

# Beacon Hill Friends House



Fellowship of residents and guests at the start of a BHFH dinner in November.

## Fall 2012 Newsletter

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## Four seasons of reasons to visit BHFH

By Katherine Fisher, Clerk, Program Cmte.

Our program committee is planning a new series of events this year on first Wednesdays every month. These will be informal opportunities to learn together, with a new theme each season.

This fall and winter, we feature a series of events led by residents, "Where Our Passion Meets Our Mission." Residents lead discussions about their passions which are connected to the house's mission. Topics include a book salon about abolition, a presentation of a resident-created video game about global economics, a local Jewish cul-

tural center, and a discussion about transgender experience. See the full schedule on page 5.

In the spring, we will have a series of events oriented toward spiritual seekers, within the house and in the larger community. If you are curious about spiritual topics, come explore and share!

Our summer series will be presentations by alumni about work they are doing in the world, and how that relates to their experience at and the mission of the Friends House. If you would like to present, we would love to host you! Contact Holly

(hbaldwin@bhfh.org). Also in the summer, we will have the annual Weed Lecture on a topic of interest to Friends in New England. Last year's lecture, by Lucy Duncan of the American Friends Service Committee, is now available as a pamphlet. Check out [www.bhfh.org](http://www.bhfh.org) for a full list of pamphlets available from the house.

The summer will also feature an alumni barbecue on the deck. (See article, page 8.)

Want to find out the details of upcoming events? Send an email to: [mailinglist@bhfh.org](mailto:mailinglist@bhfh.org), or include your email address on your donation envelope.

## Moving from strangeness to intimacy

*The following is an excerpt from an article of the same name by Director, Holly Baldwin, for Friends Journal, December 2012.*

Beacon Hill Friends House is many things: we're home to Beacon Hill Meeting, we're a Quaker center that hosts occasional talks and publishes pamphlets, and we're a 21-member community. We're also a group of friends and guests gathered for dinner, and a hospitality house for travelers.

Ryan is one of the newer residents of our community. He likes to post Facebook updates about the special, atypical or remarkable aspects of being part of a large house-

hold. He recently wrote:

"There is a desire to want to talk about this place to others. In the back of my mind, though, there's a tendency to play it up as if I'm the 'straight man' among a bunch of bizarre characters or situations ... as if it's some sort of wacky sitcom.

"But that's clearly not the case. The situation is that, yes, this can be a place full of interesting people or situations. Yes, they can sometimes be different. But I'm one of them. And this is why I like it here. I am welcomed and tolerated despite my bizarreness. Despite my idiosyncrasies. De-

spite my different-ness. Despite everything about me. All of that is OK.

"So when I experience other people's weirdness or idiosyncrasies, it allows me to be more tolerant and forgiving, because I am conscious of the fact that other people here are being tolerant and forgiving of MY weirdness and MY idiosyncrasies. This makes me appreciate this place even more."

Ryan has hit upon one of the greatest gifts of community: in accepting people as they are, we allow ourselves to be acceptable. This inclusivity allows us to feel God's

*continued on page 2 →*

← INTIMACY from page 1

love for us. When we accept that we are perfect in God's eyes, we can accept the invitation to grow further into God's dreams and visions for us. This is a very Quaker orientation to hospitality.

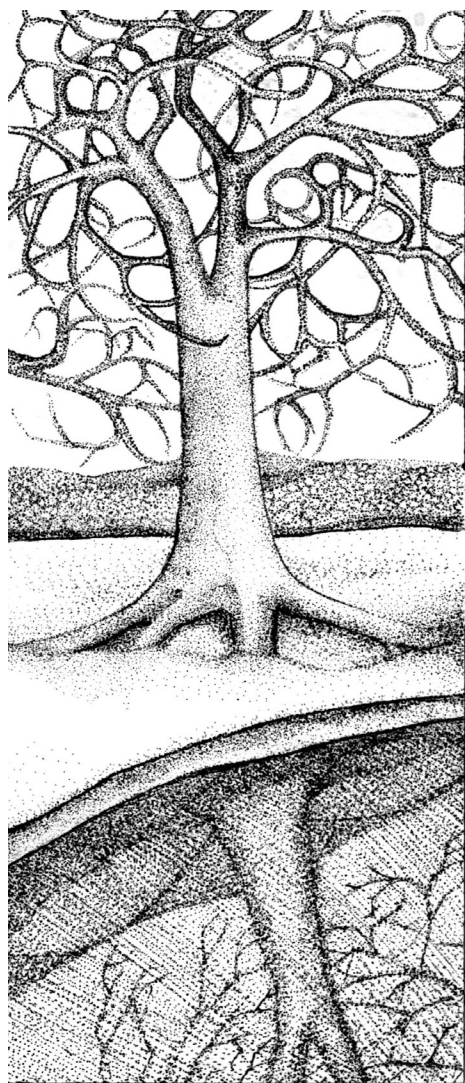
This way of hospitality is less about welcoming the stranger, and more about moving from strange-ness to intimacy. We don't come to this place through easy love. We do not surround ourselves with people like us, people who are easier to love and get along with. The more we stretch ourselves to accept those who are different, the more love and acceptance we receive ourselves. This work builds a culture that invites newcomers and visitors into the community.

