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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"'Accept It Gracefully'— Keeping Our Creative Gifts Alive" © 1991 Becky Birtha. The poems: "The Healing Poem," "A Deeper Healing," "Accept It Gracefully," "How It Happened / How I Became a Lesbian," "A Letter to My Daughter at Sixteen Months," "Poem for the Loss of the Relationship," "Counting My Losses," "Everything," "Eleven Months" © 1991 Becky Birtha.The poems: "New Year's Eve Race Street Meeting of Friends" and "Love Poem to Myself" © 1987, 1989, 1991 Becky Birtha. Poems reprinted with permission.

Elise Boulding's "The Challenge of Nonconformity" first appeared in the October 1987 *Friends Journal*.

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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

Each of Us Inevitable

Elizabeth Watson

Keynote Address, Midwinter Gathering
Friends Committee for Gay Concerns
February 20, 1977
Fifteenth Street Meetinghouse, New York City

I speak to you today as one who knew early in life the inward rage, the feeling of helplessness, of those who are judged not on their merits, or their achievements, or their potentialities, but on what I will call their "givenness."

As a child, I adored my eloquent grandfather, a pulpit orator of the old school, and I thought being a preacher would be the most exciting thing in the world to be when I grew up. In time this deepened into a genuine call to the ministry. But I was put down on all sides: Girls can't be preachers, I was told. I must have imagined God had called *me,* for God, being male, couldn't possibly speak through a woman. If I really wanted a career in the church, why not be a missionary, or a director of religious education? Preaching was for men. Being ordained was a masculine right not open to women in my denomination. Women preachers were open to ridicule, the butt of tired jokes.

When I was in college, I had a dear friend with whom I shared many interests—we both loved poetry, were sincere Christians, were concerned about human justice. We would have liked to room together, but that was impossible, for Evelyn was black. She could not live in a dorm because of her givenness, and the dean of women would not grant permission for me to live out in town with her in a segregated black home. There was not a restaurant on campus or in town where we could go together to share a Coke. Nor could we double-date at the Junior Prom, for black students had their own separate, but unequal, dance. In an English class we shared, I found these lines from Walt Whitman's "Song of Myself":

> I speak the password primeval! I give the sign of democracy!
> By God! I will have nothing that all cannot have their counterpart of on the same terms!

I have always read that line:

> By God! I will have nothing that Evelyn cannot have her counterpart of on the same terms!

George and I have spent much of our life campaigning for civil rights and equal opportunities, and we raised our family in an interracial neighborhood in Chicago.

Later, while George served as a conscientious objector in World War II, I worked at a settlement house to support our three children. The two rooms we occupied there adjoined the rooms of a staff couple newly arrived from Nazi Germany. At first they kept their distance. Later they told me they did not see how anyone could be a conscientious objector in that war, and they resented the fact that George was not willing to fight Hitler. But their reserve melted and our friendship grew and deepened. In time they trusted me sufficiently to share something of the horror out of which they had come. They shared their givenness. Part of me has looked out on the world with Jewish eyes ever since. I have had difficulty identifying myself as a Christian since then. So many of the people who did Hitler's bidding were "good Christians," and so many who kept silent were also. My reluctance to call myself a Christian does not, of course, interfere with my allegiance to the Jew, Jesus of Nazareth, nor my accepting his teaching as the norm for my life.

Still later, our children studied music with a gifted man in Chicago, and I found how different piano teaching could be from what I had endured as a child. So I began studying piano again, with their teacher. He and I often played together—piano four hands concerts, piano-organ programs at the church where he was organist and choirmaster, and I accompanied programs at our daughter's school where he was the music supervisor. We made beautiful music together. He is gay, and I came to know the terrible price that must be paid mentally and emotionally for living a double life—trying to project a false public image, because of the very real and justified fear of losing jobs, pupils, and acceptance in a community. Over and over again he'd had to start fresh in some new place, because of his givenness. I know what this man is like when his guard is down and he feels free to be himself. And I long for a world in which he can be that genuine person all the time, everywhere.

About this time we read the landmark publication of British Friends called *Toward a Quaker View of Sex,* which called for an end to discriminatory laws against homosexuals. I think there is great validity in the insight of that

pamphlet that what makes a relationship sinful is exploitation, not whether it is legal. We all know that a great deal of exploitation goes on in legal marriages. What makes any relationship, any action, right is caring—caring for the other person, for things, for the earth, and for oneself. George and I put words from Walt Whitman in our marriage ceremony to express what we wanted our marriage to be: "a union of equal comrades." I think that is a right goal for any relationship, not only between consenting adults, but between children and adults. George and I have been together 42 years—we became engaged on February 22, 1935. Sometimes when I tell young people that I found marriage liberating, they respond, "You've got to be kidding." But it is true. We have kept the goal of being a union of equal comrades, granting each other space to be ourselves and to grow toward wholeness.

George's first teaching job was at Southern Illinois University, which practiced the same kind of racial segregation we'd known in college. We made no public statements about civil rights our first few months there, or otherwise stuck our necks out. But in November when the first big dance of the year came, and the black students were planning their separate but unequal dance—they asked if we would be faculty sponsors and chaperons. Already they had spotted George as a faculty member who would treat them fairly, go out of his way to be helpful, who saw them as people. I wept for joy that they wanted us to be with them that night.

What makes a relationship sinful is exploitation, not whether it is legal. We all know that a great deal of exploitation goes on in legal marriages.

And I felt the same emotion when the invitation came to speak to you today. I feel my utterances on behalf of gay rights have been so minimal and so ineffectual. Thank you for trusting me. Thank you for wanting me to be with you today.

Compared to the kind of oppression most of you have faced, I cannot claim to have been very oppressed. Early in adulthood I came into the Religious Society of Friends, abandoning my plans for the professional ministry. I found an acceptance of women and their gifts that was healing, and a place for a wider kind of ministry for my life. I wish black Friends had found our Society equally healing. And I long that Friends of any sexual orientation may also be accepted throughout our Society as beautiful, authentic people, without having to struggle to get grudging statements of support for your rights, and wondering whether people talk about you behind your backs.

And I know people doubly oppressed. I represent Friends United Meeting on the National Council of Churches' Commission on Women in Ministry. I have a friend there, Joan Martin, who was the first black woman to enter Princeton

Theological Seminary, and last fall she was the first black woman to be ordained in the Presbyterian church. She's come a long and lonely and rough road. I have another friend on the Commission who has been triply oppressed. Dolores Jackson is a woman who felt called to the ministry. She is black, and she is openly lesbian. She is now an ordained minister. She lives here in New York City and is one of the ministers of the Metropolitan Community church, which, as you know, is a gay church. How tragic that gay Christians were so unwelcome in Christ's church that they had to found their own!

I have pondered a long time as to what to say here today. I feel I must speak out of what I know. I know that oppression is a two-edged sword, and must be fought on both sides at once. On the one hand, it comes from the outside in laws, customs, attitudes, and mores, imposed arbitrarily by the dominant group in a society. You know far more about your oppression than I do and can document it fully, so I will not dwell on this face of oppression. As Friends, we are called to combat oppression wherever it occurs. We are called to help empower the poor, the blacks, the Native and Hispanic Americans, women, gays, and anyone else who may be victims of disaster, injustice, indignity, discrimination, or any other form of oppression. I have constantly written and spoken about this for many years, and will not repeat it here.

The other side of oppression is inward. It is the brainwashing that almost inevitably happens to the oppressed—the nagging doubts as to whether the dominant view that we are inferior may be right, feelings of unworthiness and inferiority that plague us. And this side of oppression must also be fought vigorously. I have known this as a woman—the very real doubt I still contend with that I am as intelligent and quick as men. A simple illustration will suffice. I was brainwashed that girls are not good in math—that's a boy's field. So I took as little math as I could get away with and did indifferently in it. I hated math and math classes. In middle age I went through a battery of aptitude tests when I was changing jobs and was found to have a high aptitude for mathematics. I was incredulous and questioned whether the counselor was really looking at my scores. Many women I know struggle with self-doubts about their competence and their intelligence, their ability to make it on equal terms in a male-dominated world, not on *Playboy* terms.

I think the cruelest putdown of the oppressed is the insidious citing of the Bible as the authority for oppression. I don't need to tell you that Paul is the main source of authority for oppression of women as well as of gays, to those who take the Bible literally. Paul says, "I would that all men were even as myself." (1 Cor:7:7) To which I can only rejoin, God forbid!

I have found it healing to reread the Bible in the light of feminist scholarship, finding things in the third chapter of Genesis, for instance, that indicate God is not quite as clearly on the side of the male chauvinists as they think. If you'd like

to reread parts of the Bible in the light of gay scholarship, I commend to you a book, just published this winter, by a Jesuit priest, Father John McNeill, called *The Church and the Homosexual.* It is published with the permission of, if not the wholehearted endorsement of, the Catholic hierarchy. You'll find some new slants on Sodom and Gomorrah in this book! And likewise on Paul.

