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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Complete Contents

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

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

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

Preface to the Internet Edition

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

—ROBERT LEUZE

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

Kim Hanson

Robert Leuze

Our Bodies, Our Elves

George Lakey

Keynote Address, Midwinter Gathering
Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns
February 1991
Washington, District of Columbia

I've been on an emotional roller coaster from this war in the Persian Gulf. One of its high points occurred a couple of weeks ago in Washington where there was a phenomenal demonstration with many humorous, hand-lettered signs; one of my very favorites said, "George and Saddam, *go to your rooms!" [Laughter]*

In the parade, one section was called "New World Order": It was a lot of white men with neckties and briefcases. I thought, well, that's not the new creation.

My vision of the new creation came to me in a dream about a dozen years ago, that actually inspired my title, "Our Bodies, Our Elves." One of the heavier dreams of my life, I remember it as if I dreamed it yesterday. I was in a very institutional setting, like a hospital—tile on the walls, that sort of thing. Down where the corridor made a sharp turn the wall opened up and I was able to see through into a very green glade—lots of vines, lots of trees. Small people were in there, playing, having a delightful, delightful time with each other—very erotic, very natural, and very, very playful. I stood, mesmerized by this, fascinated, and felt a tremendous yearning. I sensed I could step through this wall into that space and I would be part of it; I had a great yearning to do that. Suddenly I heard a click, click, click down the hall. I turned, and there were two men walking down the hall in suits and neckties; they were white men, carrying clipboards. They looked at me—I was standing there, fascinated, with my mouth agape at this scene. Then they looked at each other, and with a sad kind of turn of the head, said, "Nah, that's not for him." I was given to understand that I was not ready for that yet, or it wasn't ready for me. They walked off, shaking their heads. And I was *so* disappointed!

I turned around and walked back up the hall down which they had come. There was a reception space with a long line, as long as you could see, of people

waiting to be processed. The people all looked very down and out, with misshapen, grotesque heads and all kinds of weirdness about them. I had a sense that, at least for the moment, I would be in that reception line. I woke up, shivering and shaken.

Our bodies, our elves: This dream symbolizes to me some gifts that lesbians, gays, and bi's can give to the Society of Friends and to the larger world. There are six gifts, actually, that I'm going to unveil this morning: embodiment, the erotic, vulnerability, pain, difference, and love.

Embodiment

I was brought up in a church where people didn't seem to believe the incarnation had really happened. Did you ever sense the version of Christianity that, somehow, we were really meant to be spirits all along? That there was a glitch in creation, and we ended up with these bodies—like, What are we doing with bodies? It's really a big mistake? *[Laughter]* That we're supposed to suffer through this vale of tears with these terrible bodies until at last we can finally get rid of them and get back to being what we were supposed to be after all? That the whole embodiment was just some terrible glitch on the part of God? Most of us were brought up in a context like that: a big split between body and spirit, between body and mind, flesh and spirit.

My gayness taught me at a very early age that the culture is weird concerning the relation of body and spirit. I learned this principally through my erections. I got erect when I was attracted to boys. There were no messages in the culture saying that that was OK. The culture was saying there was a big split; it wasn't saying anything about what was appropriate to feel. So I started to puzzle: Well, if the culture isn't really saying who I am or what I'm supposed to be feeling, what else could it be doing that's weird?

Charlie Murphy is the singer and rock star in Seattle; his song *Gay Spirit* has a verse that reminds me of this. *[Sings]*

> When we were born they tried to put us in a cage
> And tell our bodies what to feel
> But we have chosen to feel all the truth
> that our bodies do reveal.
> There's a gay spirit singing in our hearts
> Leading us through these troubled times
> There's a gay spirit moving round this land
> Calling us to a time of open love.*

There are more verses. It's a great song; I recommend Charlie's singing.

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* "Gay Spirit" (BMI) © Charlie Murphy, 1981.

That was a big wake-up for me: that my body did reveal something, and that maybe the culture was wrong on other counts as well. Our gayness puts us in a situation where we can see through the transparent façade of how we are "supposed to be." This fact enables us then to understand that there is probably a lot of rhetoric veiling what's going on in the Middle East that we can also see through; that there is a lot of rhetoric about the place of women in our society that we can see through; and rhetoric about the place of black people, people of color, and so on, that we can see through. Our gayness gives us an angle, and that's a gift that we have that we can give to the Society of Friends and to the world. I've never been puzzled, in all these years of working for social change, to find so many lesbians and bi and gay men in positions of leadership in social change, whether they were out of the closet or not. Of course we would be there, working in all those ways that see through the official rhetoric, because we already have an angle that tells us that we can dare to be cynical about all these things. Even though we also crave acceptance, still, we know what our experience is.