Just as a Friends meeting has members, attendees, newcomers, and visitors, we here at Beacon Hill Friends House have both our resident community members and many people visiting. Guests typically stay in our overnight rooms for conferences, college visits, tourism, and to visit family members in nearby hospitals. Our accommodations are a cross between a family home-stay and a bed and breakfast; for a lot of people, it's a very welcome change from hotel culture.

Guests sometime come just to stay with us. Abraham is a regular visitor. He's a librarian and researcher from Portland, Maine, a Catholic who has a great affinity for Quakers. He also soaks up the community vibe, baking us treats and staying for

dinner. He considers this his retreat time. He knows that our community is more than our dinnertime conversations; he sees the deep belonging that happens when folks spend time here. The sense of acceptance and love makes it possible for him to do the work that he is called to do.

This is a place where you will be listened to and accepted just as you are, invited to stretch and grow in your journey, and in so doing, enrich the community. For those of us who are concerned with the care of our communities, the challenge is to build communities that demonstrate this love and acceptance to members. When we do this right, our community's authenticity and love should be palpable to visitors, too.



"Winter Dreams" by Angeline Pacy, resident

## The 22nd resident

By Tony Coleman, resident

I have lived in BHFH for just an inch beyond two months now. My first weeks here felt like a storm's flurry of faces and names that I struggled to remember. With 20 housemates, keeping biographical details and personal histories well sorted and defined was at times a challenging task – 'who' had worked 'where' and had lived 'there' and had found themselves at BHFH according to 'which' windy route. But as time sped by, this information began to slowly sink in, not necessarily into my mind, but into the faces of my new friends, into the fabric of their voices and footsteps. Now, as I sit at the kitchen table eating a snack in the late quiet of night, I hear the sound of shuffling feet growing louder, and, sometimes, I can tell whose feet they are before I can even see a face.

Yet, just as I thought I had it all figured out, I've come to discover that there is in fact another resident living, dwelling, among us – someone to whom I was never formally introduced but happen to meet almost everyday, often without noticing. During those special dinner time moments where all voices fall behind a hard won focus on truly eating, she speaks. As we pass around the "talking rock" at house meetings, sharing the ups and downs of our every day lives, she whispers in between our

stories. And every Sunday, after the square yellow signs go up and worship has settled in, she preaches – not just to those sitting ready in the pews, but to every still place in our home. We call her Silence, and she may be the oldest and most popular resident we've never seen.

Even though there are twenty other bodies filling its spaces, there are times when living in a house of this size can feel lonely. Perhaps, because I know how the walls can buzz with the pulse of happy chatter and joyful noise, when they lay quiet a deep feeling of lack can set in. But then I remember our house's oldest friend, and rather than distract from the quiet with some book or a newspaper, I try to pay attention to it – to her – and listen and wait. Then, reminding me of the difference between quiet and Silence, the difference between that which sits hollow and that which makes space, her voice greets me with a smile and a story from inside the walls that I'd feared.

So next time you find yourself here – walking down the steps, sitting in a pew, sipping on a cup of warm something – remember that she's with you, sunken into the fabric of this place. She is the 22nd resident of BHFH, and she's waiting to share everything about why, over fifty years later, she's still here speaking, living, and being alongside us.

