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Open Door: A Prophetic Discipleship Community Honoring The Black Jesus, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr.

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November/December 2020

The Final Evaluation

A Parable by Jesus in Jerusalem on Wednesday of Holy Week

By Murphy Davis

I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink;
I was a stranger and you received me in your homes,
naked and you clothed me;
I was sick and you took care of me,
in prison and you visited me.

The Justice Seekers will then answer him,
“When servant-leader
did we ever see you hungry and feed you?
Or thirsty and give you a cup of Ira’s coffee?
Do you mean on Tuesday morning in the front yard,
or in the Wednesday Soup Kitchen?
When did we ever see you a stranger
and welcome you in our homes?
Do you mean Kevin Harris? Linda Moore?
Ding-dong it, Jesus —
they make us feel welcome in our own home.
When did we see you naked and clothe you? What?
When Big John, Clive, and Quiana
offered showers to 55 folk on Thursday?
Awesome. Which one was you?
When did we ever see you sick?

Yes, we know Kelly accompanied David Christian to Emory Midtown for emergency heart surgery.
Yes, we heard from Calvin about how sick he was.
Prison? Visit you?
Gladys and Dallas Holiday?
Ed and Marcus Wellons?
Mike Casey and Emmanuel Hammond?
Chuck and William Todd?
Murphy and Eduard,
with Thoni Green, Louisiana 102340?
Jesus, Human One, seems like you really get around!
Is this what Martin Luther meant
when he said you are ubiquitous?”

Jesus the Prophet will reply,
“I tell you, whenever you did this
for one of the oppressed or marginalized, or poor,
these sisters and brothers of mine, you did it to me.”

Matthew 25:35-40, Good News Bible, adapted.

Surely Goodness and Murphy

A Eulogy for Murphy Davis

By Joyce Hollyday

On the afternoon of October 31, hundreds of Murphy Davis’ beloved friends gathered by Zoom to celebrate her homegoing. It was a beautiful feast of music, prayer and remembrance. Joyce Hollyday, the editor of Murphy’s memoir and a dear friend for almost four decades, offered the following eulogy.

As we gather for this Zoom memorial celebration of the life of Murphy Davis, it’s wonderful to know that there are so many familiar faces out there. I only wish we could all be together in the same place, sharing Murphy stories and passing around hugs.

This eulogy took shape on the long drive from my home in Vermont to Baltimore last month. I was glad I was able to share it with Murphy — and now I feel honored and grateful to be able to share it with you.

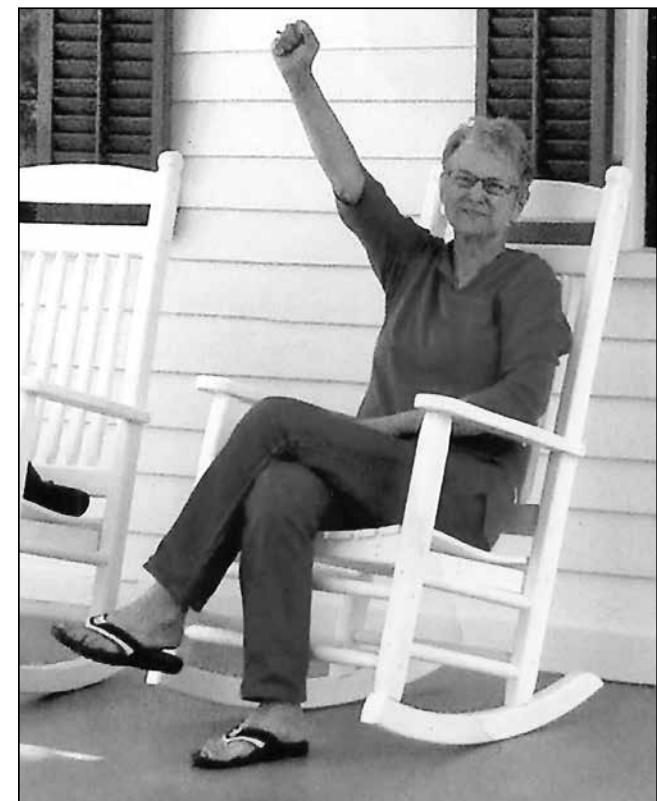
We were stretched out on the bed in the dark. Six-year-old Michaela was snuggled between me and her grandmother Murphy — whom she affectionately calls Mamotes. Murphy began to sing quietly. “Swing low, sweet chariot, comin’ for to carry me home...” I chimed in with a few touches of harmony. Murphy moved on to “Steal away, steal away, steal away to Jesus...” Then the plaintive “If you missed the train I’m on, you will know that I am gone; you can hear the whistle blow a hundred miles...” At breakfast the next morning, Michaela said to me, “That was the best night of my life.” When I asked why, she sighed and said, “Because I was between you and Mamotes and you were singing.”

That was in August, just a few weeks before Murphy Davis’ body finally gave out. For more than 25 years, she had been wondering when the chariot was coming for her — ever since a 1995 diagnosis of a rare and aggressive cancer. Over those years, many more medical crises visited, and that chariot swung low several times. But it always made a last-minute u-turn and headed back to heaven empty.

“I don’t want to die,” Murphy told me in August 2019. She was already beginning to notice small signs of cognitive decline amid the barrage of physical challenges, and she knew that more was inevitable. “I don’t want to die,” she repeated through her tears, “but I want Michaela to remember me this way — not as her batshit-crazy grandmother.” Typical of Murphy, she focused on what was best for others rather than on what she wanted. What she wanted was to be present as her precious granddaughter grows into a young woman and makes choices about education and vocation, perhaps a life partner and children of her own.

Murphy didn’t get that wish.

But as we hold that deep sorrow, we also remember that she once had that same wish for another precious child — her beloved Hannah, who was only 15 when the cancer first



The Mamotes Salute | Eduard Loring

struck. Murphy ached with grief when she thought that she would miss the rest of her daughter’s life. And then she celebrated each step as it unfolded: high school and college and nursing school graduations, a career as an exceptional nursing instructor, marriage to Jason, the birth of Michaela. By sheer courage and determination and faith, Murphy lived to be part of it all — with us still, as was her fervent hope at the end, for Hannah’s forty-first birthday last week. And for that we can only be enormously grateful.

