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

**Published by
Friends for Lesbian, Gay,
Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns**

Published by
Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns

FLGBTQC website: http://flgbtqc.quaker.org

Cover Illustration by
Melanie Weidner
melanie@createstudio.com

Book Design and Production by
Robert Leuze
Robert Leuze & Associates
245 West 104th Street, 16 C
New York, NY 10025
RLeuze@rcn.com
212-662-3252

Complete Contents

"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.

❦

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

❦

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

Helping and Healing

Ahavia Lavana

Keynote Address
Midwinter Gathering,
Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns
February 1988
Fifteenth Street Meetinghouse, New York City

I am obviously completely inadequate to meet the challenges which reality places before me. However, fortunately or unfortunately, I happen to be the best person available.

I've heard the phrase, "when your blood runs cold," and I've experienced that. The night my son told me he had ARC (which was later diagnosed as AIDS), I felt my blood run cold. My reaction was paralyzing numbness and fear. I cry easily, but it was past tears and it was past prayers.

But I'm the person that I am, and I like to take control. I don't know if any of you ever noticed that *[Laughter]*. So by the next morning I had made about 20 phone calls. I had talked to Burroughs Laboratory. I found out all the support groups in the Philadelphia area. We had an appointment with the local Disease Control doctor. I needed to feel that I was taking control of the situation.

In our lives, the idea of being in control is very important. Many times when we ask ourselves, Why did something happen? we'd rather blame ourselves—because it means we have some control. We might have done something the wrong way, or we *should* have done something differently—or this or that should have happened. A friend of mine was having a baby and had planned fantastically: She had $10,000 in the bank and a freezer full of food; she had coaches and people for support and all the things that one wants to have when one is having a baby. During the delivery the baby died. Lots of people said, "You shouldn't have gone to that hospital; you shouldn't have done this; that

was wrong." But sometimes things just happen. That's scary, because we can't protect ourselves from things that "just happen." We'd rather say, "I should have done this; it was my fault." We'd rather blame ourselves than accept what is happening beyond our control and make the best of it.

I don't think that all these hard things are happening for a greater and wider good, but we can make some aspect better, or we can *not*. What we do with what we cannot control is up to us.

Helping:

A lot of people said, What can we do to help?

Find a cure for AIDS? Help me win a magazine contest? You know, it's hard to think, in that stressful situation, what someone can do to help. The people who were the most helpful? One friend sent over a giant box of food. There was a whole meal, a beautiful tablecloth, candles—and a Mozart tape! It was fantastic. Her idea was to feed the soul *and* the body. Several Friends sent over casseroles and tried to think themselves of things that they could do, not putting another burden on me by asking, "What can we do to help?"

Contrary to all the publicity about the oppression of people with AIDS, in my experience—David [Wertheimer] has his own experiences—there is more lovingness and more kindness than not: the nurses and the technicians; the technician who wouldn't put on gloves when drawing blood; the dentist who said, "Of course, does he need more care?" These acts of kindness felt like cool water on a parched throat. At work, where I had to explain all my absences and the absences I knew I was going to have, there were more people—very straight people—who were more loving than not.

Not helpful was the pharmacist who at first said he didn't know what AZT was; he couldn't order it; couldn't get it; he had never heard of it; and it was experimental anyway.

I think that we create a cycle that influences what we receive in our lives. If you expect people to be loving, you get more loving back than if you don't expect people be loving. Of course, I don't go to Nazi rallies and Ku Klux Klan meetings; I try to be selective about the kind of people I'm seeking and hoping will be loving.

Some of the things that were not helpful: A friend asked, "How's your son?" and I said, "Oh, he's really doing well." And she said, "Denial is an important defense." *[Laughter]* If that's what I'm doing, leave me alone!

At Friends General Conference last year we had a little boy who was living with us who had a lot of problems. One day he was having an especially hard time; he was kicking and flailing and screaming while I was trying to hold him,

to keep him from running away. A woman came up to me, put her hand on my shoulder, and said, "At times like this, prayer does help." *[Laughter]* And I thought, Would you like to hold him while I pray? *[Laughter]*

Not helpful were all the people who asked, Does he know how he got it? Does he know whom he got it from?

What does that matter? It just means somebody else is sick, and it's irrelevant.

