

## Christmas Letter 24: 2019 – a year of resonance

Dear God,

Let us prepare for winter. The sun has turned away from us and the nest of summer hangs broken in a tree. Life slips through our fingers and, as darkness gathers, our hands grow cold. It is time to go inside. It is time for reflection and resonance. It is time for contemplation. Let us go inside.

AMEN.



I'm writing this listening to the Advent Service on Radio 3 and having just spent a restorative weekend on our annual Quaker winter retreat which took as its theme the poem by George Herbert 'Love bade me welcome' and started with a reflection on the above prayer by Leunig.

One of the words that particularly struck me in the prayer is the notion of '**resonance**'

Resonance scientifically (apparently) describes '*the phenomena of amplification that occurs when the frequency of a periodically applied force is in harmonic proportion to a natural frequency of the system on which it acts*'; and amongst other meanings, can refer to '*the quality in a sound of being deep, full, and reverberating*'. As I reflected on the year that is drawing to its close, ideas of resonance seemed appropriately to sum up 2019 - a year in which our life has been deepened and rendered more harmonious by the various experiences we have navigated - a summary of which I attempt capture below.

This is my 24th consecutive annual Christmas newsletter - and finally I've gone paper free! A small, if overdue, gesture in recognition of the climate crisis faced by planet earth. Over the last decade, Maggie and I have taken steps to become more ecologically responsible - we have two forms of solar heating, an electric and a hybrid car and Maggie can no longer travel by air, to her great relief, due to her heart failure. But we know there is no planet B (one of my favourite Extinction Rebellion posters) and there is much more we know we need to do besides continuing to cutting down on airmiles and meat! We take our hats off to our friends Lynne Sedgmore and John Capper who have been doing wonders on the XR demos - and aspire to join you in 2020. I apologise therefore to those of you who prefer a paper version of our news or don't have access to email. As I have indicated in my Christmas card (not going to give those up just yet as I'm not keen on electronic Christmas cards), you'll have to visit my website <http://www.annlimb.co.uk> where I've posted this newsletter (look both under blogs and speeches & writing section to get a pdf version with photos) or email me (if you can) and I'll send you a pdf digitally - if I haven't already done so.

My website will also provide you with (if you were with us) a glimpse or (if you were not present) a reminder of the 'wedding of the century'. See below the Times newspaper notice and the unprecedented positive social media reaction from total strangers which it generated - with our wedding trending joyously on Twitter. Visit <http://www.annlimb.co.uk/blog/view/wedding-video> on my website to see

some of the faces of our families and friends and to listen to the stunning voice of our great niece and budding musical theatre performer Hannah Redfern who sang ' Love changes everything' at our wedding reception.

## Marriages

### **DR M.A. COOK AND DR A.G. LIMB**

The marriage took place on 11th May 2019, at Quaker Centre, Milton Keynes, MK15 9BH,, between Dr Margaret Ann Cook and Dr Ann Geraldine Limb after 33 years of friendship, 28 years in a committed and loving relationship, 12 years in a civil partnership aged 75 and 66 respectively, we do not believe there to be any biological necessity, emotional justification, psychological gain, legal requirement, financial advantage or spiritual benefit to be derived from our getting married. However societal and attitudinal transformation over the last few years has made marriage possible. We therefore conducted our marriage according to the Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) to which we both belong. Periods of silent worship were complemented by spoken ministry from Denise Rowe, Kathy Grabowksi, Lynne Sedgmore, Joanna Redfern, Peter Hullah, James Jones, Jo Paton, Rob Paton, Shahida Aslam, Julie Mills, Abi Rowe, Patricia Langley, Joan Harris, and Helena Kennedy. Following the solemnisation of our marriage, a champagne afternoon tea was held for 130 guests comprising our most cherished family members and friends. We had an amazing time and it was a very happy day. Thank you everyone.

20:26

3G



## Tweet

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**Geoff Peters** @Geoffpet · 5d

Replying to @clamorousvoice and @Rosewind2007

Congratulations @AnnLimb looks like you're trending.

1



17



1 more reply

**Dr Cleo Hanaway-Oakley** · 6d

Replying to @clamorousvoice

This just made me cry a little bit! So lovely. Congratulations, Mrs &amp; Mrs!

1



6

**Dr Sophie Duncan** @cla... · 6d

I long to know them, they sound great!

1



8



Tweet your reply



We would, of course, have loved to have invited many more people to witness what was the happiest day of our lives and one we thought we would never experience! We were however, limited by the size and capacity of the Quaker Centre in Milton Keynes where we very much wanted to hold our Meeting for Worship for the solemnisation of marriage - to give it its full title - and our splendid Quaker marriage certificate signed by everyone present, with which the short film ends, now hangs on our sitting room wall - catching the eye of more than one of the workmen with whom our house has become acquainted over the last few months - read on for further details....