> . . . lying back, looking at this sky, . . . with an ecstatic experience of oneness with the universe, I felt: It is totally true, for every pore of my being, that I am part of this; that this is mine, by right; that all the things that try to alienate me from nature are just lies; that the new creation includes me, and I am included in it.

I'd like to tell another story about a "body" experience that reminded me of my own embodiment. I need the reminders constantly, given the culture's messages in the other direction. I went into a wilderness in Northern Ontario, in the summer a year ago. That whole week was based on Native American lore and experiences, including a couple of "sweats." The first sweat was extremely intense. I hadn't experienced before such a level of pain in a sweat as I did that time. Fortunately, the shaman had advised us, Accept, accept, accept. So I would say: "I accept, I accept, I accept." And then they would throw more water on the rocks. "I accept, I accept, I accept." We were holding on to each other—these incredibly sweaty bodies—all holding on. "I accept." And helping each other not to freak out or to run out. One person started to retch on the other side of the circle, and we put our heads down. "I accept, I accept." The intense, intense pain. At last it was over and we could go out. People were outside waiting for us with life jackets; we slipped them on, and we were led, with legs like jelly, down to the lake and pushed out into the water. It was night, and the sky was this planetarium sky. (Isn't that funny; we compare nature to something inside? *[Laughter]* City

boy, here!) There I was, lying back, looking at this sky, and I started to laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh and laugh, with an ecstatic experience of oneness with the universe. I felt: It is totally true, for every pore of my being, that I am part of this; that this is mine, by right; that all the things that try to alienate me from nature are just lies; that the new creation includes me, and I am included in it.

Did you ever sense the version of Christianity that . . . we were really meant to be spirits all along? That there was a glitch in creation, and we ended up with these bodies—like . . . it's really a big mistake? That we're supposed to suffer through this vale of tears with these terrible bodies until at last we can finally get rid of them and get back to being what we were supposed to be after all?

Melvin Keiser's latest Pendle Hill pamphlet, *Inward Light and the New Creation,* contains a quotation that leapt out at me with a different interpretation of Quakerism from any I had understood previously, and I am grateful for it:

> Philosophically the nature of Quaker spirituality diverges from traditional Western spirituality, based upon the Greek distinction between spirit and matter. . . . Matter is pregnant with divinity. . . . Quakerism is a world-affirming spirituality. Spirit and world, as our existential context, are not a dualism, leading to a world-negating spirituality. Rather the matter of our lives is a spiritual incipience potent with Spirit.*

Hey, that's embodiment!

Erotic

Another gift that I think we offer to the Society of Friends and to people in general is the erotic, because I see the erotic as a bridge to spiritual experience. I'm not alone. A lesbian has written in a West Coast gay paper about her experience of going to a major lesbian, gay, and bisexual writers' conference in San Francisco. She was amazed at all the references she heard to cocks and balls in connection with the spirit. For a while she was startled, and then she realized that there isn't necessarily a holy language and a profane language. And I thought, Wait a minute, that's one of the first things a Quaker said to me, when, in college, I started going to Quaker meeting: "This is a seven-day-a-week religion; this isn't about

* R. Melvin Keiser, *Inward Light and the New Creation: A Theological Meditation on the Center and Circumference of Quakerism* (Wallingford, PA: Pendle Hill Pamphlets), #295.

something separate that we do on Sundays." Later, I found out it was a seven-night-a-week religion, too. *[Laughter]*

It seems to me an important gift to give, because our culture is so fractured, so fearful, so denying; it needs healing.

Another book I'm reading is by Carter Heyward, the lesbian theologian, whose book *Touching Our Strength* is very rich. I want to read a bit to you about healing.

