Each of Us Inevitable

Some Keynote Addresses,
Given at
Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns and
Friends General Conference Gatherings,
1977–1993,
Revised, Expanded Edition

**Becky Birtha, Thomas Bodine, Elise Boulding,
John Calvi, Stephen Finn, Ellen Hodge,
Janet Hoffman,
Arlene Kelly, William Kreidler, George Lakey,
Ahavia Lavana, Muriel Bishop Summers,
Elizabeth Watson,
David Wertheimer, and Dwight Wilson**

Edited by Robert Leuze

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"Each of us inevitable,
Each of us limitless—each of us with his
or her right upon the earth,
Each of us allow'd the eternal purports
of the earth,
Each of us here as divinely as any is here."

—Walt Whitman: "Salut au Monde," 11, Leaves of Grass

Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns (FLGBTQC), until recently known as Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (FLGC), is a North American Quaker faith community within the Religious Society of Friends that affirms that of God in all persons—lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, transgender, and transsexual. It gathers twice yearly: Midwinter Gathering is held over the long weekend surrounding U.S. President's Day in February and Summer Gathering is held with the larger Friends General Conference Gathering the first week in July. Once known as Friends Committee for Gay Concerns, the group has met since the early 1970s for worship and play, its members drawing sustenance from each other and from the Spirit for their work and life in the world—in the faith that radical inclusion and radical love bring further light to Quaker testimony and life.

Preface to the Internet Edition

The new, revised and expanded edition of *Each of Us Inevitable*—the printed compilation of keynote addresses given by beloved Friends at prior Gatherings of Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (FLGC) and Friends General Conference (FGC)—includes all the talks in the original edition and eight additional keynotes, bringing the total to 19. The added talks were given between 1979 and 1993.

In February 2003, the community united on changing its name to Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns (FLGBTQC). The talks are available as separate Adobe Acrobat PDF files for each author on the FLGBTQC website, <*http://flgbtqc.quaker.org*>.

It is hoped that keynotes given after 1993 also will be published someday; however, the richness of content in these additional already-edited talks suggested moving ahead in the present when the possibility of publication exists.

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It may be helpful for some readers browsing on the internet if I offer here at least brief hints, however inadequate, of that "richness" that lies in specific talks.

Elizabeth Watson (1977: "Each of Us Inevitable") came to help us accept ourselves. Her message is not "love the sinner, not the sin," but, "I love you, and I love you *for* your givenness, not in spite of it." She offers an account of the life story and the healing words of Walt Whitman.

Arlene Kelly (1979: "Estrangement and Reconciliation") brought answers in the form of difficult questions: How can we remain engaged with people who are different? From what do we feel estranged? What has caused hurt and anger within us? Do we see that we come to Gathering both as oppressor and oppressed? Can we find ways to step into the shoes of the other person? What is involved in being "reconciled"?

Janet Hoffman (1982: "Eros and the Life of the Spirit") spoke on themes of exploring and wrestling with new insights; fiery passion; relinquishing our need; and transformation. Eros, she believes, drives us toward God and gives our life its basic meaning. Love demands a complete inner transformation. Love (not guilt) leads to social change.

Dwight Wilson (1984: "Nurturing Our Relationships within an Often Hostile Community") spoke from his personal experience as a black man. His message was concerned with trusting one's own perceptions and understanding—not society's mainstream view, not scripture, not the internalized hatred that society may try to induce in us. He spoke of the sometimes negative role of the institutional church for blacks, women, pacifism, gays, and lesbians.

Arlene Kelly (1984: "Nurturing Friendship and Lover Relationships") sees "coming out" as a step toward taking responsibility for ourselves as individuals. In our friendship and lover relationships, are we feeling defective, she questions; have we relinquished some of our power? She discusses ten factors essential to building relationships that are whole.

Elizabeth Watson (1985: "On Wholeness") recognizes our patriarchal, hierarchal, and homophobic civilization and religious heritage. She discusses the Christian church and Jesus; the power of the human community; "dwelling in possibility," and her personal odyssey into wholeness. Can we take charge of life and healing by imaging a desired outcome?

Elise Boulding (1986: "The Challenge of Nonconformity") acknowledges the need to bond across differences—because we need others to make us whole—and the fact that it's more difficult for those called to "nonconforming witnesses." For "publicly gay" persons, special strengths are needed; they are the social change activists. The "gay witness," she says, includes equality, nonviolence, community, and simplicity; gays should be viewed not as embattled victims but as co-workers in reweaving the social web for us all.

Thomas R. Bodine (1987: "Caring Matters Most"), drawing on his own experience, began with a description of the wide diversity of Friends throughout the world. How to change people? How to bridge the differences? he wondered. What happens if we seriously try to practice Christian "gifts of the spirit" in those parts of the Quaker world that hate homosexuality?

Janet Hoffman (Friends General Conference, 1987: "To Listen, To Minister, To Witness"). Her wide-ranging talk includes: living "without seatbelts"; following a corporate leading, not censoring it; "dis-illusionment"—a good thing ("Offend me!" she declares); to minister—sometimes just by being oneself; to love someone—to become in some sense the person we love; to witness—to be faithful to the spirit. She touches on personal growth, the true evangelist, continuing revelation, seeking, stages of development in pacifism, and committed unions.

David Wertheimer (1988: "Bias-Related Violence, Gay Marriage, and a Journey Out of the Society of Friends") shares some personal, Quaker-related experiences: seeking marriage with his (male) partner under the care of his meeting; studying and later teaching at Quaker schools; enrolling as a Quaker in divinity school. He asks whether Quakerism works well only when it can function one step removed from the harsh realities that it contemplates. He sees FLGC as a committee on sufferings, a critical group to helping Quakerism discover how to survive. Death threats led him to question his Quaker belief in nonviolence. His talk includes input from those present at Gathering.

Ahavia Lavana (1988: "Helping and Healing"). When Ahavia's son Hunter had AIDS and later died of it, what helped and what did not help? What was healing and what was not? She speaks on accepting what is beyond our control.

Bill Kreidler's address (1989: "Tending the Fire") is his intensely personal but often humorous account of learning to tend his spiritual flame following an addictive, abusive relationship—by being honest, by being open, by practicing, and by being easy with himself. He talks of the ministry of our community and of how it helped him reach the goal he had envisioned ("old Quaker ladies" tap dancing).

Ellen Hodge (1989: "Tending the Fire") offers differing images of fire: Kristallnacht, persecution of "witches," a 1963 bomb in a Birmingham church, Vietnam and Cambodian napalm; candlelight vigils for the slain Harvey Milk; the Japanese *Bon* festival. She retells, in modern vernacular, the Biblical story of Moses for its relevance to our situation.