There has however been more to 2019 than our wedding. Crucially, it's important to say that Maggie has survived a whole year following her heart failure last November - which means that her chances of being with us longer statistically increase (so she told me the other week once we'd past the first anniversary!) She retired in August, having completed an astonishing 60 years at work, and having had at least three successful careers (in the BBC, in education and for the last 30 years, as a therapist). I am

obviously biased but judging by the heartfelt and deeply moving tributes paid to her by her clients in their cards and notes, it is clear to me that Maggie has done her most amazing and life transforming work in the second half of her life and I'm extremely proud of her. So many deeply grateful people have been touched by and benefited from her quiet presence, her gentle holding and her unassuming wisdom - with which I am blessed daily.

However, Maggie hasn't yet had time to adjust either to marriage or to retirement as for the last few months she seems to have been on more or less permanent tea and coffee making duty for the platoons of workmen (all men) who have filed through our home. Our house has clearly been going (JB Priestley-like) into imperceptible disintegration over the last few years and we have been hit in one go with the need to undertake significant repair and renovation works and appliance renewals. I won't bore you with too many details here as we are not even halfway through yet but suffice to say we are thankful that my sister Julie is a veritable gold mine of practical advice and help on all matters domestic and construction. We pray that by Easter 2020 we will have all our windows replaced, a completely new bathroom installed, and new flooring laid in the kitchen and what will become Maggie's 'snug' - to complement the new water cylinder and updated solar system we had to install this autumn plus a new fridge freezer which mercifully should arrive in time for Christmas.

When not being on the end of a phone for us or doing internet research for our bathroom fittings, and of course in between her and Jim's overseas adventures, not only did Julie do the most amazing job with all the flowers at our wedding (see the video) but she has been regularly available to go swimming with me through the year. We mostly meet at Bicester pool which is halfway between our homes but in the summer months we were able to go to the open air pool adjacent to the river in Abingdon. There's nothing like swimming outdoors (even in a municipal pool) - and doing the Hampstead ladies ponds remains on my bucket list!

Speaking of bucket lists, another glorious event for me this year was ticking off my list the ascent (and descent) of Suilven - a mountain in the remote North West Highland of Scotland. This involved a fifteen mile hike in a day - up and down some tricky steep gullies (see below).

I have long been fascinated by Suilven. I first heard of its existence when I walked in the nearby Knoydart in the early 1990's and caught my first sight of it when Maggie and I had a holiday in Ullapool a few years ago. For over 300 days a year it is shrouded in cloud, immortalised in the Euan MacGregor song 'Joy of Living' as 'cloud bearing Suilven'.





Rob (with Macleod family tartan) Jo me and Jonty en route to Suilven (in the background) 29 June 2019

Fortunately, 29 June 2019 was NOT one of those days. Although we encountered magnificent swirling eddies of mist as we approached the top, the clouds dissipated as quickly as they drifted in from the sea once we were at the summit itself, revealing stunning scenery for 360 degrees around us. This strenuous climb was not one I could have done with Maggie; it was precious to me that my nephew Jonty and niece Joanna, together with Jo's partner Rob, were my stalwart companions and kept me going every step of the way. The climb was amazing, and the views were so stunning that I make no apology for sharing the photos with you. The mountain is special because when my time comes for me to find an incarnation in dust, I have requested that Jo and Jonty return to Loch Inver to scatter some of my ashes on Suilven – and I'm thrilled I've been up there with them in this life to share the magnificence of nature in this earthly paradise. I am not, of course a Scot, but my maternal great great grandfather, so the family story goes, was a Scottish orphan who walked to England in the early 1800's to find work and so I fondly think of this as a return to my ancestral homeland (if the General Election result - not known at the time of posting this on my website has not already seen Maggie and me relocating to the sanity of Scotland..... )





