mika and her husband Joe, former neuroscientist, sailor, sheep farmer, and bag piper, remind us that there are millions of Americans horrified at the U.S. President's actions. While daily digesting NPR radio news over breakfast, they attend not only weekly protests but also vigils to support local migrants. I'm reminded of Joe Hill's powerful mantra: "Don't mourn, organize!"

Mika, a potter and ceramic mural artist, faithfully practices another daily ritual. Every morning she grabs a ball of clay and makes a hand built pinch pot. Her fingers massage the clay into a shape, rotating and forming a cylinder until the wall is thin, the base solid and grounded.

For an hour, this meditative movement keeps her connected to the Earth and to her own creative spirit.



Quiet acts of resistance in response to this moment.