



Journeys in the Spirit

Children's work

Topical Activity

April 2020

VE Day



We hope that this issue of Journeys in the Spirit is suitable for use by family groups at home, as a focus for online meeting for worship or sent to individual children to use themselves.

On 7 May 1945 Germany signed an unconditional surrender, ending World War II in Europe.

Quakers at the time looked forward and recognized that helping to rebuild Europe and develop friendships with Germany was key to long-lasting peace. This topical activity looks at how some Quakers responded to Victory in Europe Day (VE Day) in 1945 and how we can respond to it today. The 75th anniversary VE Day celebration for 2020 has been postponed due to the coronavirus closures, but imagine the party when those closures come to an end!

Think about what you know about World War II and VE day. Have you learned anything about it? How do you feel about it? Read the following story about one Quaker's response to VE day.

"We meet in thankfulness and with a sense of relief at the end of open hostilities in Europe, but we know that hatred, devastation, hunger and suffering remain... Looking to the future, we pray for insight and a gift of effective service uniting us with the wounded body of humanity. We rejoice that already a message of friendship has been taken to many parts of the world by members of the relief service, most of whom are young."

Yearly Meeting Epistle 1945

Story

John was at school when the war started. He didn't think that fighting was a good way to solve problems. When he left school, aged 18, he joined the Friends Ambulance Unit. The Friends Ambulance Unit was a group of men and women who helped people that had been hurt in the war.

For four years John worked in hospitals in Britain, France and the Middle East. Then VE day came, and the war in Europe ended. John was relieved that people weren't fighting anymore. He had seen all the damage the war had done though, and he knew someone needed to help fix it. So he asked to be sent to Germany.

As John and his team drove over the border they saw a sign saying "This is Germany. Do not fraternize". That was an order from the army. It meant that John was not allowed to be friends with any Germans. During the war some Germans, called Nazis, had done some very bad things and hurt lots of people. Many of the Allied soldiers (a group of countries, including the UK, fighting Germany) were very angry with the Germans because they blamed all of them for the things the Nazis had done. They didn't trust the German people and they didn't want to be friends with them.



John went to work in a city called Dortmund. It had been very badly damaged by Allied bombs. Lots of people who lived there needed help. The Friends Ambulance Unit provided food, medicine, blankets and toys to those who didn't have any.

John's work could be difficult. There was not much food, and it could be hard to get the things the team needed, like parts for their ambulance. To begin with he didn't speak much German, so it was tough to communicate with people.





The Germans were also very angry and suspicious of all the people who had come into their country, including the Allied soldiers and the Friends Ambulance Unit. Many of their homes had been destroyed by Allied bombs, which had also hurt their friends. Their government had lied to them and told them the Allies were all cruel, so they were afraid. Most of the food was going to the people the Nazis had hurt, so ordinary Germans weren't getting enough.

John saw that the Germans were people just like him and his friends. Some were kind and some were mean. Some did clever things and some did silly things. Some were brave and some were cowardly. Even though the army said not to, John wanted to be friendly with them.

So John and his team went to live with some of the Germans, to help them feel safe from angry Allied soldiers. They gave up some of their food rations so the Germans could have more. They spoke to Allied soldiers and Germans to try and help them to stop being angry. Gradually they began to make friends with both Germans and Allied soldiers.

Sometimes John felt sad, because he thought the work he was doing was "only a drop in a big bucket", but he kept going, and 50 years later he was able to go back to a peaceful Germany and visit many of the friends he had made there.



Some questions to think about:

- What made John's job harder?
- Why do you think the Germans and the Allies were so angry with each other?
- Is it fair to blame the whole country for the actions of some people?

Think about times in your life when you were angry:

- How did this affect your thinking? What made you feel better?
- In the story how did John act like a peacemaker (being patient, showing care, standing up for what he thought was right, being positive)?
- How can we be peacemakers in our own lives?

Activity - Cry for Peace

One of the planned parts of the official VE day celebration was a "cry for peace", which would have been shouted out by town criers around the country. What would your cry for peace be? Does it need to be loud? Does it need to be spoken at all? Could it be acted out? Is it something you do once, or do you do it every day? Might it be something you draw or write?

Idea - One way Quakers have 'cried' for peace is by using posters. Look at some of the posters Quakers have produced in the past (examples follow). What symbols do we use for peace? What colours? What words?