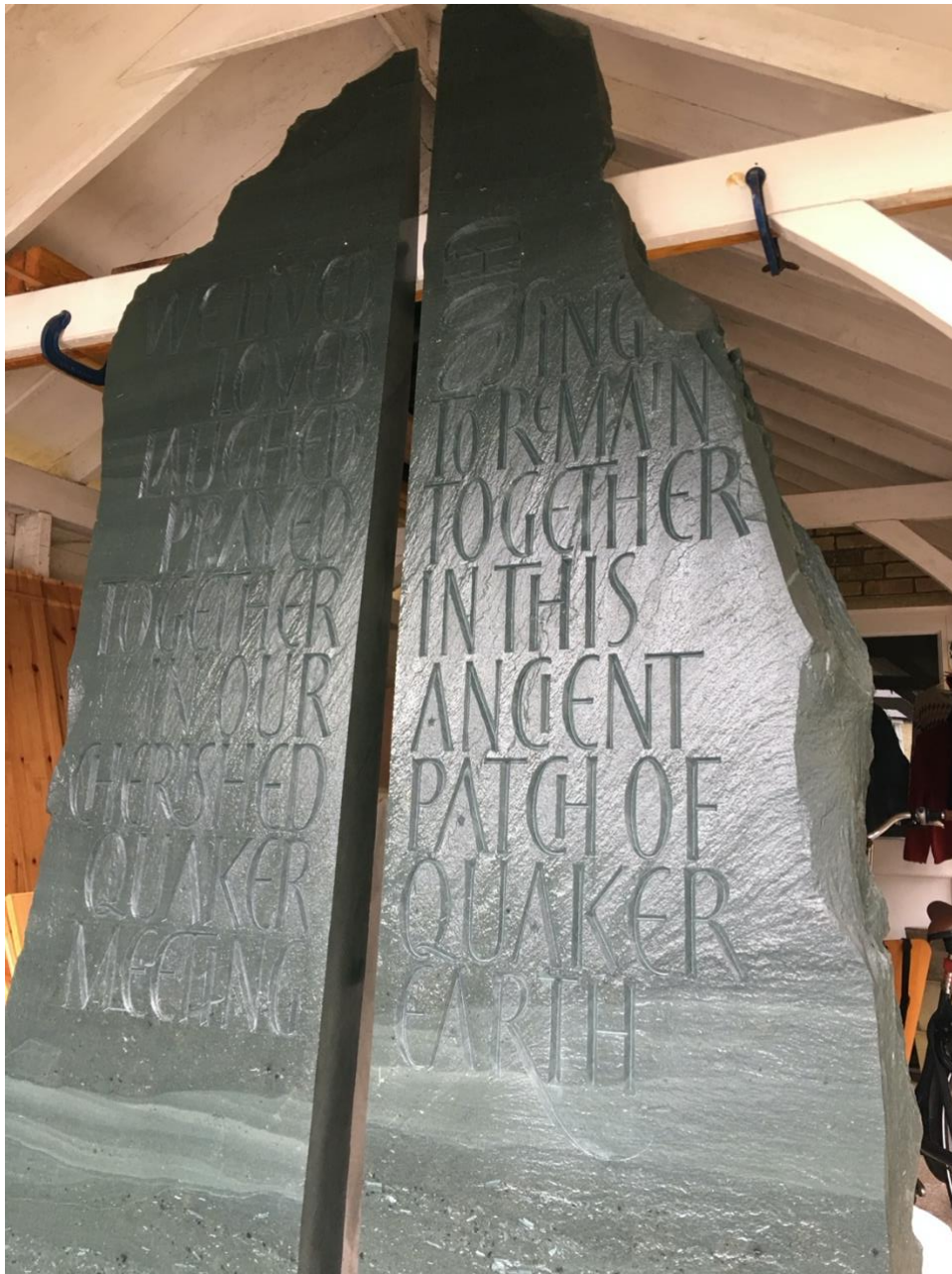
On top of Suilven and what a view!





The stone I carried up Suilven (shaped like the Hogsty End Burial Ground Stone feature below) is placed on the cairn at the top of Suilven 29 June 2109 – resting on the Trans Pride stone!

The alternative title for this newsletter might have been 'one wedding and preparing for our funerals' as in addition to my Suilven 'ashes scattering recy', Maggie and I are also part of the Milton Keynes Quaker Burial Ground group taking steps to make Hogsty End Quaker Burial Ground in Woburn Sands suitable for use again – with a view to our ashes (well the half of mine that have not ended up on Suilven!) being laid to rest there – one day. As part of this project, which involves making the burial ground accessible and replanting and landscaping it, we have commissioned a slate stone feature to be installed and cut by the world renown Lida Cardozo-Kindersley workshop. Maggie has written the inscription and the slate has been sourced from the birthplace of Quakerism – 1652 country – and is Cumbrian slate from Honister quarry. We look forward to the Burial Ground being completed in 2020 – although hope we will not be putting it to 'active' use just yet.....