I asked a friend planning to come to this conference what I should say, and he answered, Help us accept ourselves. More than 50 years ago, my call to the ministry came to me in the words that open the 40th chapter of Isaiah: "Comfort ye, Comfort ye my people, saith your God." I long to fulfill my calling today and to be a channel of God's peace and love. I look over this room now and see my friends, you whom I have known briefly and you whom I have known for years. I am moved to try to thank you for the creative beauty many of you have shared, for the spiritual insights others have given me, and for the warmth of love and friendship freely poured out to me. I love you, and I love you *for* your givenness, not in spite of it.

Karl Jung in statements in support of no longer classifying homosexuality as a mental illness says, ". . . homosexuality gives the individual a great capacity for friendship . . . and may even rescue friendship between the sexes from its limbo of the impossible." From my friendships with gay men, I know experientially that he is right. I value equally my friendships with gay women. Some of the sanest, most whole, most beautiful women I know are at this conference. I rejoice that I have lived to see the day when women have more options than being trapped into marriages for which they have no vocation. Women can now claim freedom to be themselves and to grow into their own wholeness.

Without having planned it that way, I have found myself the last few years in a specialized kind of ministry to gay people, because I work for a man whose life story and whose words are peculiarly healing, and it is sometimes my privilege to be a channel for them.

Sometimes people are too big for the centuries into which they are born. Their vision is so far ahead of their contemporaries' that their message is not heard, or else is rejected or denounced by their neighbors and fellow citizens. Those of a later time, however, hear their words and recognize them as authentic and relevant. They find strength and courage and illumination in them.

Such a man lived on Long Island and in New York City in the last century. His name was Walt Whitman, and he knew he was speaking to those who would come after him:

> It avails not, time nor place—distance avails not,
> I am with you, you men and women of a generation, or ever so
> many generations hence. . . . —Crossing Brooklyn Ferry

He was born in Huntington, on Long Island, May 31, 1819. In one of his loveliest poems he describes his childhood. It begins:

> There was a child went forth every day,
> And the first object he looked upon, that object he became,
> And that object became part of him for the day or a certain part of the day,
> Or for many years or stretching cycles of years. . . .

I know the house from which the child went forth. I work there. It is now a New York State Historic Site, on a quiet acre of land beside a busy highway, across from a huge shopping center, the Walt Whitman Mall. Busloads of schoolchildren, scout troops, college English classes, scholars, poetry lovers, families, the curious and the bored tramp through it, or linger over the displays of Whitmaniana. And there are others who come, as to a shrine, often with copies of *Leaves of Grass* in their pockets. My job is to evoke "the Whitman presence" for each of them, if I can. And the job is a joy, for Whitman is very much "alive and well" (his words) to me, and he still lives in the house his father built.

Walt's father built the house with love, for it was here he brought his bride, Louisa van Walser. Walt was the second child to be born in the big bed in the "borning room" behind the parlor. Louisa Whitman was a Quaker, and the photograph hanging in the house shows her in Quaker cap and gown. She had virtually no education, but she was a good manager, kind and placid. The first child of the marriage was difficult, probably retarded, and Louisa really rejoiced in her second, sturdy, bright, curious Walt. Probably unconsciously she imparted to him her Quaker faith in the goodness, the Light, inherent in everyone—especially himself. Self-confidence, the sense of his own worth and beauty, made this a child who "went forth" to explore the world and to try, in some degree, to change it.

It was well that Louisa was a good manager, for Walter Whitman, the father, was dogged by failure. He was a good carpenter, judging by the house he built, but a poor businessman. He never could support adequately his growing family. When Walt was a child, the family moved to Brooklyn, where the father hoped for a turn of fortune. But it didn't happen. Walt left school at eleven, and went forth to find a job to help support the family. He worked first as an errand boy for a druggist, who took him to the Brooklyn Library to get a card. Walt became a constant reader. He also frequented museums, went to lectures, and became an opera lover and concertgoer. There seems no area of human knowledge in the 19th century that he did not know and write about: astronomy, geology, biology, geography, philosophy, literature, art, music, Eastern religions. He was an

exceedingly well educated man. In "Song of Myself," published in 1855, there is a passage which poetically summarizes the sweep of evolution, four years before Darwin's *Origin of Species.*

Walt soon left the druggist's employ and apprenticed himself in the printing trade. He learned to set type and absorbed all the facets of putting out a newspaper. He became an adult early. His daily associates were mechanics, ferryboat pilots, stage drivers, people who worked with their hands and drank in the taverns. He loved their robust vitality and rejoiced in their earthiness.

As a young man he taught school in one-room schools in several towns on Long Island. It was the custom for the teacher to receive part of the living by "boarding around," that is, staying with different families in the school for a week or two at a time. In many homes there was not a guest room, or even a guest bed, and the teacher had to share a bed with one of his pupils. In a community out on the eastern end of the Island, a pupil with whom Walt had to share a bed, perhaps disgruntled at being disciplined, told his schoolmates that Walt had made advances under the covers—which may or may not be true. The boy's parents rose up in arms. By this time Walt had moved on to another house, and when a mob gathered outside, the mother in that house hid him in the attic. But he was eventually found, tarred and feathered, and run out of town. He was ill for some time afterward.

The curious thing is that this little wooden schoolhouse is to this day known as "The Sodom School." And there is a move afoot to preserve it, *because* Whitman once taught there.

Whitman decided to give up teaching and go back to journalism. He came back to Huntington, bought a secondhand press, and started a newspaper, *The Long Islander,* which still comes out each Thursday with his name as founder on the masthead. It was a one-man paper. He gathered the news, wrote the articles, set them in type, ran off the papers, and then peddled them. In a year he had a going paper, sold it, and moved back to the city. He was associated with a number of journalistic enterprises over the years, and was at one time editor of the *Brooklyn Eagle.*

So a young man grew in Brooklyn, learning to express himself in words, finding out about the world and the universe and the vast range of human knowledge, and falling in love with people. He longed to create a new kind of poetry to celebrate America, the vast stretches of the frontiers, the pioneering spirit, the beautiful democratic ideals. He wanted to encompass the sweep, the grandeur, the excitement of this new nation, still in its first century.

So a book also grew in Brooklyn, with strange, unconventional poetry, much of it on themes his fellow citizens did not think fit for conversation, much less for poetry, and couched in shocking language. Whitman was breaking not only with European poetic traditions, but with Victorian morality:

I am the poet of the Body and I am the poet of the Soul,
The pleasures of heaven are with me and the pains of hell are with me,
The first I graft and increase upon myself, the latter I translate into a new tongue.
I am the poet of the woman the same as the man,
And I say it is as great to be a woman as to be a man.

—Song of Myself, 21

Whitman was very much aware of the equality of the sexes and almost always included the woman along with the man in general references.

In 1855 he had twelve poems ready to publish as a book. One of them, "Song of Myself," is long—1,346 lines—and is as great as anything he ever wrote. But no one would publish the book. A friend who published books on phrenology let him use his printshop in the evening, and Whitman set the type himself for the first edition. Brashly he sent copies to all the newspapers and magazines and to the major writers. Whittier, the Quaker poet, we are told, glanced at the book and tossed it into the fireplace, but Emerson, the writer Whitman most admired, recognized something new and great. He wrote by return mail the famous letter which includes: "I greet you at the beginning of a great career." So what did it matter what others thought?

Poetry . . . on themes his fellow citizens did not think fit for conversation, much less for poetry, and couched in shocking language.

Scholars speculate on where the poetry came from, for nothing in Whitman's early writing suggested the originality and vision of *Leaves of Grass.* He was an adequate, but not distinguished, journalist. Nor was there anything promising in his family background.

I believe the poetry grew out of an overwhelming mystical experience Whitman had when he was about thirty, while observing a spear of grass. He sensed the oneness of the universe, the beauty of all created things, including and especially the human body, in all its activities, and the sacredness of love, in all its manifestations. To some degree the experience persisted in him the rest of his life, a "cosmic consciousness," as Dr. R. M. Bucke, his close friend and biographer, called it. Whitman tells of the mystical experience in "Song of Myself," with the theme of the grass recurring throughout its length:

I loafe and invite my soul,
I lean and loafe at my ease observing a spear of summer grass. . . .
Swiftly arose and spread around me the peace and knowledge that pass all the argument of the earth,

And I know that the hand of God is the promise of my own,
And I know that the spirit of God is the brother of my own,
And that all the men ever born are also my brothers, and the women
my sisters and lovers,
And that a kelson of the creation is love. . . . —Song of Myself, 1

Whether Whitman was homosexual or bisexual is hard to tell at this late date. He projected an image in his poetry of a larger-than-life poet, "the true son of God," who would create the climate for peace and comradeship by singing great songs which would draw everyone together. This mythic image was probably more virile, more sexually active than Whitman himself was in real life. His detractors can always cut him down to size, but the ideal he created is valid, and he did have a cosmic love for all kinds of people, both men and women, a love both sexual and spiritual.

