



Journey September 2017

Jeff Kisling

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The Journey Begins

I appreciate those who responded to my request for prayers yesterday. They are what got me through a challenging day.

Mom and Dad dropped me and my bicycle off at the Iowa State Capitol building, then continued to Bloomington, Illinois.

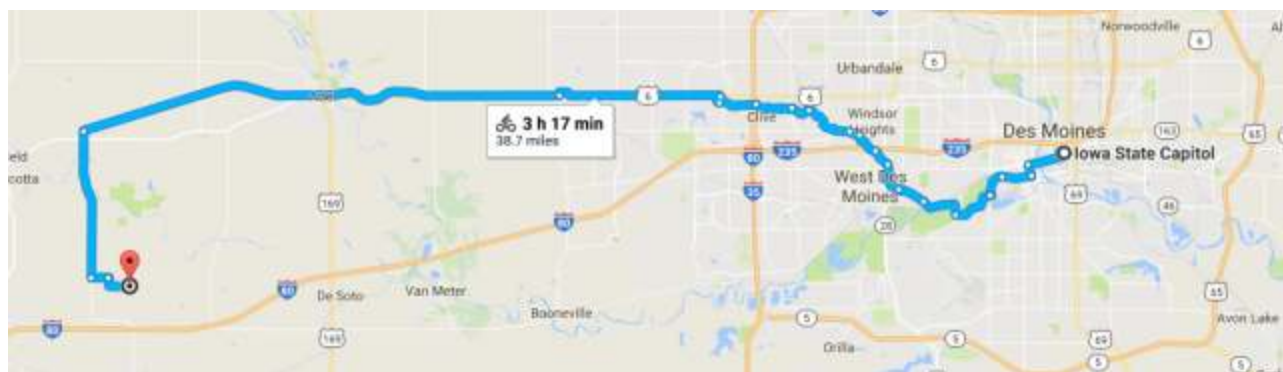
Eventually a small group gathered for our delivery of a petition for the removal of Richard W. Lozier, Jr. from the Iowa Utilities Board, because of his close ties to the fossil fuel industry. Patricia was there from Des Moines Valley Friends Meeting, and people from Bold Iowa and Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement. We were politely heard out in the Governor's office and the petition accepted.



Christine Nobiss from Indigenous Iowa arrived a little late, but live streamed comments from outside the Governor's office. Christine spoke to us at Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) this summer about building bridges between Quakers and indigenous people.

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Then I began the 40-mile bicycle trip to Bear Creek meeting that I was concerned about. I had been riding close to 20 miles almost every other day on a bike trail going North from Indianola, but it is all downhill, then uphill on the way back. And I usually wasn't that tired at the end, so I was hopeful that, if the trip to Bear Creek was pretty flat, and since I had plenty of time, I wouldn't have much trouble.



Some of the stress was that I had never ridden on these trails before, so I was hoping I'd be able to find my way, and that the trails were mostly flat. Thank goodness for Google Maps. After having to share the road (with bike paths) through downtown Des Moines, the trails left traffic behind at Greys Lake, going along the Des Moines River. It was amazing to ride through mile after mile of beautiful woods. You would barely know you were riding through the middle of a city. At 62nd street the trail came up to street level, right where a McDonalds was located, so I had lunch there.

I was looking forward to reaching the Racoon River Valley Trail, both because that would indicate I was well along the way, and the route was straight, so I wouldn't have to be worrying about whether I was still on the right path or not. As my friend and former co-worker Kristin suggested yesterday, I did reach the point along the trail when, as with running, you feel you can go for miles and miles effortlessly.

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Unfortunately, that didn't last for the entire trip. Where things got really difficult was when I left the paved bicycle trail to go south on H, a gravel road. I soon came upon a huge hill that went up and up. I had already learned it was better to just walk the bike on hills like that. I wondered how many more there would be, but knew I only had about 6 miles to go. Eventually I reached Bear Creek Road after a few more, smaller hills, which I recognized from years ago when I used to run that direction from the meetinghouse.