Murphy didn’t want to die — she loved life too much. But she often quoted her friend Jack Alderman, who was executed by the state of Georgia in 2008. Just hours before the killing chemicals were injected into his veins, a prison guard asked Jack if he was ready to die. He answered, “I’m not ready. But I’m prepared.” Murphy lived every day in that truth.

She said that she wasn’t afraid of death, because she had seen a lot of it, and she knew what it could take, and what it couldn’t. During her decades of work with prisoners on death row, she had been on “death watch” several times with friends about to be executed. They had modeled how to die with dignity, clinging to faith and anticipating freedom amid great injustice. Soon after Murphy was diagnosed with the lethal cancer, she received several letters from death row, all carrying a sentiment along the lines of “You’re one of us now. You have a death sentence, too.” That solidarity meant all the world to her.

Solidarity was what Murphy and her cherished life

Surely Goodness and Murphy *continued on page 5*

Activist for Georgia's Homeless and Death-Row Inmates Dies



2005 | Atlanta City Hall Murphy addresses the questions of "panhandling," the "tourist triangle" and the proposed "Commercial Solicitation" city ordinance.

Calvin Kimbrough

By Michael Warren
October 22, 2020

ATLANTA (AP) — Murphy Davis, a determined advocate for death row inmates and homeless people in Georgia, died on Thursday of complications related to cancer. She was 72.

Davis had been in hospice care in Baltimore, where she and her husband, Eduard Loring, lived after leaving Atlanta a few years earlier. Her death was confirmed by their daughter, Hannah Murphy Buc.

"Family surrounded her in fierce calm and peace. A long-haul, hard and beautiful journey is complete. We send thanksgiving to you and love beyond measure," the family wrote on Facebook.

Davis, a Presbyterian minister, left an indelible imprint on Georgia, where for decades she was a regular visitor to death row inmates.

"It is not always an easy task to affirm that even a murderer is a child of God, but we know that it is true," she told The Associated Press in 1986. "There is no act, no matter how vicious, that entirely blots out that identity."

Among her numerous honors, she received a 1991 fellowship from the Petra Foundation, which recognizes the work of "unsung heroes" for social justice, and she is listed among Robert Shetterly's "Americans Who Tell The Truth."

Davis became a full-time activist as a theological student in the mid-1970s, after a key Supreme Court decision upheld the death penalty. Along with her husband and fellow Presbyterian minister, she made it her life's work to fight against the death penalty, advocate for homeless people and press for racial and economic justice and the abolition of war.

In 1979, carrying a 10-day-old baby, they opened Atlanta's first night shelter for the homeless, their daughter said. Then in 1981, the couple and a few others founded the Open Door Community near downtown Atlanta, fashioned on Dorothy Day's Catholic Worker movement. Based in a large, old home, they housed and fed many of the homeless people living on nearby streets while working for their larger social justice goals.

They organized protests that won concessions from the city of Atlanta and prompted the city's public hospital to reverse its plans to impose a co-pay on its poorest patients.

They also demonstrated at the state Capitol to oppose executions, and Davis made innumerable visits to the prisoners on Georgia's death row. Eventually, she counted many of its inmates among her friends.

Anti-death penalty attorney Bryan Stevenson, who founded the Equal Justice Initiative, called Davis "a person with deep conviction and resolve, constantly looking for ways to bring light into dark places," and wrote that she "has actually spent more time in jails and prisons than most people who have never been convicted of a crime."

Stevenson, who met Davis and her colleagues as a young lawyer, wrote the foreword to Davis' 2020 memoir "Surely Goodness and Mercy." He said the Open Door gave him and other activists a place to be nurtured in spirit as well as to think, talk and strategize.

"People from every different sort of life experience sat together at table and learned about one another and figured out how to share life," said her daughter, now a nursing professor at the University of Maryland. "The opportunity to grow up with such a wide and loving perspective on the world and see how to work constantly for justice through that love and those relationships has informed everything that I've ever done. And she was the center of that."

"She was the most deeply kind and loving and most courageous person," her daughter said. "She also had the ability to listen and hear people who never experienced being listened to in their entire lives."

The Open Door Community's Atlanta home closed its doors in 2017 as the founders grew older and their neighborhood gentrified. By then, Davis had lived for more than two decades with Burkitt's Lymphoma, a relatively rare and highly aggressive cancer that was supposed to give her just six months. Davis chronicled her excruciating cancer battle in her memoir, published just weeks before her death.

"In contrast to many people I've watched die who had been judged unworthy to live, I know that I will be extravagantly loved into death, by a remarkable partner and a myriad of family members and friends," she wrote.

Davis' survivors include her husband and their daughter, son-in-law Jason and granddaughter Michaela, and a sister and two brothers. ♦

Don Schanche, who retired from The Associated Press, contributed to this report.

HOSPITALITY

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Calvin Kimbrough

2013 | 910 Ponce Murphy loved Mardi Gras, which we celebrated each year with a wonderful party — costumes, the billy-billy strut, gumbo and dancing. Here she shares a laugh with her great friend Mary Sinclair.

Newspaper

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Open Door Community

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Please join us on Facebook for the continuing journey of the Open Door Community in Baltimore. Thank you. David and Eduard.

A Redemptive, Meaningful Life

A Review of *Surely Goodness and Mercy*

By Anthony Granberry

The consolidation of power and resources demands privacy, secrecy and the expectation that everybody will stay focused on their individual lives and wellbeing.

— Murphy Davis (2019)