> We will not find much help in our healing from the church, or from the God of christians, jews, and other patriarchal religions. The problem with this deity is that he evokes our shame and fear and then constructs rigid boundaries around us as a means of containing our feelings and our lives.
>
> Men create this god to make themselves self-possessed *[How often I wanted to be self-possessed!]*; to give themselves control over chaotic forces of passion, sex, and death. *[We're seeing that played out now, I think, on TV.]* * And since men, like women, are in relation, their self-possession involves controlling others. This is why practitioners of patriarchal religion tend to assume control, by fear or force, of the world itself, including our bodyselves, psyches, and souls: the places in us in which our lives are transformed if we can reach through the fear to one another.**

A couple of you were with me in a gathering of gay and bisexual men in the Pocono Mountains last fall, where we decided that, because of the problem of our fracturing of our eroticism from our spirituality, it would be interesting to give the weekend a tone that was extremely sex-affirming. One piece of that was to establish a guideline for the weekend, that we wouldn't have sex—which might sound like a contradiction! We thought it would be neat if men weren't going to be there thinking, Whom am I going to have sex with? but instead, were free to feel whatever was there to feel, about sex. And our weekend was extremely affirming of our bodies and our sexual feelings. We reveled in this.

By Sunday morning, having done Native American ritual Saturday night, and so on, we were feeling in such a safe place with each other's caring, that when the shaman among us led us in a grief circle, we really became a grief pile. It reminded me of junior high tackle football, when I *lived* to be tackled. *[Laughter]* It was this great big pile of men, sobbing away. We cried for an hour and a half. Every once in a while somebody would say what they were crying about. We just went on and on and on and on and on. Such real depth in each other! Such affection that flowed among us! So I think it works.

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* Reference to U.S. television coverage of the Persian Gulf War of 1991.—Ed.

** Carter Heyward, *Touching Our Strength: The Erotic as Power and the Love of God* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989), pp. 88–89.

I've sometimes puzzled, why is our culture so sex-denying? Why isn't it affirming? Sex, after all, has such power. Why wouldn't that be something the culture would want to channel into building pyramids or something, affirming instead of denying? (Or, if not totally denying, manipulating for consumption of goods.) I don't have the answer to that, except in Carter Heyward's point about the usefulness of training for control. She notes that if we are trained to control one powerful aspect of our cultural existence, we are then able to control other forces as well, giving us a theme of control in our culture, which can then be projected outward onto, for example, the Third World.

But just imagine our elfishness in this context; imagine what it might mean if we were to affirm our experience of spirituality and sex, bringing these together. I sometimes ask myself, Does that mean that when I'm making love I'm automatically in a spiritual realm? That's not true for me, either.

Carter Heyward is helpful to me on this point, as well. She says it's not that the behavior itself, of having sex, is a spiritual experience, because there is no behavior itself that automatically is anything. Giving bread to the poor is not necessarily a spiritual act. So what really goes on? I quote:

> Love may or may not be embodied in those who give bread to the poor. Love may or may not be incarnate between people in the excited throes of genital sex. Insofar as our relationships are not steeped in a longing to share in such a way that each person is enabled to be herself, the Sacred is muted and diminished among us.*

So she is suggesting that spirituality in lovemaking occurs when, in the act of sexmaking, we share in a way that affirms the other person to be most him- or herself, to be whole. (Then she goes on to discuss mutuality in lovemaking. Maybe I've teased you with enough quotations from her so that you'll read her for yourselves.)

Vulnerability

So who really enjoys being vulnerable?

We are so vulnerable, though, aren't we? We lesbians, gays, bisexual people: we are so vulnerable in this society. It seems as if there's been enough gay bashing in this last year to remind any of us, however insulated we may try to be from that, that we just carry vulnerability around. We *are* vulnerable. That's what goes on in our society.

One tactic I use for something that could be bad news is to try to figure out how it could be good news. For me, vulnerability has, again and again and again

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* Heyward, *Touching Our Strength,* p. 99.

in my life, been a doorway into some experience, some extension of myself, that otherwise I'm not sure I would have reached. The starkest example of that was when I had the opportunity to be in Sri Lanka a year and a half ago, as part of a Peace Brigades International team. Our job in Sri Lanka was to hang out with human rights activists who were vulnerable to assassination. These were people who had been getting a lot of death threats, and felt, Wouldn't it be great if we could be safe. There was no point in going to the police because the police were making the death threats. *[Laughter]* It was like Mississippi in the early sixties when you would see a person in a uniform during the day and in a sheet at night. The death squads were hooked up with the government. So the lawyers among these people heard about Peace Brigades International and asked, Would you send a mission over here, to help to make us safe? So I was among the first team to do that. I found myself, at one point, on the back of a motorbike with a guy who in that particular town in Sri Lanka was the next on the list. His colleague had been brought down in a hail of gunfire just a month before, and he was next. He was taking me to interviews with people who had experienced the impact of the terrorism so that I could bring back stories to tell people.

