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

**Vol. 39, No. 9**

PO Box 10980 Baltimore, Maryland 21234 404.290.2047 [www.facebook.com/ODCBalt/](http://www.facebook.com/ODCBalt/)

**September / October 2020**

## Surely Goodness and Mercy

### A Journey into Illness and Solidarity

**By Norman Shanks**

This is a remarkable book by a remarkable woman. It is a memoir of her coping with cancer and other illnesses over 25 years (in 1995 she was given only months to live) woven together with an account of the life of the Open Door Community, for which, along with other intentional communities, members of the Iona Community are encouraged to pray on the twenty-eighth day of each month.

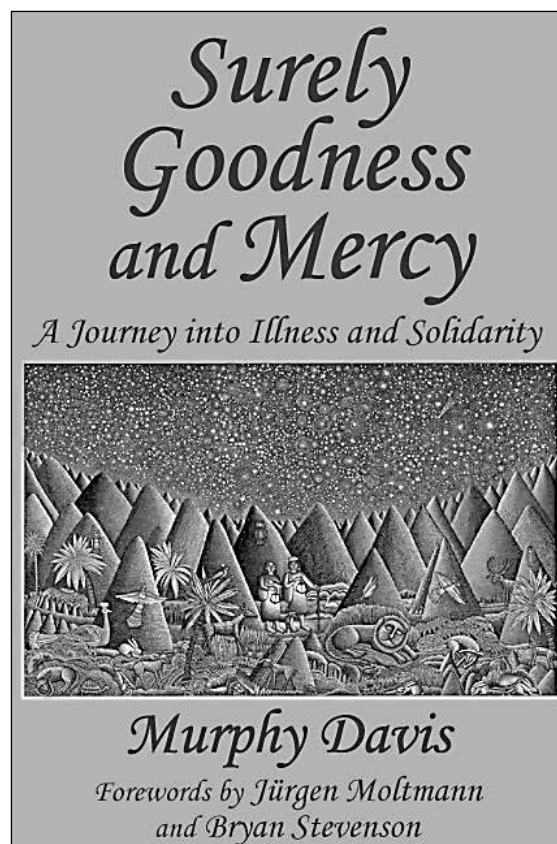
In September 2000, as part of a 'sabbatical' during my time working for the Iona Community, I spent a month as a Resident Volunteer at the Open Door. Having done a little "homework," I had some idea and understanding of what to expect in terms of its ministry of hospitality and political campaigning, but the actual experience, still vividly etched in my memory for the spiritual and emotional challenge it involved, was eye-opening, lasting and profound.

The values and history of the Open Door permeate Murphy Davis's book. It is a thoroughly gripping roller-coaster of a read. Almost blow by blow, incident by incident, diagnosis by treatment, it charts her unenviable journey, which she describes as both miracle and mystery. As she puts it, "I have no formula to share. There is no way to explain why I have lived through the impossible: a quarter of a century of intensive medical treatment, nine major surgeries, five regimens of chemotherapy and two of radiation, lymphoma, breast and squamous cell cancers, and a nearly fatal case of fungal pneumonia. I have often straddled the thin and precarious line between life and death."

Murphy's perspective is, if maybe not quite unique, one that we do not hear from often. For years she has lived "on the edge" — not only in coping for so long with most serious illness, but also in the radical commitment and solidarity with the poor and disadvantaged that have characterised her life and ministry. She pays fulsome tribute to the invaluable support she has had: "I have been buoyed by the prayers of the faithful and the hopes of agnostics, by the persistent petitions of family and the determined conviction of poor neighbours and death-row prisoners. What an inestimable gift — to be saved by the prayers of the poor!"

In 2002 Murphy, along with her husband, Ed Loring, (a larger-than-life prophetic figure whose gifts as pastor and preacher complement perfectly her gentler but equally steadfast personality and strength of purpose) came to Scotland to lead an Iona programme week, and her memorable Sunday morning sermon in the Abbey was both a wake-up call to commitment to justice and a reflection on her own experience — as long-time advocate and pastor for prisoners on death row and in the Open Door Community's ministry in Atlanta — much more than a depersonalised soup kitchen or night shelter, but rather grounded in pastoral and hospitable relationships, providing accommodation for a few on

### Open Door Community Press



**Surely Goodness and Mercy**  
A Journey into Illness and Solidarity

**by Murphy Davis**

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a continuing basis, offering to people "on the street" daily meals (for up to 150 people each day), shower and toilet facilities, a weekly foot clinic, medical advice and clothing.

In 2007, shortly after retiring, I was back in Atlanta, along with Ruth, for three months at Columbia Theological Seminary in Decatur. We visited the Open Door several times each week to help with the daily meals and the foot clinic,

and to share in the weekly Sunday evening communion. The key to the life of the Open Door and to its indelible influence for good on the lives of so many lies in the rooting of all its activities in prayer and worship. We felt and experienced there (perhaps even more than in and around the Iona Community) the integration of work and worship, prayer and politics. Here a committed group of people were living out their faith to the full, walking the ever-risky way of the cross, challenging the culture of our times that tends to give priority to the pursuit of comfort, acquisition and an illusory form of security.

In 2017 the Open Door had to move from its premises in Atlanta to Baltimore, where it is still active on a smaller scale and, despite the limitations of her health condition, Murphy's commitment to justice, solidarity and death-row ministry remains undimmed and unabated. The Community's story undergirds and is threaded through this powerful and inspiring book, giving context to the account of huge medical ups and downs, interspersed with Murphy's own challenging personal insights and theological reflections, which culminate in the unforgettable final chapter, "Remember you are dust."

*Surely Goodness and Mercy* is an immensely readable and strikingly incarnational book. It is incarnational in its down-to-earth style and approach, with detailed descriptions of medical procedures and drug prescriptions and graphic accounts of, for example, the Imperial Hotel occupation, seeking housing for homeless and marginalised people, and of the demanding Grady Hospital campaign for the improvement of public health provision for those without adequate health insurance. And it is thoroughly incarnational in its theology. In their pursuit of justice and solidarity, Murphy Davis and Ed Loring, since the very start of their life together, through their commitment to the Open Door, have sought to be true to Gospel values, to embody and share God's loving purpose and grace made human in Jesus Christ, and in so doing have consistently put their lives and bodies "on the line."