# Meet the new housies: Lynne, LeLaina, Ryan, Tony, and Kristna

By Kristna Evans, resident

## Lynne Terzis

Lynne was introduced to the house during several years of attending Beacon Hill Friends Meeting and was drawn to the opportunity to live in a community of people with shared values. Before moving into the house, she spent numerous years helping to care for her elderly mother, who passed away in September. Lynne is active in the Meeting and on its Peace and Social Concerns committee. Since her mother's death, she has been able to resume some of her volunteer and service work. Lynne found helping out on the Elizabeth Warren campaign a lot of fun, and was fascinated to gain some new insight into the political process. She is taking German and working on building some new friendships and maintaining existing ones. Lynne says, "I enjoy the pace of life here at the Friends House. The house feels to me as if it is a sanctuary from the demands of my day-to-day life, a place to reflect and recharge from the things in life that drain energy. I am enjoying living here immensely."

## LeLaina Romero

Formerly, LeLaina lived in Roslindale and worked as an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Lasell College and part-time at the Counseling and Wellness Center at Mass College of Art & Design. Now, she says, "I am working with a group of mental health practitioners and bodyworkers who are passionate about social justice and access to affordable care, and I am learning so much! It's scary and exciting to create my own work. I'm also singing more, particularly with The Sanctuary, a new vibrant Unitarian Universalist worship community. I'm passionate about healing in the midst of creating social change, and I'm trying to practice self-care while creating healing spaces for others." She loves the diversity of

*"The house feels to me as if it is a sanctuary ... a place to reflect and recharge"*

*—Lynne*

*"I'm passionate about healing in the midst of creating social change"*

*—LeLaina*

*"I really love the people.... I also love the emotional support that living in community provides."*

*—Ryan*

the community at BHFH, though wants to challenge the house to strive for more, particularly racial diversity. She loves conversations in the kitchen at all hours, shared meals, the love and support she sees and receives, and people's commitment to the community in so many ways, from chores to caring during times of struggle.

## Ryan McGrath

Before moving to BHFH in July, Ryan spent two years in dialysis and underwent a kidney transplant in February. Before that he worked in the hospitality industry. Ryan was drawn to the House because of its

Quaker values, values which he shares. He is passionate about religion and, in particular, about how mysticism manifests in the various world religions and how that can relate to modern Goddess-worship. Hospitality is also a passion which he is able to live out as a member of the BHFH community.

Ryan also enjoys reading travel writing and non-fiction, and is passionate about tea, coffee, and food, especially cheap, authentic ethnic food. When asked about the house, he says, "I really love the people. We have interesting and intelligent conversations in the House. We also laugh a lot! I love that I can socialize without having to spend money or leave my house. I also love the emotional support that living in community provides."

## Tony Coleman

Tony says, "Cooperative living has been a passion of mine ever since I first got a taste of it in college. It's funny to think about how we might describe the alternatives to this kind of life – competitive living, perhaps, comparative living? In a moment of sometimes extreme polarity in our politics, in our identities, in our options (maybe it's just those of us floundering around in our mid twenties?), the temperance of sharing feels like good medicine to me."

Before coming to the BHFH, Tony lived full time in a hostel attached to the church where he worked in Memphis, TN. When moving back to Boston, Tony decided it was time to more fully experience a life of cooperation. He felt where better to learn this than a community rooted in the spiritual principles and holistic values of Quakerism. Tony adds, "I've been here a little over two months now, and I've learned all kinds of wonderful things. In addition to sharing, I also love cooking and eating food, hanging out with trees, and writing sometimes silly stories."

*continued on page 5 →*



## Giving what we can: a resident's view

By Ben Lawent, resident

A couple years ago, I read a life-changing book called *The Life You Can Save* by Peter Singer, a bioethics professor at Princeton. Singer argues that people should donate their money to charity up to the point where any additional giving would harm the donor more than it would help others.

Before I read that book, a primary goal of mine was to maximize my time for friends, books, culture, nature, and travel. Singer's book changed my outlook. I've come to view myself as having an ethical obligation to work hard to help others. Early retirement and having an easy job are no longer part of my vision for my future.

I have been fortunate for the opportunity to lead discussions about *The Life You Can Save* twice during my year of living at BHFH. The first time was during spring house retreat, where I was one of six members of the house who led small-group workshops. The second time was at a book salon after house dinner. The topics covered at these discussions included: common reasons people don't engage in charitable giving;

viewpoints about how much people should give; and the question of where to give, focusing on a groundbreaking charity research organization called Givewell ([www.givewell.org](http://www.givewell.org)).