Whitman saw it as part of his mission to help people see the beauty of the human body, a gift from God, and to see that love, whatever form it takes, is from God. And he believed that if men would open themselves to the tenderness in them, would acknowledge their love for one another, war and violence could become things of the past:

I hear it was charged against me that I sought to destroy institutions,
But really I am neither for nor against institutions. . . .
Only I will establish in the Mannahatta and in every city of these
States inland and seaboard,
And in the fields and woods, and above every keel little or large that
dents the water,
Without edifices or rules or trustees or any argument,
The institution of the dear love of comrades.
—I Hear It Was Charged Against Me

And again:

Word over all, beautiful as the sky,
Beautiful that war and all its deeds of carnage must in time be utterly
lost . . . —Reconciliation

Our laws and mores are based to some extent on the first chapter of Genesis where we are told that God created man in his own image . . . male and female created he them. Psychology reveals to us that we are not quite as clearly totally male and totally female as this suggests. We all have within us a mixture. Jung says we carry our opposites within us, the man his "anima" and the woman her "animus."

Too long we have been bound by the notion that men must be strong, unemotional, brave, warlike, persevering, and women soft, yielding, devious, and compliant. With women's liberation and gay liberation we are opening ourselves to the realization that men can be gentle and compassionate, as women can be rational and purposeful. We see that men make good teachers of the young, nursers of the ill, carers for the aged. And women make good engineers, lawyers, and yes! preachers!

Whitman was in his forties when the Civil War came. He was working for the *New York Herald* and took from the telegraph a list of wounded in the battle of Fredericksburg. There was his brother's name. He set off at once for Virginia, and arrived there while the battle still raged. George was not badly hurt, but many wounded young men had been carried behind the lines with no one to care for them. Whitman stayed to improvise dressings, write letters to families, sit by the dying, and do whatever he could to ease their distress. Nine days later he volunteered to go with a trainload of the wounded to the hospital in Washington, hoping to find ways to ease the journey. When they arrived, the hospital was full, badly understaffed, so he stayed on to help. He rented an inexpensive room near the hospital, got a part-time job in a government office, and worked hours each day as a volunteer at the hospital. And he poured out all his love and tenderness on young men who had great need of it:

> . . . I thread my way through the hospitals,
> The hurt and wounded I pacify with soothing hand,
> I sit by the restless all the dark night, some are so young,
> Some suffer so much . . .
> (Many a soldier's loving arms about this neck have cross'd and rested,
> Many a soldier's kiss dwells on these bearded lips.)
>
> —The Wound-Dresser

And again:

> From all the rest I single you out, having a message for you,
> You are to die—let others tell you what they please, I cannot
> prevaricate. . . .
> Softly I lay my right hand upon you, you just feel it,
> I do not argue, I bend my head close and half envelop it,
> I sit quietly by, I remain faithful,
> I am more than nurse, more than parent or neighbor,
> I absolve you from all except yourself spiritual. . . .
> The sun bursts through in unlooked for directions,
> Strong thoughts fill you and confidence, you smile,
> You forget you are sick, as I forget you are sick.

You do not see the medicines, you do not mind the weeping friends,
I am with you.
I exclude others from you, there is nothing to be commiserated,
I do not commiserate, I congratulate you.

—To One Shortly to Die

Father McNeill, in *The Church and the Homosexual,* says we have "assumed every generation needs its war in order for the young to gain assurance of their virility. In liberating the heterosexual male to recognize and accept his own homosexual impulses without repression, the homosexual community could make a decisive contribution to bringing violence under control in our society."

During the war years in Washington Whitman struck up a friendship with a young ex-Confederate soldier, a horse car conductor, Peter Doyle. Doyle did not have much appreciation of poetry, but he was devoted to Whitman, and Whitman gave a great deal to him in love and concern and comradeship. Even after Whitman left Washington, the friendship continued, and they corresponded up till the last years of Whitman's life. Terry Sparks has plans to edit and publish the Whitman-Doyle correspondence.

Sometimes as Whitman walked home from the hospital at night, he passed the stooped, gaunt figure of the President, walking deep in thought. A great love for Lincoln grew in Whitman, although he apparently never spoke to him. Whitman was in the city the fatal night of April 14, 1865:

When lilacs last in the dooryard bloomed,
And the great star early drooped in the western sky in the night,
I mourned, and yet shall mourn with ever-returning Spring.
Ever-returning Spring, trinity sure to me you bring,
Lilac blooming perennial, and drooping star in the west,
And thought of him I love. . . .

In 1873 Whitman had a paralytic stroke and could no longer work. He went to stay with his brother George and his family in Camden, New Jersey, where his mother also lived. She died a few months later. Eventually he bought a little house on Mickle Street in a working-class neighborhood and arranged for a neighboring widow to occupy the first floor and keep house for him. Here he died on March 26, 1892, at the age of seventy-three. He is buried in Camden.

But he is alive and well—he projected himself into the future. I *know* that he still lives in Huntington, in the house where he was born. For all of us he has a message. He calls all of us to wholeness and authenticity:

Whoever you are! motion and reflection are especially for you,
The divine ship [the rolling earth] sails the divine sea for you.

Whoever you are! you are he or she for whom the earth is solid or
liquid . . .
For none more than you are the present and the past,
For none more than you is immortality.
Each man to himself and each woman to herself, is the word of the
past and present, and the true word of immortality;
No one can acquire for another—not one.
No one can grow for another—not one. . . .
I swear the earth shall surely be complete to him or her who shall be
complete,
The earth remains jagged and broken only to him or her who
remains jagged and broken. . . .

—Song of the Rolling Earth, 2, 3

And again he speaks very personally:

What is it then between us?
What is the count of the scores or hundreds of years between us?
Whatever it is, it avails not—distance avails not, and place avails not.
I too lived, Brooklyn of ample hills was mine,
I too walked the streets of Manhattan Island and bathed in the
waters around it,
I too felt the curious abrupt questionings stir within me,
In the day among crowds of people sometimes they came upon me,
In my walks home late at night, or as I lay in my bed they came
upon me . . .
It is not upon you alone the dark patches
fall,
The dark threw its patches down upon
me also.
The best I had done seemed to me blank
and suspicious,
My great thoughts as I supposed them,
were they not in reality meager?
Nor is it you alone who know what it is
to be evil,
I am he who knew what it was to be
evil. . . .

—Crossing Brooklyn Ferry

And among the followers of Jesus there was one named John, identified four times in the Fourth Gospel as "the disciple Jesus loved."

Have you reckon'd a thousand acres much? have you reckon'd the
earth much?
Have you practised so long to learn to read?

Have you felt so proud to get at the meaning of poems?
Stop this day and night with me and you shall possess the origin of all poems,
You shall possess the good of the earth and sun, (there are millions of suns left,)
You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books,
You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me,
You shall listen to all sides and filter them from your self.

—Song of Myself, 2

Each of us inevitable,
Each of us limitless—each of us with his or her right upon the earth,
Each of us allowed the eternal purports of the earth,
Each of us here as divinely as any is here. —Salut au Monde, 11

Whitman wrote a beautiful poem called "To a Common Prostitute," which begins:

Be composed—be at ease with me—I am Walt Whitman, liberal and lusty as Nature.
Not till the sun excludes you do I exclude you,
Not till the waters refuse to glisten for you and the leaves to rustle for you, do my words refuse to glisten and rustle for you. . . .

These words echo those of Jesus, who said that God "makes the sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt.:5:45) I am reminded also that the band of followers Jesus gathered around him included Mary Magdalene, a former prostitute. And among the followers of Jesus there was one named John, identified four times in the Fourth Gospel as "the disciple Jesus loved."

I said at the beginning that I have a hard time identifying myself publicly as a Christian, although I am devoted to Jesus. This was also true of Whitman, who never joined the Society of Friends, or any other religious body. Quakers in the last century would not have accepted him into membership, I fear, but I think that today he would be quite welcome in Fifteenth Street Meeting here in New York.

I want to leave you with the poem Whitman called "To Him That Was Crucified":

My spirit to yours dear brother,
Do not mind because many sounding your name do not understand you,
I do not sound your name, but I understand you,

I specify you with joy O my comrade to salute you, and to salute
those who are with you, before and since, and those to come also,
That we all labor together transmitting the same charge and
succession,
We few equals indifferent of lands, indifferent of times,
We, enclosers of all continents, all castes, allowers of all theologies,
Compassionaters, perceivers, rapport of men,
We walk silent among disputes and assertions, but reject not the
disputers nor any thing that is asserted,
We hear the bawling and din, we are reach'd at by divisions,
jealousies, recriminations on every side,
They close peremptorily upon us to surround us, my comrade,
Yet we walk unheld, free, the whole earth over, journeying up and
down till we make our ineffaceable mark upon time and the
diverse eras,
Till we saturate time and eras, that the men and women of races,
ages to come, may prove brethren and lovers as we are.