This is truly a tale of "courage, faith and cheerfulness," a challenge and inspiration to us all. And it is clear that, above all, what has sustained Murphy through all her tribulations is not only much attentive medical skill; the prayers of her many friends and of her dear family; the unfailing companionship of her husband, Ed, and the love and professionalism of her daughter, Hannah, but also her own vision of "the Beloved Community," her continuing gratitude for the gift of life, her remarkable resilience and unquenchable faith and hope. ✠

*Norman Shanks is a friend of the Open Door Community, a retired Church of Scotland minister and former Leader of the UK's Iona Community ([www.iona.org.uk](http://www.iona.org.uk)). This review first appeared in September 2020 in the Community's monthly online, eCoracle. ([rufuski@btinternet.com](mailto:rufuski@btinternet.com))*



# We Are One Family

By Catherine Meeks

For quite some time now, as an African American I have been very troubled about the ways in which we continue to make Indigenous Peoples invisible. Unfortunately, this has been true for many of us who have proclaimed ourselves to care about “the least of these” on the earth. Of course, we had centuries of assistance in the process of making them invisible. I have lived in Georgia for almost 50 years, a state that was home to at least 12 nations until the early 1800s, when through war and treaties they were killed and dispersed to other parts of the country. I have not known ten Indigenous people in Atlanta and the nearby areas in all my years here. While I do not pretend to think that I should be able to see all of the people who live in this region, if Indigenous sisters and brothers had not been driven off their land, I would see them around in stores, restaurants and in general. I am working to shift this lens for myself and to shift my justice work to be more inclusive.

When the first explorers arrived in this land that was to become the United States, they found millions of Indigenous Peoples who were functioning just fine without the interference of Europeans. But that was soon to change because the Europeans were supported by the Doctrine of Discovery, which was given to them by the Pope, granting them a license to kill anyone who was not a Christian. So they went about finding a path to become the controllers of the land. Killing the folks that they found here was not a problem because they had been told that their mission was to do just that.

The mission was highly successful. Had they failed, there would be Indigenous people living in my neighborhood; I would see them everywhere as I see Asians and Latinx. It is difficult to imagine what it must be like to have someone come to your home and enjoy your welcoming energy who then turns on you and takes over your home. In addition to taking over your home, they force you to a designated part of the land and bind you in every way possible so that you essentially become a slave who has to watch them enjoy your home and your homeland while you are treated as less than human.

As one travels around the United States it is very easy to see what we have done. But what we do not see is the total genocidal picture unless we take the time to investigate what happened to this part of our family. We have to look carefully



at our history in order to learn how the millions who were here in the 1400s have become the few thousands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In general, along with their physical decimation, achieved through war and any other means that Europeans chose, there is much evidence to support the long-term neglect and many broken treaties that helped to create the present reality for Indigenous Peoples.

In spite of everything, they survived, and one nation, the Navajo, represent one of the largest populations of Native Peoples in the U.S. now. They were forced to live on designated land (reservations). There are 300,000 of them living primarily in Arizona, New Mexico and Utah on a land mass about the size of West Virginia, designated as Navajoland. Poverty rates are high and daily life can be quite challenging. The current pandemic of Covid-19 vividly highlights their plight while helping us to see their longer-term struggle with the pandemic of racism, which has been here since 1492. While African Americans and other minority groups are hit the hardest by this virus, folks in Navajoland are dying from Covid-19 at a per capita rate that exceeds New York and New Jersey combined. But what would one expect to see other than a high death rate in their community? There is often no easy access to water. People live in very close proximity to one another because of their commitment to family and their sense of responsibility for the care and nurturance of

everyone, especially of their elders, so social distancing is often impossible. There is a shortage of medical facilities and there are not enough doctors and nurses. There have been many unexplained delays with their yearly treaty-designated payments. All these challenges create a clear and undeniable portrait of white supremacy and its successful effort to keep the Navajo People in their designated space and place with little possibility of hope for a new day to dawn. ✦

*Catherine Meeks is the Founding Executive Director of the Absalom Jones Episcopal Center for Racial Healing, and the retired Clara Carter Acree Distinguished Professor of Socio-cultural Studies and Sociology from Wesleyan College. She has published six books and is editor of Living Into God's Dream: Dismantling Racism in America (2016), which focuses on racial healing and reconciliation. She and Nibs Stroupe are authors of Passionate for Justice (2019), a book about the life and witness of Ida B. Wells for our time. She writes for the Huffington Post and is a regular contributor to Hospitality. She is involved with prison work, visits on death row and works for the abolition of the death penalty. (kayma53@att.net)*

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Hannah Murphy Buc

*Murphy Davis, getting a big smooch from her granddaughter, Michaela!*

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



# Celebrate the Passage and Fight for the Promise

By Caroline Leach and Nibs Stroupe

On August 17, 1920, Seth Walker, the Speaker of the Tennessee House of Representatives, left his position and went down to the floor to speak in favor of tabling the motion to ratify the 19th Amendment, which would give women the right to vote. Tennessee was one of the last chances for the Amendment to be ratified; if it did so, it would be the 36th state to do so, and it would push the amendment over the line for ratification to amend the Constitution. If it failed to do so, the Amendment was likely dead.

The vote on passage in Tennessee would be exceedingly close, and thus the Speaker took the unusual step of going to the floor to speak on defeating it. In his speech, Walker got to the heart of the matter. He was against giving the right to vote to women, and his reasoning boiled down to one fundamental reason: “This is a white man’s country.” He spoke this to a legislature full of white men. Speaker Walker received a dismaying surprise later that day when Banks Turner changed his mind and voted against tabling the motion, thus freeing it for an “up or down” vote.

The next day, another surprise. Although he had voted to table the motion the previous day, Harry Burn, the youngest member of the legislature, had received a letter that night from his widowed mother, Phoebe “Febb” Burn, urging him to vote for the 19th Amendment. He had been vacillating over what action to take all during the session, but his momma’s words convinced him. He voted “aye” on the 19th Amendment, shocking everyone, and a tumult followed on the floor of the Tennessee House. The 19th Amendment, certifying the right to vote for women, would now become the law of the land.

This vote culminated a process that took over 100 years, a process requiring at least five generations of women and men to pick up the torch for equality and continue to fight against heavy odds to seek to secure the right for women to vote. From Abigail Adams and Frances Ellen Watkins Harper to Abby Kelley to Angelina and Sarah Grimke to Sojourner Truth to Lucretia Mott to Elizabeth Cady Stanton to Susan B. Anthony to Ida Wells to Mary Church Terrell to Alice Paul to Lucy Burn to Jovita Idar to Zitkala-Sa to Mabel Ping-Hua Lee to Harriet Stanton Blatch and many others — the torch would be passed to newer and diverse generations.

It is a memorable event because it is in the midst of an ongoing struggle in American history. To paraphrase John Lewis, the vote is the main non-violent weapon for change and for justice that we have in a democracy. It is why the Constitution began with such a tight-fisted hold on who was allowed to vote. Indeed, it was so controversial that the Constitution did not want to address the right to vote. That decision was left to the states, with the implication being that only white men of property and standing would be allowed to vote. This issue would not be addressed constitutionally until the 15th Amendment was ratified in 1870.

