

*You can't always get what you want.*

*But if you try sometimes, you might just find—*

*You get what you need.*

Greetings from the 2015-2016 Western Young Friends New Year's Gathering.

This year the Gathering met at Daybreak Camp in Felton, California, just north of Santa Cruz. Over the course of six days, fifty-five friends met and experienced the joys and struggles of community life. We carried expectations and longings with us. Not all could be met, for we are imperfect people, but the Spirit and the support of friends gave us nourishment as we entered the new year.

Daybreak Camp is close to town and a quick drive to the Bay Area. The accessibility of the site made it easier on us in some ways, but proved challenging in others. Many friends joined us late or for just a day or two. Some found this flexibility helpful—for others, it was fragmenting. Because of our location, we were able to join Ben Lomond Quaker Center for an evening presentation on early Friends' community. Rather than being isolated in the woods or the mountains, we could be in town within minutes. "I'm going out. Do you need anything?" we asked each other—and the question, rephrased and aimed deeper, became an emblem of our challenges.

While many of us came seeking a sanctuary, our week together was real life: not a perfect world apart, but a place to listen and to struggle. We heard the traffic of our minds along with that of the highway. Some of us were ill with fever or sore throat and relied on friends for care. Gathering couldn't erase all the burdens on our hearts, but it eased them—through the joy of a long-awaited embrace, through the curiosity of our children, through tears of grief in the arms of a steady presence, and sometimes simply through the peace of exhausted acceptance. We gathered for daily worship and for Bible study. We hiked to historic sites and old-growth redwood. We laughed under winter sunshine and clear skies. We chopped vegetables and stirred soups. There were fiddles and drums, board games and cuddling, sand dragons and surf chasing, and blue glittered noses.

And—one way or another, because of our struggles or despite them—we found ourselves again: in the firelight of the gathered meeting, among friends, letting go of the old year and entering the new.

“Do you need anything?” Have faith. Quietly, in the nooks and crannies, in unexpected ways, the Spirit is working.