Stephen Finn (1990: "Celebrating *All* Our Being") describes a personal journey, illustrating reasons some people have trouble celebrating their being. He asks, does one feel shameful rather than worthy of experiencing "heaven on earth"? Does one adopt compensatory mechanisms to get through a life without heaven? Does FLGC sometimes serve to shield us from the need to be open about our shame?

Muriel Bishop Summers (1990: "On Living in Integrity") spoke of living with integrity—the quality of one's relationship with all of creation—and with oneself: a process. She discusses the balance between integrity and safety; the need of being whole, not fragmented; some essentials for wholeness; and the Divine Presence as ultimate reality, whose nature is love and whose character is truth.

John Calvi (Friends General Conference, 1990: "Laying Down the Weapons 'Round Our Hearts") offers steps to healing: surrendering; inviting one's angels; receiving, with honesty and tenderness, the messages that are sent; entering upon the dance between hope and fear.

Becky Birtha (1991: "'Accept It Gracefully'— Keeping Our Creative Gifts Alive") shares her personal experiences with healing, growing, dealing with pain, and loving herself—often as expressed in her poems.

George Lakey (1991: "Our Bodies, Our Elves") sought a vision of the new creation. He emphasizes, in six general areas, gifts that lesbians, gays, and bi's can give to the Society of Friends and the larger world; the areas are embodiment (in a human body); the erotic (as a bridge to spiritual experience); vulnerability (seen as a doorway); facing pain; reaffirming difference; and love (moving beyond judgmentalism).

Elizabeth Watson (1993: "Night and Day") relates how the titles of some Cole Porter songs evoke reflections from her own life. "Night and Day"—falsely dividing the world (a continuum) into opposites. (Are we the "good guys"?) "Down in the Depths"—unlearning the shame and guilt inspired by our Judeo-Christian tradition. (If there is sin, it is in not caring.) "In the Still of the Night"—embracing the darkness; finding it full of possibility, a time for gestation, for creation, for rest.

—ROBERT LEUZE

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EDITOR ROBERT LEUZE has been involved with gay Quaker groups since 1973, first in New York City where he attended Morningside Meeting and subsequently with the group that evolved to become the present-day Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns. He grew up in rural Northern New York near the eastern end of Lake Ontario, amid the extreme homophobia of the McCarthy period. During his college years at Yale University no one he knew (or knew of) was openly gay. He came out (to himself and two or three others) his senior year and, a year after graduation, moved to New York City. He and his present wife Sarah fell in love in the late 1960s and were married in 1969, believing that psychoanalysis had changed his orientation. He came out for the second time in the mid-1970s, but he and Sarah remain very happily married after 34 years. He pursued a career as an opera singer in the 1970s and 1980s and continues to perform in solo concerts—concerts that usually include songs relevant to the gay experience. He is a longtime member of the Yale Gay and Lesbian Alumni/ae Association (Yale GALA), and of Outmusic, a GLBT organization for singers and songwriters.

Kim Hanson

Robert Leuze

Estrangement and Reconciliation

Arlene Kelly

Keynote Address, Midwinter Gathering,
Friends Committee for Gay Concerns
February 1979

It's good to be here and to see friendly faces, faces that I know and by which I feel supported. I'm a little bit scared to be here. I really appreciate the warmth of that introduction. . . . I have felt the warmth in the room that seems to be among us; and I think that warmth, more than anything else, bodes well for this weekend. There will be times of pain and times of anger, I'm sure, but if we can also hold onto the warmth, I think we'll be OK.

Also, I'm glad to feel this support because I'm going to need your help this morning if I'm going to be successful in what I've set as goals in talking with you. My goal really is to help us open up—each one of us within ourselves—so that when we begin later in the afternoon to deal with small groups, hopefully we'll go into those in a spirit of being open, being ready to listen, but also being ready to share in a real and honest kind of way. So I'm going to share with you my experience, but my goal is not that you leave here knowing me better. It's rather that you leave here more in touch with yourselves and ready to deal better with all of us together.

I'm going to talk about two main areas. One will be estrangement. We wouldn't need reconciliation if there was not some sense of estrangement. Second, I'll speak of the elements of reconciliation. I think you'll find that I'll mostly pose questions, because I don't know the answers. I know some answers

for myself, and I will share some of those. But we each need to find our own answers. A lot of it is in the process of seeking together. It's not as though we know the right answers when we set out. And it's in not running away from the pain and the anger.

Let me mention one thing parenthetically that I feel to be important: that many times when people are expressing anger, what they're really doing is dealing with their pain. If we can avoid being blown over by somebody's anger and can really seek with them about what it is underneath that is hurting so much, sometimes that can help us get past the anger and get to know that person better—and begin to reconcile.

Those of you who don't know me have a right to know a little bit about me so that you understand the biases out of which I'm speaking. I want you to understand where I am coming from so that you understand the insights that I have. Your experience may lead you to different insights that are obviously valid for you. I don't care that we agree with each other, but I do want you to listen to me, because I think the questions I'm raising are important.

> We seldom learn anything from talking with people who think exactly as we do. Engaging with people who . . . see things differently is a lot more work, and you can run into a lot of pain and a lot of anger.

Obviously, I speak to you as a woman, and I hope for the men in the group that that's not something that's too off-putting. There undoubtedly will be things that come through in what I have to say—things I'm not even aware of—that reflect my experiences as a woman. I hope that if any of that is offensive to the men in the group, you will say so. I would like to understand men better. So if I inadvertently do offend, I apologize here in advance, but I hope you will help me learn about it.

I've been a lesbian all of my adult life, but consciously one and actively one in various stages. I came out not quite two years ago with my meeting members and with my personal friends. I made my decision to come out for two reasons. One is that it reached a point of integrity. Within my meeting, probably more members are openly gay than within any meeting in Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. Gayness has been discussed openly. I felt that I could no longer remain honest and remain in the closet: I never pretended to be heterosexual, but I also was not claiming to be gay.

My second reason for coming out in meeting is very related to that: If one is not openly heterosexual and not claiming to be a lesbian, then that really makes one asexual. I knew I was not asexual, and the only way I could move beyond

seeming asexual in people's eyes was to affirm my sexuality. And thus I did it. I have to admit, the sky did not fall, as I thought it might.