There was a huge battle over that Amendment itself, with strong resistance from those who wanted to reserve the vote for men classified as “white.” But there were also

struggles over whether the 15th Amendment should include women in the category of those who could vote. The thorny intersection of race and gender was on full display. Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton indicated that they did not want Black men having power over them if they themselves were not allowed to vote. Frederick Douglass indicated that he was not sure if Black women were ready for the vote. The 15th Amendment was ratified, but it did not secure the right to vote for Black men, especially in the South. By the 1890’s, every Southern state had stripped the right to vote from Black men, making the 15th Amendment only a hollow shell.

The wording of the 19th Amendment had been introduced into Congress in 1878 as the proposed 16th Amend-

the envelope further — they managed to get arrested after the U.S. entered World War I in April 1917. Borrowing from tactics learned in Britain, they began a hunger strike to force a vote on the amendment. The authorities decided to force feed them instead of making martyrs for the movement. Instead, it shocked the public and the sympathy meter began to move. All the while, Harriet Stanton Blatch and many others were working at the state levels. In June 1919, the 19th Amendment passed the Senate by ONE vote and was sent on to the states for ratification, and again, ratification finally came by ONE vote in Tennessee.

Some Black women in the North were allowed to vote, but Black people of all genders were still denied in the South. Asian-Americans, Latinx and Native Americans would all have to continue to scrape and claw for this fundamental right, secured finally with the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Or so we thought. The Supreme Court of the United States in *Shelby v. Holder* in 2013 effectively eviscerated the Voting Rights Act, so we are right back into the fight again. The right to vote is not the goal here; it is not the ceiling, but rather the floor on which the struggles for justice and equity can be built. Without the vote, it is so difficult to get changes without violent revolution.

The White Male Alliance (as we name it) is well aware of this, and the WMA seeks to continue to hold power in our democracy by suppressing the vote as much as possible. The work for universal voting rights that began before the founding of the country, continues today. We give thanks to all those women and men who

worked for the passage of the 15th and 19th Amendments, the Snyder Act of 1924 (giving Native Americans the right to vote), the Voting Rights Act and many other actions.

When the Tennessee legislature gathered in the hot days of August to vote on the 19th Amendment, there were about 10 weeks to go until the presidential election of 1920. So it is with us today as we write this article in the hot days of August. As the WMA seeks to suppress the 2020 vote, let us make sure that it is expanded for this presidential election. Make a plan for your voting and to assist others in registering and voting. Following that final ratification in 1920, all kinds of barriers were raised for the presidential election, especially the tired refrain that a woman’s place is in the home. Our forebears and allies added: a woman’s place is also in the House. Let us celebrate the passage of the 19th Amendment and let us fight now for its promise. ♦

*The Rev. Caroline Leach was the 21st woman ordained as a minister in the former Presbyterian Church US in 1973, was campus minister at Georgia Tech, co-pastor with spouse Nibs Stroupe at St. Columba Presbyterian Church in Norfolk, Virginia and at Oakhurst Presbyterian Church in Decatur, Georgia. She is author of O Lord, Hold Our Hands: How a Church Thrives in a Multicultural World.*

*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](http://www.nibsnotes.blogspot.com). ([nibs.stroupe@gmail.com](mailto:nibs.stroupe@gmail.com))*



Above: Suffragettes march for the right to vote in a Nashville parade, ca. 1915. (Tennessee State Museum)

Right: Harry and Phoebe Burn. (constitutioncenter.org)

ment, but it would be over 40 years before it was passed as the 19th Amendment. As we are seeing now with the emergence of new leaders in the fight for racial justice, it would take a new generation of leaders to push through the passage of the 19th Amendment. There were many, but Alice Paul, Lucy Burns and Harriet Stanton Blatch stand out. And, as we are seeing now in the renewed Black Lives Matter movement, it took millions of people galvanizing and organizing to get the needed changes. They believed that more political pressure on state and federal leaders was needed in order to get the vote for women.

Paul and Burns went to Britain to learn under the Pankhurst family and others who were already working for the right for women to vote. Black women like Ida Wells and Mary Church Terrell were also working on the right to vote for women. All joined the National American Woman Suffrage Association, though there was great tension over whether the 19th Amendment would include Black women — the white women were afraid of alienating Southern white women, and the Black women had heard that story so many times! They all organized the first political mass protest in Washington, DC, gathering thousands of women and men from all over the country to march for women’s rights on March 3, 1913, the day before the inauguration of President-elect Woodrow Wilson.

In January 1917, Alice Paul and the NWP did another first — they began picketing the White House, demanding the right to vote for women. Many of their allies felt that they were going too far, that it would alienate more people than persuade them. Protests that seem routine now were started by women seeking the vote. Alice Paul and others pushed

# Pandemic and Peace

## Healthcare not Warfare — Part 2

By Weldon D. Nisly

*They have treated the wound of my people carelessly, saying 'Peace, Peace' when there is no peace.*  
Jeremiah 6:14

"I can't breathe!" George Floyd's last words to a white Minneapolis policeman kneeling on his neck in breath-taking, cold-hearted murder.

A father and son in an Iraqi Kurdistan village whose last breath was taken by Turkey's cruel bombing.

A young woman suffering as COVID-19 attacks her lungs and destroys her ability to breathe.

Gasps for breath coming days apart with opposite results: traumatic death in the first two, healing life in the latter. Why? The difference between warfare and healthcare!

The pandemic Coronavirus consumed a woman's lungs until double lung transplants restored her life breath.

The pandemic war of Turkey's bombing killed the life-breath of a father and son, in the name of the U.S.-defined and -driven "war on terror."

The pandemic racism of white police brutality kneeling on George Floyd's neck until he took his last breath.

The pandemic virus of racialized militarism and militarized racism ravages as surely as the Coronavirus.

Healthcare honors humans as God-breathed creations in God's image. Warfare scorns human breath of life. Healthcare is *The Way* of the Black Jesus. Warfare is the way of white anti-Christ violence.

"Pandemic and Peace: Healthcare not Warfare — Part 1" contrasted healthcare and warfare responses to the Coronavirus. This pandemic offers the world a *kairos* moment to stop warfare and focus on healthcare to re-imagine God-breathed life anew for all people.

### Militarism and Policing as Parallel Problems

Militarism and policing are predominately exercised on behalf of white people justifying violence to control and enforce, not protect and serve people of color.

Rosa Brooks documents the militarism pandemic in *How Everything Became War and the Military Became Everything* (2016). A law professor and former legal counsel in the Defense and State Departments, Brooks critiques military proliferation with diminishing accountability to Constitution, law, policy or politics.