So I got really scared.
And—I noticed this incredible sky;
the sweet smells of the jungle plants and flowers;
the warm, moist air of the jungle.

Whether we were visiting a family or the Roman Catholic bishop, the person would say, Now you really need to be getting home because it's getting late in the day and it's getting more dangerous all the time. And this guy kept saying, "Well, but I've got one more; you'll really want to meet these people." And we'd go off and meet them, and they'd say, "But it's getting very late now, it's really dark out; you need to be safe; get away."

So, finally, even he acknowledged that it was time to take me back to his place. We were actually scooting down this jungle road, and I said, Why are we making this very circuitous path? As I asked that, I noticed his heart was beating strongly (I had my arms around him). He said, "Well, it's because the army checkpoint is over there, and that guerilla band's checkpoint is over there, and *that* guerilla band's checkpoint is over there," and guess what, my heart started racing.

I usually hope that if somebody is going to shoot at someone I'm hanging out with, there'll be at least a little bit of space *[laughter]* if one of us has to go . . . you think of these things, right? *[Laughter]*. It's called survival defense mechanism. But here, on a moving motorbike, who's going to make discriminations; I'm going to get blown away. So I got really scared; the adrenaline was absolutely pumping through me.

> And—I noticed this incredible sky;
> the sweet smells of the jungle plants and flowers;
> the warm, moist air of the jungle.

I had one of the peak experiences of my whole life. Again, unity with the universe was my privilege to experience.

So my life has taught me that it's OK to be vulnerable. It's OK to take risks, because there can be an opening there; that's valuable. And when I ask myself what goes on in Friends meeting for me, I realize that that also is an experience of vulnerability, and that the more ready I am in a meeting for worship to let go of my defenses and just let happen whatever is there for me, the more chance there is for the spirit to move me. But when I go in self-determined, controlled, deciding to run a line of argument through—or just so scared of what's going on inside me that I try to keep the wraps on, then nothing really happens for me, at meeting. I remember the first time Michael sat beside me for meeting for worship; it was at FLGC's midwinter gathering in Boston: my teeth were chattering like human castanets. Two good friends had the misfortune of sitting next to me this morning, and it was happening again. I identify with the seventeenth-century Quakers who were quaking. It seems OK to me for us to exercise our vulnerability and to express it.

Pain

Another gift: pain. I won't even ask for hands on how many of you like to feel pain. [*Audience member*: You might be surprised by the show of hands.] *[Laughter]* OK, we'll do it; how many of you like to feel pain? *[More laughter]*

Well, of course, we're in a big pain-avoiding culture. Again, I was struck by learning something from Native American lore: how their experiences of the vision quest, the sweat, the long dance, dancing all night are painful experiences that lead somewhere. Our culture is pretty much against pain.

Robert Bly also brought this home to me, when he gave a seminar in Philadelphia a couple of weeks ago; he talked again and again about how we can get people initiated (he's particularly focused on men right now): How do boys become initiated to become men if we are into pain avoidance? All initiation rites known to him in tribal cultures include pain as part of the process. We learn something about ourselves through pain that we can learn in no other way. But if we live in a pain-avoiding culture that says the mall is the place to go, not some place where you encounter, you know, real life *[laughter]*, then how do we learn those things that are only available to us through learning pain?

Of course, early Quakers would not have been surprised by this point of view. We have William Penn's book, *No Cross, No Crown.* It's that clear. I find that contemporary Quakers have also bought in somewhat to this "no pain"

concept. You've heard the phrase many times, Are you comfortable? Are Friends comfortable? I think there's a great way to use that phrase and there's also a pain-avoiding way of using that phrase. Are you comfortable—meaning a very low common denominator—is, I think, a problem.

We're at war in the Persian Gulf now, I believe, because we've had a period of national leadership that hasn't wanted to lead us through the pain of adjusting to a globe that's the way it is. The wish to live a high-consumption lifestyle as a nation forces us to go to war from time to time to make sure that we can get an unjust amount of the world's goodies funneling into our malls, so that we can avoid pain again: a kind of cycle.

The ironical side of this is that we don't really avoid pain. In my experience and, I think, also in the national experience, elaborate pain-avoidance strategies can result in your experiencing more pain than you would have otherwise. So it might make sense to face the pain.