As a lesbian, I have made a decision not to be extremely active. When people hear my name, I don't want their first thought to be, "Oh, yes, Arlene Kelly, lesbian." I'd like to think that I'm a lot of things. I don't want people putting me in a box because of my sexuality. I don't personally think that my sexuality matters to anybody except the person with whom I might be a partner. Beyond that, I would like people to say, "Does she love people well, is she a caring person? What is the quality of her relationships?" I don't see the fact that I'm a lesbian or not, as central. I know that for some women it is the central part of their identity. That's very normal. It's not central for me, at this point in my life.

I tend to be a person who likes to build bridges between groups: I enjoy the role of mediator. By definition, a person who does that is not out on the edges, is not an activist, is not the one who's raising consciousness fully and having the whole world angry with her. I have a strong conviction that we should not get angry or upset or troubled with other people who are not in the same place as we are. I need the activist. The only way in which I finally had courage to come out in my meeting was because of gay men . . . who were there pushing the meeting, who raised the consciousness of the meeting and made it safer for me (not totally safe, but a lot safer). I need that. But conversely, activists need people to come along behind to say, "You know, it's not all that scary." You don't have to be that scared; let's see each other as human beings and then build beyond that. A simple analogy that comes to mind is building a road. Where the bulldozers come through, if there are trees that are barriers, the bulldozers can knock them down. That's necessary. But somebody also has to come along and put on the final touches. I hope we can understand how we need each other. Because we have different approaches, it doesn't mean that someone isn't caring as much or working as hard.

I have a deep confidence that, underneath, all people, gay or straight, want the same thing. I think most people are motivated by a desire to have esteem from people around them. Most people want to be needed. Most people need other people, and most people want to be loved. We can get beyond both real and apparent differences to touch those needs in the other person. Sometimes if persons are doing something I totally disagree with, I think if I can dig deep enough I will find out that what motivates them are some of the same things that motivate me. They're going about it in a way that I wouldn't, and I still might not approve of the way. I think it's important to remember: The differences are threatening; we need to discover the similarities.

I'm wondering whether any of you have turned me off. I realize that what I'm stating are my experience and my values, and that my way of operating is different than that of many of you. I know, at times when I listen to somebody who is different from me, I click off; I figure, "Oh, hell, I don't want to bother with

this. You know, why should I listen to this; I know where I stand." I hope that you'll stay with me, because I think that's the very issue. If we start clicking off this weekend when people start saying things with which we disagree, then we might as well go home. We seldom learn anything from talking with people who think exactly as we do. Engaging with people who are different, who see things differently, is a lot more work, and you can run into a lot of pain and a lot of anger.

Tolerating diversity

One of the questions with which we'll need to deal this weekend is, How much diversity can we tolerate among ourselves? People see gays as they see other minority groups: as monolithic, as "all the same." So, if we're all the same, then I may want to be very cautious when another gay person acts in a way that I don't want somebody saying I'm the same as. I wonder if that doesn't at times create some of the anxiety among us.

I'm wondering, too, does being supportive as gays mean being the same? As viewing the world the same? When we are being battered by the world, we come together and very rightfully look for support from one another. But at times, we may get upset if we don't get it or if we find somebody having a different point of view from ours. I know I have that reaction: "But you folks were really supposed to understand!" And we *don't* always understand each other.

What are the things about which we feel estrangement? What has caused the hurt, the anger, within us? I'm going to share just a couple of anecdotes that I've encountered in my own experience as well as a reading which somebody shared with me recently. There's nothing special about these anecdotes. I hope you'll make connection with them and think out of your own experience, OK, what am I feeling estranged about? With whom am I feeling estranged? And where do we go from there?

While I was walking to lunch one day at Friends General Conference at Ithaca last summer, two men and a woman were walking about ten or fifteen feet behind me, and I couldn't help overhearing their conversation. One of the men was carrying a shoulder bag, and either the man or the woman commented, "Oh, that looks like a really handy way to carry things." He said yes, that it was becoming more acceptable in this country, and it always had been in Europe, and men had carried them, et cetera. Then one of his companions said, "Well, you know, it used to be that just homosexuals carried those, and you wouldn't want anybody thinking that you were one of them." So goes the anecdote. It's just those kinds of things that you overhear.

I think of an experience in one of our meetings. One of our members was turned down for a job at a Quaker boarding school in the Philadelphia area. She had thought it was for different reasons, but I learned inadvertently that the fact that she was a lesbian had come to the attention of the school. At her request,

we met with the headmaster of the school. He was very candid, very friendly; his candor led him to say to us that, yes, the reason she had been turned down for the position was because she was a lesbian. This woman had been seen as qualified. But there had been a situation at that boarding school—not an inappropriate one from the point of view of a gay person—but the headmaster had dealt with the situation and had had to struggle with the school committee a year prior to that. He didn't want to have to struggle again, so she was turned down for the job. She was angry, and we can understand why. How many of you have had a similar type of experience?

I read the minutes recently of Representative Meeting when there was a big discussion as to whether or not Philadelphia Yearly Meeting should write a letter to the Legislature in New Jersey (part of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting is in South Jersey). There was a revision in the penal code coming up which was very down on gay men. The meeting decided that it really shouldn't infringe on this particular province, that the whole yearly meeting being in Philadelphia and all, they really shouldn't infringe and tell South Jersey [Friends] what to do in the New Jersey Legislature. I could have lived with that except that the next piece of business concerned the Wilmington Ten and involved writing a letter to North Carolina. That letter was sent, and nobody saw an inconsistency. I think a lot of straight people walked out of there feeling as though their integrity was intact; they didn't see what they were doing.

"Another thing that grinds me is people saying they don't feel comfortable . . . when my lover is present. . . . I get infuriated, because for years I gave up feeling comfortable so they wouldn't be hurt by knowing the truth. . . . When is it their turn to make me feel comfortable? To care about my feelings and wonder if I may hurt?"

I think of a situation, again in our meeting, probably two years ago now. Coffee hour was over, and one of the couples in the meeting was looking for their six-year-old son. They couldn't find him and had reached the point of being frightened. It turned out later that Andrew was hiding and had fallen asleep. Nevertheless, we didn't know that. So, as people do in that situation, several of us were going to help look and had gathered in the hall. The question was asked, "Well, where have you looked?" The first remark out of one of the women, the woman who has been very outspoken in our meetings about gay people, was, "Have you looked in the restrooms, because you know the kind of people we have as members now."

I recall hearing women in workshops, women living in lesbian relationships who have children, talking about the fears they have of losing their children. I believe men must have experienced being hassled by the law, being intimidated because of being gay.