Militarism fulfills the adage, "If your only tool is a hammer, everything looks like a nail." In Brooks' words: "If your only functioning government institution is the military, everything looks like a war — when everything looks like war, everything [is] a military mission." (21)

The militarization of policing in the U.S. and the U.S. military policing the world are a racialized, militarized pandemic. The boundaries between war and peace have been blurred beyond recognition and regulation. "The boundaries around war and the military grow ever more blurry," (8) warns Brooks. "American military personnel now operate in nearly every country on earth." (13)

The final unmooring of 21st-century, asymmetrical, endless war from traditional warfare was 9/11. Scorning 911 as a call for help, 9/11 justifies lawless, endless "war on terror."

The U.S. lied its way into the "war on terror" in Afghanistan and Iraq, lied throughout the war and lies about ending war. Lies have led to wars that the U.S. can't win, can't lose,

### Two favorite t-shirts express my choice!

can't stay in, can't leave. The operative message of "war on terror" is: No laws, borders, institutions, people, policies or protocols will prevent targeting whomever, wherever, whenever the dominant power chooses to kill or imprison or torture without national or international judicial restraint or recourse.

Endless war is waged by unilateral, asymmetrical warfare, fulfilling another revealing adage: "We have met the enemy and the enemy is us." We become what we hate!

Parallel to militarizing everything, policing in the U.S. has expanded the role and escalated the response of police into nearly every arena of civic life and social service. The training, technology, purpose and practice of policing institutes racialized, militarized, legalized violence, especially white police against Black people. Burgeoning police budgets escalate these expanding roles. Dominant white policing racializes the "other," becoming an extension of the global war on everything.

George Floyd's "I can't breathe" plea has led to a Black Lives Matter uprising. This is an uprising, not rioting. Black people lead the fight to stop the pandemic virus of racism. Take your white racist knee off our necks. Stop racist militarized policing. Stop the dominant white policing paradigm. Focus energy and imagination on the transforming paradigm of community-based public safety and restorative justice.

### "We will not stop until we can all breath." William J. Barber II, Poor People's Campaign

Exposing and undoing systemic and systematic militarized racism is essential to revive the breath of life across the country and around the world.

War must stop! The Coronavirus pandemic is the crisis and opportunity to stop the pandemic virus of war.

"It is time to put armed conflict on lockdown," UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres prophetically proclaimed. "End the sickness of war and fight the disease that is ravaging the world."

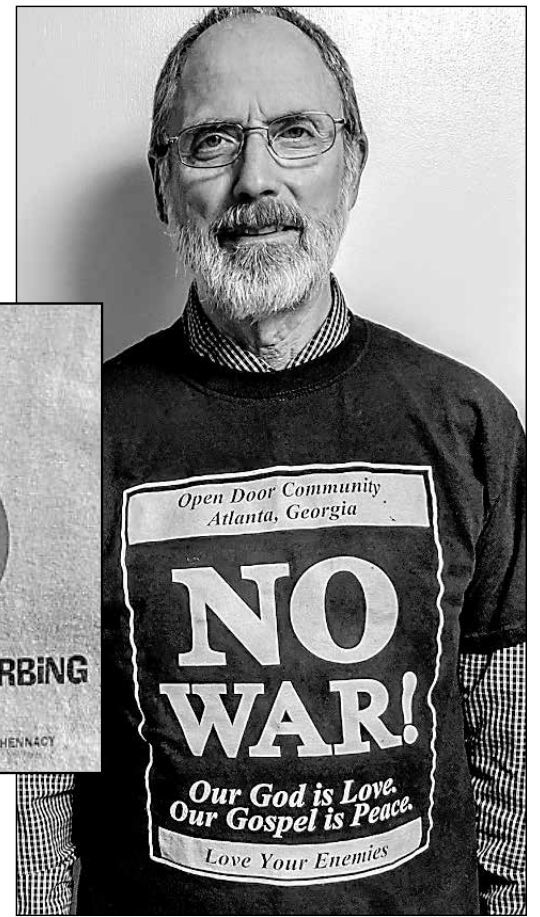
The disease ravaging the world is not only the Coronavirus. It is the virus of racialized militarism of both police and military.

Every war ever waged was stopped — until the 21st century. Yes, there are complicated considerations and costs. But waging endless war is even more complicated and costly, especially for people of color labeled "other" or "enemy."

Nearly two decades of endless war in Afghanistan and Iraq have cost over \$6 trillion dollars! That does not count the incalculable cost of human terror and trauma, life and livelihood. Nor does it account for mass destruction of infrastructure, environmental degradation and dysfunctional political systems.

Are we so unconscionably mindless and heartless to insist that it is better to spend \$6 trillion waging endless war than to build JustPeace? God have mercy!

The United States spends nearly as much on militarism as the rest of the world combined and has more military in other countries than the rest of the world combined. The U.S. is weaponizing the world by supplying over half the weapons of the world, most going to brutal authoritarian regimes who use it against their own people.



Margaret Nisly

The unconscionable madness of racist warring violence must stop! Silence is violence! Which side are you on? Two favorite t-shirts express my choice!

Stop the racism of war  
Stop the sickness of war.  
Stop the madness of war.  
Stop the addiction to war.  
Stop the lies of war.  
Stop the hell of war.  
Stop the sin of war.  
Stop the violence of war.  
Stop the evil of war.

We. Can. STOP!  
When we STOP, we will find the sanity  
and space to breathe together.

Then we will re-imagine life rather than killing.  
Then we will re-envision JustPeace rather than just war.  
Then we will re-invigorate democracy  
rather than imperialism.  
Then we will re-invent human security  
rather than national security.  
Then we will re-energize human rights  
rather than human oppression.  
Then we will re-invest in healthcare rather than warfare.

We can because God has given us hearts  
and minds in God's image.  
We can because we have conscience  
and compassion for transformation.  
We can because we have the resources  
and resilience for the journey.  
The Black Jesus calls us to *The Way* of JustPeace! ✦

*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. (nislyweldon@gmail.com)*

# Vashti: Crowned with Dignity

By Joyce Hollyday

*This is the fourth in a series of reflections on biblical women, launched in January 2020. It is based on Esther 1:1-2:4.*

Esther is one of only two women to have books of the Bible named after them and her courage is widely acclaimed, but my favorite character in her book is a relatively unknown one who disappears after the first chapter. Vashti was a queen whose husband was the most powerful monarch in the world at the time, ruler over 127 provinces from India to Ethiopia. His opulence was legendary — as were his parties. For half a year, King Ahasuerus entertained soldiers and nobles and governors as he displayed “the splendor and pomp of his majesty.” (1:4) His luxurious palace was filled with marble pillars and lavish curtains, adorned with gold from couches to goblets. “Drinking was by flagons, without restraint.” (1:8) The king had extravagant and profligate tastes, and he clearly enjoyed flaunting them. He also had the power and the wealth, as well as the people in his service, to get his way in all matters.