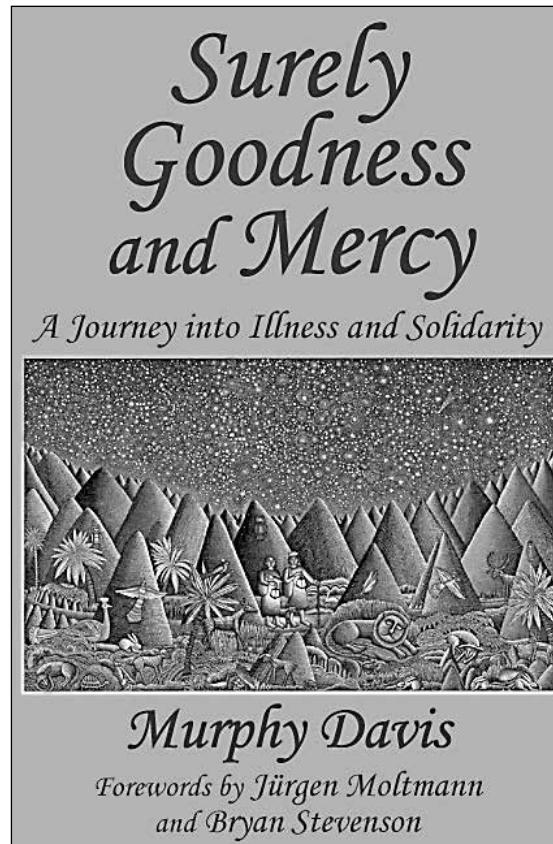
A gift. Murphy Davis has given us a gift. The gift is an invitation to look within our souls, our psyches, and to consider what it means to live a redemptive, meaningful life. These opportunities are usually reserved for psychotherapeutic experiences or deep, meaningful conversations with wise friends, or coming face to face with one's own health fragility. It is often too late when one reaches the point of health fragility but not for Murphy Davis. There are several paths to this golden opportunity if we are open to one or any of them. Murphy's most apparent path may be her health struggles, yet upon closer observation, her path began years earlier. The question is, what will be your path, my path? Will I choose to take it? Will you?

Some will find the earthiness of Murphy's experiences too much. She presents a stark look at the frailty of the human body. The task is to take in the discomfort that resonates with our own vulnerabilities and insecurities to discern the deeper meaning, or sometimes, meaning that is rather obvious. When some read "Black Lives Matter" they subconsciously read "Only Black Lives Matter." Just as when some read "Cats Matter," their psychic interpretation is "Dogs Don't Matter." Some will experience affective and cognitive discomfort when they read *Surely Goodness and Mercy*. It can't all be real. The reader in some ways suffers with Murphy. Isn't this what Christians are called to do? For those ready for a candid, unadulterated peek at our essential selves, who we are and whom we can choose to be, the book is a gift.

Somehow, some way, we must learn to value, to seek out the interior, introspective life. The transforming, life-enriching experiences that give our lives the depth they so dearly deserve. Rituals are both life sustaining and the thieves of the interior work that helps us to mine and treasure life's journey while successfully avoiding shallowness, superficiality, and an insensitivity to the plights of others. We must learn the difference between good and not so good ritual. If approached with open minds and hearts, psychotherapy allows us to own and appropriate in healthy ways our anger and sadness, and to work through our guilt, shame and other emotions. Failure to do so precludes us from expanding our life options and our wills, relative to how we will live this life, how we will relate to and care for others and ourselves. *Surely Goodness and Mercy* invites readers to look deeper. The book is a therapy session in just under two hundred pages.

I once had a conversation with a man who unintentionally told me that during the harshest of winters, he rarely ever experienced the cold. He left a temperature-controlled house in the morning and walked to an attached temperature-controlled garage. He hopped into a vehicle already warmed by an automatic starter, drove to a temperature-controlled office garage and made his way to his temperature-controlled office. He was in no real way impacted by the brutal cold. Should we vilify this man? No. Should we encourage this man to do the work to retain a sensibility to the plight of others who daily experience the brutal cold or who, wrapped in numerous blankets, sleep on a cold sidewalk? Yes. Is sensibility enough? No. The hope is that this man will do all he can to better the lives of those battered by cold and harsh winters. Sensibility includes an understanding that the plight of these others is not about being *less fortunate*, but rather about being

Open Door Community Press



Surely Goodness and Mercy
A Journey into Illness and Solidarity
by Murphy Davis
Forewords by Jürgen Moltmann
and Bryan Stevenson



Surely Goodness and Mercy
A Journey into Illness and Solidarity
by Murphy Davis

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caught in a framework that methodically limits their progress toward becoming whole and able to at least attain Maslow's physiological and safety needs. Do some squander opportunities? Yes. Most of us have and still somehow come out smelling like a rose. How? Because many of us are supported by a system that allows for missing the mark while not falling through the cracks of society. Most of us have safety nets. Few of those whose lives are indeed cold and harsh, and not only during the winter, are opportunity squanderers. Labeling them as such only helps us to justify our fear that somehow we with them share kinship. We become the man who rarely ever experiences the cold, harsh world of our marginalized brothers and sisters. We become the person who focuses largely on her or his own individual life and wellbeing. *Surely Goodness and Mercy* cries out to us — Do not become this person!

Murphy's book is a gift to this man and to each of us. She reminds us that our kinship is far more than socioeconomic. We share a human and spiritual kinship, a kinship of destiny. To remain oblivious to our kinship is an easy choice.

Murphy's personal and intimate account of her bouts with cancer and other health challenges yanks away the covers to paths this journey can take. She opens the door to a reality from which we are far too often insulated and intentionally unmindful. Murphy shares gut-wrenching realities, cruelties and assaults directed at our brothers and sisters on death row, amazing feats and failures of our healthcare systems and miraculous sequences of blessed events in her healthcare odyssey that sustained her long enough to finish the book and hopefully will sustain her for many years to come.

We are all vulnerable in this life — to health, financial and other challenges. If we wait until we are in the grip of our vulnerabilities to discover our kinship with the other and the earth, we are less likely to live in ways that are redemptive and transformative for others and ourselves. Murphy did not wait. She lived and lives a life dedicated to our shared humanness, and because she did and does, she was able to mine this treasure of a book. *Surely Goodness and Mercy* is personal and communal. It is advocacy from a sick bed. Each health challenge allowed Murphy to delve deeper into what it means to be human. She could have focused only on herself; rather, she opens a door for you and me and invites us in. She offers us hospitality in a book.

I served as a pastoral counselor at the Open Door Community for nearly 15 years. Somewhat exasperated with my church experiences prior to that point, I sought a church that might be more authentic to Jesus' original intentions. God heard my prayer. My time at the Open Door Community blessed me in many ways and positioned me to be more of a blessing to others. At bottom, I learned the value of an *open door*. On a day set aside to complete paperwork, I considered whether I should unlock my office door. No clients were scheduled. Walk-ins are rare or nonexistent in our business. Our schedules are rarely able to accommodate someone without an appointment. On this day, I reflected on the literal interpretation of an *open door*: I left my office door unlocked. About two hours later someone entered the waiting room. I went out to find a young, reticent twenty-something-year-old college student. He shared that he walked by our office almost daily. Today he decided to come in. He shared the troubling thoughts with which he wanted to come to terms. I invited him into the office to learn more about what he was seeking. That young man spent almost two years in psychotherapy before graduating college and accepting a job in another state. No longer reticent, he went off to live life unapologetically and intentionally, with a heart for the well-being of others and himself.

