

FREE

HOSPITALITY

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Atlanta, Georgia
Permit No. 1264

ADDRESS CORRECTION REQUESTED

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

Vol. 39, No. 7

PO Box 10980 Baltimore, Maryland 21234 404.290.2047 www.facebook.com/ODCBalt/

July 2020

The Washing Society

Susanna Lang

The Washerwomen's strike is assuming vast proportions and despite the apparent independence of the white people, is causing quite an inconvenience among our citizens.... There are some families in Atlanta who have been unable to have any washing done for more than two weeks.

— Atlanta Constitution, 26 July 1881

1.
Of course we could wash our own clothes.
But our mothers never taught us to make soap or starch.
We have never had to haul water
or lift heavy irons from the hearth where they warmed.
We have not learned how to iron sleeves
with their tucks and seams.
Just yesterday the neighbors had their washing
returned to them wringing wet.
What were they to do with wet laundry?

It pains us to see our husbands leave for the city
with dirty cuffs and crumpled shirtfronts,
see our children play in yesterday's skirts and short pants.
But really, what can we do?
We don't vote in city council.

And if we did?

2.
Of course that is not a real voice.
All that remains from the strike are newspaper articles
and the Washing Society's letter to the mayor:
*...we will have full control of the city's washing at our own prices,
as the city has control of our husbands' work at their prices.*

While the women washed, they must have
murmured to themselves, trying out phrases,
settling on the clearest words, the ones that spoke truth.

3.
Sarah Hill was a maid and a cook in someone else's house
until she married, and then she took in washing. Years later
she told someone with questions and a notebook,
*I could clean my hearth good and nice
and set my irons in front of the fire and iron all day....
I cooked and ironed at the same time.* The interviewer
gave her a different name.

The poem wants to try on her voice,
saying *I did this work*; and of course I have done this work
though not as Sarah did. I have washed my family's clothes,
not another's. My water is not hauled from wells. A machine



National Archives at College Park

Making a Way Outta No Way

The Washerwomen's Strike, 1881

By Nibs Stroupe

As we struggle to find our way through the Covid-19 Trumpdemic, we would do well to remember that during the Depression, FDR established the Works Progress Administration to fund unemployed workers, including artists. One of those funded was Jacob Lawrence, and out of that came his painting "Ironing," showing three Black women in Harlem, all ironing clothes in order to earn money. Though it is set in Harlem, it emerges from Lawrence's Southern roots, where Black women did much of the laundry, including ironing, for white families.

Thanks to Susanna Lang's fine poem "Washing Society," we are reminded that this ironing and laundry service points us to some fundamentals about life after slavery in the South, and indeed, in all of America. Her poem refers us to the Washerwomen's Strike of 1881 in Atlanta, a work stoppage organized by Black women seeking higher wages and better working conditions. Their strike was not the first such effort, but the history of very few have made it through to us, either in writing or in oral history. The origins of these efforts are found in the migration of people, formerly held in slavery, from rural areas to the cities. They sought to find employment and some relief from overt oppression as white Southerners worked to re-establish white supremacy after the Civil War.

White Southerners used "black codes," vagrancy laws,

oppressive employment contracts similar to slavery, and violence to develop "neo-slavery." Despite passage of three constitutional amendments to abolish slavery, establish equality and give voting rights to Black men, the entire USA seems to have shrunk back from the commitment to equality after the end of the Civil War. As white violence in the South increased against African Americans, an appeal to President Grant in 1875 for more federal troops in Mississippi got this negative response from the former commander of the Union Army: "The whole public is tired of these autumnal outbreaks." ¹ Two years later, Rutherford Hayes would be elevated to the presidency on his agreement to pull federal troops out of the South, thus ending Reconstruction and ushering in 88 more years of neo-slavery.

White businessmen in Atlanta were seeking to rebuild the city and its image as "the New South," which emphasized that while slavery was over in the South, workers of all racial categories were still docile — so bring your businesses and investments here! Atlanta was also becoming a center of developing Black middle-class life. The Atlanta University complex was established (Morris Brown, Clark, Atlanta University, Morehouse) and in April 1881, Spelman College was opened. It was a year that continued to see the migration of Black families

The Washing Society continued on page 7

Making a Way continued on page 7

Humbled Hospitality

By Peter Gathje

The neighborhood is quiet this Thursday morning. I look down the street toward Claybrook and Jefferson. Once in a while someone goes in or comes out of the “yellow store” at the corner. The small park where people usually congregate is empty. Looking up the street, there are no students from the Memphis Academy of Science and Engineering crossing to gym class at Mississippi Boulevard Church. It is a beautiful, sun-filled morning; spring is in the air. Birds sing their songs, trees are leaved out in fresh green and weeds are growing quickly through every crack in the sidewalk or patio bricks. Yet, there are few people to be seen.

The sense of isolation, or even desolation, is broken on occasion as a Manna House guest arrives. They come one by one. On occasion two will show up at once. Voices are a bit muffled for some as they speak through facemasks. It only takes a moment or two to hand each guest a “hospitality bag” filled with hygiene items, a pair of socks and a granola bar. It was the same on Monday night when we handed out take-away suppers. Greetings are brief. Words are few.

I am grieving the loss of hospitality in which people would congregate at Manna House, drink coffee, exchange news, gossip, argue politics or religion. I am not getting my usual theological education from Moses, Larry, Don, Joyce, Patsy, among my other teachers from the streets. I am missing sharing bad jokes with Darren and Robert and whoever else would listen. As Kathleen said to me the other day, “Just giving things out isn’t hospitality.”



Peter Gathje

showers, clothing, hygiene items, food, conversation. If I have done my math right, we have been open well over 3,000 times with more than 80,000 guests welcomed (that includes repeaters). I find this quantifying of what has gone on and what is past only highlights what is not happening now.

But something is happening, albeit on a small scale. I

I am grieving the loss of hospitality
in which people would congregate at Manna House,
drink coffee, exchange news, gossip, argue politics or religion.

Fifteen years ago, Manna House started. Every Monday, Tuesday and Thursday morning since then, we have been open. Same for the More on Monday meal added about a year later; every Monday evening the door would open, and people would come in. People from the streets and from surrounding neighborhoods with low-income housing gathered. Hospitality was offered: a sanctuary place was created where a community of people formed around shared cups of coffee,

am going to call it “humbled hospitality.” No conversation is more than five minutes. But the hello and the inquiry, “How are you doing?” sometimes sparks a few words.

One of the guests who arrives asks me if I am still willing to be a reference for him. “They might call you this week. I have a bunch of applications in and this one place called me. I’m trying not to get my hopes up.” I tell him that if they call, I will definitely put in a good word for him.