Finally in this series of anecdotes, I'd like to read from a recent issue of *In Unity,* which is a publication of the Metropolitan Community church. I've omitted the one or two references that make clear whether this was written by a man or a woman, because I don't think that is important. It starts out:

> I live with a nag. Sometimes it really gets on my nerves. I just want to scream, "What do you expect of me, I'm only human. I do the best I can, leave me alone and don't bug me." But the nagging seldom ceases. Occasionally I give in to the nagging, and I really make an effort to change my ways. This is satisfactory for a while but not long lasting. Lately the nagging has gotten worse, and I'm really getting worried. What will happen if I can't change or do better? I'm not sure how to go about it, what can I do to change? I'm beside myself some days, I don't really know what I'm doing wrong. Living with a nag is a drag. God is my nag, and God ain't letting up. There's only one reason I'm bothering to write about this universal problem. That reason is not that I have anything profound to say, or that I even have anything to say. The reason is that God has been nagging me to write. Why isn't God clearer about these things? I have no ideas, and little self-discipline, and I'm even unclear about having any talent at this sort of thing. When I began writing, I had no idea what to say. But I've got one now. Let's see where it takes me. Don't you just like it when people take so long to get to the point? I'm angry. It's not one of those short term, yell-and-get-it-over-with angers, it's a continuous-always-with-me kind. I only realized recently how angry I am.
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> I teach school. Yes, I'm one of those people. The name I'm using isn't even my original name. Right now it's my real name, because that other belongs to someone else. Catch my drift? This name is honest, an out in the open one. I've taught school for nine years, and until Anita, I thought I really was saving the children. How misguided could I be? I'm not saving them at all. She is right. I don't like that one bit. I hate it. You see, as a Christian, I can't even minister openly to those students whom I see in need. I can do some counseling, but I must always be careful. They're sensitive about mixing God and books. In addition, I can't be an honest role

model for those who need it. I must pretend to be a single person, independent, and happy being alone. My real identity must be guessed at. Even then I am unapproachable for gay kids. It's frustrating.

Let me tell you more about this anger. I came back to my job in September after having spent a summer in complete honesty. I even quit lying to my parents. There I sat with my colleagues as they announced all those who got married over the summer. I really felt left out, cheated. I played their game though, gave safe answers and avoided situations where I would have to really lie. What a dream. Here I am, a teacher who can't save anyone. I teach my students values while I turn against mine. I'm not truthful with them and I cry about that. What a terrible experience not to be able to share the important things in my life with the people I care about. I feel like the invisible man Ralph Ellison wrote about. I'm invisible only because they refuse to see me. I'm a figment of their imaginations. One of these days I will be seen for what I am. I may not be accepted or understood, or liked. But I will be real. I won't be ignored anymore or forced to lie. I don't plan on helping people keep their eyes blinded.

Another thing that grinds me is people saying they don't feel comfortable in certain situations when my lover is present. Or they can't handle it. I get infuriated, because for years I gave up feeling comfortable so they wouldn't be hurt by knowing the truth. I spent time going over the script so I wouldn't say the wrong thing. When is it their turn to make me feel comfortable? To care about my feelings and wonder if I may hurt? I will not let them be too comfortable at my expense.

Yes, I'm still angry, because with my job there are only two solutions. That's put up and shut up, or quit. If I put up or shut up, I let them run me. If I quit, I've let them run me out. I used to think I had a calling to this profession. But now I'm not so sure. I don't like their roles any more, and God continues to nag me.

What is the feeling of estrangement that you're feeling? What's the source of your anger? Your hurt? What are the things that we bring with us when we come together? We come here looking for healing. Sometimes, again, I know it's true with myself, I can be so busy looking for my own healing that I don't hear other people's needs. Sometimes we end up being angry with each other. All the examples that I've given are examples between gays and straights. Are there examples

of things that happened between gay people? Of course there are. As I said before, we bring all of our baggage with us when we come. We come as gay men (I hesitate to speak much about gay men's experience, but I don't want to leave it out). It seems to me that gay men come with the experience of being called faggots, of living in a society where they are put down by one of the worst things that can be said about a man: that he is woman-like, that he is feminine, that he is not a man. But you also come from a society in which you enjoy certain privileges by virtue of being a man. How does that contradiction work when you come together? We come as lesbians who have worked hard over the past several years to develop a sense of identity as women. We come feeling a pride in that but also full of awareness and sometimes anger about the way in which women are still often stereotyped in our society and cast in subservient roles.

We come here as parents, struggling with questions as to how to deal with being parents and being gay, with having fears concerning custody. We come as lovers. I would guess that some of us have come as former lovers and perhaps feel some of the pain of a relationship recently over. We bring that pain with us.

We come here both as oppressors and oppressed. Can we see that? I think very often we experience things in a self-centered way. I know I do. Somebody walks past us without saying hello, and the reaction is, What did I do, and why is she (or he) angry with me? That's the way in which we tend to see the world, from our own perspective. So we experience ourselves much more fully as oppressed than being oppressing. But we probably oppress as well. Can we move this weekend beyond that one-way experience of seeing the world just through our eyes, and find ways to step into the shoes of the other person? Can we care enough about doing that? Can we take the risks that are involved? Are we willing to see that whether we feel oppressed depends in part on whether we allow that to happen? Another anecdote: A woman working on a committee found that the men took more of the responsibility, and she felt some anger about that because, on one level, she felt the men had taken over. But on another level she realized that she had contributed by moving into the role she was more used to or to which she had been socialized. The question became, How do we learn the skill to break out of those roles?

We come here both as oppressors and oppressed.

When we end up in a situation where we are angry with the other person for having done something to us, are we clear about our responsibility? There are truly situations where people have power over us. There are, for example, employment situations where you can be fired. But it's important to remember that in many of our human relationships a person can put us down only if we're willing to get into that situation. It's a lot easier, I think, to get angry with that

person for doing that to us than to take responsibility for ourselves and look toward ways to avoid having that problem.

Are we able to see, as gay men and lesbians, that there are areas in which we have common interests and areas in which we are separate? I think of the image of two circles beside one another but intersecting in part. I think that there are places where our circles intersect, where we have interests in common. In terms of the politics of being gay, there is value in numbers (and God knows, at best, we are not that many). So there is real importance in coming together and joining our numbers if we want to have an impact politically, about social issues. But what are the areas in which we are separate? What does it feel like, for example, to be a man here? To look around to find that most of the people here are men? Does that make you feel good, does it make you feel bad? Does it make you think about it at all? I think it's something to think about. When a woman looks around and finds that, while there's a good handful of good women here—as there are good men—does it seem biased that, nevertheless, we are not as many as the men? How does that feel? Can the men appreciate it?