Open doors make a difference if we are open to disruptions, inconveniences and unselfish rendezvous into concerns of which we are not the center. After *Surely Goodness and Mercy*, one can only hope that we will be more inclined to open the door to a journey we all should take to a reality we would rather avoid, and to brothers and sisters who are not on our schedule, yet who so desperately need us to join them in solidarity for access to our shared destiny. Murphy Davis has given us a gift. Murphy Davis has opened a door. Will we enter? ♦

Anthony Granberry is a pastoral counselor and pastoral psychotherapist with the Atlanta Counseling Group LLC (tacg.org). He has over 25 years of counseling experience in professional settings as well as in the parish. He studied at Morehouse College, Emory University and the University of Georgia. Anthony's graduate education includes a Doctorate degree in pastoral counseling.



1977 | Georgia Capitol (left) At a March and Rally organized by Southern Prison Ministries in opposition to the reinstatement of the death penalty following *Gregg v. Georgia*.



1992 | 910 (left) Eduard, Hannah and Murphy celebrate Hannah's 13th birthday.



1990 | Imperial Hotel (above) Murphy and Eduard during the first day of the 16-day occupation of the Imperial Hotel. Photograph | ODC



1999 | Grady Hospital (below) A press conference during the Grady Campaign.



2005 | Milledgeville, Georgia (right) A Hardwick Prison Teaching Trip.

Murphy Davis ¡Presente!



2008 | 910 (right) Singing at Sunday Worship.
Photograph by Amanda Petersen



2015 | Georgia Capitol (above) Speaking with the press at the Vigil for Life during the state execution of Warren Hill.



2013 | Georgia Capitol (right) Murphy's Good Friday dramatization, The Family of the Crucified. A video of this one-woman play from Good Friday 2015 by filmmaker Asher Emmanuel can be found at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2bUmrYp7eiA>.



2016 | Holy Week (left) Grandmother time with Hannah and Michaela.

Photographed (1977-2016) and Compiled by Calvin Kimbrough

Surely Goodness and Murphy: A Eulogy for Murphy Davis *continued from page 1*

partner, Ed Loring, had sought in 1981 when they abandoned their career tracks and started the Open Door Community with people off the streets in downtown Atlanta. They ran a soup kitchen, provided showers and clean clothes and offered free medical and foot clinics, while taking the deeper step of making a home with several of the people they served. They took to heart Jesus' Matthew 25 command to feed the hungry, care for the sick and visit the prisoners. Over the years they prayed for deeper solidarity with these humble ones whom Jesus claimed as his sisters and brothers. And when that solidarity came in the form of cancer, as Murphy put it, they "practically gagged on the fruit."

When the chariot finally took her from us, I expect she was welcomed into heaven by her parents and a huge throng of Jesus' humblest sisters and brothers, each one of whom she thanked by name.

Because their community members from the streets couldn't afford health insurance, Ed and Murphy had sacrificially given up theirs and chosen to receive medical care through the systems available to the poor. They were plunged into the world of overloaded and underfunded public clinics and Grady Hospital, where they had to fight for Murphy's survival. As had always been true in their decades of prophetic witness in Atlanta, this new chapter prompted escalated advocacy on behalf of people on the margins, the ones who are sentenced to suffer and die by our nation's lethal, profit-driven priorities. Ed and Murphy became catalysts for a broad coalition that successfully confronted hospital policies and channeled millions of much-needed dollars to Grady.

Murphy suffered. My, how she suffered. But she did not complain. She never asked, "Why me?" She had lived for so long among people who were victims of brutal injustices, who were denied lifegiving treatment, who died penniless and alone on the streets or by state decree, that "Why me?" would have been absurd. She could only feel blessed and grateful for each medical miracle and every precious moment of life — and for being surrounded and upheld by the prayers of a huge network of loving friends and the care of an extraordinary family. Ed never missed a medical appointment with Murphy, and he attended her with gentle, patient and adoring devotion. Hannah began cleaning and dressing her mother's wounds at the age of 15 and never stopped. Michaela assumed the role of her mother's faithful assistant — and every doll and stuffed animal in her vast collection survived multiple operations and excessive Band-aid applications.

It took Murphy about 25 years to write her memoir, *Surely Goodness and Mercy*. I had the honor and delight of working with her on it over the last decade, with several interruptions for her medical crises. One of my greatest joys is that we finished her book while Murphy was still with us. The title comes from a line of the Twenty-third Psalm, which she so loved: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life." Murphy knew and felt that promise down to

her bones.

I joked that, because the book was taking us so long, "Surely goodness and Murphy shall follow me all the days of my life." During the final weeks, when she was tethered to an oxygen machine, Murphy laughed as she declared, "Surely goodness and mercy and a long green tube shall follow me all the days of my life." One of the great graces of her long journey with illness was that there was always humor. Ed helped a little with that. Through even the roughest patches — especially then — humor carried them.

Now I face the poignant irony that my joke is true: Surely goodness and Murphy *will* follow me all the days of



Calvin Kimbrough

my life. Back in the 1980s, when I was beginning to find my voice as a speaker and writer with Sojourners Community and magazine, a few people said to me, "You need to know Murphy Davis." I was in my twenties; Murphy was a few years older and already recognized as one of the few women leaders in the Christian peace and justice movement at that time. We met briefly in DC at the 20th anniversary of the March on Washington in 1983. She invited me to spend some time with her at the summer cottage in Montreat, North Carolina, that her family had owned since her childhood.

We hiked and sang songs around a bonfire while Murphy strummed her guitar. She entertained me with hilarious tales about going to the Montreat Dairy Queen with her friend Lyn when they were girls, putting on airs as they pretended to be part of the invented Shagnasty family, whose members included Aerospray Springboard (that was Murphy), Glo-coat, and Hexecelda — who was called Stripe for short. Murphy made me my first (and actually my last) hot toddy, with a good dose of fine bourbon. And she encouraged me to become all

that God had created me to be, to live into my power as a woman, to write and preach and advocate with boldness.

I would have followed her anywhere. And now I feel the gentle comfort of knowing that she follows me.

"Why me?" I ask myself sometimes. Why did I receive the extraordinary blessing of such a friend? But I know I'm not the only one for whom the persistence of Murphy's loving spirit is true. We are legion. When the chariot finally took her from us, I expect she was welcomed into heaven by her parents and a huge throng of Jesus' humblest sisters and brothers, each one of whom she thanked by name.