Another guest approaches me as I am pulling weeds, “Do you have anyone to mow the grass?” When I explain that we do it ourselves, he responds, “I’m looking for work. I was doing so good. I had a landscape job. Got myself a place. Even got a car. Now, no work. I may lose my place. My car is gone.” I think of the 22 million unemployment claims made over the past four weeks. The number is staggering; the reality is one person after another without work, each with a story of how they were doing when they had work and the suffering they are experiencing without work.

Yet another offers a blessing to those of us handing out the hospitality bags. “God be with you. Just good to see you.”

One more gives me an update, and some of that theological education I have been missing. “I’ve got the cancer. I’m through the surgery. I don’t know what lies ahead but God is with me, just like He’s with you.”

It is still Eastertime. And this guest’s message to me makes it plain. In these times when the night seems so strong and it seems like the light will never shine through again, God’s love comes through. God’s love is stronger than disease and death. To be a witness to the resurrection, I have to live with the conviction that every spark of light is part of a larger dance of love that will spread and burst forth in a flame that cannot be quenched. So it is with humbled hospitality: What little I may offer still makes possible the sharing of some human relationship in this time of social distancing. And for now, I have to trust that spark can be part of God’s dance of love, of God’s larger flame. ✦

Peter Gathje is Vice President of Academic Affairs/Dean of Memphis Theological Seminary, and a founder of Manna House, a place of hospitality in Memphis. He wrote Sharing the Bread of Life: Hospitality and Resistance at the Open Door Community (2006) and edited A Work of Hospitality: The Open Door Reader 1982 – 2002. (pgathje@memphisseminary.edu)

Correction

Due to an editing error in “Dorothy Day: Inspiration for the Open Door” [June 2020 *Hospitality*], the word “Brother” was inadvertently omitted from a sentence. The sentence should read: **[Peter Maurin] was an educated French peasant and former Christian Brother, steeped in traditional Catholicism and well versed in its social justice documents.**

HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is published by the Open Door Community, Inc., Baltimore, Maryland. The Open Door is a Prophetic Discipleship Community honoring the Black Jesus, Dorothy Day and Martin Luther King Jr. Subscriptions are free. A newspaper request form is included in each issue. Manuscripts and letters are welcomed. Inclusive language editing is standard.

A \$10 donation to the Open Door Community helps to cover the costs of printing and mailing *Hospitality* for one year. A \$40 donation covers overseas delivery for one year.

Open Door Community
PO Box 10980
Baltimore, Maryland 21234
www.opendoorcommunity.org



Jiselle Santos | *The Cougar* | University of Houston

Newspaper

Editor Murphy Davis
Managing Editor Eduard Loring
Photography and Layout Editor Calvin Kimbrough
Poetry Corner Editor Eduard Loring
Associate Editors Pete Gathje and Catherine Meeks
Copy Editor Julie Martin
Proofreaders Nelia Kimbrough and Julie Martin
Circulation A multitude of earthly hosts
Subscriptions or change of address David Payne
(davidpayne@opendoorcommunity.org)

Open Door Community

For more information about the life and work of the community, please contact any of the following:

Murphy Davis Southern Prison Ministry
Eduard Loring Activist/Advocate/Ally
David Payne Office Manager

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

Introducing Murphy Davis

Board Member of the Open Door Community

By Lee Carroll

In 2016, when several key partners in the Open Door Community “retired,” it was decided that the organization would continue as a much smaller residential community of only three people — Ed Loring, Murphy Davis and David Payne, and that it would relocate from Atlanta to Baltimore. At that point a new external Board of Directors was created to guide the organization.

This is the seventh in a series of short articles introducing readers to those serving on the Board of Directors. These brief “spiritual biographies” describe the theological journeys of individual directors and how they help continue the legacy of the Open Door.

In this edition we share a portion of the story of Murphy Davis, one of the founding partners of the Open Door Community, and focus on her 25-year bout with cancer. Her story is told in a very poignant way in her new book, Surely Goodness and Mercy: A Journey into Illness and Solidarity which is being published by the Open Door Community Press (please see page 8 for information on ordering your copy of her book).

“Living in solidarity with the poor” has always been one of the core values and faith commitments of the Open Door Community (ODC). But very soon after its founding in 1981, Murphy Davis, Ed Loring and other original partners realized that such solidarity would require surrendering many of the privileges they had long enjoyed, including the benefits of health insurance and access to private medical facilities. If they were to identify with the poor, they concluded, they needed to depend upon the same medical system that poor people use.

This was understandably a challenge for ODC partners, but they managed reasonably well by going to free health clinics, Grady Hospital (Atlanta’s large public hospital where a vast cross-section of Atlanta’s poorest patients are treated) and other medical providers that did not require insurance.

But then, in 1995 when Murphy was only 47, this oath of solidarity with the poor came to be severely tested. She was admitted into Grady Hospital for an unknown ailment, and in the days that followed, her doctors dropped the bomb: she had Burkett’s Lymphoma, a fast-growing, virulent form of cancer, which normally would mean that she had only 6 to 18 months to live.

Murphy, her family, the Open Door Community and countless friends were stunned. But fortunately, Dr. Sam Newcome, one of her attending physicians at Grady, offered a glimmer of hope: “Because we caught this reasonably early, you are treatable. You are curable!” Indeed, major surgery soon followed to remove the invading cancerous tumors on her ovaries, uterus and small intestine. A regimen of chemotherapy followed. But after her long ordeal, she was alive!

But the story continues.

Six years later, in 2001, the Burkett’s Lymphoma returned, this time attacking the valve between her intestines, and that required a second major surgery. Then in 2004 the cancer returned. It was during this third episode of cancer that fungal pneumonia attacked her compromised immune system and almost killed her. While the fungal pneumonia is reasonably well managed today, it lingers in the background as a chronic condition and will always be a threat.

In 2008 and 2010 Murphy suffered from two incidents of “indolent lymphoma” that attacked her abdomen and lower chest. In 2011 and 2012 she was found to have breast cancer, and that required lumpectomies and radiation therapy.

After a brief 5-year respite, in 2017-19 she was besieged

by a large squamous cell carcinoma on her skull that necessitated massive skin grafts completed in eight hours of intensive, very delicate surgery.

If that were not enough, in 2019 she also suffered from a lung infection related to the fungal pneumonia. Medication used to help her survive the lung infection led to a heart incident, so now she lives with a pacemaker and a restricted diet.