Let me say a few words about Givewell. What makes Givewell unique is that they look beyond standard metrics like administrative costs and assess whether a charity is truly achieving its goals. Currently, GiveWell's top-rated charity is the Against Malaria Foundation (AMF), which distributes long-lasting insecticide-treated nets (LLINs) in Africa. In arriving at this recommendation, GiveWell's research process involved the following steps:

1. Extensive research about the cost-effectiveness of mass distribution of LLINs as a strategy to protect people against malaria.
2. Consideration of negative or offsetting impacts of AMF, such as displacement of government health funding, distortion of local markets, and diversion of skilled labor from other areas.
3. Capacity of AMF to productively use more funds.

4. AMF's degree of transparency and self-evaluation.

GiveWell's research gives people increased confidence that their charitable donations will be used effectively, and thus addresses one crucial reason that people often hesitate to donate to charity. This December, GiveWell will update its charity recommendations to reflect its latest research. If you will be making charitable donations this holiday season, you may want to consider GiveWell's recommended charities.

In closing, I'd like to share a story from my first months living at BHFH. At one of my first house meetings, I shared my interest in charitable giving. After the meeting, Holly connected me with friends at the Fresh Pond Meeting who share my interest, and her friends in turn have introduced me to an entire network of people in the Boston area with an interest in philanthropy. I really appreciate that Holly went out of her way to help connect me with her friends. This story is a great example of why I value being part of a community of caring people here at the Beacon Hill Friends House.

## Book review – *Faithist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious*

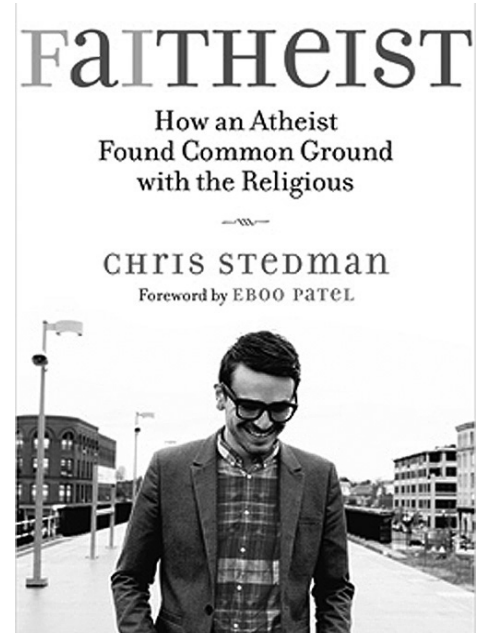
By Zach Alexander, Kitchen Manager

If you're a person of faith curious to learn more about atheists, but turned off by the amount of negativity you've experienced from many atheists in the media or in person, you will love Chris Stedman's new book *Faithist*.

Chris is the Assistant Chaplain at the Humanist Chaplaincy at Harvard University, and an interfaith activist. In *Faithist*, he tells a compelling personal story about his childhood and early adulthood as a sometimes religious, sometimes secular queer male, and ends the book with a number of thoughtful reflections on atheist-religious dialogue. He calls on his fellow atheists to stop attacking religion so much, and instead build relationships with flesh-and-blood religious people, work with them towards common goals, and, to the extent

that criticism is necessary, to do it with respect and in the context of a relationship.

If you identify as an atheist, and especially if you have sympathies with the organized atheist movement, as I do, this book will show you some of the value and effectiveness of engaging with religious people in such a spirit of respect and cooperation, and perhaps even convince you to do so yourself. There's a good chance you will feel he goes too far in putting forth his approach to atheist activism as the only right one, and in putting too little emphasis on rationality, as I argue in detail in a longer review on my personal blog ([www.zachalexander.com](http://www.zachalexander.com)). But if you look past that, there are valuable insights about compassion and persuasion to be gleaned from it. And there are few other atheist voices that are putting these kinds of ideas forward.



← NEW HOUSIES *from page 3*

### Kristna Evans

Kristna has been a Friend for almost fifteen years and has been very active in New England Yearly Meeting for the last ten. Through her engagement with NEYM and friendships made there, she had visited BHFH many times and attended meetings and events at the house. Kristna has felt called to live in intentional Quaker community for several years, spending a semester at Pendle Hill and a year at The Meeting School. When TMS closed, Kristna felt led to apply to BHFH. She enjoys being directly connected with Friends through the house and Beacon Hill Meeting, as well as spending time with all the great folks in the house.