But then someone said no to him.

After days and nights of nonstop drinking, when Ahasuerus and all the men in the palace were quite drunk, he commanded his eunuchs to go fetch the queen. He wanted her to parade before the men, to show off her beauty, “wearing the royal crown.” (1:11) Several biblical commentators believe this meant wearing *only* the royal crown.

Vashti refused. She decided it was not in her best interests to parade before a hall of lustful, raucous, drunken men just to satisfy the command of one — even if he was the king, and her husband. She refused to be put on display like one of his fancy trinkets.

Her bold action threw the palace into an uproar. Ahasuerus was outraged. He had boasted about her

a competition to replace her, ordering commissioners in all his provinces to round up “beautiful young virgins” in order to find himself a new wife. (2:2) Esther was among hundreds who were subjected to a year of intensive cosmetic treatment with oils and perfumes before being given to the king for a night. The criterion for being chosen the next queen: “the girl who pleases the king.” (2:4) I think it could be argued that, despite the temptation to royalty, this was a contest some might not have wanted to win.

Vashti was a woman of great dignity who knew her convictions, rather than her place. At great risk, she refused to be exploited. Despite the suggestion of the king’s sage that he should give her position to one “better than she,” (1:19) Vashti was the one in this story who acted with strength, courage and integrity.

On first glance, it would be difficult to find a woman more unlike Vashti

and cheers, pointing scornful fingers at the ministers they had applauded just moments before, as Sojourner continued. “Then that little man in black there, he says women can’t have as much rights as men, ‘cause Christ wasn’t a woman. Where did your Christ come from?” She repeated the question, her words echoing with emphasis. “*Where did your Christ come from?*” She paused a moment, then gathered

all the force of her voice. “From God and a woman! Man had nothing to do with him!” Glorious pandemonium erupted in the church.

But Sojourner was still not through. She turned toward a minister who had declared that women are inferior because Eve brought sin into the world. “If the first woman God ever made was strong enough to turn the world upside down, all alone — these together ought to be able to turn it back and get it right-side up again. And now that they are asking to do it, the men better let ‘em.” She took her seat



Queen Vashti | Meinrad Craighead



Sojourner Truth | Library of Congress

And so we too cheer women who refuse to let men — whether husbands or ministers or kings — “head” them. Ain’t they some women?

to all his friends, and she disobeyed him. His honor and pride were at stake. He feared subversion throughout his kingdom. What if men were no longer in control? What if other women got the same idea that they could defy their husbands? According to the king’s troubled sage, if nothing were done, “there will be no end of contempt and wrath!” (1:18)

Now perhaps there was already a little trouble in the kingdom. This issue of female insubordination must already have surfaced, or there would not have been such fear and backlash. The sparks had to be snuffed out before they became a forest fire. And so there went out a royal decree: Men are in charge, just in case you women forgot; just in case you have any notions and start to get a little out of hand. A woman’s place is in the home — but the man is master there. And watch out for what happens if you ever step out of line. Queen Vashti was never heard from again.

Meanwhile, King Ahasuerus wasted no time launching

than Sojourner Truth. One was a queen who lived in an elegant palace; the other, an enslaved woman who never had a home of her own. One refused to stand before a gathering of men; the other refused to keep her seat.

In 1852, while she was lecturing against slavery around the country, Sojourner Truth stopped at a women’s rights convention in a church in Akron, Ohio. Tall and dressed in a plain, gray dress and a sunbonnet, she made a stir as she marched up the aisle — one observer said “with the air of a queen” — and took a seat on the pulpit steps. She remained still

as various ministers spoke vehemently against the rights of women, until she could stay quiet no longer. A hissing rush of disapproval greeted her as she stepped to the pulpit.

Sojourner wheeled around to face one of the earliest speakers. “That man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages, and lifted over ditches, and to have the best place everywhere. Nobody ever helps me into carriages, or over mud puddles, or gives me the best place. And ain’t I a woman?” Her voice grew more fervent. “Look at me. Look at my arm. I have plowed and planted and gathered into barns and no man could head me! And ain’t I a woman?”

A murmur surged through the crowd, and Sojourner’s voice thundered on. “I have borne thirteen children, and seen them most all sold off into slavery, and when I cried out with my mother’s grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain’t I a woman?”

The people began to rock the church with applause

amid resounding cheers.

And so we too cheer women who refuse to let men — whether husbands or ministers or kings — “head” them. Ain’t they some women? ♣

*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](http://www.joycehollyday.com).*

## Searching for Home are we there yet?

The Dalton Gallery at Agnes Scott College  
September 3 – December 12, 2020



Frank 10/93

Seven of Calvin Kimbrough’s portrait photographs are included in this amazing new exhibition. These images are from his work at the Open Door Community in the 1990s.

The gallery is currently open for in person visits by appointment only Monday, Wednesday, Friday 12-5 p.m.

You may also **download** and **view** the exhibition catalog online at:

<http://daltongallery.agnesscott.org/on-view/searching-for-home-online-catalog/>



## poetry corner



Julie Lonneman

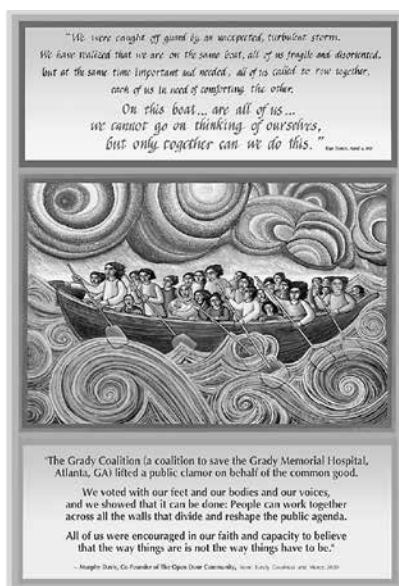
## Otherwise

I got out of bed  
on two strong legs.  
It might have been  
otherwise. I ate  
cereal, sweet  
milk, ripe, flawless  
peach. It might  
have been otherwise.  
I took the dog uphill  
to the birch wood.  
All morning I did  
the work I love.  
At noon I lay down  
with my mate. It might  
have been otherwise.  
We ate dinner together  
at a table with silver  
candlesticks. It might  
have been otherwise.  
I slept in a bed  
in a room with paintings  
on the walls, and  
planned another day  
just like this day.  
But one day, I know  
it will be otherwise.