As a woman I feel drawn to be together at times with other women. I don't have that much contact with lesbians in my day-to-day life. I value being together with other women. If I were a man, I think two things might happen. The one is that I might feel some hurt when I had worked so hard to help make FLGC open to women more fully—that I had gone to all that trouble—and then found them taking off by themselves. The other thing I think I would succumb to if I were a man would be, if when I was in the world I was getting put down as a man, I somehow would take real strength when I got together with a group of gay men. And I think that some of my not-necessarily-best characteristics as a man—but those that society tells me I should hold—might come to the forefront. All those things I got put down about, I can be, here. The point I'm trying to make is that I think we should look at the subtle things that get us going, that we do bring with us from the world.

I think it's important to remember that there is a difference between being separate and being rejected. In the marital counseling that I sometimes do with straight couples, the question often arises, Who are you as a couple and who are you as separate individuals? Where do your lives intersect, where do you want them to intersect, and where is each of you a separate human being? How do you develop that individuality? I think there's nothing sadder than seeing people who live such a full life as a couple that they don't develop as individuals. Because, when something happens to that unit—as it ultimately will through death—then the person who is left is nobody. You see this with women who have totally subsumed themselves into their husband's role; when he dies they are nobody. It's hard to discover who you are when you're in your sixties and seventies, if you haven't been working on it over the years. It's exactly the same question with which we are dealing as lesbians and gay men: Where do our lives

intersect as gays? Where do they become separate as men and women? And as I say, there is a difference between being separate and being rejected. Surely there are times when separation is rejecting, and where it's clearly meant to be. But it's important to remember that even though people are being individual and separate, they aren't necessarily rejecting us.

Finally, what does being reconciled mean? What does it mean to be a Quaker or a religious person and be reconciled? To me, being reconciled is being open to the Spirit moving within my life, and open to the Spirit moving within our lives. It is to be whole. It's to be in touch with both our maleness and our femaleness within us. And each of us, I think, has both of those parts. Are we comfortable with both of those parts? To me, it's being at one with older people, younger people, children. A person who is whole and reconciled is at peace with people of different kinds. To me, it's moving away from a self-centeredness to a centeredness in God and being open to other people.

A passage from the *Garden of the Prophet* by Gibran has been special to me over the years. In it he asks, What is it, to be? I'd like to share two pieces of the response to that. Gibran says that "to be is to be strong, but not to be undoing of the weak. It is to be wise, though not a stranger to the foolish. It is to be able to play with young children, not as a father or a mother, but as a playmate. It's to be able to talk with old men and women, when you're still one with spring." He goes on to say, "To be is to be a garden without walls, it's to be a vineyard without a guardian, it's to be a treasure house forever open to passersby."

A person who is whole and reconciled is at peace with people of different kinds.

To me, to be reconciled is to be whole, to be strong enough that we can hear differences. To be strong enough that we don't have to always have it our way, that we can take the trouble to hear what the other person is wanting to say, and that we can work hard enough to find out what it is that joins us as well as what it is that separates us. I think it's extremely important as we move ahead that people want to reach out, to feel warmly toward each other. I hope we remember that it's a very special thing when people risk and care enough to share and that what people are sharing will be very tender feelings that need to be treated tenderly. I hope we remember that we should not be put off by anger, because the anger in a lot of cases is just a smokescreen for other things that need to be cared for.

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Arlene Kelly is a native of the Philadelphia area. Her involvements in recent years have centered on a project called Deepening and Strengthening Our Meetings as Faith

Communities, which serves the monthly meetings of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. She is a past member of the board of the American Friends Service Committee and has also served on both the board's Human Resources Committee and its nationwide Affirmative Action Committee. A convinced Friend, she joined Central Philadelphia Monthly Meeting more than 40 years ago. In addition to serving as an overseer for many years she has served as clerk of the monthly meeting, as well as clerk of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting. A recent trip to Israel and Palestine as part of a delegation of yearly meeting clerks and superintendents has opened her more deeply to the suffering in that area; it is her hope to facilitate ways in which she and other concerned Friends can be responsive to the needs that exist there.

Arlene Kelly

Nurturing Friendship and Lover Relationships

Arlene Kelly

Keynote Address, Midwinter Gathering,
Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns
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"They will never have the comfort of our silence again." In times of my own personal pain and despair these are words on which I fall back. I cannot make people understand or accept us. But even in the face of pain and in the face of loneliness from being on the outside there is some solace to me in being able to proclaim that we are and will be. It is encouraging, however, that there is decreasing need to seek solace in these words. Over the past 10 to 15 years, both within and outside the Society of Friends, many have worked hard to break the silence. Many have worked hard to make us visible, and increasingly there is success in those efforts.

Each FLGC newsletter carries articles on how different yearly meetings are coming to grips with issues relating to gay and lesbian Friends. At the upcoming sessions of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, there is a threshing session on the subject, Should meetings sanction same-sex marriages? The Family Relations Committee of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting this month adopted a minute on same-sex marriages, which said in part:

> We are united in our belief that the question of same-sex marriages is not one which lesbian and gay Friends should need to carry alone within the yearly meeting. The time is past when we keep our gay and lesbian members standing at the door while it is decided whether their loving relationships are as worthy in the eyes of God

> and the meeting as are loving heterosexual relationships. The burden should not be fully on gay and lesbian Friends to prove the validity of same-sex relationships; rather, we need to recognize that there is an opportunity for all Friends to open themselves to knowing and understanding that which is different.

It seems significant to me that the minute states, "The time is past when we keep our gay and lesbian members standing at the door while it is decided whether their loving relationships are as worthy in the eyes of God and the meeting as are loving heterosexual relationships." I have no illusion that all are comfortable about our being inside the door. And I certainly have no illusions that we are going to be asked immediately to sit down and to become welcome as members of the family. I am clear, however, that those courageous men and women who have led the way both within and outside the Society of Friends have succeeded in having our presence known.

We are, I think, at a milestone. What comes to mind are the words of Winston Churchill that he voiced to the British people at a critical junction, early in the Second World War. He said, "It is not the end, it is not the beginning of the end, but it is the end of the beginning." I suggest, my friends, we have come to the end of the beginning, in our efforts to be heard and our efforts to be seen. Thus, we need to turn our energies and creativity to the tasks that lie ahead in the next stage, lest we be caught in the position of the young child who is frustrated at not being seen and acknowledged in the crowd of adults. "Listen to me! Listen to me! It's my turn to speak," she cries. But when the adults turn to listen, she has nothing to say, for getting their attention was the main thing she had wanted.

