



Friends House Letter

*Friends House
Seniors Association*

March 2026

Life at Friends House... Residents talk about what life at Friends House is like for them.



Newness of Life

by Libby Schleichert

In September of 2023, Bob and I moved to Friends House. It all happened quickly, a mere five months after getting word a place here was available. We were still suffering the after-shocks of buying this place and clearing out and selling our old Victorian farmhouse where we'd lived for 39 years.

Over those years, we had restored the home, room by room. And we had planted and tended gardens, put in maple, oak, and holly trees, established a goldfish pond, raised our son here from babyhood to adulthood. We knew by heart practically every blade of grass, hillock, and stone on this 1½ acres of sacred ground. To leave it all behind was heartbreaking.

But in the midst of grieving what we'd given up and struggling to adapt to our new home, moments of astonishing grace happened. For instance, one day that first Fall, I took Annie, our golden retriever, for her early morning walk, along the path through the dark woods by the Friends School pond. Suddenly, we found ourselves literally blinded by the light in the midst of a sunny field. Off to the left, stood a majestic white oak tree. Its mighty branches reached out as if in supplication, dropping toward the ground and then up toward the heavens. As Annie and I stood, awed by this sight, a flock of bluebirds swooped low overhead. When we started to walk again, a few birds flew before us, then perched on the saplings lining the trail as if waiting for us to catch up. I had always seen bluebirds as omens of happiness. At this moment, I sensed some mystical force leading us on, affirming that all is—and would be—well.



Photos by Libby Schleichert



Miss E, photo by Sally Mennel

My Trip to Friends House

by Sally Mennel

I wasn't ready to move! I loved my house on a quiet street in NW DC with a deck, a large wisteria tree, beautifully landscaped yard and a fish pond. So what was the problem? The bedroom and the bathroom were on the 2nd floor and I was having increasing difficulties handling steps. My wonderful brother-in-law, Patrick, volunteered to help me with my search for a new place.

Our first visit was next door to a shopping center and I couldn't tell if the parking lot belonged to the mall or the building which looked like a hotel.

Next was a place right next to a huge data center! Another community had high gates—I wasn't ready for grandma to be locked away! One place was right next to the beltway and the patio looked onto the retaining wall!. We visited a fancy building in downtown Rockville. I saw an apartment on the 7th floor. But I'm afraid of heights. Another place was converting trio Villas into duo Villas. The opening depended on moving current residents out. That was a bit too iffy. The last place I visited was Friends House. We saw the

Harker apartments, the lodges and cottages. Patrick thought I'd like the Quaker way—whatever that meant.

I looked at my 20 inch stack of brochures and narrowed down my requirements: I'm afraid of heights so nothing above the 3rd floor. I need 2 exits and I don't want to live in a hallway with many neighbors. I wanted 2 bedrooms and 2 baths. I needed a patio/balcony for me and my cat, Miss E. I wanted a campus with gardens and wildlife where I could live tranquilly, read books and watch the seasons change.

So, one weekend, I decided to write "deposits" for 3 places. That Monday, Maria called saying she had an opening in a lodge. It was just what I was looking for.

Now, as Miss E and I watch the snow melt, I know I made the right choice in making Friends House our new home! And plus, the people here are incredibly friendly and helpful making it an even better choice!



Art show opening 11-2-25. Photo by Lee Perkins



Photo by Mary Campbell

Hard Choices

by Mary Campbell

For thirteen years at Bill's we slept in the brass double bed that had been a wedding gift to his grandparents. Bill used the 17 inches of room under the bed to store college textbooks, clothes, and a sentimentally valuable guitar he inherited from a cousin. At my house we slept on a queen platform bed with chests of drawers attached to both sides. Because a provider needs to keep obstetric charts until the baby turns twenty-eight, the space under the platform housed 600 OB charts.

Both beds (and the OB charts) made the move when we combined households in 2005. The brass bed was demoted to the guest room, but usefully hid six bins of fabric. We slept on the queen platform, but only had room to attach one of the chests.