We lived loved laughed prayed together in our cherished Quaker Meeting, choosing to remain together in this ancient patch of Quaker earth

That said, we are getting older and if I needed any reminder of this it has come in the form of numerous awards and accolades this year. These seem to increase as the years of living left decrease! So, in 2019 came Northern Women Power List 2019 where I was cited as one of the 50 most powerful women born in the North of England, followed by Fellowship of the Chartered Institution for Further Education, an



Hon D.Litt. from Sheffield Hallam University (my sixth honorary doctorate) and most astonishing of all named #1 LGBT+ Public Sector Executive on the OUTstanding LGBT+ Role Model Lists 2019. The latter entailed attendance at a very glitzy corporate event at the Banqueting Hall on Whitehall and my picture with Ben Hunte BBC LGBT correspondent and Pedro Pina Vice President Google #1 LGBT+ Private Sector Executive



named #1 LGBT+ Public Sector Executive on the OUTstanding LGBT+ Role Model Lists 2019 with Suki Sandhu, Ben Hunte BBC LGBT correspondent, Pedro Pina Vice President Google #1 LGBT+ Private Sector Executive

As Chair of the Scouts, I made a short appearance on the BBC 1's The One Show and was also asked to do my one version of Desert Island Discs – the People's Play list - which featured on BBC3 Counties Radio. If you are interested in listening to this, you can download it from my website or contact me to send you a copy via WhatsApp. It's also been a year of meetings with royalty (although not with Prince Andrew!) and the odd celebrity. In my role as Chair of the Scouts, and also as Vice Chair of City & Guilds, I had the opportunity to have a personal one to one meeting at Clarence House with The Prince of Wales in February, followed by a private overnight visit and dinner at his estate, Dumfries House in Scotland, where HRH is known as Duke of Rothesay.



Dumfries House, Scotland with Chris Jones, CEO of City & Guilds April 2019

At Windsor Castle, I met with Star Wars and Harry Potter legend Warwick Davis, who is one of our Scout Ambassadors and at Gilwell Park, HQ of the Scouts we met the Duchess of Cambridge to show her our work on early years and our President the Duke of Kent.



Windsor Castle in April 2019 with Star Wars and Harry Potter legend Warwick Davis



Gilwell Park in April 2019 with the Duchess of Cambridge and The Scouts CEO Matt Hyde

In addition to our annual holiday ‘retreat’ on Holy Island, there has been much culture, politics, theatre, sport and general celebratory activities with friends and family too. Hay Festival in May with Julie and Jim, Wimbledon with Kirstie and Nat, Ascot (for me) with Gillian and Oliver, whose Silver Wedding in York we both also attended in July, trips to the Royal Court (The End of History), The Bridge (to see Maggie Smith and an amazing production of A Midsummer Night’s Dream ) and the National (Small Island stood out for us) with Catherine, with whom I also managed to walk a few more legs of the Capital Ring around London. There have also been two 70<sup>th</sup> birthday parties for Athenaeum and skiing chums and a lovely lunch with my cousin (once removed) Rachel and her wife, Lou and two children Rose and Duggie in October. The opening of the Limb Family Foyer, in memory of my mother from whom I derived my love of visual art, in the newly extended MK Gallery which also featured amazing exhibitions by Paula Rego and George Stubbs was however perhaps one of my happiest moments this year.





Limb Family Foyer in memory particularly of my mother from whom I derived my love of visual art

With all this going on as well as providing, when needed, an excellent (in her words) personal care service for Maggie (meals on wheels, transport to hospital appointments and the like), it may surprise you to learn that I do still undertake both voluntary and paid work – all of which I love and seem to be able to fit around our domestic and leisure activities. I really won't fill the space here with an account of my work, you will be relieved to read, but it keeps me active and focussed as does my swimming and latterly the personal training that I have taken up to prepare for skiing next week. In fact, both Maggie and I now have a personal trainer! Maggie's comes to our house and does low impact exercise that help Maggie's strength without damaging her heart and I am fortunate to have found the wonderful Paulina who puts me through my paces in her small and fascinatingly equipped PT gym – my legs have never been stronger and I hope this will pay dividends as I shall be on the ski slopes in Kitzbuhel imminently. For the tenth year running, I am about to go off on the Athenaeum ski trip to experience God in the mountains and get a few rushes of adrenalin as I shoot down the pistes.

On which note, I shall end this tireless stream of self-indulgent reminiscences of 2019. The beauty of not putting this on paper is that you won't have to throw it in the recycling bin or file it away and bring it out to remind yourself just how nauseating other people's lives are when you do your 2020 Christmas cards!

That said, I very much enjoy receiving your news and keeping in touch – which, astonishingly to me, I do with a whole range of you, of all ages, and across all parts of the globe and who in some cases go back over the nearly seven decades of my life. So, I look forward to receiving your updates and I hope that these selected parts of our news find some 'resonance' with you!

With love and our very best wishes for an enjoyable Christmas and our hopes for peace and healing throughout the world in 2020

Ann and Maggie

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