For those of us still here...well, Michaela said it best. When Murphy was dying, Ed gently told Michaela that Mamotes was leaving us. Michaela responded at once: "Mamotes is *never* leaving us. She'll always be in our hearts." True wisdom from a beloved young granddaughter, who will feel the presence of her dear Mamotes at every important juncture in her life — and many times in between.

poetry corner



Julie Lonneman

Psalm 23

Adapted by Murphy Davis

Oh my Beloved Friend,
you are my shepherd.

In your care I have everything I need.

You open the gate to green pastures.

You teach me Sabbath
and give me time to rest.
Beside the flowing stream
and the still lake

you restore me to myself in your image.

You lead and accompany me
into the path of justice and solidarity.
and I find my integrity in your way.

Even though I walk through
the valley of the shadow of death,
I am not afraid,
because you never leave me
and your love casts out fear.

With a shepherd's rod and staff,
you guide me and give me
comfort and strength.

You invite me to a bountiful table,
where enmity and divisions fall away.
"Justice is important, but supper is essential."*

You welcome me as an honored guest.
My joy overflows like a cup
poured full and always
spilling over.

Surely goodness and mercy have
run after me my whole life long.
And so I will live under the shelter of your wings
and enjoy you forever.

*Ed Loring's mantra, repeated often

When I hear the barred owls singing to each other in our Vermont woods, I think of Murphy, who had a special, mystical connection to owls. On my walk there this morning, I came across a rare patch of sunlight among the thick birches and pines, gleaming on the snow like a pool of diamonds. And I thought of Murphy — who reflected the Light of God and sparkled like no other. She lives in the beauty and mystery all around us. And she's parked right there in our hearts, dogging us all, encouraging us to be our most compassionate, most creative, most courageous selves.

Thanks be to God.

Amen. ♣

Joyce Hollyday, a writer and pastor living in Vermont, has been a friend of the Open Door for four decades. Her blog can be found at www.joycehollyday.com.

Homegoing: A Celebration of Murphy Davis' Life
is available online: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kp0i7_INvv0&feature=youtu.be

Introducing R. Leon (Lee) Carroll

Board Member of the Open Door Community

By Nibs Stroupe

In 2016, when key partners in the Open Door Community “retired,” it was decided that the organization would continue as a much smaller residential community of three people—Ed Loring, Murphy Davis and David Payne. ODC relocated from Atlanta to Baltimore, and a new external board of directors was created to lead the organization.

This is the tenth in a series of short articles introducing readers to those who serve on the board. These brief “spiritual biographies” describe the journeys of individual directors and how they help continue the legacy of the Open Door.

In this edition we will hear some of the story of the chair of the ODC board of directors, R. Leon (Lee) Carroll. For 26 years, he was associate director and then director of the Office of Contextual Education at Columbia Seminary in Decatur, Georgia before he retired. Lee has been doing these interviews, but it is my delight to interview and introduce him to Hospitality readers.

“He’s such a high achiever, but he’s still a regular guy—an unlikely combination,” said my partner in ministry and life, Reverend Caroline Leach. I had a delightful interview with Lee via Zoom on the day before his 55th wedding anniversary (but he and Betty have been together for 62 years, he also said!)

Lee is a child of the segregated South. His dad was a petroleum engineer, and his family traveled a lot in Lee’s first years. He lived in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi, including the southernmost point on the Mississippi River: Pointe a la Hache. At times he lived in oil camps, which were small villages built for oil prospectors, including the engineers. His Southernness was demonstrated most clearly when his mother was pregnant with him. She and his father went back to her home place of McComb, Mississippi, to birth her first born, Lee. Unbeknownst to him in his Advent birth in McComb, he was born in what came to be known as the “bombing capital of the world,” for its legacy of bombing and violence in the civil rights movement.

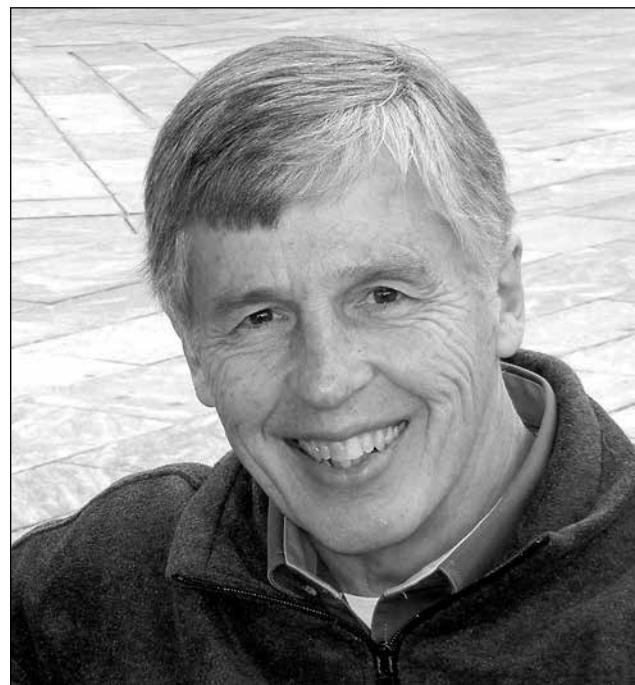
Then, it was back on the road until his family settled in Laurel, Mississippi, in 1956 in order for him to go to high school. He felt that he had arrived in the big city—population 25,000! He would captain the football team in high school, date the cheerleader Betty and graduate in 1960. He was oblivious at the time, like many of us Southerners classified “white,” to the racial turmoil swirling around him. He did not realize that there was much to be concerned about regarding racial classification. Like many of us, it simply was not on his radar at the time, though when the leaders of his Presbyterian church voted not to allow Black people in worship or as members, he did feel a bit of unease.

He went to college at Rhodes and at the University of Southern Mississippi. It was in college where his eyes were opened a bit, and his consciousness began to change. His professors were important vehicles for these changes, but a more important force was his involvement in Westminster Fellowship, the Presbyterian campus ministry. Here, he began to hear new and different voices, voices emanating from Black Jesus. Though that concept was not used at that time, the liberating Black Jesus was calling to him.