As adults we have the possibility of mastery. It did not exist when we were children. We can build our own home. We no longer need to wait for someone to open the closet door . . . We no longer need to try to find the key to unlock the parents' love. The key is within us.

Now that we increasingly are finding ourselves inside the door, what is it that we wish to say? What is it to which we wish to witness? Part of me wants to shout in response to that question that there is nothing to which we wish to witness. We don't need to prove ourselves. We don't need to be super people, totally whole and totally mature, to justify our existence as equals with straight Friends. That voice needs to be heard. Indeed, we do not need to prove our right to exist and to love people of the same sex. We do not need to try to meet their standards nor to go beyond those standards in being accepted. But then another,

deeper voice responds by asking yet another question: What do we want for ourselves? And what has our journey taught us thus far?

One very valuable thing that we have learned on our journey is about coming out. For although we have not fully arrived, we have learned a great deal, sometimes very painfully, about what it means to drop our mask, to come out of the closet and to be called by our own name. All human beings, gay or straight, need to come out, for we all carry an adversary within us who contradicts the outer front: the mask. For each of us the adversary is different. For some it is the angry side that is unacceptable. For some it is the fun-loving, frivolous side, which seems irresponsible. For some it is the imperfect side, which makes mistakes and draws attention to us. And for some it is the side that is different, our gayness or whatever, which we suppose will lead people to think less of us. The inner adversary is the one we try, usually unsuccessfully, to hide—to hide from others for fear they will reject us. The more we identify with our masks and turn our backs on our inner selves, the more fragmented we are, however. The central task, I believe, for all of us as human beings, gay or straight, is to grow past fragmentation, to drop our masks, to become whole. For only in wholeness can we become channels of the living spirit. Wholeness is our dark side and our light side together. It is the acceptance of ourselves, as we are. It is the acceptance of our humanness, acceptance of our capacity to make mistakes. It is letting go of the mask. It is being called by our own names. It is coming out.

I take these moments to comment on the individual and on wholeness before moving on to consider the nurturing of friendships and lover relationships, because taking responsibility for ourselves, as individuals, is the essential first step in the formation of any healthy, mature relationship with a friend or with a lover. We cannot use our relationships as a way of avoiding doing the work that we need to do as individuals. Our friendships and our lover relationships are nurtured by our quests for wholeness and in turn nurture those quests. Our friendship and lover relationships are the places in which we are at home. Metaphorically, they are the houses in which we live. Particularly in a world which is sometimes inhospitable and in which we may feel less than totally safe, we need to pay careful attention to how we build our relationships that are our home.

What do we want them to look like? What do we want them to be? Against what do those relationships, which are our home, need to protect us? To what do they need to open us?

Two examples come to mind as we think of the place in which we are at home. The first is characterized by a house that exists here in Philadelphia. It is located in Mount Airy, a nice section of single-family homes that have yards around them. They're not spacious homes but rather nice. As you come around a corner, you see a home sitting in front of you in which the owner has placed, first of all, along the curb, iron posts which are filled with concrete, lest you make the mistake of missing the turn and coming up in his yard. Immediately

beyond those posts is a cyclone fence, which encloses the yard. Across the driveway is a chain. And on the chain is hanging a sign that says, Keep Out. On the windows there are bars. And on the door there is a sign that says, No Trespassing. I think that is a very clear message. It comes to my mind every time I pass that house.

The second is a house which was described by a woman who participated in a workshop that I co-led. We asked people to bring to that workshop on wholeness something that, to them, symbolized wholeness. We had a wide variety of responses, but the thing that this particular woman brought were the blueprints to her home that she was having built in the southwest United States. She had participated actively in the design of those blueprints and had talked very fully with the architect about which way she wanted the house to face. She had thought very fully about the light coming into the house. She had thought very fully about the layout of the rooms within the house so that they would be inviting. She wanted it to be a place in which there was warmth, in which it was possible to live in caring relationships. These two examples represent the wide range of choices we have. Do we have a sense of strength in the house of our relationships so that we can welcome the stranger, the unknown? Or do we live in fear, barricading ourselves from the world?

> The central task . . . for all of us as human beings, gay or straight, is to grow past fragmentation, to drop our masks, to become whole. For only in wholeness can we become channels of the living spirit. Wholeness is our dark side and our light side together. It is the acceptance of ourselves, as we are, . . . acceptance of our capacity to make mistakes. It is letting go of the mask. It is being called by our own names. It is coming out.

As I have thought about the image of our friendships and lover relationships as being the places in which we are at home and have thought of those relationships as figuratively creating the house in which we live, I again thought of the stage of development at which we are in relation to the straight world. In so doing I am reminded of a phenomenon which I have encountered in my own life and in the lives of many people whom I have counseled. I see an analogy between this phenomenon and a phenomenon that I think needs to occur in our corporate lives as gays and lesbians.

The phenomenon is this: In the life of a child deep pain and struggle sometimes occur because the parents are not aware of, sensitive to, or caring about, some of the basic emotional needs of the child. Nurturing, to which I believe

the child has a basic right, does not occur. While in some of our lives this can be extreme and overt, for most of us this lack of nurturing is more subtle. It occurs in an overall setting in which we are physically well cared for and in which our parents believe they're giving us what we need. This lack of nurturing to parts of our lives and our selves, by the way, is very closely related to what we were speaking of a few minutes ago in regard to the inner adversary. For some children, that deep pain and struggle develops because they are expected to be strong and unafraid. At the same time they have voices within them which cry out that they need help and support. These voices go unheard and unacknowledged. In the parents' view there is no room for fear. And so fear in the child, even when it appears in normal ways, is deprecated. The message to the child is that it is bad to be afraid, bad to be needing. The mask which that child adopts is one of self-sufficiency.

For some children that deep pain and struggle occur because the parents' standards are so high that the child can never fully meet them. Often when they get close, the parents up the ante. From the parents' perspective their goal may well be to set high standards for their child and help him or her grow and achieve full potential. From the child's perspective, however, what it feels like is that one is never good enough. No matter how one tries, the unreserved love and acceptance of the parent is unavailable. There is pain in that, and what the child experiences as he or she either gives up or tries ever harder is that he or she is defective.