Since that night a few weeks ago I've been working the pain repeatedly, going into that abyss. . . .
Along with those repressed memories has emerged a lot of shame about my lustiness, about how much I want to have sex, shame about my gayness. . . . I thought . . . I [had] handled that, and here it is, . . . really on me. I find myself blushing again, when I come out to people, and it's been years since I've done that.

I asked Michael if I might tell a story that comes out of our relationship, about six weeks ago, and he said yes. Michael and I, as some of you know, used to be a couple, and then we uncoupled a few years ago. Now we're building a solid friendship that includes tremendous support. Our friendship is very important to us. When I was visiting Michael a few weeks ago here in D.C., I felt panic—so panic-stricken that at 1:30 in the morning I was out of his bed, into my car, driving up 16th Street as fast as I could. I ran red lights (I don't run red lights); got stopped, got a ticket; got home at 4:00 A.M. still shaking; spent a hellish morning. Finally a friend was able to come over and be with me, to listen to me: to go right into the pain.

Lo and behold, memories came up that I had been repressing for 40 years or so of when I had been sexually abused at the age of ten. Since that night a few weeks ago I've been working the pain repeatedly, going into that abyss—an abyss of demons, dragons, and fire. For some reason, having partly to do with the safety of my friendship with Michael, I just freaked out. Along with those repressed memories has emerged a lot of

shame about my lustiness, about how much I want to have sex, shame about my gayness. I thought, hey, that was mid-'70s: good old internalized oppression days. I thought I handled that, and here it is, '91: really on me. I find myself blushing again, when I come out to people, and it's been years since I've done that. It's like the peeling of an onion: additional layers emerging over time.

Along with that bad news and that hurt, I also can report a lot of relief. I feel more self-confidence when I'm not in those moments; I feel more freedom to be with Michael and other people; I feel lighter, like, hey, that vision of the elves isn't as far away from me as I'd thought. Those guys in the ties: One of these days, they're going to let me in. Because they are inside me, right? And I'll be dealing with them successfully, through facing the pain. I'll quote Carter Heyward again.

> But most of us are so frightened of harm, of being badly hurt, and of hurting others. And so we resist the sacred eros.
>
> O, my sister, what madness tears at the heart of God! at my heart and yours!
>
> We are together in this fear, you and I. We are its captives—and we, its liberators.
>
> So come. Let us wait for God together.*

Difference

Difference. I told my friend Frank that I was going to talk about gifts that we give, and he said, "Well, surely, your gift is your difference." In this society, difference isn't really appreciated very much. It's not appreciated that much other places either. Michael and I were in the Burmese jungle last summer in a guerilla encampment; we were surrounded by student revolutionaries; we had a chance to teach there. We thought, maybe this is a remote enough setting from our East Coast U.S. that maybe people will be more relaxed about difference here. No; they bash each other over differences, too. Differences are a big, big problem, a global problem. Well, guess what? We're different. So we already have an inside track on that.

In worship I thought of our differences with what appears to be mainstream thinking right now about the Persian Gulf.

The differences that we carry with us all the time by virtue of our sexuality mean that we have tremendous opportunity to *reaffirm difference* inside ourselves as a daily spiritual exercise and in our process of interaction with everybody. What I love about it is, the more we can accept difference inside ourselves the more we have to give. It's a win-win situation.

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* Heyward, *Touching Our Strength,* p. 104.

It's also a challenge, because our fear of difference can get in our way, both inside ourselves and among ourselves. While it can be a little daunting, our fear provides an opportunity to practice. That leads me to the sixth point.

Love

In practicing dealing with difference, we receive a chance to love and to forgive ourselves for the times that we haven't loved.

Sometimes I feel like a judgment machine. Do any of you feel you do a lot of judging in your life? I do so much! Sometimes I get very angry at myself. I have to judge myself—right?—about the fact that I judge people in my meeting, judge people in my family, judge my friends, judge, judge, judge, judge. Sometimes I feel that's the main thing that I do.

"PC," Political Correctness, has fit nicely into that. *[Laughter]* Originally, in the early '70s, political correctness meant a growing perceptiveness that would enable us to shake off some of the prison around us and be able to find new ways of relating. It then became rigidified into yet another set of judgments that we could make on each other. Who is more liberated than who? I've gotten into that a lot. In fact, some of us have been known even to try to make our sex lives conform to PC!