He was fortunate enough to be selected to participate as a college student in the World Alliance of Reformed Churches meeting in Frankfurt, Germany. It was at this conference that he met many students of different skin colors and approaches to life. He was appointed to a task force to draft a resolution on whether the Alliance should support the Civil

Rights Bill of 1964. Others on this task force included brown-skinned Africans who were graduate students in England. His eyes and heart opened wide through his engagement with these students; as he no doubt had suspected all along, they were human beings just like him, even smarter than him. He wouldn’t be able to go back home again with the same perceptual apparatus.

Lee graduated from USM in 1965; he and Betty got married; then after a short honeymoon, it was off to Columbia Seminary in the Atlanta area, where he would seek ordination as a minister. As they were moving into student housing, Lee



Savan Wilson

was dragging a huge suitcase up the stairs, and who should come bounding down the stairs but an upperclassman, Ed Loring. When they met on those stairs, Ed asked Lee if he was saved. While Lee wondered what he had gotten himself into, Ed added, “Hi, I’m Ed Loring.” I asked Lee if Ed had assisted him with the suitcase, and he replied, “Of course not, and I still haven’t forgiven him.”

It was in seminary that Lee breathed in and developed one of his powerful attributes: the weaving together of spirituality and social justice, from faculty such as Shirley Guthrie, Charlie Cousar and Neely McCarter. Lee had grown up with spirituality and social justice split asunder, a split that enabled those of us classified as “white” to call ourselves “Christian” while endorsing slavery and neo-slavery. Black Jesus was working on Lee to help him reconnect the biblical foci of spirit and justice as integral to one another.

Upon graduation from seminary, Lee accepted the call to become associate pastor at a Presbyterian church in Whitehaven, Tennessee, a bubbling suburb of Memphis. He accepted the call in February of 1968. Two months later he found himself walking in the funeral procession in Atlanta after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. He would start in the Whitehaven church in June, not thinking about what the name “Whitehaven” suggested. It would not take him long to discover its meaning. He did community ministry and began to discover a side of Memphis that he had not known. In the middle of white resistance to public school desegregation, his church began a so-called “Christian” academy, which he opposed. He began to reach out to Black people who were moving into the edges of Whitehaven. One day he came in to his office and found a calling card on his desk, with a picture of a pair of eyes on it: “The eyes of the KKK are upon you.” It wasn’t too much later that a couple of

the church elders came to him and told him that it was time for him to leave. Lee agreed—he had had enough.

He then went to Highland Presbyterian Church in Louisville as an associate pastor, and this congregation was very supportive of his ministry. It was a time of healing for him and for Betty, and they stayed there five years before he accepted a call to be associate pastor in a church in Charleston, West Virginia. It was during his pastorate in Charleston that he made a trip to Atlanta, and while there, he went to the Open Door and re-acquainted himself with Ed Loring and Murphy Davis. He came away impressed with the ministry and the model of theological reflection/practice.

In 1983, he joined the faculty of Columbia Seminary to help direct their contextual education office, then known as supervised ministry. The contextual education experience is one where the rubber meets the road in educating ministerial students. Students are placed in churches or other ministries, and they participate in ministry and reflect upon that practice as they participate in it. Lee became a leader in this field of action/reflection in his 26 years at Columbia, guiding over 1,000 students in various placements, including at the Open Door. During all this time, he participated actively in the ministry of Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta, getting involved in and helping to lead their ministry with homeless persons, their prison ministry and their anti-death penalty work. Lee also placed many students at Oakhurst Presbyterian, where Caroline and I were pastors. It was our great privilege to experience first-hand Lee’s leadership, guidance and ministry.

And what a guide he is! He has served on numerous boards and has chaired many of them, including Central Presbyterian Outreach and Advocacy Center, Our House (a childcare and support center for homeless families), Appalachian Ministries Education and Resource Center and Urban Training Organization of Atlanta. In 2017, after the Open Door moved to Baltimore, Murphy Davis approached Lee to see if he would be willing to chair the newly formed board for the Open Door. As Lee put it to me, “Who could say no to Murphy Davis?” This was a new relationship for everybody, and as usual, Lee has provided great leadership for ODC in this transitional time. As board chair, he sees two primary duties for himself and for the ODC board: to be good stewards of the current and future ministry of Open Door, and most of all to provide good stewardship of the Open Door so that the retired partners will be sustained after their long and powerful seasons of ministry.

When I asked Lee about his hopes and fears, he indicated that over his life, his faith in God’s movement has grown deeper, and that he is always looking for signs of God’s movement. He and I were both raised by good white people in the age of segregation and white supremacy, so I understand him well when he indicates that “race” has been a central issue all of his life. He hopes for racial justice and even racial healing, but he also knows that the forces of white supremacy are deep and strong. We give thanks to Lee for his continuing ministry to bend the arc of history toward justice and healing. ♦

*Nibs Stroupe is a longtime friend of the Open Door, retired pastor and author of *Deeper Waters: Sermons for a New Vision*. He and Catherine Meeks are authors of *Passionate for Justice*, a book about the life and witness of Ida B. Wells for our time. He writes a weekly blog at www.nibsnotes.blogspot.com. (nibs.stroupe@gmail.com)*

Grace and Peaces of Mail

“Immediate saint” were the first words out of Catherine Morris’ mouth when we heard the news of Murphy’s passing. I have stopped praying for Murphy. Now I pray to Murphy. I pray that she may send you consolation in your immense sorrow at the loss of such a great and beautiful soulmate and partner.

Love and Prayers,
Jeff Dietrich
LA Catholic Worker
Los Angeles, California

Murphy Davis,

You, Sister, are a grand human being and a great writer! You tell your horrific cancer story with multiple narrative arcs. Because you avoid self-pity, pity itself finds no place in your book.

You lived the life and loved the people and add in the writer’s gift of the telling detail.

You place your personal saga in the context of the celebrating, intentional community engaged in the fight for dignity and a welcoming, safe haven for each and for all.

You are on the path of Dorothy Day. Our one true Saint. Thanks for living and giving life and for the labor and the promise of this book.

Perhaps we’ll all of us meet Dorothy Day somewhere along the roomy South Pole Wall, whose discovery was announced in July 2020.

I know I’m excited.

Richard Cook
Cockeysville, Maryland

For Murphy I rejoice — talk about someone who fought the good fight! It is just that huge empty slot of life which was left behind. For all of us but most especially for y’all!