I could go on with examples such as the artistic, sensitive child in a family of intellectuals, who is pushed to become like the other family members and gets the message of not measuring up when he or she is different. The common thread to which I am pointing, however, is that the parents fail to see or value some aspect of the child which the child knows to be real and knows to exist within herself or himself. When that part is not nurtured and valued along with other parts by the parents, the message taken by the child is that that part is bad. It is to be hidden from the world. There is often a loneliness and deep anger in having a part denied which we know to be real.

As young children, dependent on our parents, we don't have the option of packing our bags and setting out on our own to find a place which is more nurturing to build a home in other relationships. Instead we adapt the best we can within that situation in order to survive. We continue the elusive struggle to win our parents' love either by doing violence to that part of ourself which we know to exist but which is not valued—putting it in the closet and trying to hide it—or we may continue to struggle with them to accept that part of us which we know to be real. But very often those efforts are unsuccessful.

When we are children, dependent on our parents and without independent access to other relationships in which we can be seen as whole and valuable, it is a good adaptation to focus our efforts in that parental relationship and to

struggle with or live in the hope that it will improve. It is a deep, deep trap, however, to get locked endlessly in that struggle. Even after we have reached adulthood, we remain locked into the struggle with our parents by our pain and our anger. We had a right to expect more than they gave us, and so we keep demanding it or we keep looking to them to finally say we're okay—seeking the full approval which they have never given.

Let me be clear. We no longer demand this or ask for it in words usually, but we do set up situations to get it. When we do that we nearly always come away disappointed. This is a game that goes on many years after we move out of our parents' home. The game will continue, to our real detriment, as long as we don't truly accept the limitations of our parents, don't accept their humanness, and don't forgive them for not fully giving to us and affirming us. Until we do, no matter how old we are, we remain, within ourselves, little children. We leave our fate in the hands of another because our sense of our self-worth is tied up not with whom we know ourselves to be but is tied up in that other person's view of us. While there is a deep, deep pain over not receiving what we should have received, not receiving what we had a right to receive, it is time to let die the hope that it will happen. It is time to recognize that as adults we have the possibility of mastery. It did not exist when we were children. We can build our own home. We no longer need to wait for someone to open the closet door, for someone to see beneath the mask. We can drop our mask and move toward wholeness. We no longer need to try to find the key to unlock the parents' love. The key is within us.

Taking responsibility for ourselves, as individuals, is the essential first step in the formation of any healthy, mature relationship with a friend or with a lover.

As gay men and lesbians we have, also too long, left that key in the hands of straight people. We have gotten past, by and large, allowing people to tell us we don't have a right to build our homes in same-sex relationships. But I ask you to consider whether we are not yet too vulnerable to the judgment that we don't know how to build a relationship; that even if we do build it, it won't last; it will fall down. I suggest that the time has come when we can know that those doubts exist in the hearts and minds of others, but stop letting that knowledge affect who we are. We need to stop trying to have straight people open the doors into their world, to prove to them we're okay. We need to build our homes and invite them into ours if they wish to come. Let me be very clear, I am not speaking of being separatists. I am speaking of operating from strength and conviction. I am speaking of taking back the power that we give to straight people when we ask them to affirm that we are okay. I am speaking of ceasing to turn to

straight people to seek a sense of our identity. Let us be the people God called us to be. Let us move toward the wholeness for which we have the seed within. It is time for us as lesbians and gay men to let go of anger and bitterness over what has not been bestowed on us—to let go of anger and bitterness over the fact that straight people have not nurtured us more fully, individually and as couples. We need to stop using their failure to do so as an excuse.

Those perhaps feel like harsh words, and I'll be glad to elaborate on them later if they're not clear, because it is important, I think, that they be understood. The central message that I am attempting to communicate is my confidence in our capacity to be whole and centered regardless of whether the scales on others' eyes allow them to see it.

A Vision of Wholeness in Our Relationships

Let's turn our attention, then, to what we need to keep in mind as we envision our friendships and lover relationships, and as we think of nurturing them and building them into a strong home in which we live. If we are articulating our vision of wholeness in our friendships and lover relationships, what needs to go into the design? Let me share with you ten factors which I consider essential to building relationships that are whole.

First, while those relationships need to be a place in which we are safe, they cannot be a place to hide. If a relationship is to be safe it must be a place in which we are known, where it is safe to be vulnerable, where our strengths are welcomed and affirmed and our shortcomings are accepted. And the safety in the relationship must be based on our sense of trust rather than on dominating others or holding on to them in false ways. We need to discover the power of powerlessness.

At the same time, a relationship cannot be a place to hide from the world. To be there because we are afraid to be elsewhere is a reason that ultimately must undermine the very foundation of that relationship. If we are afraid to be elsewhere we must be compliant. We must sell our souls in little pieces day by day to avoid conflict. Then one day we realize that there is nothing left of us except a sense of nothingness or a sense of rage.

Second, there needs to be a sense of confidence and trust in our co-builders of those relationships, so that in addition to doing our part well, being able and ready to give, we are also able to relax and allow the other to build. We must be able to receive from him or her. That trust is not to be given blindly. Nevertheless, a pressing question to which most of us need, I think, to give some thought, is whether or not we are really open to receiving. Are we open to yielding control? Are we open to trusting the other in the relationship, leaving ourself in their hands at times?

Third, I think that we need, as did that woman in the workshop on wholeness, to pay attention how we place our homes. I think that we need to face the sun, to face the light, to open ourselves and our friendships and our lover relationships to experiencing and nurturing the support of other people for ourselves as a couple. We cannot survive well in darkness. We cannot survive without other people acknowledging who we are. We need to give that to each other. So we need, as I say, to place our houses facing the light and being open to that kind of support.

As we think of the placement of our homes I think we need also to be aware of the elements that endanger us, the hidden springs which will wash away the foundation. These hidden springs are sometimes the anger we find generated within ourselves from the outside world that we carry home with us into our relationships. Sometimes when it's not safe to get angry and be open about it in the world outside, we bring it home and take it out on those whom we trust. That erodes the relationship if that keeps up too much. Another spring, a hidden spring that can erode the foundations of a relationship, is our placing too great expectations on the relationship—expecting it to meet all of our needs. Or similarly, when we don't feel okay within ourselves, we mistakenly put responsibility on our friend or on our lover for not making us feel better.

Fourth, as we build our relationships, I think we need to maintain enough space—in order to have room to be separate as well as together. Several years ago I heard a message in meeting for worship which spoke of the importance of the spaces on a page—that it really is the spaces which make it possible to read the words, to gain meaning from the words which are there. The space in our relationship punctuates the relationship. We need to have the times apart if we are to assess and build in our times together.