Not helpful was the Friend who, after meeting when I was upset, asked what was wrong. I told her my son had AIDS, and she said, "Well, I'm not surprised."

Situations involving money were often hard. It's easier to talk about sex in this society than to talk about money. Friends can sometimes insulate themselves with committees and committee processes. A representative of one group said, We want to help and we want to know what we can do to help. At that point I *had* set up support systems; I had friends; and we were talking to the people we needed to talk to and to gather around us. I said, "Well, you know, we need money." "Well, oh, you have to come and talk to our committee," was the response.

I didn't need more folks to talk to. That response was not helpful. It's easier to ask oneself, What do I really want to do to help? One Friend said she knew we were getting a lot of attention at the beginning of the crisis, but she wanted to know what she could do later on, when things calmed down and people forgot. People tend to react in crisis, and it was reassuring to know that that person is there for the long haul.

One friend—the woman who lost the baby—is legally blind, yet she sent ten dollars for David to buy vitamins. That was very helpful because we know where it came from—from her heart.

Not helpful was the pharmacist who at first said he didn't know what AZT was; he couldn't order it; couldn't get it; he had never heard of it; and it was experimental anyway. *[Laughter]* He was my HMO pharmacist. He wanted a thousand dollars up front; and then I would be reimbursed by the HMO. I'm suing him.

But my second pharmacist went out of his way to make sure that David's prescription was there. He calculated when it would be running out, so it wouldn't take two to three days to reorder. Many people really care! In my experience of the medical profession, more have been helpful than not.

Whenever we survive an immediate crisis, the change that has upset us so much becomes part of the norm. And then it *becomes* the norm. It's what we live with. As much as we are changed by it, we are still ourselves. And what we come into it with, we are still that. We need to think past pain and past fear and be who we are. For me, the meeting for worship is more a resting place right now than a place of prayer. And that's fine—because that's what I need it to be. I believe this world is a better place for our being in it. I try to live very much in the present, and to think that we have this moment. One of the support groups

that I'm going to—it's for families of people with AIDS—spends a lot of time anticipating the future, to be prepared "for what's going to happen." That just doesn't seem right to me. I have this moment. We have what we're experiencing now. I don't know what will happen in the future or how to be prepared for it. I want all the information I can have. But you can really paralyze yourself with fear in this situation.

Healing:

When I asked what people wanted me to talk about here, they mentioned helping the men and women work together and heal together.

That's something I have given much thought to, and I have many ideas about what I would like men to do, to help. *[Laughter]*

Talking about the history in this meetinghouse:* Ten years ago FLGC met in Philadelphia and nine years ago we met here. Ten years ago we changed the name from Friends Committee for Gay Concerns to Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns. Nine years ago, here, we had more discussion about that change. And some of us women went off into the lounge, and we closed the door and wouldn't come out. *[Laughter]* (I notice that we're not still there in the lounge.)

I thought about what I come to FLGC for. Midwinter, for me, is as much to be with the men as to be with the women. Where I work and in the average world, I don't meet a whole lot of real nice guys. *[Laughter]* Neither do all of you, right? So I come here to give myself hope, to dissipate thoughts of wanting to take a gun up in a tower somewhere and start shooting everybody. I want all the men here to be totally aware, totally supportive, and *allies*. I want them all to be here just to hear how women have been hurt and how women are upset. That's not why you all come here, I realize. *[Laughter]* But that's why I want you here: to be supportive; to understand, when we women want to be separate; to stand at the door and talk to other men who might want to come in; to *be there* for us.

Sometimes I have come to the conference to be angry, to be upset with men and to let them know it, and to have them listen continuously to my being upset—whether we have agreed on it or not, which is not always fair. This is OK to do, but there has to be some previous "Listen, I want to be upset with you, is that all right?" *[Laughter]* So it's a wonder you haven't all gone off to the men's room and locked the door! *[Laughter]* You don't have a lounge? *[Laughter]* Something for liberation.

But when anybody comes and says, "I want to be separate from you," that's scary. "You've hurt me so much; I'm so angry; I'm fed up with you; and I don't want to deal with you any more." It's scary because the person might never come back.

---

* A reference to David Wertheimer's address at the same gathering, published in this volume.—Ed.