—Huntington, New York, January–February, 1977

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Elizabeth Watson grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, and graduated from Miami University, Oxford, Ohio, with majors in English literature and Greek. She wanted to enter the ministry and spent two years studying theology at Chicago Theological Seminary and the University of Chicago Divinity School. Midway in the course she found 57th Street Friends Meeting, and came to feel that she was being called into the Religious Society of Friends for a nonprofessional ministry embracing all of life. For many years she worked in Chicago with a concern for race relations, the long-time job being with a community organization in a changing neighborhood. In 1972 the Watsons moved to Long Island, where George accepted the call to be moderator (president) of Friends World College at Huntington, and from 1973 to 1977 Elizabeth was curator of Walt Whitman's birthplace, a New York Historic Site in Huntington. Since that time she has been a freelance writer, speaker, and workshop leader, with particular interests in liberation, feminist, and creation theology. She is the author of several published books, including *Guests of My Life*, now in its fifth printing, and *Wisdom's Daughter*s, a book about New Testament women now in its third printing. Presently she is at work on another book whose working title is *Walt Whitman Speaks to Our Time*. The Watsons have four children and several foster children; they now have eleven grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. In their late 80s, in 2002 they celebrated their 65th wedding anniversary. They have lived since 1991 in Minneapolis and are members of their "beloved community," Minneapolis Friends Meeting.

On Wholeness

Elizabeth Watson

Keynote Address, Midwinter Gathering
Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns
February 1985
Cleveland, Ohio

When Eva called me last summer and asked if I would speak to you today on wholeness, I said I'd love to, and at the time I was feeling very good about myself; I had a very heavy schedule and felt that I was doing everything well, and with a little bit of sinful pride, I thought I was well on my way to wholeness.

I could not anticipate what was to happen between the end of the summer and my being with you today, that I would find myself in late November and early December stopped dead in my tracks, wounded in body and broken in Spirit, and anything but whole. Since then I've been struggling to come to terms with losing a part of my body, mutilation through surgery, and facing the terror that a diagnosis of cancer produces in one. And anger too. Why me? All the clichés came back. Happy people don't get cancer, and I had always thought of myself as a happy person. Why me? Why now?

I had to set aside engagements that I had for the months of December and January, and this is my first "public" appearance, but I said to George that even if I had to come on a stretcher, I wanted to be with you today.

Thank you from a full heart for wanting me to be here. One of you said this morning to me, "Now we really feel you're one of us." I was very moved by that.

I'm speaking very personally today, out of my own journey, trying to move back in the direction of wholeness. So at the beginning I will share with you what I have read during the last two months while I've been ill, and just say that the thoughts of all of these people have so mingled with my own that at times I haven't been able to remember who said what.

I've been very fortunate to have someone feeding me things to read. That was Eric [Kristensen]. Among the things I've read was *Toward a Theology of Gay Liberation,* a British book, a small one which I myself had bought before we left Britain.

Then I also read a little book called, *But Lord, They're Gay,* by Sylvia Pennington, minister of an MCC church in the Los Angeles area, and I envied her!

In addition, and more in my own field, I read, *The Redemption of God, a Theology of Mutual Relation,* by Isabel Carter Harrison. I first met Carter Harrison ten years ago when she and I both served on the National Council of Churches Commission on Women and Ministry. She was one of the first eleven women priests to be ordained in the Episcopal church, before such ordainments were officially recognized. She teaches at the Episcopal Divinity School in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and several years ago publicly came out as a Lesbian.

But most importantly—and I've read it several times—I read Eric Kristensen's master's thesis for Harvard Divinity School, entitled *Voices from Exile: Lesbians and Gay Men in the Church.* I read it with excitement because Eric and I are in the same field, and he was saying some of the things that I have been struggling to say, and that I did say in the pamphlet *Sexuality, A Part of Wholeness.* I hope some day his thesis can be published or at least made available so all of you can read it.

Eva asked if I would talk about moving toward wholeness in a Quaker setting, and at the time I felt very comfortable with that. With me was the very moving time at the gathering of Friends General Conference last summer, when Susan Stark sat down at the piano and we all sang that beautiful song by Holly Near which she wrote in memory of Harvey Milk, "We Are a Gentle, Loving People." And then we sang "We Are a Gentle, Angry People," and I held my breath waiting for the next verse, and sure enough we were all able to sing, "We Are a Gay and Lesbian People," and finally, "We Are Gay and Straight Together, Singing, Singing for Our Lives," and I could not hold back the tears, that I had lived to see the day when we could openly put our arms around each other and sing that song together in a gay and straight gathering. Only a week later I was at Friends United Meeting, where, as you heard this morning, it was a very different story.

We tend to think historically that Friends have been out in front in all areas of social change, the abolition of slavery, rights for women, prison reform, and all the rest, but Margaret Bacon points out in an article that it was only a few Friends who were out in front. The John Woolmans and the Lucretia Motts were very lonely in their own meetings, in their own days, and the Elizabeth Frys also. They were eldered by their meetings and looked on as a little bit too far out for the general populace.

I think this is also true today. Many Friends, perhaps the majority of Friends, accept the prevailing values of our time. And our civilization and our religious

heritage, our Judeo-Christian heritage, are patriarchal, hierarchical, and homophobic. White, propertied, straight men, roughly between the ages of 25 and 65, who feel the need to prove their virility by violence, have determined what is normative for all of us.

If we are people of color, if we are poor, if we are gay, if we are young, or elderly, or women, we do not fit the norm of wholeness. We are automatically lower down on the hierarchical ladder.

We have all been brainwashed to accept hierarchy as the natural order of things. It has the powerful backing of religion, both through doctrine and through Scripture. In Genesis the man was assigned dominion over the earth and the animals were brought to him to name, and the naming helped him assume dominion over them and gave them their status. And then, as we read on into the next chapter, the man named the woman and gave her the status of helpmeet.

Eric points out in his thesis that part of the roots of homophobia lie in the doctrines of the Christian church, with regard to sexuality, that sex is unclean, that sexuality is to be repressed, and that the most holy people, priests and nuns, don't engage in it at all.

This is not how it was meant to be. Although the Christian church became a rigidly hierarchical and patriarchal and homophobic structure, Jesus, I am convinced, wanted to do away with hierarchy. He assembled around himself a band of men, one of whom was known as "the disciple Jesus loved." "I have called you friends," he said, not followers, not disciples, and he began by turning hierarchy upside down, proclaiming good news to the poor, the oppressed, the sick, the unclean, and the sinful. I don't know what he specifically said to gays and lesbians, probably because at that time the concepts were not known, but he did tell the chief priests and the elders in the temple, "Truly I say to you, the tax collectors and the harlots will go into the Kingdom of God before you." [Matthew 21:31]

Paul later captured the essence of the message of Jesus in his letter to the Galatians. "There is neither Jew nor Greek. There is neither slave nor free. There is neither male nor female [and I believe it should be added, There is neither gay nor straight], for you are all one in Christ Jesus." Elsewhere, of course, Paul was not as clear about slaves or women or homosexuals.

George Fox, seeking to get back to first-century Christianity, did away with hierarchy in the Society of Friends. He saw clearly that the Light of God was in every human being, without distinction. People in prison, the mentally ill, children, women, all of them were included in George Fox's definition of the Light of God in everyone.

In spite of our limitations, I think Quakerism does provide a good spiritual framework for moving toward wholeness, but I think we've got to keep pushing on the doors, knocking on the doors, and trying to wedge them open, and put doorstops in them.

In the half-century I've been a Friend, I have watched individual Friends grow and change their minds, and admit it publicly. I have watched meetings wrestle with thorny issues and sometimes come out with clear forthright statements on racism, sexism, and gay rights. People can move and change and grow, though the process is often painfully slow.

I think the Society of Friends provides a good framework for growing, for we join not on the basis of what we believe (an initial statement of what we believe in the form of a creed); we join on the basis of a mutual search for Truth. Ultimately, however, each of us must reach toward our own personal wholeness, and the first step, I am convinced, is seeing through the falseness of hierarchy, rejecting the label of inferiority that a patriarchal society places on us. We must rename the world, seeing it not as a hierarchical ladder, with people on different rungs at different heights, but seeing it as an intricate circle dance in which we are all involved. And if anyone stumbles, the whole line falters.

"Maturity is the ability to tolerate ambiguity and conflict."

And we need to name ourselves, rename ourselves if necessary. We need to accept and feel good about who we are, and what I have called in other places (and what I called the last time I spoke to you eight years ago in New York City), our *givenness*: our bodies, our sexuality, our minds, our situations—family situations, our geography, our time in history. We need to find out who we are and accept our strengths without false modesty and recognize our limitations.