Friends House bedrooms were even smaller. Given the accessible storage under the double, I suggested selling the queen and embracing the smaller sleep space. Before listing anything on Facebook Marketplace, perhaps we should don our jammies and spend our first night in decades in a double bed? Bill suggested a nap. And so we napped. Even with a dog helping, we could still spoon quietly on

a double mattress. But although we have not grown since 1993, we couldn't change positions without damaging one another. Those few accidental elbow strikes killed Bill's sentimental attachment to the bed.

We shredded the charts. We moved the queen. And the chests—handsome, bespoke, and part of a matched set. Yet again, only one of them fit in our bedroom. After a year of trying to find a place where the second chest would be useful, it left the house via Facebook Marketplace. While we can't predict the future, we can see our space will not be larger.

Retiring at Friends House

by Lorne Garrettson

We planned to retire in Friends House fifty years ago. We often visited my mother-in-law when she was here. She loved it.



Lorne giving a talk on stories of Sandy Spring. Photo by Lee Perkins, 11/21/25

I have not been a bit disappointed in anything. The Lodge is totally comfortable in that it is well insulated against the outside world. It has wonderful windows to the woods so enjoying the trees and animals therein is a daily blessing.

It is the lovely group of residents that I associate with daily that makes this community special. People come from varied backgrounds, have captivating interests, and are friendly. It's a socially warm community, indeed.

The frosting on the cake for me are the woods, trails, and the Sandy Spring that are nearby. Even as walking gets limited in my life, there is still energy for the beautiful walks just across the stream.



Toby, photo by Diane Copley

What Life at Friends House is Like for Me

by Diane Copley

When I first moved to Friends House in May, 2023, I was newly widowed and my beautiful dog, Toby and I lived in the yellow cottage, former home of Nancy McIntyre, now a guest cottage. I spent 3 months there until a Lodge apartment became available.

John, my husband and I had sold our lovely home in Etchison, MD to retire back in Scotland. We loved being back in the U.K., visiting relatives and old friends but soon, John's Parkinson's worsened. Social Services in Scotland were wonderful and provided us with many things to keep John safe as well as regular home visits. However, when John started falling, it became too difficult for me to lift him up, plus he began having hallucinations and would wander the house at night, often falling during these episodes.

The social worker we had suggested a care home for John so, after a vacancy arose, I very reluctantly and sadly said ok. John lasted 8 months there then suddenly died of septicemia, a total shock to our family, wondering how that happened.

My children on this side of the Atlantic pled with me to return here where I had many

friends and at least we'd be in the same time zone. I loved being home in Scotland but without John and my children's frequent visits, I did think perhaps I should return.

I contacted old friends, Lesley and Elie Rogers who were already happily ensconced in a cottage in FH, who gave me contact information for FH.

I was offered the chance to stay in the guest cottage until something suitable came up so, once again, I sold our house in Scotland, packed up, booked flights for me and doggie travel for Toby and back we came.

I loved it at first but, after almost 3 years, not so sure. I'm an introvert who also happens to be very deaf, thanks to Lyme Disease nerve damage so I don't partake of noisy gatherings or go to the dining room. I'm vegetarian and don't enjoy the slim choice of vegetarian meals.

My beloved Toby died a year ago of bone cancer and he's greatly missed. I loved taking him for walks and meeting the other dogs. He enjoyed his romps at the play area with doggy friends and because of Toby, I met many people who stopped to admire him and chat. I've discovered without Toby in tow, I'm anonymous and keep being asked if I'm new here!

Friends House has certainly been a blessing in many ways and I do have lovely neighbors and made good friends as well as adopting a sweet little cat but, my heart is in Scotland and always will be.



Friends of Wild Flowers

by Sarah Haviland and Mary Birckhead

Submitted by Hal White

First published in Friends House Letter October 1984

On my first visit to Friends House I was impressed and delighted by the flowers, masses of color in patios and gardens everywhere. Indoors, too, in the entrance-way and library, there were chrysanthemums and a beautiful yellow dahlia was on the desk. Moving in during Indian Summer weather, the woods and meadow tempted me to look for wild flowers. There was goldenrod and sweet joe-pye-weed. However, I could find little trace of anything else. Neighbors feared the wild flowers had disappeared long ago.