She appreciates how the house provides a community of people to see each day as she works on her more isolated projects of finding editing work, and of writing a book on eldership among Friends. The house is also a great place to live while planning a worship-based, Friends intentional community in New England.

## Haverford College Center for Peace and Global Citizenship

*By Hugh Gelch*

We are overjoyed that the Haverford College Center for Peace and Global Citizenship chose Beacon Hill Friends House as the venue for a talk and discussion of the Center by its director, Parker Snowe (right), on November 14th. The Center sponsors over 50 international summer internships in social action each year for Haverford and Bryn Mawr College students, sponsors Haverford House, an urban post-graduate program for community living and service in Philadelphia, and provides support for any faculty member wishing to integrate experiential/service learning or field research into their teaching and mentoring of students.

The synergies between the CPGC and Beacon Hill Friends House are great as we both strive to effect change through learning, discernment and social action. For more information about the Haverford



College Center for Peace and Global Citizenship visit [www.haverford.edu/CPGC](http://www.haverford.edu/CPGC).

## Where our passion meets our mission: A series featuring the passions of BHFH residents

*First Wednesdays  
7:30pm  
BHFH Parlor*

### Changing the Face of Education (One Video Game at a Time)

*December 5, 2012  
Seth Alter*

At a time when the video game industry is prosperous, the educational tech industry is on the rise, and public education is severely on the decline by any meaningful metrics, I have put my interests in gaming and education (I used to be a middle school teacher) to the task of developing an educational video game that is altogether educational, entertaining and enriching to the lives of students!

Join me as I introduce Neocolonialism to the wider community.

### The Abolitionist Legacy in Modern America

*January 8, 2013 (2nd Wed. this month)  
Ben Lawent*

A book salon that will link the rich Quaker tradition of social action to issues we face in the contemporary world.

### The Mosaic of Gender Identity and Expression

*February 6, 2013  
LeLaina Romero and Mykal Slack*

It often happens that the base of knowledge we hold onto so tightly is actually the stuff that shifts and changes the most. Join us as we explore the concept of gender identity, particularly transgender experience, and take a closer look at how our

long-standing views on the gender binary have been re-imagined and reconsidered, making way for a mosaic of gender expression that we can all learn more about and have greater respect for.

### The Vilna Shul: Boston's Center for Jewish Culture

*March 6, 2013  
Rachel Spilecki*

The Vilna Shul, now a historic sanctuary, museum, and cultural center, has a colorful history which I try to make more accessible to the public through volunteer work as a docent and creator of interpretive materials for self-guided tours. I will talk about the Vilna Shul as a point of reference to little-known Boston history, the institution that is growing today, and how BHFH values have complemented my work there.

## The ties that bind: reflections on alumni

*By Mykal Slack, Residency Manager*

Nietzsche once said, "Invisible threads are the strongest ties." Having lived most of my adult life away from my native Georgia and away from the family I grew up with, I thought I had a firm grasp of what Nietzsche was trying to say. But after settling into my time here at Beacon Hill Friends House, something much deeper and more beautiful has emerged.

After making the move to Boston from Central Pennsylvania, I figured out rather quickly just how much I'd enjoy my new community and my new position as Residency Manager. There is something very special about people from all walks of life carving their own niche in the world and then coming home to shared meals, good conversation and opportunities to both laugh and cry together and learn from one another. And the work of Residency Manager seemed straightforward enough: attend to residency admissions (with the help of staff and current residents), guest relations and the various systems that keep the house in good working order and, most importantly, minister to the people who make up this unique mosaic that is our community.

One of the most rewarding and brilliant aspects of this work, however, has actually come from my interactions with folks who lived here in the earlier days of this community's life and who, before making their way back to our doors, I'd never before met. It's always lovely when visitors stop by to see this house they've heard so much about (and believe me, MANY people stop by), but it's something quite different when residents from a different time and place come back to connect with us newbies and to share their experiences of living at Beacon Hill Friends House.