All right, Carter Heyward, move over for Starhawk. My favorite witch. She says in *Dreaming the Dark* :

> We must demand that our politics serve our sexuality. Too often, we have asked sexuality to serve our politics instead. Ironically, the same movements that have criticized sexual repression and bourgeois morality have themselves too often tried to mold their sexual feeling to serve the current political theory. This tradition includes nineteenth century revolutionary asceticism, the New Left's demand that women practice free love (meaning sex without involvement), the fear of lesbianism in the early women's movement, and the mandatory separatist line taken by some in the later women's movement. Too many generations have asked: What do my politics tell me I should feel? The better question is: What do I, at my root, at my core, desire? If we see that root of desire as the Goddess incarnate, as the source of power-from-within, if we honor it and explore it with eyes open, then we can ask: How do I create a society that furthers my sexuality? How can I live my politics erotically, so that they deepen my knowledge of the mysteries, so that they deepen my capacity for joy?*

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* Starhawk: *Dreaming the Dark: Magic, Sex and Politics* (Boston: Beacon Press, New Edition, 1988), pp. 140–41.

It strikes me that insofar as we use our precious FLGC, our support groups, our relationships as labs for moving beyond judgmentalism, that we thereby give a tremendous gift—to the Society of Friends (which, in my perception, also has judges within it); to our American society; and to the globe. If we were able to reach a place of no blame—where we would go after problems and solve them; where we would confront people about stuff that they are doing, but in an ennobling way—then we would be making a phenomenal contribution to everyone, but most of all, to ourselves.

Quakers sometimes fluctuate between judgmentalism on the one hand and a kind of liberal wishy-washiness on the other. You may have run into the attitude, "Oh, well, who knows what's right?" A kind of giving up. We need instead to find some way of discernment that enables us to join folks in their struggling. I've benefitted so much from my friends saying, "George!" but doing it in a way that loves me rather than separates them from me.

Quakers sometimes fluctuate between judgmentalism on the one hand and a kind of liberal wishy-washiness on the other. You may have run into the attitude, "Oh, well, who knows what's right?" A kind of giving up. We need instead to find some way of discernment that enables us to join folks in their struggling.

So when I find myself judging, I ask myself, Is this connecting me or is this separating me? That question clarifies. There are ways I can be thoughtful about people, when I see them mess up, that also connect me. I'm the last person to advocate tolerance or an "Oh, well" attitude. But when one notices someone acting in ways that seem weird or "off" or not representing that person's best, one can respond in a way that *connects* rather than separates by judging.

Last, I'll share a prayer that has helped me deal with my particular judgment machine. It comes about in the context of a Course in Miracles, which I'm beginning to explore as a support for my spiritual growth. When I'm running a judgment number I can go on for an hour developing a very elaborate scheme of how wrong something is. Lots of A, B, Cs and 1, 2, 3s. (Maybe I should have been a lawyer.) Actually, it can be a useful skill. But at the service of judgmentalism it doesn't seem to do me any good. When I catch myself at it, this is what I pray:

Please God, help me to see this in a different way.

And each time something shifts. Somehow I get off that track and open again. When I'm judging, my soul looks contracted; but when I pray that prayer: *Please, God, help me to see this another way*—I just open up.

So maybe that prayer will assist you as well.

George Lakey, director of Training for Change in Philadelphia, has led over 1,000 social change workshops on five continents in more than 40 years of activism. He is author or co-author of six books including *A Manual for Direct Action* (often called the "Bible" of direct action by Southern civil-rights activists of the '60s); *No turning Back: Lesbian and Gay Liberation in the '80s*; *In Place of War, Moving toward a New Society*; *Powerful Peacemaking: A Strategy for a Living Revolution*; and *Grassroots and Nonprofit Leadership: A Guide for Organizations in Changing Times*. His publications have been translated into Swedish, German, Danish, French, Japanese, and Thai. He co-founded the Movement for a New Society and has taught peace studies at Haverford, Swarthmore, and the University of Pennsylvania. In his 45 years of activism, he has trained lesbian and gay leaders in Russia, student revolutionaries in a guerrilla encampment's "jungle university" in Burma, Buddhist monks from Sri Lanka, Mohawks in Canada, Act Up in New York City, farm workers in Michigan, African-American neighborhood leaders in Philadelphia, United Mine Workers in Virginia, therapists in Colorado, and a tenant organization in the Bronx—among others! George is a Quaker, father, grandfather, and great-grandfather in an interracial family. He received the national Giraffe Award (1992) for "sticking his neck out for the common good," and the Ashley Montagu Peace Award (1998) from the International Conference on Conflict Resolution.

George Lakey, swimming