It was about 6 pm when I arrived. I was really glad to find that Jackie Leckband, the meeting's clerk, had left some granola bars and Powerade, that quickly disappeared. Jackie had previously indicated she could pick me up in her pickup truck if needed.

I had left a sleeping bag and some food at the meetinghouse last weekend, so I started to heat up supper, when Jackie arrived with some more food, which was really thoughtful. So we had dinner together. It wasn't long after that I climbed into the loft of the cottage on the meetinghouse grounds and went to bed, thankful for the prayers and that I made it here.

There is no plumbing in the cottage, so in the middle of the night I had to go into the meetinghouse to use the bathroom. It is REALLY dark at night in the countryside.

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Day 2 Bear Creek Meeting

First, there are a couple of things I wanted to add related to the first day of this journey. Some people who read this on the Internet will not have met me. One of the reasons I asked for prayers is that I'm 65 years old and don't have the physical stamina I used to. And as I mentioned earlier I've lived the past 40 years without a personal automobile for environmental reasons and knew transportation would be a challenge when I moved to Iowa a couple of months ago. The bicycle part of this journey thus relates to the theme of stopping fossil fuel infrastructure (StopETP-Energy Transfer Partners) and making further connections with Native Americans to learn more about their spiritual and environmental practices and support water protectors

One thing that happened during the bicycle trip yesterday was being greeted with big smiles and waving hands from a group of teenagers I passed along the bike trail near Grays Lake, which boosted my spirits. Another was, just as I was about to get on the Raccoon River Valley Trail, a large barrier across the trail said the trail was closed! Wow, I hadn't anticipated something like that. I went around the barrier to see what the alternative might be. A little further along, as the trail went under Highway 6, there was a small bulldozer and the trail dug up in front of it. But there was room to go up the embankment and around the construction. Big relief.

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I also didn't write about how very tired I was at the end of the trip—bone tired exhausted. I was really discouraged by the seemingly gigantic hill I had to push the bike up just after I left the Raccoon River Valley Trail, even wondering if I was going to make it to the meetinghouse. The reason I mention it now is because I had just been reading what Martin Luther King had said to a gathering of Quakers in 1958 in a talk titled "Nonviolence and Racial Justice". He talked about the willingness to accept suffering being an important part of nonviolence, not only because that de-escalates the tension and might shame one's adversary, but because it changes the person experiencing the suffering, too.

I don't have his words in front of me, but I think he was saying it helps the sufferer connect to a deeper, spiritual place, a closer connection to God perhaps. While my suffering from the exercise might be a little different, I do sometimes express continued fossil fuel use as war (violence) against Mother Earth. Not using a car and exercise might be considered forms of environmental nonviolence.

The second day of this journey began by writing yesterday's blog post. Actually prior to that was another lesson about energy. When Jackie and I were talking last night, she said she could turn on the hot water heater. When I said that wasn't necessary, she explained several ways she had heated water when she was living at the cottage. So I heated some water on the stove to clean up with. There is no running water in the cottage, and while there are three bathrooms in the meetinghouse, there is not bathtub or shower. That is often the reason more Quaker meetings are not equipped to offer sanctuary even though they would like to.

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I had thought I would spend the day recovering from the bike trip and preparing for the evening program we were going to have related to the StopETP campaign, "The musical activism of Nahko and Medicine for the People". But I knew Bold Iowa was interested in getting the photos I took at the State Capitol StopETP event. I had edited those photos when I got to the meetinghouse.

The cell phone signal at Bear Creek is very weak and Internet hot spot access not usually an option. Jackie mentioned the Earlham library had Internet access. Though I wasn't eager to get back on my bike, I rode about two miles to the library and uploaded the photos and sent emails to Bold Iowa to let them know they were available, and published yesterday's blog.

It was fortunate that I did this because that night we received an email from the national organizers of StopETP asking for photos from our events. I was able to respond and they replied they were glad to get our photos of the Des Moines event.

The rest of the afternoon I rested, read and reviewed the videos I planned to use last night. Seeing and hearing Amy Goodman's broadcast of the dog attacks against the water protectors at Standing Rock, and Nahko's words and songs to those kids just 4 days after they were attacked brought tears to my eyes.