I just passed on the news of her death to Nelson Mitchell — it was Murphy who suggested more than 20 years ago I begin to write to him on the Row. He is off the Row and at Reidsville State Prison. We are still in regular contact — thank you, Murphy!

Now my heart aches for you folks. Holding you in love before the Lord!

Jim Powers
Evans, Georgia

Dear Ed, Hannah and family,

My heart goes out to you with so much love and gratitude for having the honor of knowing your beloved Murphy. Her smile will be something I cherish and can access anytime. That brings me joy. Hannah, I send my love to you in the loss of your precious mother. I know she loved you fiercely and you her. Ed, it has been so clear my whole life how much you two loved each other; my heart goes out to you.

One of my favorite memories of Murphy is when she found gum stuck under a chair in your kitchen that Colleen had stuck there while I was working. Colleen was probably two years old. Rather than being annoyed or frustrated, she just laughed and laughed and told me she was going to leave it there, just to remember Colleen! What an amazing human.

I love you all very much.

Legare Clarke
Swannanoa, North Carolina

Dear, dear Ed,

I hold you so closely in my heart, with Hannah and Michaela. A world without Murphy physically present in it is hard to get my mind and heart wrapped around (feels like a gut punch!) and I hurt for all of you, thinking and praying all the time these past days. I loved Murphy deeply. She was present for me at difficult and happy junctures of my life. I remember being with her at Metro Prison back in the 90s after we found Janice Buttrum’s mother and brought her for a visit. It was a few days before the cancer diagnosis and Murphy told me tests were being run. Then Elizabeth Dede called to say it was cancer.

I’m glad you’ve had all these years since then with Murphy but in my heart they still don’t feel like enough! I treasure our last long phone conversation when she told me about the fun time with your grandson and taking him to the aquarium, how he loved visiting you. I loved and was blown away by her beautifully written book. I am thankful for Murphy — for her courage, her example, her compassion, love, humor, the good way you two (and the community) raised Hannah (influencing our own parenting of our three children). I remember her beautiful, strong singing and gitaring, all the Open Door services we shared at 910. Susan (ours) cried, and recalled our week in Maine in 1999 and that you and Murphy gave her money to buy a hat like Murphy’s. We thought of how Murphy laughed when we told her Susan asked, “Why does Ed Loring call himself Ed the alligator?”

I wish I had checked the OD Facebook page to learn that hospice care had begun for Murphy and feel sad that I didn’t. I love you, Ed. I will write to Hannah. I’m glad Murphy got to vote at this terrible time for the U.S. You are welcome here. A friend has a warm little cabin not used much in winter near us and you can stay there if you want to in the coming months. What can we do? The gift is to keep your head and ears warm this winter. Clyde sends love, too, dear friend.

Blessings,
Jane Tipton
New Harbor, Maine

Murphy Davis Christmas Packages for Death Row



For over 30 years, Murphy Davis made sure that every prisoner on Georgia’s death row received a box of Christmas gifts that included essentials like socks, writing tablets and knit caps, as well as nuts, cookies and other holiday treats. New Hope House is honored to continue this tradition moving forward, a tradition that will forever be called the **Murphy Davis Christmas Packages for Death Row**.

To donate to the fund for the packages:
www.newhopehousega.org

Dear Murphy and Ed,

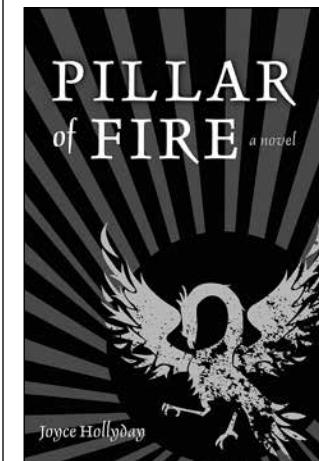
— for I can’t think of one of you without the other, Well, we’ve come to that time when putting your body, Murphy, through one more intervention and its consequences in your long struggle with cancer has come to an end. I am thankful that you are not facing another surgery, another bout of radiation or chemo, or a trial medication, and combatting all the side effects from such is over. But now we know that this freedom comes with a great cost. As Ed has described, you are becoming more fragile though praise God for the time left with those you love most dearly and the strength to make it to the dinner table.

When I think of what to possibly say to you in these last days, one thing pops up over and over and over. It’s thank you! For the witness of the Incarnation in your words and your work. For our friendship that’s lasted over 40 years. For the way you made me feel so deeply loved every single time we got together. For the book you labored over and completed that took us all on this hard journey you’ve traveled but inspired us to live more fully as you have. For calling me Marilyn Jo.

May you leave us gently and peacefully, surrounded by angels here and those waiting for you. May God comfort you both in your parting from each other.

You are both deeply loved. Prayers are going up for you each day. May you feel carried through this valley of shadow of death with a sense of deep peace.

Marilyn Schertzer
Atlanta, Georgia



Announcing
Pillar of Fire
A novel by Joyce Hollyday

In an age of intolerance, compassion can be dangerous. Pillar of Fire captures the stunning witness of the medieval mystics known as Beguines. Amid the intrigues of kings and knights, against a panorama of church corruption, Crusader campaigns and Inquisition trials, these bold women followed their faith and broke all the rules.

“Joyce Hollyday weaves a fabric of adventure that gallops across Europe to Sinai and back. Retelling the gospel story in a feminist key, Pillar of Fire is a compelling mirror for our own times and consciences.” —Elaine Enns and Ched Myers, authors, *Healing Haunted Histories*

“This profound epic tale will move you to tears, incite your righteous anger and inspire you to create authentic community. Reading it is like taking a deep spiritual journey.” —Nancy Rue, author, *The Reluctant Prophet Trilogy*

For more details and ordering information, please go to: <https://wipfandstock.com/pillar-of-fire.html>. When you click on “Add to Cart,” you’ll receive an automatic 20% discount. At checkout, use the code PILLAR for an additional 20% off the cover price.

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Murphy,

I finished reading your book last night. Thank you so much for the care and effort you took to write it. You are a great writer.

I feel compelled to give you some feedback because for me it is an important book on a number of levels and I want you to know how much I appreciate what you wrote and why. As you know; although our lives are quite different, Tensie and I have parallel journeys to yours and Ed's as do many Catholic Workers. So your book resonates with us and affirms us and instills a deep gratitude for those experiences and struggles we hold in common and with which we so identify. That in itself is a huge gift.