Fifth, I feel that we need to build the relationship strong enough to withstand stress and conflict. That means being mindful of the weak points and having the courage to face them openly, not hiding our heads in the sand. It means being courageous enough, when we see a part of the structure that may be crumbling a little bit, to draw our attention to it, to draw the attention of our friend or our partner to it so that we can perhaps shore it up. I think that one of the saddest things that I have ever encountered in my counseling over the years was a situation that was shared by a couple who had been married for 25 years. Incidentally, this was a straight couple, but I think that's irrelevant. In one of their sessions, one of them happened to remark to the other how very sad she felt when she saw how their neighbors across the street said good-bye to each other in the morning, when the one person went off to work. The response of the other person was, "Oh, no, I've been looking at that couple all these years, too, and wondering why you didn't want to say good-bye to me that way." They had been living in fear over the years, depriving themselves of something which they could have had because they did not have the courage to say, "I'm frightened. I

see a weakness in our marriage." We need to be courageous in pointing to the spots that need shoring up as well.

Sixth, we need to know that no house is perfect. Houses, when we move into them, may look and feel perfect for a little while, until we experience some of the day-to-day living. It's one of the beauties of falling in love. It's a very lovely, lovely period, and there's really nothing to take its place. But, even as we live in a house and discover its shortcomings, when we live in a relationship for a period of time, we discover its shortcomings, too. We have a choice when we encounter those shortcomings, as we inevitably will. We can say, "Oh, I made the wrong choice. This is not a place where I want to live because there are cracks in the wall. There are failings I had not seen." Or we can, with some humor and grace, accept the fact that there are imperfections and really look to see if there is some way in which those imperfections can be assimilated into the relationship. There are, indeed, times when the judgment to leave is the correct one, to acknowledge that we did make a mistake. I want to be clear; I'm not saying that we must stay in a relationship at any price. But what I am saying is that part of maturing in a relationship is moving into that second stage, facing it when we discover some of the shortcomings, and seeing if together we can find ways to improve them.

I am speaking of ceasing to turn to straight people to seek a sense of our identity. Let us be the people God called us to be. Let us move toward the wholeness for which we have the seed within. It is time for us as lesbians and gay men to let go of anger and bitterness over what has not been bestowed on us.

Seventh, we need to make a place for the Living God in our relationships. There is a Spirit that is greater than ourselves. We can only ever fully achieve the potentiality of ourselves, in my opinion both individually and corporately, if we open ourselves to that Spirit and find a way to let it work in our relationship.

Eighth, I think that we need to take time for care and maintenance of that house we're building. That caring, I think, has to come off the top, in terms of the time we spend. It can't be continually put off, or we will pay the price for it. We need to recognize what our personal escapes and what our personal excuses are for postponing the task of maintenance of our relationships. I think that sometimes, for some of us, over-involvement in committees, over-involvement in Quaker work, are good excuses for putting off some of the harder work of maintaining our relationships. I wonder if, to some extent, when we move from relationship to relationship, when we have extensive sexual contacts, whether that too, is not a way, at times, of avoiding the hard work of building a relationship—

whether it's not a way of avoiding the intimacy and the closeness that needs to be worked on beyond simply our sexual relationship.

I think that the daily maintenance is what matters. Permanency in a relationship is a by-product. It is not a goal. We will only have permanency, I think, if we recognize that each day is the only day in which we are living and that we cannot insure tomorrow. The thing over which we do have control is this moment, this now, in which we live. We must pay attention to that and build our relationships as though the future depended on *now,* on *today.*

Ninth, I would suggest that we build beauty and excitement into our friendships and lover relationships by not being afraid of that which is different—by discovering the complementarity in differences. Trust will be very important as we try to cope with our stylistic differences in building our relationships. For whatever crazy reason, we tend to pick people who are opposites to us. So we are ready to start building, and we find that they don't approach it the way we do. That can be so frustrating, because *we* know The Right Way and *they* won't listen!

I think that the daily maintenance is what matters. Permanency in a relationship is a by-product. It is not a goal. We will only have permanency, I think, if we recognize that each day is the only day in which we are living and that we cannot insure tomorrow.

Trust will be very important as we try to cope with that. When trust exists, our stylistic differences will be complementary and enrich the relationship. If trust breaks down then our differences will be polarizing. Let me offer an example of what I mean. One stylistic difference that occurs frequently in couples as they approach the building of a relationship, is that one person will tend to be fairly outgoing and expressive of his or her feelings, while the other might be more reserved or taciturn. One partner may assume that the other person is going to remain fixed in one pattern, and begin to compensate. The person who tends to be expressive and outgoing does so for both people. "Somebody had better stir things up a little bit or else we'll never talk about our problems." And at the same time the other person is perhaps compensating by saying, "If somebody doesn't keep calm and quiet in this relationship, then we're going to be screaming at each other all the time." That's a situation in which trust has broken down. The assumption is that if I alone don't take responsibility for how this proceeds, then I am going to be overwhelmed by the way in which my partner deals with things. If we have trust, we know that part of what we value in the other person is the difference which they bring to us. Those of us who are excitable can value calmness if we don't feel that calmness is going to overwhelm us. Those of us who are calm can value being

stirred to express our feelings more directly. That can be there if we trust that we can be enriched by the complementary. Otherwise, we find ourselves going further and further to our own extremes.

Finally, tenth, let the home of our relationships be a place of hospitality. This will not be without pain, for there will be times when those to whom we open ourselves take advantage of us. The paradox I have come to accept, however, is that the only way to be invulnerable is to be totally vulnerable—is to let another know that we have no need to attack, and yet to know within ourselves that if we are attacked we will survive. It will hurt, but we will have the strength to bear it and to survive it.

I envision a world in which people are no longer frightened by that which is different from themselves, a world in which we see beneath skin color or beyond physical or mental handicap, beyond differences in sexual orientation, and discover the person who is there to meet us. Our vision isn't stretched by encounters with that which is not different from us. We have got to have the courage to recognize that what we do not know is perhaps far greater than what we do know. There is a power at work in the world that is beyond the comprehension of our conscious minds. It is that power that unites all living things. But the transformative experience of that unity can only be achieved if we let go of our impulse to know everything, in order to be safe; we need to live with the vulnerability of unknowing.

There will indeed be times when we stumble and fall as we build our homes. But it is better that we begin the task of building a place we can call home than leaving our fate in the hands of other people. There is a strength which we do have as gay men and lesbians. There are things we have learned which are deeply valuable. Let us claim them.

They will never have the comfort of our silence again.

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