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The idea to have an event as part of the national StopETP (Energy Transfer Partners) campaign this weekend came as a vision earlier this week. I felt badly that I didn't give Bear Creek meeting more time to consider, but email messages indicated it would be OK to go ahead. The only other event in Iowa was the one I attended at the State Capitol the first day of this journey. I wanted there to be more of an environmental activism presence from Iowa, and I was hoping to get connected to a network of concerned people, like I was in Indianapolis, and thought an event at Bear Creek might help with that. I mentioned the Bear Creek event to the people who were at the State Capitol, so they, at least, were aware of our efforts.

I also shared the Bear Creek plans with my friends at the Rainforest Action Network (RAN) that I had worked with for years. They responded they were with us in solidarity from San Francisco.

At 7 pm a small group of Bear Creek Friends gathered at the meetinghouse. My Aunt and Uncle, Ellis and Win Standing, have been active with Iowa Citizens for Community Improvement, including working on the impact of factory farms on water quality. Jenny Cisar shared her experiences with Native Americans building straw bale houses. Our clerk, Jackie Leckband was able to join us a little later.

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I shared some of my experiences related to Nahko and Medicine for the People.

The first clip I shared was Nahko saying:

Where my warriors at?

And so I feel like what has been said many times tonight and I appreciate the sentiment that we can say this now in this time and this generation is that prayer is the most G thing you can do homey. And I can say that for my life, in the things that have happened in my life, the anger, for the pain, for the hate, that I've carried, that forgiveness, and therefore remembering to pray for those that oppressed us, is the most powerful testament to mankind.

Then we watched the Democracy Now video by Amy Goodman during the dog attack against the water protectors at Standing Rock.

https://www.democracynow.org/2016/9/4/dakota_access_pipeline_company_att

That was followed by Nahko's concert just 4 days later for those kids who had been attacked by the dogs. Between songs he spoke to the youth:

"Remember that nonviolent direct action is the way to a successful revolution. And that is a hard one, because they are so bad (chuckles). When they come at us you just want to hit 'em, you know? Just sit with that. I know it's tough. They're going to try to do everything they can to instigate you. But remember what we're here for. We're here to create peace for our Mother. We're not here to create more violence."

"When you're feeling bad, when you're feeling frustrated, put all your prayer into your palms, put them to the ground, put them back to the sky, honor the Father, the Mother, just know it will be alright."

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Are you guys feeling proud, are you proud of yourselves? Because the whole world is watching. The whole world is watching. So whatcha gonna do? Gonna show love? Are you gonna be smart? You gonna think before you act? Take care of each other? Your gonna show 'em what family does. They don't know what that's like.

You gotta put down the weight, gotta get out of your way.

Get out of your way and just look around the corner at your real self and look at all the potential that this beautiful Earth and love has to offer you.

It's crazy being out in front of you guys. I had a moment there. I was like, I like started spacing out and I'm like oh god they're looking at me aren't they? I was thinking about how much happened before any of us were here. You know? There is a lot of history here. We gotta hold that when we're standing out there. You gotta hold that when you're on that line out there, too. You're here for a lot more than just this pipeline.

It's about rejoicing, it's about laughter right now. We've got a big day ahead of us tomorrow folks. So, I just want to say I'm so grateful and I'm really proud of you guys. I'm really proud of you. (and then he turned away with obvious emotion)."

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The last video we watched was "Love Letters to God" which was just nominated for Best Music Video for the Native American Music Awards.

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We finished with some silence.

Day 3 Prairie Awakening

Sunday, or First Day, September 10th, was the third day of this journey, and the original reason for it, to attend the Native American Prairie Awakening celebration. The day began with pre-meeting discussion of the relationship between the individual and the Quaker meeting, then meeting for worship.