However, most of us only live partial lives. Growing into wholeness involves trying to be all we were meant to be, living to the "circumference," if I may use an Emily Dickinson word. It is taking disasters, failures, setbacks, abuse, persecution, still knowing that the center holds, that the real person we are is still intact, and that God's love is still poured out to us without reservation.

When I was young, as many of you know, I wanted to be a minister, but the denomination in which I grew up did not ordain women. For many years I railed against fate that I had not been born a man. I have long since come to rejoice and be exceedingly glad that I am female, which is a major part of my givenness.

But I'm a stubborn person, and the more as a little girl I was told that girls can't be preachers, the more determined I became, and after college I went on to Chicago Theological Seminary, and, Friends, that was nearly 50 years ago, and I

was often the only woman in theology classes. What I wouldn't give to be young today and starting out in seminary now. Why, half the entering class at Chicago last year was women! Part of my givenness is the time in which I was born.

Now I had supposed that in studying theology, I was going to tie up all my beliefs and all my doubts and all my conflicts and emerge equipped to dispense Truth from a pulpit like that. I had a course in pastoral counseling, taught by a psychiatrist, not a man with a divinity degree at all. His name was William H. Sheldon, and he went on to Harvard after a year or two at Chicago. I learned a lot of practical things from him that have stayed by me, but one thing he said changed my life. He was given to quips, and one morning he tossed off this one:

"Maturity is the ability to tolerate ambiguity and conflict."

Up to that point I had assumed that maturity was having resolved all my ambiguities and conflicts. Surely as a mature adult I wasn't going to have to go on struggling the way I'd been struggling up to that point. And I wrestled with his idea for a long time. And eventually I became a Friend, accepting as my authority the Inner Light as it is filtered through my experience, and the communal search for Truth, rather than the authority of creeds and Scripture.

We need to learn to live with our own inconsistencies, ambiguities, conflicts, and to be understanding and accepting of the inconsistencies and the ambiguities in our lovers and friends, and the conflicts that inevitably arise when two people join their lives.

Let us also learn to tolerate the ambiguities and the conflicts in our beloved Religious Society of Friends. For me, Quakerism is a huge umbrella, sheltering all kinds of people—orthodox Christians, Universalists, agnostics—and I will resist with everything I have any institution of membership requirements. I want to count people in, and not shut them out. Differences are to be celebrated and not feared.

So I reach for wholeness in myself, in my relationships, in my community, and in our fragmented and violent world.

Why, then, am I periodically stopped dead in my tracks, laid so low that I can no longer go on with my life as it has been constituted? It's a funny thing. It seems to happen every seven years.

There's a story in Genesis of how Jacob wrestled with the Angel all night long. And in the dawn Jacob said to the Angel, "I will not let Thee go, except Thou bless me." And the Angel blessed him and changed his name. He was no longer to be Jacob. He was to be Israel, one who strives with God. And four times in my life I have wrestled with a Dark Angel, to try to learn what I needed to learn from a disaster, and out of that to rename myself and my world.

Let me go back to the first time. It was June 1964, and George and I and our three daughters and my mother all drove from our home in Chicago to attend our son's wedding at Radnor Meeting outside Philadelphia. On the way home the next day we had an accident on the Ohio Turnpike in which our eldest

daughter was killed and all the rest of us in the car badly hurt. My mother was to be hospitalized for the remaining ten and a half years of her life.

Without the tremendous outpouring of love and support from friends and community, life would have been absolutely unbearable. That love and support was a gigantic safety net in which we were sustained until we gradually regained our physical and emotional strength and could operate on our own again.

Out of this disaster I learned the reality of the power and the depth of the human community at a level I had never experienced before. Although it had been a score of years since I had thought in terms of a personal God, who protects us from danger if we only pray hard enough, I found myself angry at whoever ran the universe thus unjustly. How could this have happened?

And for a long time I wanted nothing to do with God. God, as far as I was concerned, was dead.

The human community first ministered to us in terms of love and support. Our meeting mobilized to meet our needs when we returned home from the hospital in Ohio. Meals appeared. Transportation was provided. Errands were run. I would look out the window and see someone weeding the garden. And it came from strangers too. I went to the door one day and found a man there whom, so far as I knew, I had never seen before. And he said to me, "I pass your house each day on the way to work and I've appreciated your garden. I heard what happened and I would like to help. Could I cut your grass?" That man happened to be black, and I think of what courage it must have taken for him to come to our door.

But the human community poured out not only love and support. It shared our grief and our pain. I had never realized before how many people die young, die before their time, how many people grieve for children . . . and young lovers. I finally came to see that our personal tragedy was part of the universal human experience. And the human community of grief extended back throughout history. Rachel mourning for her children and not to be comforted. David crying out, "O my son Absalom, . . . would God I had died for thee!"

In time I was to discover that it was more than a human community, that it included the other creatures of our planet, and the Earth itself. And my roots sank deep into this community of love and shared grief and sorrow. But at times I was aware of a presence in myself. It would well up in me. I would read in the paper of children starving in Africa or India or some natural disaster happening, and people losing their lives, and then I began to feel the anguish and the grief of God. And God, I discovered, had been pouring out love and support the whole time, through the community, the human community. God is not out there, or up there. God is in the community—human and planetary and universal.

Whitehead once said that God is the binding element of the universe, the force that holds the stars in their courses, and the atoms and the molecules

functioning in matter, the force making for greater interdependence and mutuality in the human community and the whole delicate ecological balance of our planet.

Carter Heyward, in her book on *The Redemption of God*, speaks of God being incarnate, literally "in the flesh," and she says God is part of our human experience, "physical, tangible, sexual, painful, humorous, delightful, terrible human experience in the world." Entitling her book, *The Redemption of God*, she says that God needs *us* just as surely as we need God. "Emmanuel, God with Us."

Our civilization and our religious heritage . . . are patriarchal, hierarchical, and homophobic. White, propertied, straight men, roughly between the ages of 25 and 65, who feel the need to prove their virility by violence, have determined what is normative for all of us.

Gradually we recovered from the accident, both physically and spiritually, and life resumed something of the old hectic pace, only now there was an added depth or shadow to everything.

And then six years later, in the fall of 1970, I had a long bout with pneumonia, and made the discovery that I was allergic to antibiotics. I spent weeks in the hospital in Chicago and in my more lucid moments was aware people were not sure that I was going to survive.

Finally I went home to many more weeks in bed. I had to give up my job. And my lungs never did fully heal. The doctor said that the level of air pollution in Chicago was such that we would have to leave the inner city where we lived if I was ever to regain my health.

What I learned out of the pneumonia experience was (and again I'm using Emily Dickinson's words) "to dwell in possibility." George and I talked it over and we both made the decision that we would rather make a complete break than to try to reconstitute our old lives from a suburban base.

Our family was grown and nearly all educated (and we've had an enormous family, some of whom we gave birth to, and foster daughters and adopted children). We didn't need as high an income. We had put seven children—almost, the last one had just a few more semesters to go—through college. We talked it over and decided we could drastically simplify our lives and reduce our worldly goods. Maybe there was some lost cause to which we could give the last working years before we retired. To what new adventure would we be called?

Dwelling in Possibility

We said, "Let's open ourselves to any possibility." Such is the efficiency of the Quaker grapevine that we hardly even said it to ourselves before we found

ourselves moving to Friends World College on Long Island, our income shrinking by considerably more than half, our big old inner city house replaced by a four-room cottage and the city streets of Chicago which we love gave way to the woods and fields and shores of Long Island, which we also love.

We went to Long Island because George was called there to be moderator of Friends World College. Back in Chicago Friends kept saying, "What are you going to do while George is busy with the college?" And I answered, "I'm dwelling in possibility. . . . I will proceed as the way opens."

Well, some of you know what possibility came along. I was asked to be curator of Walt Whitman's birthplace, which is also in Huntington, New York, where Friends World College is, and I loved that job! I became something of an instant expert on Walt Whitman, a poet who "came out" more than a hundred years ago at great personal cost, whose book was burned and banned by libraries and he himself tarred and feathered at one point, for his forthrightness.

Our whole experience at Friends World College, however, confirmed us in the idea of dwelling in possibility. The college is a learning community, where staff and students are committed to learning from and with each other. The college has centers in North America, Latin America, Europe, South Asia, East Asia, Africa, and the Middle East. Students usually spend the first year in their home continent, but at least two years abroad on two other continents is a requirement for graduation. It's a university without walls, most of the work being independent study projects in the field. The main faculty activity is one-to-one advising.

There's a great deal of student input at all levels. George's full title was Moderator of the Presidential Council, which consisted of three people, one of whom was a student, selected by a process of consensus by the worldwide community. And that takes some doing! The student, usually a senior, takes a year's leave of absence and serves as a full-time paid executive, fulfilling the role of dean of students and ombudsperson. The College could not have functioned without the student input at every level, because we were experimenting with a new kind of education, and those in the administration hadn't ever been through it. George could come up with ideas out of the left side of his brain and the students would say, "But look, George, that doesn't work in Africa."