Throughout this long, 25-year battle for her health, Murphy has had eight different bouts with cancer, five major surgeries, five regimens of chemotherapy, fungal pneumonia,



Alison Reeder

heart failure and several intestinal blockages. Her chemotherapy treatments alone put her in the hospital for 89 days! And throughout this long pilgrimage she remained faithful to her oath of solidarity with the poor, living without private medical insurance. Surely such an unimaginable medical history qualifies Murphy Davis to be a walking miracle. As she likes to tell people, “I’m just too mean to die!”

One of the disciplines practiced by members of the Open Door Community has been to engage routinely in theological reflections on their actions. They believe that while working for social justice is a mandate, it is also important to correlate our actions with the Scriptures and to engage in social analyses of our context. So when Murphy was initially beset by this long string of catastrophic health challenges, it seemed only natural for her to keep a written journal in which she reflected on her experiences.

Those journal entries are the genesis of her new book, *Surely Goodness and Mercy: a Journey into Illness and Solidarity*, which tells of her journey with God and other loved ones through the ravages of cancer and other illnesses, a story that she describes on several different levels.

At one level — perhaps the most likely one — she reflects on coming to terms with the inevitability of her own death. On more than one occasion throughout those years, she was not expected to survive. On one occasion she was actually thought to have died, only to be resuscitated. She is a fighter! But in spite of her love of life, she is now able to say honestly that, for her, death has lost much of its sting.

A second, related perspective that she discusses is the power of being sustained by family and friends. She recalls with deep gratitude, “I was never, for one moment, alone.” In addition to her beloved Ed Loring and their daughter, Hannah (only 15 when Murphy initially became ill), she was surrounded by a circle of loved ones. Members of the Open Door Community prayed daily for her, as did untold others. One doctor who once literally saved her life remains one of her closest friends. In reflecting about the power of this kind of personal support, Murphy likes to think of love spatially. Love, she says, enters our lives and takes up all the available space in our being, so there is literally no room left for fear (see I John 4:18).

Solidarity with the poor is a third level of meaning that Murphy describes in the book. Her experiences with our health system underscored for her that poor people are seldom treated with the same kind of respect and care that wealthier, insured people enjoy. Murphy’s experience was that the culture of Grady Hospital at that time was such that it was common for medical providers not to show compassion. Many did not trust their patients to speak truthfully or intelligently about their circumstances. On the other hand, she vividly remembers notable exceptions such as when Grady’s Dr. Amy Spector told the family that it was highly unlikely that Murphy could survive more than a few months. In that very difficult moment, this caring physician openly wept as she delivered the grave news to Murphy and her family.

One additional lens that Murphy uses, among others not mentioned here, for interpreting her days of illness is by examining where her story intersects with the biblical story. For example, she now has a deeper appreciation for the text about the ten lepers (Luke 17) and realizes that gratitude is an essential part of lived faith. And from the stories of the paralyzed man (Mark 2) and the hemorrhaging woman who touched the hem of Jesus’ garment (Matthew 9), Murphy sees more clearly how God uses faith and hope to heal people.

In thinking back upon all that has taken place during her struggles for health, Murphy has experienced a deepening sense of God’s presence in her life. She avows: “Something was holding me up through that long medical ordeal.”

Love, she says, enters our lives
and takes up all the available space in our being,
so there is literally no room left for fear (see I John 4:18).

Many who suffer from medical catastrophes or other personal crises turn in upon themselves and pray for God’s intervention, but they find it difficult in those moments to remain engaged in any outward concern for social justice. But Murphy follows a more balanced approach. For her, the journey inward and the journey outward fuel one another. She believes that God works in and through people — people like her physicians, like the medical researchers who discover life-saving procedures, like loving friends and family who surround her. But she also believes she must still challenge and change systems that marginalize the poor. Instead of calling upon God to fix the inequities of the world, she prays for

Introducing Murphy Davis *continued on page 8*

Thrown to the Curb

By John Cole Vodicka

I pull up the Athens-Clarke County jail roster on my computer on a weekly basis. One day in January, 65-year-old Vanessa Louise Brookins's name appeared on the list of prisoners. Her age immediately caught my eye, but the fact that it also showed she'd been locked up pre-trial *nearly a year* on criminal trespassing and terroristic threat charges really piqued my interest. I filed an open records request seeking the police reports leading to her arrest and jailing. In January 2019, Ms. Brookins had been arrested at an Athens cemetery after being warned about trespassing by the cemetery's director, who called the police. She'd also been arrested after refusing to leave a homeowner's porch on which she'd been sleeping. And during this same time, she tried to withdraw \$5 from a non-existent account with Wells Fargo; when refused she told the teller and anyone within earshot that she would kill them. That landed the felony charge and the \$1,000 security bond she could not meet. On the police report, Ms. Brookins gave her address as "homeless."

Vanessa Brookins suffers from mental illness. Indeed, five months after she was arrested and jailed, in July 2019, her public defender successfully had her moved to a treatment facility in Augusta to determine if she was mentally competent to stand trial. Ms. Brookins was confined to the hospital for much of the remainder of 2019 before she was returned to the Clarke County jail.

I visited Ms. Brookins at the jail for the first time on the afternoon of January 28 of this year. Because it was a non-lawyer's visit, I was directed to a room just off the jail's front lobby. It had partitioned booths, each equipped with a phone, camera and small video screen. I sat at one of the booths. The prisoner sits somewhere in the bowels of the facility looking into a camera as well.

During most of my 20-minute visit with Ms. Brookins, it felt as if I was talking to the top of her head. (Later, she told me she was too short to keep her face in the camera's focus area.)

As impersonal as this was, we talked and got to know a little about one another. She had been essentially homeless much of the last several years. As a result of not having a place to lay her head, she hadn't been regularly taking the

cial order that sent Ms. Brookins to the Augusta treatment hospital.

The lawyer looked concerned. "I'm not sure," he told me, "but my guess is that when Ms. Brookins left Augusta and returned to the jail, the jail never told us she was back in Clarke County. This has happened before in other instances. Ms. Brookins was forgotten. It shouldn't be."



John Cole Vodicka

Things began to move. On February 3, two days after my conversation with John Donnelly, Ms. Brookins's public defender, Rachel Williams, succeeded in getting her client in front of a Superior Court judge to revisit the bond issue. Ms. Brookins's niece, Rita Willhite, sat in the courtroom with me to tell the judge her aunt could live with her upon release and that she would make sure her aunt got to the local mental health facility and wouldn't return to the places from

Law enforcement, the courts, the jails have helped create a racial undercaste — criminalizing people like Ms. Brookins — who then can be tossed to the proverbial curb.

medications prescribed to help her overcome the demons. She'd been barred from a number of places in Athens, including the cemetery, the Social Security office and now, Wells Fargo. She told me of a niece here in Athens, Rita, who wanted her to come live with her when she was released from confinement. "I really want to get out of jail before my birthday so I can do some cooking," Ms. Brookins said. She also told me that she was on a new medication since leaving the Augusta hospital. "It makes me have dizzy spells. It makes me pee all the time. I'm always peeing in my pants. I try to wash my underwear in the sink so I don't smell too bad."