Around 3 pm Russ and Jackie Leckband picked me up and we went to the Kuehn Conservation Area about 3 miles from the meetinghouse, where the annual Native American **Prairie Awakening** celebration, sponsored by the Dallas County Conservation Board, was being held. We learned during the celebration this Conservation Area was selected as one of the seven wonders of Iowa. Although this was my first time here, Russ and Jackie and many Bear Creek Quakers have been involved with this event and people for many years.

Walking from the grass parking lot through the tall prairie grass, we first passed a tipi, which people can camp in.

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As people greeted Russ and Jackie, and met me, I learned one of them had beaded the band on Russ's hat.

Seeing my camera, I was invited to document the Monarch butterflies in the milkweed garden.

Regarding taking photos, I am aware of the concept of cultural appropriation, so I had exchanged emails with Chris Adkins, the conservation officer, ahead of time. He approved me taking photos, asking that they be shared with the Conservation Area.

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I also asked permission from Rob Knuth, when I began taking photos of the burning of the sage and, I think, blessing of the flags that were then placed on poles around the celebration area. He asked that photos not be taken when he presented a peace pipe to a friend during the ceremony.

People began to gather around the circle, with the drums in the center. The celebration began with the grand entrance.



Several drum songs were played, and everyone was invited to dance.

Howard Crow Eagle was then honored for his many years of not only working on this event, but many other things, including with youth at risk. People were invited to greet Howard. Then as each person passed him, they were invited to greet each person who had done so, which meant, in the end, every one of us greeted every other person there!!

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Rob Knuth then shared the history of the Prairie Awakening event.

Next people were invited to hold one of the 19 butterflies that had been tagged to track their migration to Mexico. Each one was to be kissed, then all released at the same time with the word “Adios”



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Dallas Chief Eagle and his daughter then performed an amazing hoop dance.



Mike brought a raptor that had been injured around the circle, then released it.

Irma, who had cooked meals for the celebration for many years, was honored and given a blanket.

Children and adults then gathered around as Jerome Kills Small told stories.

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Finally, as darkness fell, we moved to the area in front of the tipi where wood had been stacked for the bonfire. As the fire burned, Dallas Chief Eagle spoke for a long time, teaching us how to be still and empty our minds, to learn to listen to the spirit. And how as we practice this, we will recognize the spirit in others. This was fascinating for the eight or so Quakers in the audience to hear since that is our own spiritual practice.

Then he and his daughter taught the children to hoop dance around the fire.

After sending the following link to all of the photos from Prairie Awakening to Chris Adkins, he wrote **“they will also bring a smile to our faces as we remember this time shared with friends as we awaken the prairie and ourselves”**



<https://1drv.ms/f/s!Avb9bFhezZpPilpEOOg3ynDNw6oVVQ>

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Reflections on September Journey

This **past weekend's 3 day journey** happened as a result of spiritual leadings. Quakers (among others) believe we can communicate directly with God or the spirit, which is why we don't feel the need for a minister. Meditating together in silence we try hear what the spirit is saying to us. Something is added by doing this as a group. Occasionally someone will feel led to express what they are experiencing vocally, which often resonates with others.

Its not like God speaks in words, but rather nudges us along a path. My grandmother, Lorene Standing, used to say God's will is revealed in a series of small steps. Each step reinforces the ones before. Things begin to happen that reinforce these steps. This may occur over a short time, or years.

Interestingly, Dallas Chief Eagle spoke about this for quite a while around the bonfire at the end of the Prairie Awakening celebration. The desire to attend the celebration was where the idea for this journey started.