— Jane Kenyon

Jane Kenyon, 1947 – 1995, is the author of poetry books *Constance*, *Let Evening Come*, *The Boat of Quiet Hours*, *From Room to Room* and *others*. She was poet laureate of New Hampshire in 1995.

From artist **John August Swanson**, who created the beautiful cover art for ***Surely Goodness and Mercy***:  
“Murphy Davis’ book is so powerful and moving that it inspired me to use a quote from it along with Pope Francis’s quote on my new poster ***Storm***.”



The poster sells for \$15 and can be ordered at:  
<https://temp.johnaugustswanson.com/product/storm2020-poster>

## Grace and Peaces of Mail

Murphy,

Thank you so much for gifting me your book, and for the sweet note you included. I picked it up on Saturday afternoon and didn't put it down until I had read the entire book! That is such a rare feat for me and my tired eyes that I think it's only happened a couple of other times in my life, when I was much younger and could manage reading for extended periods of time.

I haven't had much time to (deeply) reflect on your book other than to know that I'm sure I will be reading it a second time. But I do know that the timing of receiving your book & reading your story is a greater gift to me than you could imagine, as my 8-year-old niece was recently given a “grim” medical diagnosis.

It was Chapter 9, “The Worst of Times,” when I found myself with tears rolling down my face and I had to keep checking on the title of the chapter because you had filled it with stories full of such gratitude. There's a lesson to be found in there, or be reminded of, and I learned and was reminded of a number of those lessons reading your book.

Thank you both for sharing your story, your gifts, your insight, your wisdom, your love. Peace be with you always.

With much love and gratitude,

Alison Reeder

Framing Faces, Photography by Alison

Baltimore, Maryland

*Alison is the wonderful photographer whose work appears often in Goodness and Mercy.*

Good morning Murphy,

I hope this note finds you well. I write to say I have just finished reading *Surely Goodness and Mercy*. What a marvelous testimony! You write so well and with such sensitivity. One can almost walk with you through several of the episodes. I envy one who can express herself with such care.

I have decided I want others to read your testimony. Below are individuals I would like you to send a copy. I hope the enclosed check is sufficient to cover the cost of the books and the postage for mailing. If there is any money left over, you are free to use it as you see fit.

In deep appreciation for your friendship,

Frank Gulley

Nashville, Tennessee

*I, Ed Loring, entered Vanderbilt in the fall of 1968, the fateful year: Immediately I went to work in the Divinity School Library under the guidance of Professor Frank Gulley, head librarian of the Divinity School Library. Frank and his wife, Anne, have been close friends for decades and decades. Supporters of our work and supporters of our lives, we give special thanks to Frank and Anne. Frank is 90 and works out at the Y three times each week. Thanks be to God!*

Dear Ed and Murphy,

What a treat to read Murphy's book, and your note, Ed! It felt like being right there with you as you navigated, and continue to navigate, both the fragile and resilient nature of the human condition — often at the same time. Thank you for your persistent faith, hope and honesty that inspires so many people to live as their best selves. Your steadfastness, sense of humor, wisdom and fiercely loving presence are a witness to us — and I often think of you, Murphy, singing and playing your guitar when some of your favorite songs drop into my head! Sending much love for the continued journey of peace and justice,

Gail and Edwin Steiner

Petaluma, California

Hi Ed,

I just finished reading Murphy's memoir, which triggered a full range of emotions. I want to share those reactions with Murphy but I need you to pass these comments on. So, I will be addressing the message below to her.

Milt

Hi Murphy,

Let me first state how well the memoir was written and how it flowed. For me, reading your story was like riding on an emotional roller coaster. My feelings ran the gamut: anguish, admiration, compassion, anger, joy, awe, sadness, exhilaration, humor, respect.

Anguish - knowing the pain you had to suffer during these illnesses as your body was taken apart and put back together.

Admiration - realizing what a sacrifice you and Ed made in solidarity with the poor and homeless by giving up so many privileges.

Compassion - understanding how hard it had to be to provide support to those on death watch.

Anger - recognizing how the commodification of our healthcare system means serving only those having financial resources.

Joy - absorbing the deep pleasure you found with Hannah, her work and marriage and your grandchild.

Awe - dumbstruck by how you were familiar with the drugs you were taking and being prepared to monitor your own care.

Sadness - experiencing you and Ed's intense disappointment in having to bid farewell to the Open Door.

Exhilaration - identifying with your victorious campaign at Grady to make prescriptions available without co-pays.

Humor - imagining the expressions on the faces of Grady staff as you pushed Ed along in the wheelchair.

Respect - accepting how this whole journey was rooted in your faith and spirituality.

Finally, in my own fight with cancer including surgery, radiation and chemo, I have come to feel greater compassion for the suffering of others and gratitude for the opportunity to wake up and experience a new day.

With love and solidarity,

Milt Tambor

Atlanta, Georgia

Tim & Cindy,

I just completed reading Murphy Davis' new book, *Surely Goodness and Mercy*. WOW! What a story of perseverance and faith! She chronicles her 25-year battle with cancer and her solidarity with the poor and prisoners, particularly those on death row. It is truly powerful and I think that you both would be inspired by it as I have. They suggest a \$15 donation to their ministry per copy. Contact them to order.

Jeff Jenkins

Calhoun, Georgia

Ed,

The Washer Women poem and Nibs' article look great and are great. Thanks for publishing this great poem by my friend. Holding you and Murphy in the light.

Faith and Action. Poetry and Social Justice.

Steve Rhodes

Charleston, South Carolina

[www.jstephenrhodes.com](http://www.jstephenrhodes.com)

# Grace and Peaces of Mail

Hello Murphy,

I feel so proud and special to be able to write you, a dear and special friend.

After talking with Mary Catherine over the weekend and hearing about her and Mary Sinclair's road trip to visit you, man, I couldn't pass up a chance to write and tell you how special you was and is to me and all us men from the row. It wasn't just the nice Christmas packages you made sure we all received during the holidays, but you visited year round and when you couldn't, you made sure someone came to see us. Your warm and caring heart made everyone around you want to be at their very best.

I have been off death row for 8 years now and inmates as well as officers ask me, how was death row and what if anything did I miss from being there. How it was is hard to answer but talking about you and all the love you and the Open Door Community did for us, you all show me love and that people care no matter the color of my skin or what I did, you always had open arms for us men from the row and being from Atlanta, the homeless community felt your love.

I wish I had met you before the row, my life would have turn out so different but I trust in God's path for us all! Murphy Davis, I love you and Ed, you and your family is in my daily prayers, take care my friend, I wish I could have made the road trip with the other two special ladies in my life, Mary and Mary, man, don't God love us?