Several days later, while doing lynching research at the public library, John Donnelly walked in to pick up a book. John is the chief public defender for this judicial circuit. We greeted one another. "John," I asked, "do you have a minute to talk?" He sat down at my table.

"Tell me what's happened here," I said, spreading out the few records I had on Vanessa Brookins. "She's been locked up for a year."

Donnelly examined the documents, including the judi-

which she'd been previously barred. Standing in front of the judge with hands cuffed and chained to her waist, her ankles shackled, 65-year-old Vanessa Brookins was released on her own recognizance. As her niece and I left the courtroom, Ms. Brookins gave us a big smile, lifting her two bound hands just above her waist to wave at us in relief and appreciation. She came home to Rita's apartment that afternoon.

Later that week I visited Ms. Brookins at Rita's home. She had already checked in at the mental health facility and they had changed her medications and were planning on making weekly visits to the apartment. She talked with me more about her experience at the Augusta hospital, but otherwise was full of hope anticipating better days ahead. Several weeks later, the public defender's office finally received the Augusta hospital evaluation regarding Ms. Brookins's competency to stand trial. She's competent, the document declared. Her attorney told me she would try to get Ms. Brookins back in court for the judge to dismiss the charges that jailed this senior citizen unnecessarily for 12 long months.

Vanessa Brookins was not only forgotten by our criminal system of justice, she was, as are most who are poor and/or people of color, deemed a "throwaway."

Law enforcement, the courts, the jails have helped create a racial undercaste — criminalizing people like Ms. Brookins — who then can be tossed to the proverbial curb.

"We are indicted by a terrible blindness," Dr. Martin Luther King once said. And in Athens, Georgia, thousands of poor people and people of color, to quote Dr. King, "have been crucified by the conscientious spiritual and intellectual blindness" of the over-advantaged and privileged. Michelle Alexander, author of the powerful and essential book *The New Jim Crow*, writes that "the fact that so many black and brown men and women are rounded up for drug crimes [and I'll add here misdemeanor offenses] that are so largely ignored when committed by whites is *unseen*. Racial indifference and blindness — far more than racial hostility — form the sturdy foundation for all racial caste systems."

Vanessa Brookins is not an anomaly. She, like so many others caught in this country's criminal justice web, is Black, poor and lives with mental impairment.

"Before she went to jail I knew my Aunt Vanessa was off her medications," Rita Willhite told me in the courtroom the day Vanessa Brookins was released from confinement. "She wandered away for months. I couldn't find her. Until she went to jail."

Vanessa Brookins wandered into a cemetery to "look at the monuments." She was arrested for criminal trespassing. She wandered onto someone's porch to find a place to rest her body. She was arrested for criminal trespassing. Then she wandered into a bank to obtain a few dollars from an account she didn't have and became bewildered and spoke threateningly to a teller and the bank manager. She was arrested for making a "terroristic threat." It was time to throw her away.

On February 9, 2019 Ms. Brookins was locked up. She didn't have the resources to make a \$1,000 bond.

On February 3, 2020, 359 days after Ms. Brookins's arrest, her niece, Rita, reclaimed her aunt and took her home.

When I visited Ms. Brookins at Rita's apartment, we hugged and she told me a little more about her life's story. Born on March 28, 1954, she grew up in one of Athens's housing projects, "born on the floor behind the bed 'cause my mother didn't have time to get to the hospital." She asked me to fetch a Bible and an overcoat that the jail had not returned to her upon release. She had me call the mental health program to make an appointment for her. She showed me a bottle of pills that she said were not making her urinate all the time or giving her dizzy spells. She posed for a photograph beside a basket of clean clothes.

As I left the apartment that afternoon, Vanessa Brookins gave me that same excited smile she had flashed in the courtroom earlier that week. "I'm going to be home for my birthday," she reminded me. "Home for my birthday."

"Home to do some good cookin'," I said and waved goodbye.

Postscript: Vanessa Brookins did indeed do some cooking on March 28 to celebrate her 66th birthday. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, though, she and her niece, Rita, were the only ones to be at her party. ♠

John and Dee Cole Vodicka and sons were Resident Volunteers at the Open Door Community in 1985-86 and 1992-93. John founded and, for 15 years, directed the Prison & Jail Project in Americus, Georgia. Today he is an activist, writer and community organizer who lives in Athens, Georgia. (johnvodicka@comcast.net)

Pandemic and Peace

Healthcare not Warfare — Part 1

By Weldon D. Nisly

Pandemic Risk and Choice

A virulent virus stopped the world like nothing has in our lifetime. The global coronavirus pandemic poses risks and choices around the whole world.

Nowhere on earth is risk-free. No one in the world is immune. No weapon of war will vanquish an invisible virus. No wealth of capitalism will conquer it. The coronavirus is no respecter of persons, passports or powers. Everyone is at risk. We are all in this together.

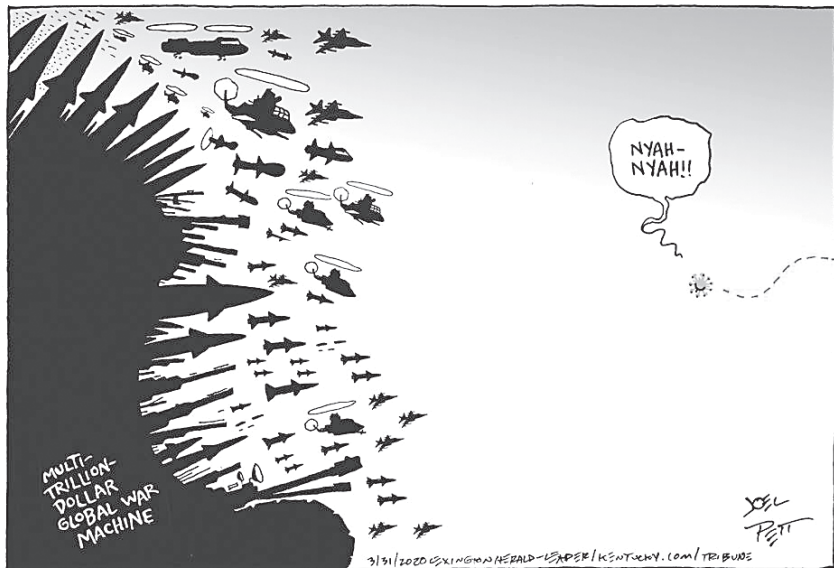
Yet COVID-19 is not an equal opportunity virus. Some people are far more at risk than others. Shelter-in-place is essential to impede the COVID contagion. But some have a greater privilege of sheltering in place than others. Some face greater risk of hardship, hunger and poor health than others. More vulnerable people face higher risk. The coronavirus pandemic exposes longstanding systemic inequality and injustice in the United States and other countries.