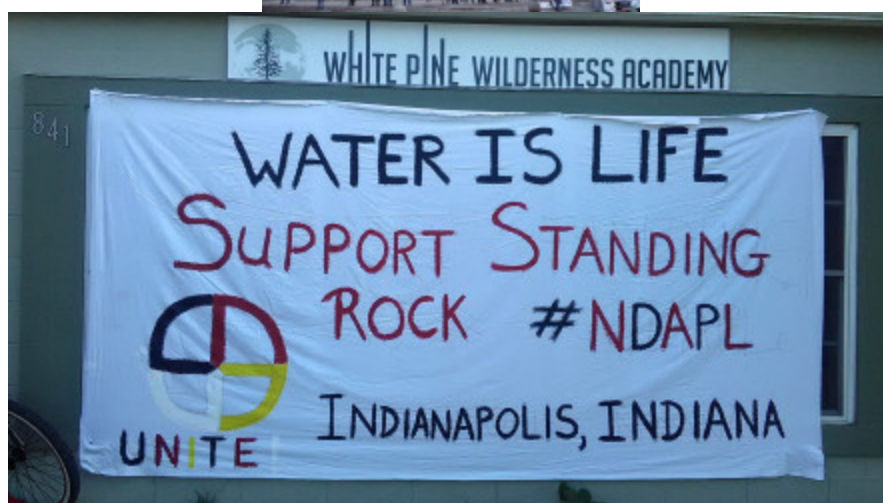
He told us to empty our mind. When thoughts enter, say "no". To be completely still. He then had us do this together. Afterward he asked the children what they felt, and they said "good, "peaceful" and "happy". He said to practice this, and that we would also learn to recognize the spirit in others.

My spiritual life has been profoundly affected by time spent with Native Americans in Indianapolis last year as we worked in various ways to support the water protectors at Standing Rock, including several awareness raising and prayer events with burning sage and drums. We also had an event where we went to two of the banks involved in funding the Dakota Access Pipeline, Chase and PNC, and withdrew \$110,000. I also had **my own defunding experience**.

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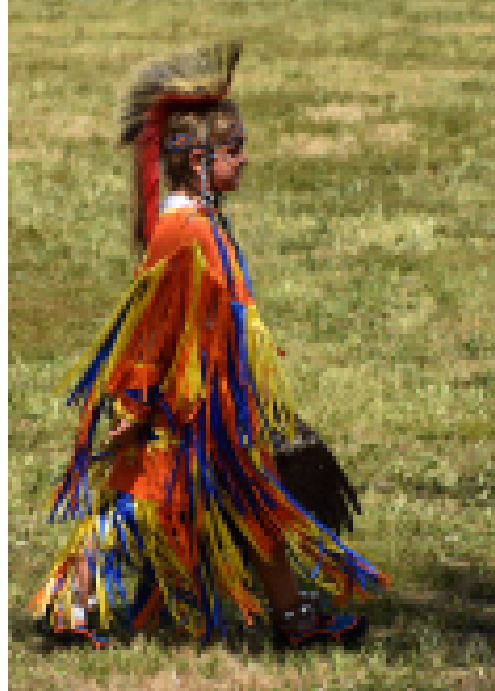


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A number of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative) Friends have been drawn to the brave nonviolent struggle of the water protectors at Standing Rock, some having visited there. As this year's Peace and Social Concerns Committee report says "The witness and commitment of the Water Protectors at Standing Rock inspire us, as does the support for them from Indigenous Peoples all over the world". The first evening at Yearly Meeting was a panel discussion about "Building Bridges with Native Americans". Iowa Friend Peter Clay had visited Standing Rock several times. Christine Nobiss of Indigenous Iowa spoke, as did Donnielle Wanatee, who invited us to attend the Meskwaki Powwow at the settlement she lives at near Tama, Iowa. Dad and I did attend and enjoy the powwow, and **shared photos** with the organizers.

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This month at Bear Creek we discussed the **queries related to social and economic justice**. I said there was a growing consensus among the activists I work with that we need to confront two foundational injustices of United States history, taking the land and genocide of Native Americans, and the enslavement of and continued injustices related to African Americans. Bear Creek Friends' years of support for the Prairie Awakening celebration and the people involved throughout the years, is one way to do so. This was further stimulus for me to attend.

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The problem to attend the ceremony was I have refused to have a personal automobile for the past 40 years or so. That worked fairly well in Indianapolis where public transportation was available. But I knew this would be a challenge when I moved to Indianola, Iowa. Many friends in Indianapolis gave me money to buy a nice bicycle when I left, and I have been working to build up my endurance.