Those who come through this program are clear-eyed, tough-minded, compassionate world citizens with many coping skills and a longing to help heal the world's wounds. The College is not for everyone; only people with a strong sense of self-direction and a spirit of adventure are going to make it. While we were there we came to see more than ever that the unadventurous nay-saying, security-seeking life is simply not worth living.

Are you familiar with *The Chronicles of Narnia*, that set of little books by C. S. Lewis that is about an imaginary world into which four children who are siblings stumble, and in which they are kings and queens of Narnia? One

afternoon the four monarchs are out riding on their noble steeds, following the white stag. And after a time the stag goes into a dark thicket, and the forest begins to looks sinister and forbidding, and the three older riders say, "Well, that's enough for today. We'll turn back to the castle and have tea." But Susan, the youngest of the monarchs, draws herself up in her saddle and says, "Are we to refuse the adventure life sends?"

Are *we* to refuse the adventure life sends?

In 1977, seven years after the pneumonia, I went back to Chicago for a weekend, and while there I began to feel chest pain. It got worse as the weekend dragged along, and I assumed Chicago's air pollution had reactivated my lung problems. I would certainly be all right when I got back to Long Island. But the pain persisted after I got home, and in three days I called the doctor and told him I thought I needed a chest X-ray. He asked a few questions, urged me to find someone to drive me to the hospital emergency room where he would meet me, and within an hour I was in coronary intensive care. It turned out to be acute angina and not a heart attack, but a month later I was taken into the hospital by ambulance in the middle of the night and spent another time in coronary intensive care.

> We tend to think historically that Friends have been out in front in all areas of social change, the abolition of slavery, rights for women, prison reform . . . but . . . only a few Friends . . . were out in front. The John Woolmans and the Lucretia Motts were very lonely in their own meetings.

Then a month after that I was back again. I had to give up my job at Whitman's birthplace, and I was in a state of panic, and I realized I simply could not go on like this. Somehow I had to take charge of my life again, and my healing, and not leave it all up to the medical profession.

I asked my doctor for help. He brought over a model of the heart and explained what was going on in *my* heart. He suggested that I begin to image my heart working normally, pumping my blood regularly, good rich red blood, all through my veins. And I began to do this. Whenever I felt the chest pain come on, I would stop whatever I was doing and breathe very deeply till I could feel my heart beating again, and then I would say, "Good Heart, keep on pumping that blood. I need you. I still have work to do." I promised my heart that I would take better care of it.

I still do that every night before I go to bed. And in time I was able once again to resume a full and active life, but I no longer take my heart for granted. I carry my heart medicine with me, but I haven't taken it in more than five years.

In some respects, one's body is like *all* other human bodies. In some respects, one's body is like *some* other human bodies. But in some respects one's body is like *no* other human body. It is an original and no one's copy. That is, I assume none of you are clones. *[Laughter]* Your body has its own rhythms, idiosyncrasies, needs, and its own wisdom. We need to learn the ambiguities of our own bodies. We need to take charge of our lives, because our bodies must last us for the rest of our lives, well, at least the rest of this life.

I found imaging to be a very good tool. George has been involved in a program of imaging a world without weapons. People begin to envision a world some 30 years from now in which disarmament has been achieved. What's it like? How's it different from the world we live in today? As individuals and then in small groups they begin to work on the details of this world, until finally in the whole group it becomes so real that they actually feel that they are living in 2015.

Then at the end of the workshop they begin to remember backwards how it happened. What happened in 2014? What happened in the year 2000? What happened in 1990? What happened way back in the dark ages of 1985 to make disarmament a possibility?

Out of this come goals to work for, rather than things to be against. Perhaps we can begin to image a Religious Society of Friends where all can participate fully and honestly with no separation, no hierarchical distinctions, and no belief required of everyone, a place in which everyone can be openly the person that he or she is.

Now, in the winter of 1984–1985, 7 years after I took charge of the healing of my heart and learned to image, 14 years after the pneumonia when I learned to dwell in possibility, and 21 years after the automobile accident, when I learned the depth and the love and the shared pain of the divine human community, here I am again once more, stopped in my tracks. I guess I'm a slow learner.

In late November I went for a routine checkup and instead of coming out with a clean bill of health, which I had expected, I came out with a diagnosis of cancer, a biopsy scheduled, with surgery to follow in a few days. The physical healing from surgery has come along at a fairly normal pace, with ups and downs, days when I cried a lot and felt that I simply didn't have the strength to take charge of my life again, alternating with days when I felt, "Of course I can make it." Imaging cancer, I find, is much harder than imaging a normal heart. One can't be affirming and nonviolent when one's imaging a cancer cell. I read a book about imaging cancer, and it says to see the cancer as the enemy, and the medication or therapy as a powerful army that is marching into the body to destroy the enemy, and then the white blood cells come to clean up the battleground and get rid of all the mess.

Well, I tell you, that's heavy going for a pacifist like me. And I'm not very good at it yet, though I keep trying to work on my images of cancer.

I have had three close friends die of breast cancer, one of them just a year ago. And the psychological healing has been much slower and more difficult for me. I've done much reading, meditating, and talking to other women who have survived. It was terribly important for me to find people who had survived.

Once again the community of love and support has been poured out to me—incredibly. But I've had to face the fact that I can't really blame our polluted environment and our processed food for my having cancer, although these things certainly contribute to the higher incidence of cancer in our time. Everything I have read points to the fact that cancer is stress-related. And I had always thought of myself as able to handle stress very well. After all, hadn't I early in life accepted "tolerating ambiguity and conflict" as one of the major goals of my life, a way of life as it were.

We spent 1983-1984 at Woodbrooke, a Quaker college in Birmingham, England. And we lived in a community that provided little room or time for solitude. I don't know how the British ever get anything done. They eat six times a day. There are the same three meals that we have, but then at 11:00 A.M. everything stops immediately and everybody goes to the dining room for coffee and what they call "elevenses"—snacks, caloric snacks. At four o'clock everything stops for tea. And this is a more elaborate one, with little tables set and goodies. And at 10:00 at night everyone gathers in the dining room for cocoa and more snacks. Yes, we put on weight while we were at Woodbrooke. *[Laughter]*

Well, the classes I taught went well. The ones I *took* were interesting, and I did enough reading to keep up. I counseled my advisees, of which I had six each term. I led my share of weekend retreats and conferences that all faculty were supposed to do. I turned out book reviews and articles for Quaker publications when requested. And I made speeches, not only at Woodbrooke, but in London. And in March George and I both went to the retreat weekend to speak to the Friends Homosexual Fellowship, one of the most beautiful weekends we had the whole year we were in England. And in our spare time we did some sightseeing. I managed it all. I met every deadline, and I felt very good about it.

I came home and in a day and a half went to Friends General Conference. I was home two days from FGC and flew to Orange, California, for FUM, and at the end of that time I was literally starved for solitude.

There were days this winter, this Winter of the Cancer, when I felt like a wounded animal that retreats back into its lair, deep in the forest, to lick its wounds, days when I asked George to answer the telephone and tell them I was sleeping, and that if our friendly neighbors came to call, to tell *them* that I was sleeping. I found myself wanting to make people think I felt worse than I really did in order to prolong the solitude.

These were leisurely days when I could just lie in bed and read—I didn't have to do anything. And I will tell you my husband turned out to be a gourmet cook. I should have let him into the kitchen a lot sooner. *[Laughter]* All this, despite the fact that several years ago I wrote an article in *Friends Journal* called "The Protection of Solitude," which you can find reprinted as a pamphlet.

> The first step [toward wholeness] is seeing through the falseness of hierarchy, rejecting the label of inferiority that a patriarchal society places on us. We must [see the world] as an intricate circle dance in which we are all involved. And if anyone stumbles, the whole line falters.

Slow learner that I am, this is the lesson I am learning from cancer: to take time for myself. Somehow I have always felt guilty if I took time for myself. I think it's the Protestant work ethic, which my mother so strongly believed in. If I sat around, not obviously doing anything, even just reading, my mother would say, "How can you just sit there? Can't you see the living room needs dusting?" And I found myself with the dustrag in the hand busily going around.

All my life I've carried a heavy schedule. I've had a large family. I've been a working mother. And periodically, at seven-year intervals, my body has rebelled and made me take off time to be by myself.

In his *Letters to a Young Poet*, Rilke images love between two human beings. "And this more human love that will fulfill itself, infinitely considerate and gentle, and kind and clear in binding and releasing, will resemble that which we are preparing with struggle and toil, the love that consists in this, that two solitudes protect and touch and salute one another."

The greatest gift of love one person can give another is the right to grow into wholeness, sufficient time and space—solitude, that is—to realize some measure of that person's potential.