We may not always have control over the risk we face. But we have control over our responses. The pandemic reveals responses of rant or reason, harm or healing, selfishness or self-sacrifice.

The coronavirus brings out the best or worst in us. The worst is frighteningly evident; the best is amazingly abundant. The care and compassion of many is in stark contrast to the rage and threats by others. Everyone chooses which response they give and live.

Even our language used for the pandemic is a choice for good or ill. The public language is primarily words and images of war. We are “at war” with a coronavirus. But war is not the answer. The coronavirus is not an enemy to be defeated and destroyed. The world faces a healthcare crisis, not another foolhardy war. Healthcare is not warfare.

Healthcare addresses COVID-19 with the best available medical care, scientific knowledge and protective resources. Warfare uses words of domination as weapons of destruction for the politics of division. The energy of healthcare is healing, the energy of warfare is destroying. Healthcare communicates that we are all in this together while caring for those who are ill and at risk. Warfare blames others for our viral war while competing for scarce resources.



Joel Pett | Lexington Herald Leader

A “wartime president” rallying “warriors” to wage “war” on a virus makes as much sense as using a sledgehammer to heal migraine headaches. A proverbial trope warns, “When the only tool you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail.”

Presuming to wage war on a virus is not only the language of the sitting president. The presumptive opposing presidential candidate publicly goaded the president, saying, “This is war. Act like the commander-in-chief.”

The last thing needed to face a global pandemic is more warring madness. This virulent virus will not be bullied or bombed into submission by manipulative language or militarized action.

Confronting coronavirus calls for embodied compassion, forthright collaboration, self-sacrificial solidarity, using common sense for the common good. We are in this together. None are safe until all are safe. Warring words and ways will not save us.

Pandemic Crisis and Opportunity

Every crisis poses an opportunity, as an ancient Chinese symbol illustrates.



*In every crisis
lies the seed
of opportunity*

This coronavirus pandemic offers US and the world a great opportunity to transform our world from endless war to ending war.

Antonio Guterres, The UN Secretary General, warns the world that the virus “does not care about nationality or ethnicity, faction or faith. It attacks all, relentlessly.” Listen to Antonio Guterres’ prophetic voice to and for the world: “The fury of the virus illustrates the folly of war. That is why today, I am calling for an immediate global ceasefire in all corners of the world. It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown. ... This is crucial to help create corridors for life-saving aid,

open windows for diplomacy and bring hope to places among the most vulnerable to COVID-19. End the sickness of war and fight the disease that is ravaging our world. ... That is what our human family needs, now more than ever.” A growing number of nations and agencies have joined this global call to end war.

Christian Peacemaker Teams, with whom I serve on the CPT Iraqi Kurdistan team, accompany innocent people suffering the terror and trauma of war. This pandemic now poses the additional threat of COVID-19 for many civilians across northern Iraqi Kurdistan. While they are sheltering in place against the coronavirus threat, Turkey and Iran continue their relentless cross-border bombardment. Our CPT IK team joins the global call for healthcare not warfare.

We join our partners in Iraqi Kurdistan pleading to be heard: #HearUsNowStopTheBombing.

The coronavirus pandemic poses a choice for US and the world. We either contribute to healing or harming. We

survive and thrive together, or we destroy ourselves and the future forever. Let US choose healthcare and reject warfare! We. Are. All. In. This. Together!

**Confronting coronavirus
calls for embodied compassion,
forthright collaboration,
self-sacrificial solidarity,
using common sense
for the common good.**

As a postscript, I give the last word to a prophetic young voice. Kidus Kassa is a 17-year-old artist and poet from Ethiopia now living in the Seattle area. His teacher, Merna Hecht, a peacemaking poet friend, helps youth from war zones of the world portray their “Stories of Arrival.” Listen to Kidus Kassa’s prophetic introductory words and Freedom poem:

I [wrote this poem] to show that the world needs something bigger than war, bigger than fighting, and that it needs love and peace. ... It makes me feel like my art can speak out for a peaceful world.



Kidus Kassa

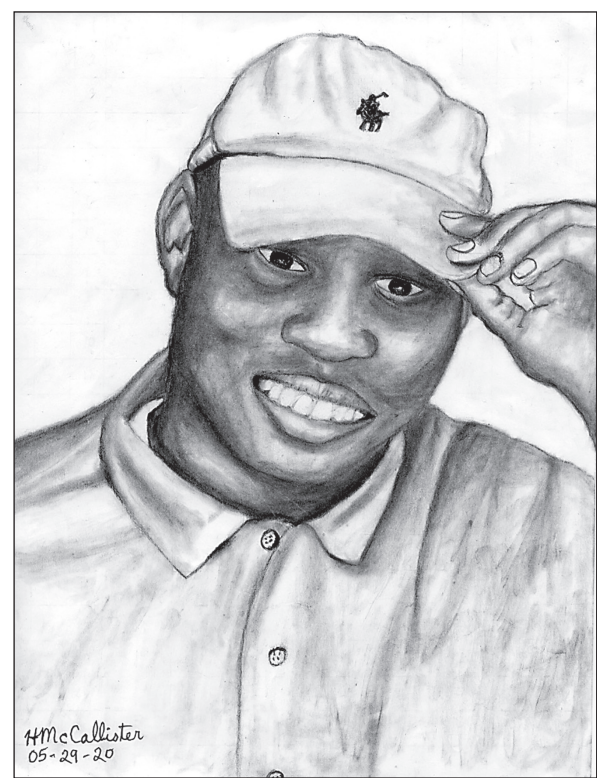
After 40 years of Mennonite Church ministry that included community, pastoral and peace ministries, Weldon Nisly currently devotes himself to Contemplative JustPeace building and work with Christian Peacemaker Teams. He is a Benedictine Oblate. His life is dedicated to the abolition of war. Weldon serves half-time on the CPT Iraqi Kurdistan team and also was on the CPT Palestine team in Hebron in September - October 2017 and August - September 2018.