Your friend for life,  
Al Stripling  
Georgia Prisoner



Rita Corbin

Dear Rev. Davis,

You have written something wonderful.

Your cousin Jeanne Ann is a member of my congregation, and she gave me a copy of *Surely Goodness and Mercy*. But she failed to warn me of the tears I would shed as I read your words. I shed tears of joy for the beautiful network of people who came into your life at Spirit-inspired moments. I shed tears of self-reflection, as I have seen your name on my congregation's prayer list since I first came to this call in late 2016, but only now begin to understand the story that belongs with your name. I shed tears for and with you. Your story spoke to my soul. It was breath. It was ruah.

I want to thank you for writing, for sharing, for storytelling. I want to thank you for the tears I shed and for writing something wonderful.

Thank You,  
Walter Canter  
Blue Ridge Presbyterian Church  
Ruckersville, Virginia

Dear Murphy,

If I didn't know it is true, I wouldn't believe it. *Surely Goodness and Mercy* is Unbelievable. But you and Ed and Hannah know without a doubt that it is true. If the only thing that you have done is write the book, "it would have been enough." Thank you.

Communication is not my strong suit, but know that you are ever in our thoughts and prayers.

Peace & Blessing,  
Catherine Morris  
Los Angeles Catholic Worker

Dear Murphy,

I just received my copy of *Surely Goodness and Mercy*. I am so excited that you would remember me and send me an autographed copy.

I too have been very sick, with Crohn's disease, and have lost so much weight. I now weigh only 146 pounds, however, I'm eating much better and I'm pain free. I believe God is healing me but if not, I'm gonna praise Him and serve Him anyhow.

I pray and hope you are doing better and that your recovery is complete. The staff here enjoys reading the paper you send but having only one copy makes it difficult to share with many.

Enclosed is a donation for your ministry and if you can, please send me two more copies of your book. I'd like to share it with women who are suffering with recurring breast cancer.

Thank you again and give Ed my love.

Yours in Christian Love,  
Rev. Dr. Jim Allen Milner, Sr.  
Atlanta, Georgia



SOA Watch

Dear Murphy,

It is an honor to have your incredible book in my personal library and at New Hope House. I read my copy in one sitting — I could not put it down. It is at once devastating and life fulfilling. Thank you for writing it, and for being my friend and teacher.

With Gratitude, Solidarity and so much Love,  
Mary Catherine

Dear Ed,

I read Murphy's book soon after I received it. I couldn't put it down — I read it in one sitting. One of the gifts of the pandemic for me has been more time to read and reflect. I cried throughout much of the book — for Murphy, for you, for everyone who suffers. Your poem "SHE" is the perfect epilogue.

Participating in some of the Black Lives Matter protests rescued me from the loneliness and despair of the pandemic. I have thought of you often out in the streets — it was through my friendship with you and my time at the Open Door that I found my courage to be in the streets. My heart bursts with gratitude for you and your example. I know it must be painful for you to not be able to take part in the protests. But for what it's worth, you are definitely there with us in spirit.

Lots of love to you and Murphy,  
Mary Catherine Johnson  
New Hope House  
Barnesville, Georgia

Dearest Murphy,

I finished reading *Surely Goodness and Mercy* at the lake last week, thinking often of our treasured time up there a year ago. I was deeply moved by your book. Hearing the familiar stories, the account of the Grady Coalition laid out with all its significant successes — where would we be now if not for that infusion of cash that the coalition was able to pry loose. Thanks for giving us all a richer understanding of your approach to illness; it will inform my own approach, choices and outlook.

Ellen Spears  
Atlanta, Georgia

Dearest Mary Sinclair,

I have just finished reading Murphy's story. I had a number of books to read before I read hers and the anticipation was great as the pile of the other books got smaller.

What can I say? I am truly lost for words! I have read the book (devoured the book more like) in four sittings over just two days. It is one of the most beautiful, touching and powerful true accounts of the amazing struggle of an amazing and beautiful lady against all the odds that I have ever read in my life. I simply could not put the book down! Many times when I was reading it I could actually hear Murphy's voice. I could totally relate to the feeling of sheer panic she also felt when needing the bathroom urgently during her treatment and hoping desperately the bathroom would be free whilst wheeling the stand with the wonky wheels holding the chemo drugs still attached to her arm. I too experienced that many times. My treatment was nothing compared with what dearest Murphy has gone through ... nothing at all! And here in the UK, of course, we have our wonderful National Health Service where everything is free for rich and poor alike. Even our Lifeboat, Air Ambulance and Fall Rescue services are completely free. How I wish it was the same for all of you in the USA!

As an example, two weeks ago I was bitten on the ankle by a horsefly. A simple but vicious bite, the outcome of which I could never have imagined. Despite antibiotics and taking great care with sterile dressings, it blistered hugely and became infected, resulting in me having to go to A&E at Leeds General Infirmary to have it drained, washed out and dressed with an iodine patch and a huge bandage. Double the dose of antibiotics was also prescribed. Where would I have been at Grady hospital with no money I wonder? What would have been the outcome? Possibly cellulitis and even, in extreme cases, losing a limb? All costing far more money than treating the problem in the first place. As it is it has been treated for free and all is going really well. What sense is there in turning poor, ill people away, meaning their problems become worse, ending in great suffering and even death? I just don't get it!

A beautiful, beautiful book which is really well written and which I will treasure forever; thank you! Please feel free to share this message with Murphy. Tell her I love her, and you too, and I am so glad you have touched, and continue to touch, my life. It is indeed an honour to count you both as my very dear friends. I am hugging both your necks as I sign off.

With love,  
Carole Butcher  
Leeds, United Kingdom



Rita Corbin

Dear Murphy,

I am on the last chapter of your book. Oh Murphy, what a beautiful and timely memoir. So well done (thanks to Joyce too!) and so much your voice. It makes me miss your good storytelling in person even more. And of course I've shed a few tears of nostalgia and grief for the days at 910. I just want you to know what a gift this little piece of writing is to the world. So glad you made it to the finish line!

Love you so much,  
Heather Bargerion  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

# Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Murphy & Ed,

Thank you so very much for my copy of *Surely Goodness and Mercy*. Murphy, as I've been reading through this personal account of your past 25-year journey with cancer it both saddened and blessed my heart. This has been a refiner's fire experience more than anything, I'm sure. The thought that kept coming to my mind is "Miracle Baby." You know how so many are referred to as a "Grady Baby." Well you are our Miracle Baby. You have defied all natural odds to still be here with us in the land of the living and it is evident there are yet lives for you to impact.