Getting to know more friends meant meeting other wild-flower enthusiasts. With spring, we discovered carpets of trout lilies, jack-in-the-pulpits and everywhere spring beauties and azalea and dogwood. Next door there were rare yellow spring beauties. Now, some of them are growing in our gardens. A Turk's-cap lily grows by the stream.

Many people here are interested in our native plants. So, as wild-flower enthusiasts we have become the Friends of Wild Flowers, a group of volunteers working to discover, protect, propagate and care for our own wild flowers at Friends House. We go on walks to identify our most common plants. So far we have a list of about 150. It is time now to collect seeds.

Thanks to Dick Woodward and the Building and Grounds Committee we are able to use the bank above the picnic area, an excellent location for spring flowers. We are working there at present and hope to see beginning blooms next April.

Now that the new cottages are finally done we hope the pond will be the next project for special attention. We would like to be able to have part of the bank and little pond area

saved for wildlife, with asters, turtlehead and cardinal flowers as well as water-loving plants such as iris, ferns, water lilies and a few reeds.

One more great service we would appreciate would be news of any endangered wild flowers in the area. There are so many farms and woodlands with flowers being leveled off for housing and shopping centers, etc., that we'd like to try to rescue at least the rarest plants.

“Thank You” as A Part of Living at Friends House

by Martha Hale



There is a new gentleman working at friends house. Greg Burton arrived on November 10, 2025 to take the position of Director of Facilities. Greg came from Georgetown University. His job description includes oversight of the maintenance team new projects, building codes and contracts. You might find him discovering what is wrong with something that is broken and assigning responsibility to fix it to one of the men he supervises. Or, recently Greg grabbed a shovel and participated in clearing our walks. Sometimes he discovers something broken or missing or listens to Phil or Jason and calls a subcontractor who has the parts and the know how to repair it for the least expensive cost.

If you pass Greg in the hall or the bistro you'll notice a warm smile and that he looks at you straight in the eyes. There is one other thing to notice. He is very busy because Friends House needs many repairs and much reconstruction. In fact, he was too busy to talk to the resident assigned to write about him. So, she says “Thank you, Greg, for being here and for your diligence. We're glad you and your staff contribute to what enriches life at Friends House even if we occasionally gripe!”

Life at Friends House

by Susan Griffin

When Byron and I considered where we would live after retirement, we soon agreed on Friends House. We were familiar with the campus from visiting our friends Myra and Roger Wolcott and by service on various Baltimore Yearly Meeting committees. We knew that Byron's Parkinsons would progress and we wanted to have convenient access to care and be part of a supportive community.

When we moved here during the pandemic in June 2020, the only opportunity we had to socialize was in the garden, a welcome respite from isolation. The newness of our experience was a distraction from Covid restrictions, as were paths we could take through outside spaces and a stunning view of the pond and garden. Add to those gifts the daily search for items in boxes, we had everything needed to get through the challenges of quarantine.

Byron and I had first met Joe Rockey, our downstairs neighbor in Lodge 3, attending Friends General Conference a few years before moving to Friends House. What good fortune that now Joe and Jane are neighbors and close friends. Mary Campbell and Bill Strein were dear friends from Friends Meeting of Washington who moved to FH last spring. YAY! In our five years here, Byron and I have woven many remarkable people at FH into the web of love and friendship, an essential reason for our saying to each other frequently, "I am so glad we are here."

Since Byron died, my experience of everything is new, through a different lens. Yet, the love and support we both relied upon is here with me.



Photo by Judy Stanfield

Food Programs

by Judy Stanfield

The Friends House Seniors Association offers several opportunities for free food to residents and staff each week.

The first is "Free Food," a program begun over 6 years ago, where non-perishable food is brought to us from Trader Joe's by Harvest Gleaners every other Thursday. Harvest Gleaners is a volunteer 501(C)3 organization that gathers surplus food from grocery stores and community partners, distributing it to senior communities in the area. A team of residents fills and delivers bags based on the list of "likes" provided by each resident. Once bags are filled, surplus food is then delivered to the residents or to the Stabler break room for nursing aides and other staff.

Every Monday morning there is a Harvest Gleaners delivery of baked goods and deli products from our local Harris Teeter. These perishable food items are placed in the HQL Activities Room, available for pick up by residents.