I'm in an interracial relationship, and sometimes Inspira wants to be with other black women. She might not come back. This is a possibility. But it's more important for me to be supportive of her need to be separate. Hopefully it's also more of a guarantee that she'll come back! *[Laughter]*

This organization has come a long way in nine years. Enough men have listened so that I still want to come back. And enough men have been supportive and listened to each other. Maybe some of us are less angry. Maybe some of us have found other places to be. Some of our women come to our Quaker Lesbian Conference and not to this. But I feel we've grown a lot. It's important to me that the men I love are here.

I wear this button that someone gave me: "I'm the mother of all things and all things should wear a sweater." *[Laughter]* And a condom. *[Laughter]* But that is something else that I bring—that might not be wanted—to be mothering. I want you here to be my allies, to be my brothers; to be strong for me and to understand my pain; to fight for women's rights or whatever; but to be here. That's really scary, because if you're not here, I would miss you. That's part of a different message than I would have given if I had been asked to speak on relationships between men and women in FLGC last year, or the year before, or before AIDS. So my mothering feeling is more on top than my "angry, be there strong for me, men" feeling. (I'm needing you and wanting you to be there, strong for me, too.)

> The idea of being in control is very important. Many times when we ask, Why did something happen? we'd rather blame ourselves — because it means we have some control. We might have done something the wrong way . . . We'd rather say, "It was my fault" than accept what is beyond our control. . . .

I always tell my children: "If I could protect you and keep you wrapped in plastic up in a drawer and look at you once in a while, you know, I would do that." *[Laughter]* I truly would!

The first time David went to Christopher Street he was with Inspira, Blanche, and me—he was about 16—and he wanted to go without his coat and walk around. I chased him up the street with his coat, yelling, "You're going to be cold." *[Laughter]* If that's not the height of mothering!

I find that I look at different guys—Are you too thin?—just worrying about everybody, fussing with people, and realizing that that's not an adult relationship. That might be good sometimes; that's one of the reasons that I play at it, and put it out as play—because some parts are very serious and not always good. We need to be friends; we need to see each other as people. There is a phrase in a

book I like, [Marge Piercy's] *Woman on the Edge of Time*: "A person's got to do what a person's got to do." And that's true. People have their own lives, and they decide how they're going to live them. They decide what they're going to do with them. Sometimes you just have to let things go. So you let them go out in the street without their coats on.

I'd like to close by reading this passage from the Bible. I've changed two words. *[Laughter]* Inspira told me I have to read it the way it's written, but that we have different versions of the Bible, so I could find what I liked best. But I really do have to change two words. It's from the *Good News Bible*, 1 Corinthians 13. Love.

> I may be able to speak the language of [people] and even of angels, but if I have not love, my speech is no more than a noisy gong or a clanging bell. I may have the gift of inspired preaching. I may have all knowledge and understand all secrets. I may have all the faith needed to move mountains. But if I have no love I am nothing. I may give away everything I have, and even give up my body to be burned, but if I have no love this does me no good. Love is patient and kind. It is not jealous or conceited or proud. Love is not ill-mannered or selfish or irritable. Love does not keep a record of wrongs. Love is not happy with evil, but is happy with the truth. Love never gives up. Its faith and hope and patience never fail. Love is eternal. There are inspired messages, but they are temporary. There are gifts of speaking in strange tongues, but they will cease. There is knowledge, but it will pass. For our gifts of knowledge and of inspired messages are only partial. But when what is perfect comes, what is partial will disappear. When I was a child, my speech, feelings, and thinking were all those of a child; now that I am [grown], I have no more use for childish ways. What we see now is like a dim image in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. What I know now is only partial; then it will be complete—as complete as God's knowledge of me. Meanwhile, these three things remain, faith, hope, and love; and the greatest of these is love.

Ahavia Lavana co-chaired the Friends Conference for Gay Concerns in 1978, when the conference literature identified her as "a happily married mother of two children, active member of Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Committee on the Civil Rights of Homosexuals, and counselor in the field of mental health." She notes that the marriage ended one year later; she now works as a quality assurance system analyst; and the committee has been laid down. Her life is enriched by Shante, now 18 years old, whom she raised since Shante was a baby. Her grown son, Ron, and his wife, Sue, have made Ahavia a grandmother of Ryan, age 9. Hunter died of AIDS complications in 1991 at the age of 25. Ahavia has maintained a loving friendship with a dear womyn, InspirAmazon, over 25 years.

Ahavia Lavana and Shante