What would it mean to a relationship if two people committed themselves to the protection of one another's solitude? Their times together would be incredibly richer than if there were continuous togetherness. When energy doesn't have to be squandered on protecting a self that is hurting and frustrated, it can go into building a relationship and supporting one's lover.

Rilke suggests that the two solitudes touch, and I read into that, sexually. If people approach sexual relations, each committed to maximizing the other's pleasure, rather than concerned for their own gratification, this would indeed be a real sexual revolution. Rilke's solitudes also salute one another, seeing their partners as "thou," not "it," in Martin Buber's terms, never seeing their lovers as means to their own ends.

So once again I'm working my way out of brokenness, trying to move toward wholeness. Realistically I know that my days are numbered. But then, everyone's days are numbered. I still have work to do. I've got at least five books inside of me that want to be written, and I *do* believe I will have time to write them, but I know now that I must stop rushing around and take time for solitude, as well as time for being with my family and my friends.

I am grateful for my life. I am grateful for the gift of a human body with which to experience this incredibly beautiful planet in all its infinite variety; a human body with which to see the world, hear it, and touch it, also to taste it and smell it; a human body with feet that were made to dance, and arms that were made to encircle other human bodies.

Wholeness, in the words of Kahlil Gibran's *Prophet,* is "to wake at dawn with a winged heart and to give thanks for another day of loving."

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Elizabeth Watson (1993)

Night and Day

Elizabeth Watson

Keynote Address, Midwinter Gathering
Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns
February 1993
Epworth Forest Retreat Center
North Webster, Indiana

George and I were especially glad to be invited to this FLGC Gathering in the heart of Cole Porter country. Cole Porter was writing during our high school years, but it was our college years he dominated. His were the tunes we danced to: "Let's Do It," "Begin the Beguine," "In the Still of the Night," to name a few. His were the songs we hummed as we came out of the movies: "I Get a Kick out of You" from *Anything Goes,* "Down in the Depths" from *Red, Hot, and Blue,* and, of course, "Night and Day" from *The Gay Divorcee.* And that last one had Fred Astaire in it! Who could ask for anything more?

It was the depths of the depression, and none of us had much money. We went to the State University where a good education could be had at rock-bottom cost. My roommate and I shared each other's clothes, augmenting our scanty wardrobes. Most dates were going for a walk, or nursing a five-cent Coke all evening in a cheap eatery. (I've never been able to face a Coke since!) We saved our scanty allowances so that from time to time there was money for a dance or a movie. Cole Porter's music and Fred Astaire's dancing represented the glamour, the extravagance, the glitter lacking in our own lives.

Cole Porter's life bore no resemblance to ours. He was somewhat older, in the generation between us and our parents. He had a rich grandfather and never had to worry about money. He went to Yale, where he wrote the "Bulldog" song, and then to graduate work at Harvard, starting in the Law School, but soon transferring to the Music School. After that he went to Paris to study long-hair music. Success came early and steadily, with only an occasional flop. He lived ostentatiously and luxuriously, traveling in his own private railroad car.

And the music poured out of him. From 1930 to 1946, he turned out a show a year, writing the book, music, lyrics, and hiring someone to produce and stage

it. The shows were spread out after that period, but he continued composing until 1957.

When I heard that *Night and Day* was to be your theme, possibilities for a keynote address danced before me. What I have to say will have nothing to do with Cole Porter's life, or the plots of his shows, but will take off from the titles of some of his songs. The ideas come out of my own life. I hope they may speak to yours.

I. Night and Day

Night and day are a continuum. Our planet is constantly turning day into night, and back again to day, with some of the loveliest times being dawn and evening, when it is not sharply either day or night. Our planet is seasonal. Winter gives way to spring, to summer, to autumn, and back to winter.

Our lives, too, are seasonal and cyclical. We all have times when everything goes our way; then come days when nothing works out. We despair, and fear that things may never change and life be happy again. William Blake gave us good advice:

> We were made for joy and woe,
> And when this we rightly know,
> Through the world we safely go.

If we can remember that woe will not last forever, we can cope with it, experience it, and then let it go. We can "watch with serenity through the winters of our grief" (from Kahlil Gibran*).

Yet one of the hang-ups of our Western civilization is that we tend to ignore the seasonal nature of things and to divide things sharply into opposites: night and day, joy and woe, good and evil, black and white, men and women, gay and straight, life and death. We see these opposites locked in struggle. Good must overcome evil; light must prevail over darkness, and life must struggle against death.

Quakers are as prone to this as anyone. With our doctrine of the Inner Light, we tend to think that the Inner Light is the norm, that it is all we were meant to be. And we deny and fail to recognize the darkness in ourselves.

During the Second World War, many of us—Quakers and others—saw the evil in Hitler and the Japanese. The Allied cause was good guys fighting bad guys. The evil was over there, in the enemy. When we dropped the bomb on Hiroshima, many of us saw that the evil is in us too. The Vietnam War, our support of undemocratic and violent regimes in Latin America, Operation Desert Storm have all continued our violence. Yet we still think of ourselves as the good guys.

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* Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*, On Pain

But we haven't made the world safe for democracy, which we said was our intention. We still divide the world into opposites, and designate some people our enemies.

History, too, is cyclical. Empires rise, erode from within, are attacked from without, and eventually pass from the scene as world powers. As distances dwindle in our modern age, we can no longer afford to have enemies. Nuclear war may well destroy us all.

When will we learn to see the wholeness of things? We live on a planet, a globe. When we look at it from space, we can't see boundary lines between nations. A straight line on a globe, if extended, becomes a circle. Circles include rather than divide. Earth is really one world.

Lord, who can be trusted with power,
and who may act in your place?
Those with a passion for justice,
who speak the truth from their hearts;
who have let go of selfish interests
and grown beyond their own lives;
who see the wretched as their family
and the poor as their flesh and blood.
They alone are impartial
and worthy of the people's trust.
Their compassion lights up the whole earth,
and their kindness endures forever.*

WE NEED TO UNLEARN HUMILITY . . . HOW CAN WE BE HEALED [FROM OUR SHAME]? IT IS NOT EASY IN A HOMOPHOBIC, GYNOPHOBIC, RACIST SOCIETY. WE NEED TO REREAD THE THIRD CHAPTER OF GENESIS AND SEE WHAT A STUPID, FAR-FETCHED STORY LIES AT THE FOUNDATION OF THE DOCTRINE OF ORIGINAL SIN.

II. Down in the Depths

"Down in the Depths" was a hit song from the show *Red, Hot, and Blue*, and it suggests my second theme.

While I think that as a nation we need to learn humility and recognize the evil in our national life, I feel strongly that as individuals we need to unlearn humility, and get rid of the guilt trip laid on us by our Judeo-Christian tradition.

I did not grow up a Friend, and in my childhood I remember going to church for the communion service and hearing everyone say they had "erred and strayed" like lost sheep and done those things they ought not have done,

* Stephen Mitchell, *A Book of Psalms Selected and Adapted from the Hebrew* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), Psalm 15.

and not done what they should have done, and we all said, "There is no health in us." Then we would all say that we would go forth to lead a new and sin-free life. Yet the next service found us back, going through the same repentance game again. What if you really had managed not to sin in the interim? There was no provision for that.

Things were stacked against us. We were born in original sin, and no matter how hard we tried to be good, it was not possible to be sinless. The story of Adam, Eve, and the Serpent has laid a guilt trip on us all. I have a friend who is a pastoral counselor, who says that *shame* is the major problem of most of her clients. She writes:

> Since the Garden of Eden, we humans have been in hiding. God has called us in the cool of the evening, and we have wrapped ourselves more tightly in our fig leaves and fled, fearing to stand revealed lest we be known just as we are because, somehow, we are ashamed of who we are.*

How did we get this way? Stephen Finn and John Driggs have written a helpful book called *Intimacy Between Men,* which I recommend highly to you. Listen to this:

> Shame is not inborn but a mirror of the inadequacies of our families and society. People shame others in an attempt to stifle behavior they feel helpless to control in other ways. Unfortunately, the shame you receive from others is internalized while growing up. The more experiences of disapproval, humiliation, conditional love, and enforced secrecy you have experienced, the more likely it is that you will have a substantial residue of shame. Also, the more shame you have, the harder it will be to face a partner in total honesty and vulnerability, and eventually be healed of your shame.**

How can we be healed? It is not easy in a homophobic, gynophobic, racist society. We need to reread the third chapter of Genesis and see what a stupid, far-fetched story lies at the foundation of the doctrine of original sin. We need to role-play that story, ham it up, devise new and different endings.

I recommend two books to you. First *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* by Elaine Pagels.*** Saint Augustine, she tells us, is the one who read back original sin into that Genesis story. It is not part of the Jewish tradition.

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* Carolyn W. Treadway, *Healing Our Inner Violence,* p. 11 (Plummer Lecture, Illinois Yearly Mtg., 1989).