Harvest Gleaners also supplies the Food pantry located in C17. A team of residents fills and delivers orders for canned and boxed non-perishable items for residents and staff.

Forms for both free food and the pantry can be found on the shelf underneath the cubbies or in the HQL lobby. Fill out the forms and

leave them in the trays next to the blank lists for delivery (usually the same day.)

This is a great opportunity to make sure that no one ever has to go hungry at Friends House.



Transformation in the final chapter

Transformation

by Elaine Yamada

Who knew that retirement could be a time for transformation? And that one badly needed to make a shift in one's life?

Somehow I had missed America's Civil Rights movement. But when I landed here at Friends House, the Diversity Committee was sponsoring a 2-3 month study group that presented me with what it felt like to grow up Black in America. The non-Black participants talked openly about their challenges in having to counter the impulse to take charge, or think they knew better than the Black person they were accompanying. We all learned from the Black participants what it felt like to be dissed and to carry the burden of slavery.

I found this dialogue opened me up to question the America I had grown up in with its norm of White men being in charge and the expectation of a hierarchical system where some were on top, some were on the bottom.

As I started to wonder where exactly I was as an Asian American in all of this, I began to understand my own status as a minority in

America. And in that process began to shift to an appreciation of communities that were not based on hierarchy with their winners and losers.

The Native American community was one such model. My Quaker Meeting another one. And now Friends House has become such a place of support and acceptance where I can risk growth.

And so transformation continues as I grab hold of this final chapter of my life to finally learn how to slow down and deepen with my community. The goal is not perfection but being human. We are in this together. Richness lies ahead.



The Takoma Park Singers return to Friends House for a holiday concert, 12/17/25. Photo by Lee Perkins

What We Are Reading

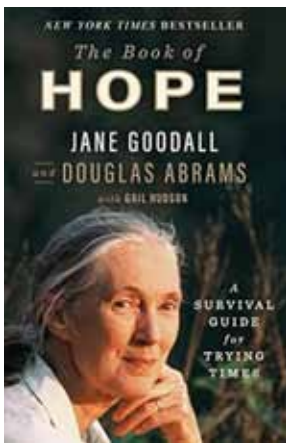
by Kerry Stoltzfus

The Fiction and Non-Fiction Book Groups enjoyed a good year in 2025 and we are pleased to share out top five favorites.

Non-Fiction

#1 Ilyon Woo, *Master Slave Husband Wife: An Epic Journey from Slavery to Freedom*

#2 Neil King, *American Rambles: A Walk of Memory and Renewal*



#3 Jane Goodall, *The Book of Hope: A Survival Guide for Trying Times*

#4 Nancy Pelosi, *My Story of the Woman's First Speaker of the House*

#5 Tara Westover, *Educated: A Memoir*



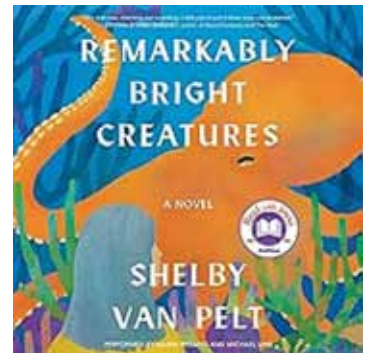
*Lunch bunch at the Olney Ale House 11-18-25.
Photo by Lee Perkins*

Fiction

#1 Charles Dickens, *A Christmas Carol*

#2 Bonnie Gamus, *Lessons in Chemistry*

#3 Shelby Van Pelt, *Remarkably Great Creatures*



#4 Marie Benedict, *The Personal Librarian*

#5 Ya'a Gyasi, *Homegoing*

Our groups enjoy sharing new insights, emotional connections and authors that often challenge our assumptions. We also read books that we may not have chosen but appreciate expanding our literary horizon. Imagination and empathy is expanded as we connect with persons and places and events beyond our own experience. The members come to know each other better while enjoying and sharing our love of books.

We always welcome new members and we meet at the Miller Center; Fiction on the Second Wednesday of the month at 7:30 and Non-Fiction on the third Wednesday at 7:30

Contacts for more information: Non-Fiction, Jennifer Fajman, jennifer@fajman.org 301-960-9739 Fiction, Betty Smallwood, smallbetty@aol.com 240-498-0378

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