We highly Recommend



A Primary Source of Truth

Tomorrow is but Yesterday For Ahmaud Arbery



Harold McCallister

The swamp gurgling
From Black waters roiling
White steam rising
Miasma.

White Gulls screaming murder
Of Black Crows cawing madly
Above the green Bald Cypress
Pondy Woods
Five miles from Brunswicktown.

Black waters boiling.
White steam rising

The past is never past
Tomorrow is but yesterday
Next year last year
1954 skipped over the Magnolias
And the Poplar Trees blooming gallantly
Down in Brunswicktown.

Black waters agitating
White steam rising

*Reverend Charles C. Jones once rode the roads down here.
Dark. Moonlight. Hoot owls 'red eyes blinking. Or sunlight bright.
Wisteria reeking. Spanish moss hanging from Oak limbs like old ropes.
He. Teaching the Word of God to Black Slaves (He: owned 300)
"Obey Your Masters," read he from the Good Book.
He. Teaching the Word of God to White Masters (He owned 3 plantations)
"You be nicer, now, you hear me?" (The White Gentleman's manners code).*

Black waters storming
White steam rising

In the Black waters of Pondy Woods vigiling
Black skulls and body-bones
Never Whiten.
Babbling Black waters give witness:
Whipping
Lynching
Castration
Rape
Brutal beatings
Burnt Black bodies
White laughter
Fingers Ears Ace of Spades collected.
White pleasure
White picnics.
And name it: The horror is white steam rising.

Five miles from Pondy Woods
As was his habit
Black man jogs
Feels joy
In lungs and legs.

Black waters bubbling
White steam rising

No liturgy
No Lecture:
("You goddamn n.gg.. boy").
Just Police & Son
Scotch-Irish by name.
(Now they added Roddie Bryan. What about you?).
Simply fist.
Simply shotgun.
Simply one more down.

Black waters raging
White steam rising. ♣

— Ibo Lorinski
May 2020

The Box

1
"When a leader allows himself to succumb to the wishes of those he leads, who will always seek to turn him into an idol, then the leader will gradually become the image of the 'misleader'. . . . This is the leader that makes an idol of himself and his office, thus mocking God."
— Dietrich Bonhoeffer
Sent to the Open Door Community by Wendell Wentz radical Baptist, Texas

2
Once upon a time the great writer, poet, dancer, devoted to Malcolm X and Martin each of whom got killed just as she was working with them, this woman of Stamps, Arkansas wrote, "History . . . if faced with courage, need not be lived again." I disagree with her. I disagree with the much accepted aphorism by the Spanish American George Santayana, "Those who do not learn from history are doomed to repeat it."

Of course we repeat history. Every war is a repeat. Every murder is a repeat. Every Work of Mercy is a repeat. Every disastrous marriage is a repeat. Every pothole in Baltimore is a repeat. Where does history come from? History is the force above nature which is rooted in the good and evil of human nature then is seeded into institutions, religions, nation states

and now globalization and Neo-Liberal economics. History will repeat itself as long as there are human beings and the artifacts of organizations on earth. Tools and technology change. Human nature remains the same. What do you think?
— Ed Loring, simultaneously saint and sinner.

George Santayana, "Only the dead have seen the end of war."

3
Martin Luther King Jr.,

"Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation."
— *I've Been to the Mountain Top*, April 3, 1968

Martin Luther King Jr was doing what we Democratic Socialists do today: work to strengthen Labor Unions. (Except Police Union: a scourge). Especially the Labor Unions among the poor and working classes. I have a friend here in Baltimore who is the janitor for a Presbyterian USA Church. She is not paid a living wage or even \$15.00 an hour. I know why. Do you?
— Ed Loring

4
"It is the wind and the rain, O God, the cold and the storm that make this earth of Thine to blossom and bear its fruit. So in our lives it is storm and stress and hurt and suffering that make real men and women bring the world's work to its highest perfection. Let us learn then in these growing years to respect the harder sterner aspects of life together with its joy and laughter, and to weave them all into the great web which hangs holy to the Lord."
— W.E.B. Du Bois, *Prayers for Dark People*

5
A person should always offer a prayer of graciousness for the love that has awakened in them. When you feel love for your beloved and his or her love for you, now and again you should offer the warmth of your love as a blessing for those who are damaged and unloved. Send that love out into the world to people who are desperate; to those who are starving; to those who are trapped in prison, in hospitals and all the brutal terrains of bleak and tormented lives. When you send that love out from the bountifulness of your own love, it reaches other people. This love is the deepest power of prayer.
— From *Anam Cara*, Chapter 1, The Wounded Gift, by John O'Donohue

Making a Way Outta No Way *continued from page 1*

to Atlanta, especially on the south side.

Many of these newly arrived Black women took in laundry as a way to make money. Known as “laundresses” or “washerwomen,” more Black women did this kind of work in 1881 in the South than any other occupation. It was back-breaking work, with long hours and very low pay. Picking up dirty clothes at white people’s homes on Monday, making their own soap from lye, hauling water from wells or pumps to washtubs made from old beer barrels, scrubbing the clothes on washboards, wringing out the clothes, then hanging or draping them to dry, then ironing the clothes with hot, heavy irons, then delivering the clothes on Saturday — all for the pay of four to eight dollars a month. Still, the women were glad that their “domestic” work enabled them to stay home rather than have to move to the white people’s homes as “almost slaves.” As Sarah Hill put it: “I could clean my hearth good and nice and set my irons in front of the fire and iron all day without stopping. . . . I cooked and ironed at the same time.”² They made a way out of no way.

Making a way out of no way did not mean, however, that they were content with it. In 1881, some 20 of these washerwomen began to meet and organize to seek better wages. They met in a Black church in Summerhill, discussed their options and decided to set a strike date. They also went door to door in their neighborhoods, seeking other washerwomen to support the effort and join in the strike. Their efforts built on the efforts of others, but it was still early in the labor union movement. The first labor union in the state of Mississippi was a washerwomen’s union in 1866 in Jackson. The Knights of Labor was formed in 1869, but the American Federation of Labor was not formed until 1886, so these washerwomen were in the forefront of this developing movement to support workers in their demands for better wages and working conditions.