Come up with your own peace poster to 'cry for peace' on VE day 2020. Perhaps you can put it in your window for neighbours to see, or share it online.

This Topical Activity was written by Lucy Saint-Smith Friends House Library Assistant, with help from Ellis Brooks Peace Education Coordinator QPSW.

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A Whole Peace

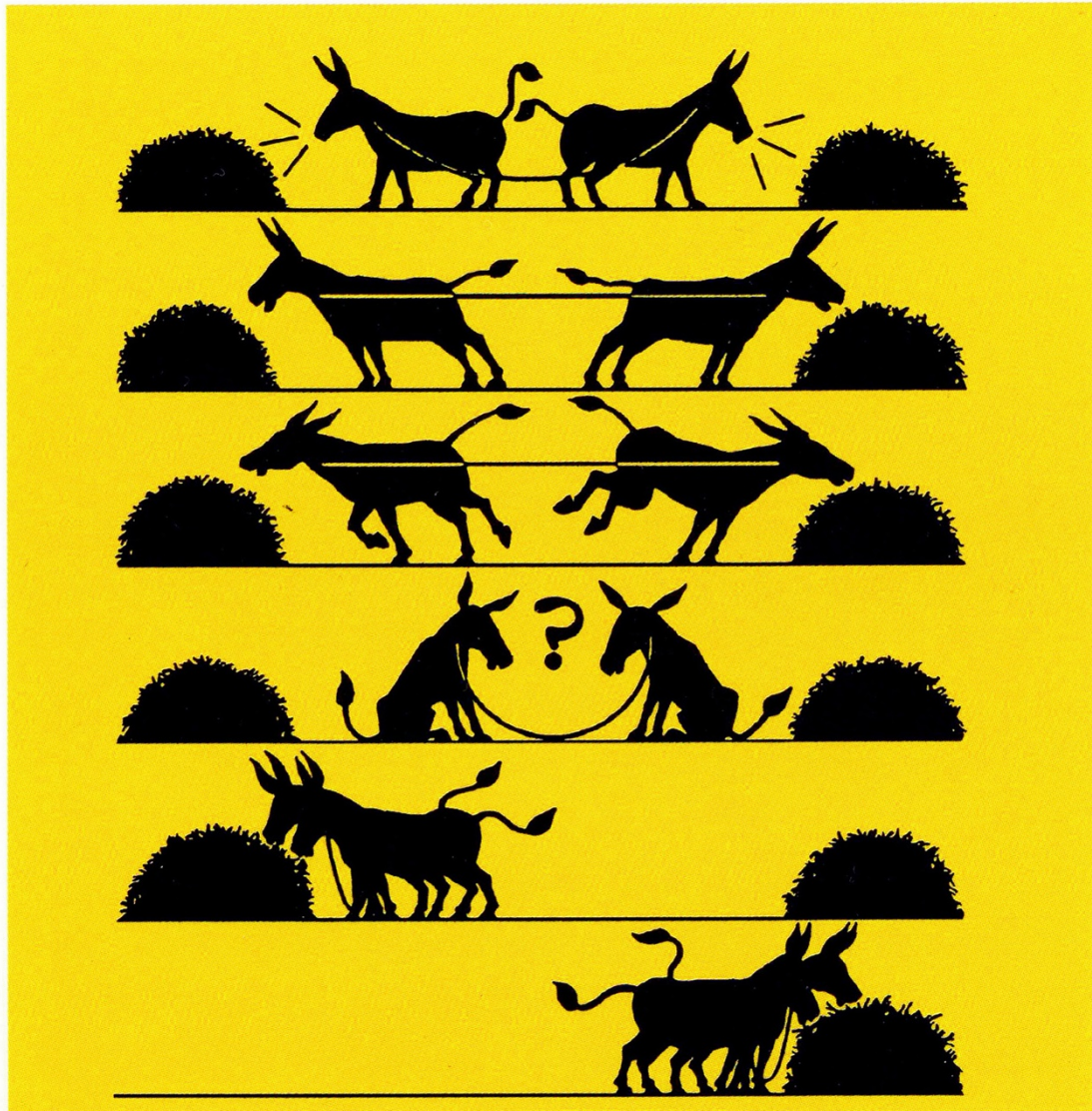


needs
All its Parts

Shelf 1

‘THE TWO MULES’

A fable for the Nations



CO-OPERATION

IS BETTER THAN CONFLICT



World Peace will come



through the will



of ordinary people



like yourself