It is staggering when I think of all you and Ed gave up to gain solidarity with the poor, homeless and those on death row. It is very humbling because you all could have lived a nice middle-class and cushy life. Yet you chose to become one with us in our plight. I was one of those death row prisoners here in Georgia when we first met some 35-40 years ago. In fact, you mention in your book the final days of one of my co-defendants, Jose High, before he was executed. This was the first time I had heard of the circumstance surrounding his death. My heart is filled with gratitude for the both of you.

You all are not counted among those who have merely given lip service when it comes to embracing the cause of the poor, homeless and those on death row. You've put your money where your mouth is and your lives have spoken volumes of your commitment. Murphy, you have truly gained solidarity with us and it is an earned solidarity. I'm sure you didn't see the path God would use to get you where you are today, but He has done a tremendous work, God has no doubt given you more than you ever could have asked for or imagined. I know it has been an arduous journey to say the least, but to see the bounty of fruit from your labor of love is refreshing.

Until this book I had never realized or truly understood the greatness of the people God had placed in my life. It is obvious His goodness and mercy have been your constant companion though this long ordeal. You and Ed are among those giants of the faith. I will forever be indebted to you for your prayers, support, friendship and love. August 29<sup>th</sup> will mark my 44th year of incarceration. Murphy, my own journey has been enriched and productive because of you. Stay encouraged my friend and I love you.

With Heartfelt Gratitude,

Nathan Brown  
39233/HB  
Metro Reentry Facility  
PO Box 17668  
Atlanta, Georgia 30316

*Nathan Brown is readying to translate Goodness and Mercy into Braille.*

Dear Murphy,

We  
Thank God for your enlightenment and capacity;  
Thank you for your courageous "yes" to caring and being a guiding light;  
Thank God for our awareness and appreciation of your loving;  
Thank God for sending you Ed to adorn your person;  
Thank you and Ed for walking together, blossoming together, rejoicing together, and taking what is given;

We  
Ask for God's grace for tomorrow.

With Love,  
JoAnn and Steve Knapp  
Marietta, Georgia

Dear Murphy Davis,

How do I speak to you? While I am reading your wonderfully written book you are present to me as you share all the journey of your illnesses and yet present me with so many injustices of our failed systems. I resonate with your stories and am amazed at the clarity and prayer-filled spirituality of each page. I've sent out all the books except the one you signed to me. You are taking me on an amazing journey of courage and resilience, also letting me see the ability of the power of how your book speaks of today, the corona virus and how it helps us understand how we can be in solidarity with all humanity and support each other. I am grateful for your generous spirit and ability to go into your own struggles and low points with the recurrence of the cancers. Your own spirit of gratitude for your health care workers — nurses, doctors, and all of the hospital workers. You never forget the poor people that go to Grady Hospital to let us know that you are sharing the same difficulties. You keep bringing to our hearts that what you experienced is going on with many others. The confrontations at the hearings for money to support Grady were special and show how important Solidarity works.

I want 10 more copies of your book.

You are in my heart and prayers.

Gratefully with love,  
John A. Swanson  
Los Angeles, California  
[johnaugustswanson.com](http://johnaugustswanson.com)

*Artist John Swanson's Psalm 23 is the cover of Goodness and Mercy. See the announcement for his poster Storm on page 6.*

Dear Murphy,

I hope you all are well and staying safe! I just finished your book and I am in awe. So powerful, honest and inspiring. I always knew about some of the challenges you faced but not the incredible hard details. So grateful for all the care and support you got and still get. You are amazing!

I think your book should be required reading for all students entering any aspect of health care.

With much love and admiration,  
Kevin Brady, Retired  
Center for Disease Control  
Atlanta, Georgia

Dear Murphy and Ed,

I cannot find the words to express adequately my surprise and joy in receiving an autographed copy of *Surely Goodness and Mercy: A Journey into Illness and Solidarity* — truly a *tour de force* in meditative reading written by one who is skilled in integrating the personal, the medical, the political and the theological dimensions of her life always with love, compassion, friendship and justice. Every page reveals your amazing journey of life and hope constantly interrupted by the shadow of death. Yet, God has repeatedly thwarted that threat with the miracle of life. Please know that I join with your family and countless colleagues and friends in thanking God for God's continuing blessing on your lives and mission which have made indelible marks on all who have met you either in person or through your respective writings. I pray that God will continue to bless you both and all whom you love (especially Hannah, Michaela and Jason) with long life and much joy.

Peter Paris  
Elmer G. Homrighausen Professor, Emeritus  
Princeton Theological Seminary  
Middletown, Delaware

"Love brings strength" — indeed

And I know full Love is dwelling within and all around you and Murphy.

We send our deepest heart-felt appreciation and love to the two of you and others in your Beloved Community of Open Doors, including to once "wee Hannah" whose vocation came very early to her. I am happy, through *Surely*, to have gotten to know this most capable, loving, beautiful daughter of yours — but of course!

So thankful you all are together. (BTW — yes, I did offer my neighbor Murphy's book, but to borrow. I treasure it and want/need to continue learning from you all as we all journey along).

Judy Collins & Jim Allen  
Lanett, Alabama

Mr Ed,

How are you? Fine I hope. This is from down the street. Me and my Mom was wondering if you had a few dollars for groceries to hold us over until our stamps come the 28th of this month. I knocked at your door earlier this morning but there was no answer. Please give me a call.

Thankfully,  
a neighbor  
Baltimore, Maryland

Murphy,

Just finished your book. Really well done. Don't know how you managed to describe going through so many very rough patches in a way that made this particular reader often smile while feeling uplifted and affirmed about the fundamentals of life.

Congratulations, Best wishes and much love.

Gene Guerrero  
Takoma Park, Maryland

Dear Murphy and Ed,

This morning as I was sitting in the darkness of pre-dawn, you came into my prayers — as you have frequently in the past few months.

I write now because I want you to know how my life has been influenced by both of you. Even though we often did not see eye to eye, I want you to know that living at the Open Door was one of the most transformational periods of my life.

Although I don't use it regularly, I open my NIV\* to check the notes I made while we were studying the book of Luke. It has all stayed with me.

I mostly remember Murphy's handing me a letter from Emma at Colony Farm, who was requesting help to be released from prison. Asking me if I wanted to write her, you said "You can't help her, you can only be her friend." I did become her friend and eventually she was released from prison. That was all because of my immersion into scripture and social justice at the Open Door and, of course, the prison ministry that was in existence there.

I only mention these two things, but, as I look back, there are many, many more that formed the way I live, pray and relate to people of all stripes. No matter how difficult it was at times, I wouldn't in all the world have given up that time with you, the volunteers and the residents.

With Gratitude, Shalom and love,  
Barbara Gifford  
Decatur, Georgia

*\*For many years now, I have been using the Priests for Equality Inclusive Bible: the first egalitarian translation.*