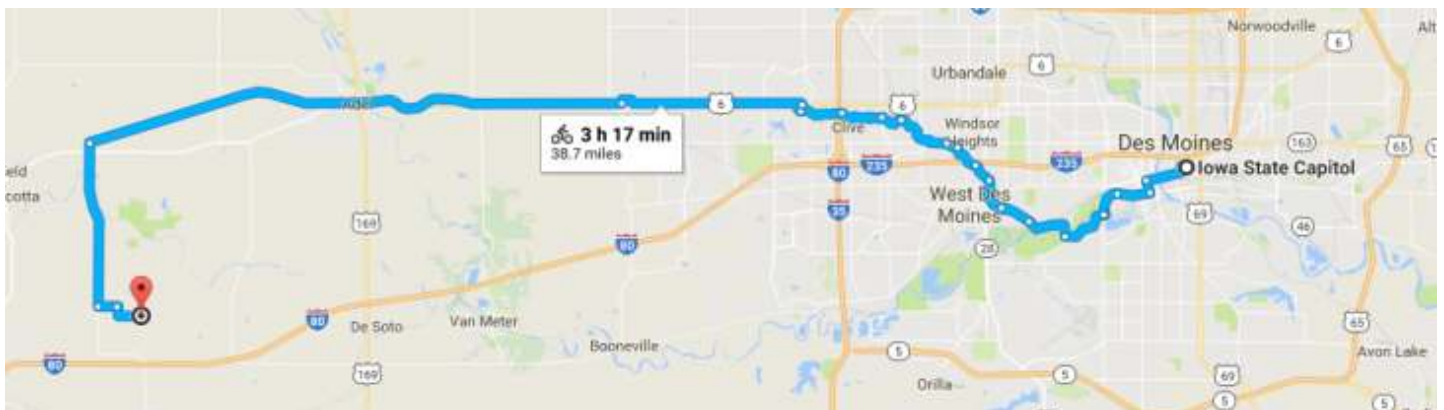
So I was praying for a way to get to the Prairie Awakening celebration at the Kuehn Conservation Area, near Bear Creek meetinghouse, about 40 miles from Indianola. Going by car with my parents was not an option, because they were going to be in Bloomington, Illinois.

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Then I learned that an event was going to be held at the Iowa State Capitol building the Friday of the Prairie Awakening celebration weekend. That was when my parents were leaving town, so I thought they could drop me off. Afterwards I would ride my bicycle to Bear Creek meeting, which was about 40 miles away. I was apprehensive about that, not having ridden that distance, yet. But that was how my leading was evolving, so I had faith things would workout somehow. Bear Creek clerk, Jackie Leckband, offered to pick me up in her truck if needed, so there was a backup plan.

The event at the State Capitol was part of a new national campaign called **StopETP**, Stop Energy Transfer Partners, the company behind the Dakota Access and many other pipelines. This event involved **delivering a petition to the Governor to** remove a member from the Iowa Utilities Board (that approves pipelines, etc) who has close ties to the fossil fuel industry, organized by Bold Iowa and Indigenous Iowa. Christine Nobiss who spoke at Iowa Yearly Meeting attended.

After the event, I began to ride through downtown Des Moines to get to the bike trails along the Des Moines River through the city. It was a struggle, but I made it to the meetinghouse around 6 pm. I stayed in the cottage on the meetinghouse grounds.



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Earlier in the week I awoke with a vision related to Bear Creek and StopETP, described in detail here <https://kislingjeff.wordpress.com/2017/09/07/bear-creek-friends-meeting-and-stopetp/> Saturday evening I showed videos related to Standing Rock at the meetinghouse.

Sunday morning I attended meeting for worship, then Russ and Jackie Leckband gave me a ride to the Prairie Awakening, which they have been involved with for many years. That is described in this previous blog post: <https://kislingjeff.wordpress.com/2017/09/12/september-journey-day-3-prairie-awakening/>



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My parents returned to Indianola from Illinois that evening. Monday morning Dad picked me up. He had to be in Earlham anyway to attend a funeral.

I hope this has shown how this came together as a series of leadings related to Quakers, Native Americans, spirituality and environmental justice.