I'm thinking of people like William Rhoads (1957-58) (pictured with his wife), who came to visit the house over the summer. I'll never forget how bright-eyed Mr. Rhoads became when I walked with him to the music room/parlor and then rode the elevator with him up to the main library on the 2nd floor. "It's been so long since I've been here, and it looks just the same as



it did before," he exclaimed. He wanted to see everything, even his old room and especially the kitchen! Taking our time, he pointed out corners, closets and books to me and told an endearing story about how he, as the only resident with a beat up old car, was in charge of going to the local grocer to pick up oranges that had to be freshly squeezed for juice because orange juice by the quart was too expensive, "as much of it as everybody drank!" And as he was walking toward the door to leave, he thanked me for showing them around and talked about how glad he was to see the old house, perhaps for the last time.

I'm also thinking of German and Marta Ruiz Silva (1970-72), who came back to stay as guests just a few weeks ago. According to Marta, they were the first couple to live in the house together. They, too, marveled at how much of the house they recognized and how little the place had changed. Marta talked about being assigned the Library chore and how difficult it was to dust all those shelves! Although he ultimately didn't, German was very interested in joining our "Res 201" discussion, a time for newer residents to talk with staff and each other about how they're feeling after three months of residency at BHFH. He shared later that, as much as the house looked the same, the energy was new and quite beautiful. Several residents noted feeling really

honored to have met them and to have had the opportunity to hear their stories and know that they had come before.

Without even realizing it, these wonderful people, who also happen to have lived where we now live, minister to me and to all of us. Even after all these years, this place means as much to them as it does to us now. She offers them peace and security, a time to build community, and all the comforts of home. And it matters to them that she's still standing, going strong and sending out into the world people who will take her wisdom to all the corners of the earth and into every situation. So when they visit and share their stories, they're sharing a little bit of themselves to help keep the spirit of Beacon Hill Friends House alive and to remind us just how invaluable this place and this time really are. Their invisible threads and the threads of so many others together weave a pretty remarkable fabric into the life of Beacon Hill and into the life of the Quaker community here in Boston, and I am blessed beyond measure to be a part of this magic.

Without our former residents, staff, board and committee members, F/friends, ministry partners and contributors of all kinds, we wouldn't be here. And maybe – just maybe – who we are can and will make the difference in the lives and spirits of those yet to come.



## Alumni news: Vermont, Vietnam & Vancouver

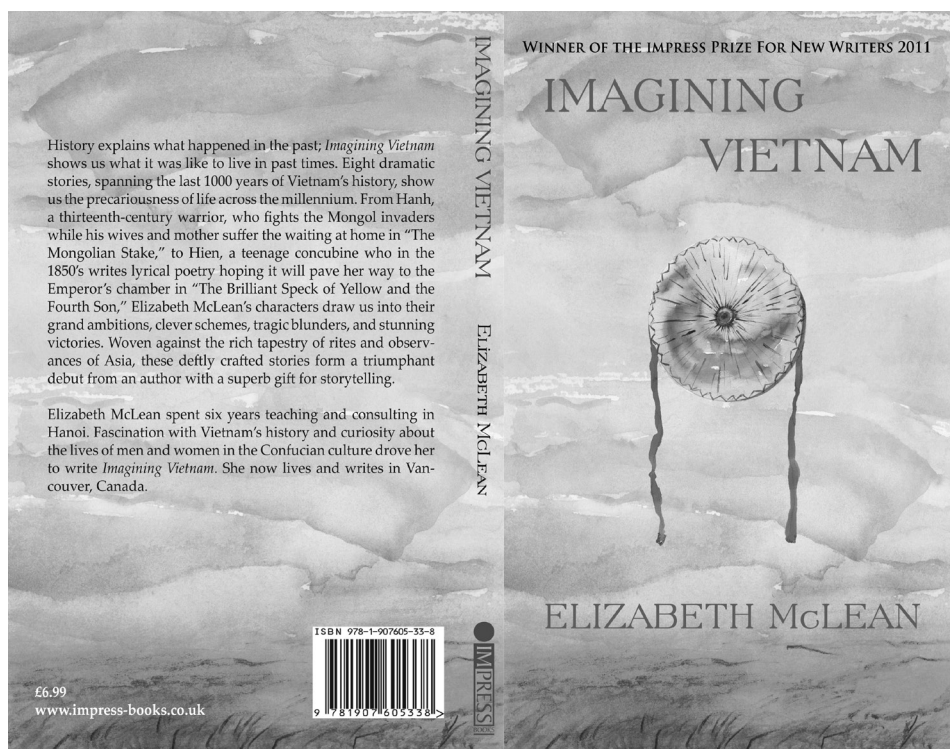
### Kate Stephenson ('04) and Glen Hutcheson ('06)

Kate "Stone Face" Stephenson (2002-04) and Glen Hutcheson (Kitchen Manager 2005-06) have been living together in Montpelier, VT for the past three and a half years. Glen is working in a restaurant downtown, in local schools as a substitute teacher, and in his art studio. Kate is the executive director of Yestermorrow Design/Build School in Warren, VT.

