

## Women's Retreat 2019 Epistle

Women's Treasure - honoring our time and talents.

To Friends everywhere:

In the bleak midwinter, women seeking refuge, rest, reconnection and rejuvenation look forward to the annual Women's Retreat. Over the weekend of January 25 - 27, 2019, 135 women gathered at Pearlstone Retreat Center in Reisterstown, Maryland to explore the theme of "Women's Treasure - honoring our time and talents."

For the first time, the planning committee was comprised of individuals representing six different Meetings. The committee felt supported by other women who arrived early to help get them set up.

This year, many women felt concern from the 5 weeks of the furlough weighing on them. They were concerned about spouses, loved ones, and strangers who were struggling. We were relieved to hear that the shutdown had ended, and breathed a collective sigh of relief.

The familiarity of the retreat brought peace to those who have attended before. This helped to create a peaceful environment and open space to first time attenders.

Upon arriving, some women found their rooms and put away their belongings, others set up their pop-up shops with handmade wares, and others went to dinner.

Chanting and singing brought us together where we were lovingly reminded to tend to the needs of our own spirit this weekend. We felt hopeful and excited for the weekend's experiences.

Accompanied by the sunrise on our stroll to breakfast, the song rose up: "Yonder... day is breaking; sunlight is rising on my soul."

For mealtimes, we found sustenance from colorful food prepared by the Pearlstone Retreat Center's staff. Their ethic, printed on the dining room wall, states: "It is our honor to nourish our guests in body, mind and soul. Pearlstone Food honors the bounty of our seasons, the traditions of our ancestors, & the integrity of sustainable agriculture. We strive to provide consciously sourced, wholesome, delicious food inspired by crops grown on our farm and prepared with love. We always aim to improve, and we are proud to share our food journey with you. Enjoy!"

This Retreat Center aligns with our heart values of Simplicity and right relationship with the Earth. People, especially those with dietary restrictions, feel appreciated, embraced and cared for. At mealtime, joy and enthusiasm are paused by hand raising, in silent gratitude for the food, the seeds, plants, chickens and goats and also for the people who prepared and serve it.

The morning session began with chanting. "Come now Peace, Fill us with thy spirit...." led us into worshipful silence.

Out of the silence, the delightful theater troupe called "District Community Playback" reflected many of our different experiences. They conveyed emotions and stories of individual women amongst us by using improvisational theater techniques. They played back our stories, accompanied by violin. They used actions,

fluid movements, and our own words. They dramatized our stories. They viscerally acted out emotions. It opened us up to seeing our own paths in a new light. Their drama style opened our hearts to our own needs for acknowledgements and affirmations for ourselves.

We realized the almost universal experience so many of us have: feelings and emotions of not feeling seen, feeling prideful, or selfish. Then they gracefully moved into helping us recognize our own strengths and value. We explored our inner light and the importance of recognizing and shining our own light outwards.

The violinist of the group led us in a new version of the song, "This little light of mine," with the words:

This little light of mine  
I'm going to let it shine

This big light of ours  
It has magic powers

Hide it under a bushel "NO"  
Be Fabulous and let it shine

Let it shine  
Let it shine  
Let it shine!

The plenary session felt: magical, true, weepy, inspirational, refreshing, revelatory, encouraging, funny, awesome, vulnerable, and "gave me courage." The troupe invited all to specifically name each other's treasure.

The workshops offered us the space to reconnect with parts of ourselves we may have forgotten, and provided us paths to follow going forward.

The retreat offered several different modes for healing in our bodies and hearts. There was a healing corner where women gave and received neck and shoulder massages. There were moments for women to find healing while chanting, singing and dancing. Women found refuge in pockets of safety during worship sharing. The fireplace in the main building provided a spot for vibrant and chatty women. Upstairs, women could be found collaging, decoupageing, talking about poetry and sharing quiet laughter.

Saturday evening gave us the opportunity to enjoy the annual coffee house where women share their talents including: music, poetry and prose with a sincerely appreciative audience.

May we all leave this weekend feeling that the light has poured into our hearts; our load lightened, so that we may go out in to the world continuing to honor our treasures and talents. May we walk in the light and share boldly with others who cross our path.

With love,  
The Baltimore Yearly Meeting Women's Retreat