The washerwomen of Atlanta named themselves “The Washing Society,” and we have the names of six of them: Matilda Crawford, Sallie Bell, Carrie Jones, Dora Jones, Orphelia Turner and Sarah Collier. They began to organize, and soon their numbers had grown from 20 to 3,000. They went on strike in late July 1881, letting their white employers know that unless their wages were raised, no more laundry would be done. It caused a furor in the white community, especially since the white businessmen were planning the International Cotton Exposition in the fall of 1881 to show that cheap and docile labor was available. These kinds of actions would belie that image. The *Atlanta Constitution* (AC) covered the strike almost daily, and its coverage — which is the only written records that we have of the strike — was filled with both contempt and amazement at the temerity of these Black washerwomen. The AC called them the “Washing Amazons,” and in using what it deemed a derisive term, it revealed the fear which these women struck in the heart of privileged, white society. The idea of “Amazons” originated in ancient Greece and referred to a fierce band of women warriors; indeed, Diana of the recent movie “Wonder Woman” was living among and trained by Amazons.

The AC had these words about the Washing Society: “The laundry ladies’ efforts to control the prices for washing are still prevalent and no small amount of talk is occasioned hereby. The women have a thoroughly organized association and additions to the membership are being made each day . . . the washerwomen of Atlanta having ‘struck’ for very unreasonably high prices.”³ Even more ominous for white society was that talk began among other domestic workers about going on strike. As the Washing Society strike held out, the city council went into

action to end the strike. Strikers were arrested for disorderly conduct (not much changes in our history); white businessmen proposed building an expensive steam laundry to end the Black women’s “monopoly,” and the council levied an exorbitant tax of \$25 on each Washing Society member. In response to the tax, the Washing Society met at Wheat Street Baptist Church and voted to send this letter to the Mayor. They are the only words that we have from the Washing Society:

We the members of our society, are determined to stand to our pledge and make extra charges for washing, and we have agreed, and are willing to pay \$25 or \$50 for licenses as a protection, so that we can control the washing for the city. We can afford to pay these licenses, and will do it before we will be defeated, and then we will have full control of the city’s washing at our own prices, as the city has control of our husbands’ work at their prices. Don’t forget this. We hope to hear from your council meeting Tuesday morning. We mean business this week or no washing.⁴

The city council voted to rescind its action, and the strike proceeded. We do not know the resolution of the strike. The articles in the *Constitution* eventually faded out, and since we have no other sources, the conclusion of historians is that the Washing Society only got a few of its demands. But their work demonstrated five important issues that would resonate through history and bring us up to our own time. First, they demonstrated the powerful capacity of Black women to organize and mobilize on a grassroots level; we would see evidence of this again in the Civil Rights movement. Second, the Washing Society demonstrated the power of unions and strikes to make demands for better wages and rights for workers. Third, their work encouraged others, especially Black workers, to seek such wages and conditions, especially in the anti-union atmosphere of the white South (the South IS always in us.).

Fourth, it highlighted the necessity for Black women making a way out of no way. Their husbands and partners oppressed as neo-slaves, their gender leading to double oppression, these women demonstrated a remarkable determination and resiliency. As Ida Wells thanked God in her Memphis diary on her 25th birthday in 1887: “I have always been provided with the means to make an honest livelihood.”⁵ Working outside the home as well as inside the home has long been a tradition for African American women (and other women of color).

Finally, it reminds us that the struggle for justice and equity is long and difficult, but so essential. The economic forces that shaped racism and slavery are deep and powerful, and the only way to bend the arc of history toward justice is to engage in the struggle for such bending. We are now in a crucial period, with the inevitable reshaping of our world in light of Covid-19. Significant changes will be made in these times. Let us be inspired by the Washing Society and let us take up their dirty but cleansing work in order to bend these times toward justice. ✚

¹ Nibs Stroupe, *A Twice Told Tale: Race In America*, Open Door Community, 1996, p. 14

² <https://aflcio.org/about/history/labor-history-events/atlanta-washerwomen-strike>

³ Tera W. Hunter, “African-American Women Workers’ Protest in the New South,” *Organization of American Historians*, Summer, 1999, p. 54.

⁴ Hunter, p. 55.

⁵ *The Memphis Diary of Ida B. Wells*, edited by Miriam Decosta-Willis, Beacon Press, 1995, p. 151.

The Washing Society *continued from page 1*

wrings out the soap and water and dirt, my iron plugs into an outlet. The poem wants to speak in her voice, saying *I marched, I refused*, and of course I have, but when the risk was heat or cold or rain, nothing more than discomfort.

Look at this figure set in a glass case at the museum: *Sister Tuesday*, carved from wood with an ordinary pocketknife. She is ironing a shirt, fifty years after the Washing Society strike. Does the artist speak for Sister Tuesday and her aching arms — her mouth slightly open as if she sang while she ironed, or told a story to someone else in the room, someone whose only job was to listen? Maybe about her grandmother and the Washing Society, or how her mother pointed the iron into a cuff like this. Or does the sculptor, a man whose handwork was displayed with the Harlem Renaissance, see her from outside—a woman whose handwork was worn on her employer’s back? I have not allowed the poem to speak for Sarah and her sisters.

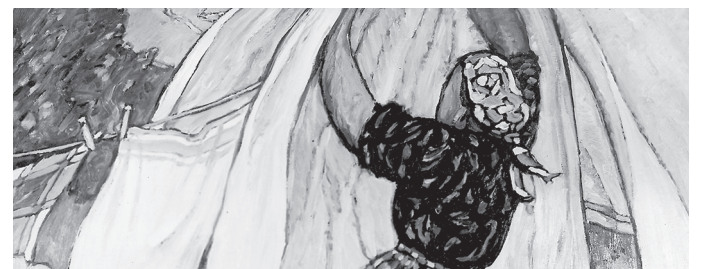
4.

And, of course, the irons were every bit as heavy after the strike and the well didn’t move any closer to the house. There is no record of the council’s final vote, but in any case the women still had to cook while they ironed or there would have been no dinner. But those words, *full control*, must have added salt to their cornbread, must have lightened their steps as they carried the starched and pressed shirts to those who paid them for the privilege of wearing clean clothes. As for me,

I can be the one who listens to a woman tell her grandmother’s story while she irons; I can hear Sarah hum to herself as she carries the clean shirts. ✚

Image Credit: “*Washer Woman*” by anonymous, licensed under Public Domain from the National Archives at College Park and obtained from Wikimedia Commons.

Susanna Lang’s “*The Washing Society*” won *Women’s History Month Special Issue Poetry Runner-Up* in *Columbia Journal*, March 29, 2020. Her collection of poems, *Travel Notes from the River Styx*, was published in 2017 by Terrapin Books. Two chapbooks are forthcoming in 2020, *Self-Portraits* (Blue Lyra Press) and *Dear Girls* (dancing girl press). Other collections include *Tracing the Lines* (Brick Road Poetry Press, 2013) and *Even Now* (Backwaters Press, 2008), as well as *Words in Stone*, a translation of Yves Bonnefoy’s poetry (University of Massachusetts Press, 1976). A two-time Hambidge Fellow and recipient of the Emerging Writer Fellowship from the Bethesda Writer’s Center, she has published original poems and translations from the French, in such journals as *Little Star*, *The Literary Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *december*, *The Slowdown* and *American Life in Poetry*. She lives and teaches in Chicago.