Tensie and I both worked as lay chaplains at the County Hospital in Los Angeles; Tensie for 4 years and I for 8. Your descriptions of Grady and your experiences there were both familiar and palpable. Grady could be a twin sister of L.A. County Hospital, from the level of care, to the indignities of loss of all privacy in rooms with 4-6 patients, to the need to advocate for oneself, to the dynamics of being a teaching hospital (University of Southern California in our case), to the waiting times, to the treatment of the poor, etc. There were many days when I would leave the hospital at 5:00 pm and pass the standing-room-only emergency waiting room and come back to work the next morning and see some of the same people still sitting there waiting to be seen. I could tell stories forever (and maybe will if we ever have the good fortune to visit you and Ed some day) as I'm sure you could as well. In your telling I felt like I was transported back. It is so important that people know what the poor endure and your book helps shine that light.

When Tensie and I first came together I had some significant health issues and no insurance and was at the mercy of Highland Hospital in Oakland, the county hospital. My first trip to the emergency room had me on a gurney in the hallway with Tensie standing next to me for 16 hours until I was seen. What you describe of Grady I'm convinced is the template for all county hospitals in the country and the experience of all of the poor and uninsured among us.

Although my health issues pale in comparison to yours, I have had a few and your experience of the incredible grace of the love and care from family and community members in times of crisis is so true. It might be the deepest experience of God's love as transmitted through loved ones I've ever experienced. I thank you for your witness to that as well.

I was touched by your description of the all-consuming nature of physical pain as it conspires to isolate us in the raging sea and how grace-filled it is to have loved ones standing on the shore constantly reminding us that we have not been abandoned and that we have firm ground and loving arms to return to when the storm of overwhelming pain finally subsides. I teared up a little reading that because I've been there and it was healing to know another has experienced that and how humbling and nourishing it is to be the recipient of that deep a love.

I'm also grateful for your so beautifully articulated constant spiritual foundation for the values that lead you to care for and throw in with the cast-aside in our society and the importance of solidarity with their plight as a way of both understanding and standing with them.

Your description of the leaving and eventual destruction of the building at Ponce de Leon also brought tears to my eyes. I remember sitting in a cell at the Metropolitan Detention Center in Los Angeles with Jeff Dietrich when we received your letter announcing the painful decision to let the Open Door go. We could feel your heartache and struggled to find words of encouragement to send you. The enormity of what you all accomplished there was and is

such an inspiration! I was so glad that your book chronicled that as well. What is possible through the grace of God funneled through the people who love and support us and the persistence that comes with faith in the folly of the Gospels is one of the great miracles of our lives. Your book is a testament to that miracle and thereby a continuation of the work you started so many years ago.

So, dear Murphy, without going on too long, I just want to thank you so much for your book. I hope you know how much Tensie and I love you and Ed and how much we look forward to the day we can once again, God willing, throw our arms around you and express our love and gratitude in that way. You challenge us and give us courage and determination to keep our lamps oiled up and burning.

With love and deep respect,

Dennis Apel
Beatitude House
Guadalupe Catholic Worker
Guadalupe, California

P.S. I loved Ed's poem at the end of the book. Tell him Longfellow has nothing on him!

Dear Ed,

I give thanks to God for the life and witness of Murphy, for the blessing of your marriage, partnership in life and ministry and that I was privileged to be impacted and challenged by Murphy.

I hold you in my heart and prayers as you continue the journey & la lucha without her physically by your side.

May Jesus who wept at Lazarus' tomb accompany you.

In Gratitude,
Mark Adams
Douglas, Arizona

Dear Murphy,

In spite of seeing you far too rarely you have always been there for me, and always will be there for me. I remember clearly when you told me all I needed to know. I was in my 20s (a child!). You told me if I kept at this work I would get a window into a world I could never otherwise know. You could not have been more correct. I know you spent your life both at that window and reflecting that window back to the rest of us. You gave me the words to understand what was happening and why it mattered. Thank you.

I think of you so often when I enter a prison, when I enter a witness' home, when I don't feel great and I want to give up. What would Murphy do? The answer is always the same; she would let love and faith lead her. I could never replicate the extraordinary work you have done in your life, but I channel you wherever and however I can.

Thank you for the gift of your book. It is spectacular and it is one more way that I can keep you with me and pass your guidance of love and faith along to those that I love.

Do you remember when you sat in that chair at the top of the stairs at ODC during the bone marrow drive and my girls were young, and very taken by you? They dubbed you "Upstairs Murphy" and that's who you have been at our house ever since. Even when your health said you couldn't be too close, you were there close. Community.

It's with a lot of tears of love that I think of you as you climb even higher upstairs, but it's the journey up toward hope and love and freedom that you have been on your entire life. That's how I always picture you, leading all of us up.

I so love you.

Ellie Hopkins
Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Murphy and Ed and Hannah,

I am sending you love in this time of sacred journey. I am listening, once again, to the webinar on Murphy's book. I am delighting in Murphy's voice, stories, laughter, faith, persistence. And I am holding this all in my heart, which is filled with gratitude and grief.

In such a time as this I am moved toward reminiscing, remembering. I relish the walks we took through the neighborhood around the Open Door. I am thinking of all the dinners at the Open Door or those treats of going out. I'm recalling the times on the porch at Dayspring talking about everything — loves, struggles, joys, sorrows, and sometimes just the weather. And sometimes there was simply sitting in silence, soaking in the sounds of the night and watching the fireflies light up. And the times of marching, and of standing in vigil at the State Capitol. I'm also thinking of songs, of music, at Sunday worship, and Murphy's preaching too!

Murphy, you have been a mentor, and really a second mother for me. You asked me hard questions from time to time. You never stepped away in my times of failure. You encouraged and supported me as a teacher/professor, and you welcomed my students in ways that made them grow in their lives and faith. You have helped me to find and to live my vocation, to be Peter Gathje, nothing more nothing less.

And you dear Murphy have lived your vocation, Murphy Davis, nothing more and nothing less. You have lived from your heart, without masks, sharing your strength and your vulnerability, and in all that living and wrestling with God. You have been the best human being under such trying circumstances, you have been loving, kind, compassionate, creative, and courageous. You have not been a whiner.

I am so thankful for you and for your life of faith, of witness, of solidarity with people in poverty and in prison. Holding you in the Light and Love.

Love,
Pete Gathje
Memphis, Tennessee



Calvin Kimbrough

2015 | Mardi Gras