** John H. Driggs and Stephen E. Finn, *Intimacy Between Men* (New York: Dutton, 1990), p. 26.

*** Elaine Pagels, *Adam, Eve, and the Serpent* (New York: Random House, 1988).

And the second book is *Original Blessing* by Matthew Fox.* He refutes the idea that we are born in original sin and says that in reality we are born with "original blessing."

We are children of God, each of us unique. We live in a world, indeed a universe, with infinite variety. What a dull world it would be if we were all alike. Walt Whitman says it beautifully:

> 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.**

If you don't already own a copy of Whitman's *Leaves of Grass,* buy one and begin to live with it. (You'd think I owned a book store, with all the books I'm recommending!)

Whitman lived from 1819 to 1892—he's been dead more than a century; but he speaks directly to us today. In his young manhood he had a tremendous mystical experience in which he felt the oneness of everything, as he looked at a leaf of grass and recognized its connection to the whole universe. He saw, too, the beauty of all creation, including the human body, and the holiness of love in all its manifestations. He was openly gay, writing poems of homoerotic love, among other things, in his incredible book. He suffered for his openness, both physically and in the banning of his book. Moreover, writing more than a century ago, he habitually used inclusive language. Living with *Leaves of Grass* can be a healing thing.

> If there is sin, it is simply this: not caring.

This organization can also be healing. Your love was poured out to me at a previous gathering in 1985, shortly after I had had surgery for cancer. I had been told I might have five years if I were lucky. I left that Gathering, no longer fearful, but knowing that I would make it. You changed my life.

Let this Gathering also be healing. Here we can affirm our love, our admiration, and our gratitude for one another. We need each other. Here no one needs to wear a mask.

We can be ourselves.

And let us get over our hang-ups about rigid definitions of right and wrong, drawing a dividing line between good and evil. No one is perfect, not even Jesus, who was said to be. I know what it is to have an unreasonable desire for something you cannot have, like craving figs when they are not in season, and in frustration, cursing the fig tree. (See Mark 11:12–14.) I too have done foolish, hurtful things when I couldn't have my way.

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* Matthew Fox, *Original Blessing* (Bear and Co., 1983).

** Walt Whitman, "Salut au Monde" (*Leaves of Grass*).

If there is sin, it is simply this: not caring. Not caring about other people, about God, about the fragile beauty of the earth and the infinite variety of life that shares our planetary home. And, not caring about yourself! You too are worthy of being cared for; your wishes and needs should be taken into consideration when you make decisions. Have compassion for yourself. This is not selfishness; it is mental health.

We need to find appropriate and safe ways of letting out anger: strenuous exercise, pounding pillows, shouting or screaming, so that we can be nonviolent with other people.

Above all, let us not be violent with ourselves, nor feel guilty because we are human. Let us accept the seasonal nature of our lives. If we were perfect, we would be stagnant, and also incredibly dull. We are many-faceted, and our weaknesses and imperfections make us accessible to others coping with their own guilt trips.

If you have trouble affirming yourself, try reading Whitman aloud:

> I inhale great draughts of space,
> The east and the west are mine, and the north and the south are mine.
>
> I am larger, better than I thought,
> I did not know I held so much goodness.

Those lines are from his "Song of the Open Road," a long poem, full of beautiful affirming lines, very much worth reading and living with, very healing.*

III. In the Still of the Night

I think one of Cole Porter's most beautiful songs is "In the Still of the Night," and that is my third theme.

I speak to you now as a night person, knowing that some of you must also be night people. George is a day person. He gets up at six, ready to go, lucid and efficient. By evening he runs down and by ten p.m., his IQ expires. He goes to bed, goes to sleep at once, and sleeps soundly.

Because the world is run by and for day people, most of my life I had to get up with the dawn, get the children off to school, and get to a job. However, there is nothing efficient about me in the morning. I just did routine things when I got to work, until numerous cups of coffee gave me some measure of alertness. It's nice to be retired and to get up when I'm ready. By ten p.m., however, I am in high gear, thinking clearly, full of new ideas and energy. My best time is midnight to three a.m.

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* Walt Whitman, "Song of the Open Road," *Leaves of Grass.*

When you read the book of Psalms in the Bible, you find many attributed to David the King. And if you read them through, you will find that David was a night person. For instance:

> "In the night, wisdom comes to me in my inward parts." (Psalm 16:7)
>
> "Thou has proved my heart, Thou hast visited me in the night." (Psalm 17:3)

He saw that idle chatter belongs to the day, but wisdom comes in the night:

> "Day unto day uttereth speech, (but) night unto night sheweth knowledge." (Psalm 19:2)

Walt Whitman, too, was a night person, as is evident in *Leaves of Grass*:

> "I am he that walks with the tender and growing night . . . " ("Song of Myself," line 431)

And in what to me is his most moving poem, "Out of the Cradle, Endlessly Rocking," he speaks of the night child he had been:

> Over the sterile sands and the fields beyond, where the child, leaving his bed, wander'd alone, bareheaded, barefoot.

In my book, night people are special. George and I talked recently with a man who in his early years had driven a taxi at night to earn money for school. He found people friendly, sometimes just wanting to be driven around, sometimes confiding things to him that they would never tell someone they know. He said the city is a different place at night.

People are more relaxed and friendly; he felt they were more independent, more autonomous, not obsessed with appointments and making money. Alas, it is now no longer safe to walk city streets at night, and for some, not safe to drive taxis! Our society is less human.

I DO NOT SEE DARKNESS AS EQUATED WITH EVIL. . . . I EMBRACE THE DARKNESS. I FIND IT FULL OF POSSIBILITY.

On Public Radio recently there was a report of a sociologist who studied day and night people. He dropped on Boston Common, at various hours of the day and night, a set of keys with his address attached. The highest rate of return was from midnight to three a.m.

I do not see darkness as equated with evil. I do not see it as something to be endured until morning. I embrace the darkness. I find it full of possibility.

Yet day people will say to me, But you can see things clearly in the day. At night you have to grope around. To which I respond: Night puts out the garish light of day so that the things of earth are no longer visible, and we can see the sky! Only in darkness can you see stars and planets. All that we know about the universe had to be first surmised at night. Our early ancestors were well aware of the movement of stars and planets, and how the seasons of earth parallel the seasons of the night sky.

Stars are to steer by. On a ship in a vast ocean, the sun shows only a vast sameness of water. At night you take your directions from the stars, and chart your course. Runaway slaves hid during the day, and followed the Big Dipper at night northward to freedom.

George and I were given a trip around the world for our fiftieth wedding anniversary several years ago. Because the places we wanted to visit were all in the Northern Hemisphere, the night sky was familiar wherever we went. Early in the trip I found two planets: Venus, rising first, and several hours later, Mars, faintly reddish. I found them in Hawaii, then in Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, Bangkok, and all over India, the focus of our trip. Coming on around the world, there they were in England and Northern Ireland. On our return home in early November, I saw them in the winter sky above our house. I had a sense of being at home everywhere we went. The world is my home.

Darkness is also for gestation, for creation: seeds in the dark earth, waiting patiently to be flowers in the spring. The child in the womb, growing, developing, waiting to be born. Ideas fermenting in the unconscious. Archetypes, dreams, making us aware of a larger self than our individual isolated lives. Poems grow at night; connections are made; possibilities are endless.

Night, too, is for rest—rest for the eyes, solitude for the soul, and sleep to "knit up the ravell'd sleave of care," as Shakespeare so beautifully said. Night is for going to bed, unable to solve a problem or make a decision, and giving it up for a time, only to find that when you awaken, you have reached clarity.

Saints and mystics speak of "the dark night of the soul," times when God seems to have withdrawn the sense of Presence, and we feel alone and without an anchor. But God is very much there in the darkness under the stars. It is true that the Presence is a gift, an act of grace, which we cannot will. It comes and it goes, in the day, in the night. It helps if we can remember the cyclical nature of our lives, the ebb and flow, the turning of the world toward morning, and then to evening, the turning from autumn, to winter, to spring.

Do you know Sydney Carter's lovely song about Julian of Norwich:

> Loud are the bells of Norwich and the people come and go,
> Here by the tower of Julian I tell them what I know.
> Ring out, bells of Norwich, and let the winter come and go:
> All shall be well again, I know.*

George and I have two dearly loved lesbian Friends in Maine: Mary Hillas and Barbara Potter. Barbie wrote these words at Christmas that summarize what I have said, and I can find no better way to close my remarks:

> The real trick is to let in both darkness and light, to be moved by the sorrow of the world, to listen for what my particular call is, and to let joy live side by side with the sorrow—to go with the cycles as they affect me personally. And in all seasons, I send you much love, wishing Fullness of Time for all of us.

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Bill Hendricks

George and Elizabeth Watson
60th Wedding Anniversary
July 1997

* Stainer and Bell, Ltd., *Worship in Song: A Friends Hymnal* (Hope Publishing Co., 1981), no. 250.