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

Hello,

We are writing because we have noted a number of people who have stated they are canceling their subscription to *Hospitality* because something you do has made them upset. I don't know all their reasons, but we hope our gift can help replace some of the funding you are missing now. Are they angry because you console the grieving in prison, or feed the hungry on the streets, or clothe the people who are cold or call out the leaders who arrange for privileged people to get more while so many others have less? I don't understand, but I do want to support all you do. I can't do all of it myself. My wife and I are now retired school teachers with a total of 70 years' experience between us. We both know that some detractors do not want to support you if you think abortions are fine. I can say that, after helping young people for many decades, that not everyone has the same support, the same loving family, the same access to healthcare, the same access to mental health counseling and medication, or even the same hope for the future. For me to presume that I should support a law that bans a woman from accessing a medical procedure that her psychiatrist recommends and her physician recommends is completely wrong. Women need freedom and health care access to make their own decisions so they can go forward and live a good life. These women need our help and God's Love, and so does the Open Door.

Wes & Deborah McCoy
Marietta, Georgia

Dear Ed, Murphy and all at the Open Door,

I can't tell you enough how much a blessing you and the ODC are in my life. I read *Hospitality* regularly and pray for you daily. I have three different calendars up on my board to remind me of all the connections I have in my personal Beloved Community.

Being involved with your work with the poor, the imprisoned and the societally rejected gives me purpose and great hope for the future.

May our Gods bless all we do.

With the Love of Christ,
Max Holder
Roswell, Georgia

I don't like many inspirational books or papers, but the Open Door's *Hospitality* always makes my heart sing.

Janie Freeman
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Thank you for the April 2020 issue of *Hospitality*. There are several articles in it that I really enjoyed reading. "I Saw the Light of Jesus," by Katie Aikens and "Foot Theology" by Nibs Stroupe. The articles really touched my heart and made me realize how far we all really need to go in order to have a really just and caring society.

Until next time, continue to stay safe as I'm sure God will allow. Answer soon please.

Charles
Georgia Prisoner

Dear Ed, Murphy & Open Door Community,
Greetings from the U.S./Mexico border!

The enclosed coffee is donated through the Frontera de Cristo's Coffee, Conversations & Compassion campaign. For almost 18 years, the farmers of Café Justo have been living into the reality that "those who plant will enjoy the fruit of their labor."

Hope y'all enjoy it!

Paz,
Mark Adams
Open Door extended community, 1995-1998

Good Day God Bless!

Eduard, it's been quite some time since I've last related to someone by these means, and as I sit here doing so, I've realized just how much I've missed doing so. But when certain situations here in prison cause much stress and tension on me, I seek refuge and comfort in writing someone. Writing happens to be one of my better pastimes, and I could go on doing so forever, but without a response it would be impossible. I am becoming an advocacy reader of the *Hospitality* newspaper, and I've received my second issue already. Also, I received two books that was sent to me, I really appreciated them. The "Tell the Truth and Shame the Devil" article was very enlightening, and the question was ask, what truth can we not talk about? Housing. I enjoyed that article, because just the other day on C-Span, they was discussing housing, and further down in the article in *Hospitality* the question was ask, where was Jesus born? There is a lot that I take from these articles to share with others. Especially from the first issue I received, "Chaos and Choice." I like that title, and I'm from the city of Chicago. I love knowledge, and I wake up every day seeking it. Because here in prison, ignorance has become the new normal, and I refuse to be placed in that category. I will be praying for you and the staff at *Hospitality* that you all will keep putting out good information. And with that, I prayed for you today, Eduard, gave thanks for your life.

Prisoner
Illinois



Rita Corbin

Introducing Murphy Davis *continued from page 3*

the strength and wisdom to change systems and prejudices which uphold injustices.

Murphy has often found strength from the writings of the brilliant lay theologian and activist William Stringfellow (1928-1985), who also suffered catastrophic illnesses. He once wrote, "I am called in the Word of God — as is everyone else — to the vocation of being human, nothing more and nothing less. . . . To be a Christian means to be called an exemplary human being." (*Second Birthday*) Likewise, Murphy believes that her vocation is to be the human that God intended her to be. Nothing more, nothing less! So while she may have been forced to change her "job" during her debilitating illnesses, her "vocation" always remained being the Murphy Davis that God intended her to be.

In her book, Murphy shares her story under the very apt title, *Surely Goodness and Mercy*. That phrase, borrowed from Psalm 23:6, begs to be cited in its entirety: "Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the Holy One my whole life long." With grace and peace, Murphy Davis, as much as anyone this author knows, has faithfully embodied that verse through her faithful "journey into illness and solidarity." ♦

Lee Carroll is an ordained minister of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Associate Professor Emeritus of Columbia Theological Seminary, Decatur, Georgia. He is the current chair of the Board of Directors of the Open Door Community. (lcarroll@ix.netcom.com)

Dear Ed,

I just finished reading Catherine Meeks' and Nibs Stroupe's fine book, *Passionate for Justice*, that you sent me last week. Many, many thanks for this extraordinary commentary on the impact of Ida B. Wells on the lives of many and of these two people and their joint work and their mutual quest for racial justice here in America. I very much like the structure of the book that enables each to speak for himself/herself vis a vis Ida B. Wells and in conversation with each other about their specific take-aways. It is a book filled with helpful insights from beginning to end. Being born and raised in Canada myself, I deeply appreciated the conversation Nibs had with the Canadian at the Barth conference at Princeton Theological Seminary. I have heard such statements all my life whenever the race issue was raised anywhere in Canada.

Thanks again for your thoughtful gift. We continue to keep Murphy, you and the Open Door in our prayers, hoping that you will remain safe during this pandemic and beyond.

Peter Paris
Middletown, Delaware

request your copy now!

Open Door Community Press

Surely Goodness and Mercy

A Journey into Illness and Solidarity



Murphy Davis

*Forewords by Jürgen Moltmann
and Bryan Stevenson*



Surely Goodness and Mercy

A Journey into Illness and Solidarity

by Murphy Davis

to request your copy
contact

opendoorcomm@bellsouth.net

404.290.2047

PO Box 10980 Baltimore, MD 21234-0980