They sometimes see former BHFH Director Margaret Hart, who lives down the road in Stowe with her partner Alice Clark (2004). Glen says that the living is great in Vermont and that we should check out [www.yestermorrow.org](http://www.yestermorrow.org) and [www.gch-fineart.com](http://www.gch-fineart.com) for more details on their lives and projects.

### Elizabeth McClean ('10)

Elizabeth McClean (summer 2010) was a summer student of creative fiction at Harvard during her time at Beacon Hill Friends House. She recalls fondly that, while her "little room on the top floor [was] a bit hot,



but cozy," she did a lot of good writing in it. Her new book of historical fiction entitled *Imagining Vietnam* will be published by Impress Books in the UK at the end of No-

vember 2012, and she hopes to publish it in Toronto and New York as well. After nearly six years in Vietnam, Elizabeth now lives in Vancouver, Canada, close to her daughter.

## Chef's notes: roasted peppers & winter squash

By Zach Alexander, Kitchen Manager

I pride myself on discovering new foods and introducing people to them, but a lot of my favorite recipes I learned about the opposite way – by other people introducing them to me.

Case in point: roasted bell peppers. We've all had them before, but I never really liked them until Fernando (a resident) made them many months ago. They were tender to the point of almost falling apart, but not mushy, and simultaneously sweet and smoky. And all he did was roast them with some olive oil for an hour or so.

You can't go far wrong with just those directions, but if you want more specific ones, here is my working recipe, for 16-20 people. Red bell peppers are best, if you have them, but green, yellow, etc. are fine too.



### Ingredients:

- 7 lbs. bell peppers
- ½ cup olive oil
- 2 tsp salt
- 1 tsp ground black pepper

### Directions:

1. Preheat an oven to 450 °F.
2. Core and slice peppers, and toss in the remaining ingredients.
3. Roast peppers on two large baking sheets for 45-60 minutes, turning every 15-20 minutes.

You can get away with combining them into one giant pan, but they'll cook more slowly. And you can get away without turning them periodically, but some of them will get more crispy than others.

And while we're on the subject of roasting fall vegetables – you really should try a few new varieties of squash this winter. Everyone knows butternut squash, but that's actually one of the least flavorful winter squashes, in many people's opinion. At the house I've recently made acorn squash, turban squash, and my favorite, delicata.

# Open houses: Holiday Party and First Midsummer BBQ

## Annual Holiday Cheer at the Friends House

Beacon Hill Friends House and Beacon Hill Friends Meeting warmly invite you all to attend our annual Holiday Party at the Beacon Hill Friends House this Sunday, December 9th from 12:30 PM to 4:30 PM. Light fare will be provided. Potluck contributions are appreciated, but not required. We are excited to be co-hosting this event with Friends from the Meeting this year. We look forward to, once again, sharing the joys of the holiday season with you!

## Save the Date! Announcing the First Annual Midsummer BBQ!

BHFFH Residents decided at House Meeting this fall to add a new open house to our yearly calendar. We would like to invite you to our First Annual Midsummer BBQ! As with the Holiday Party, we hope that this will be a festive open house for alumni and friends to gather and celebrate our community at 6 & 8 Chestnut Street. Save the Date for Saturday, June 22, time TBD.

## What's your email?

Beacon Hill Friends House has a goal this year to develop our online communication to reach out to as many in our community as possible. This will allow us to give you timely updates about the wonderful activities happening here without increasing our use of paper and ink.

To do this, **we need your email address.** Please write your email address on your annual giving form, or email us at [mailinglist@bhffh.org](mailto:mailinglist@bhffh.org).

We look forward to keeping in touch!

The mission of Beacon Hill Friends House is to embody the Quaker principles of faith, simplicity, integrity, community, and social responsibility in order to nurture and call forth the light in all of us.

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

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[www.bhffh.org](http://www.bhffh.org)

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