The Open Door Community

HOSPITALITY

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

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From Juneteenth to July 4

The Meaning of America

By Nibs Stroupe

The federal recognition of Juneteenth as a national holiday this summer was a pleasant surprise. Since Juneteenth begins a two-week period until July 4, it is important to consider the meaning of these two national holidays in dialogue with one another. The recognition of Juneteenth means that in one small way the equality of Black people is acknowledged, while at the same time acknowledging the terrible legacies of slavery and neo-slavery in our history. It is no coincidence that many state legislatures are seeking to limit the teaching of the history of racism in our shared history. They know that it is deep and profound, and once we go down that road, it will be difficult to go back.

The recognition of Juneteenth is a start on that road. Juneteenth reminds us that one of the powerful seeds of our nation goes back into the 1500s and especially 1619, when the first record of African people being brought here as slaves was found. The 1619 Project of *The New York Times* is a reminder that the seeds of our nation are found in that year rather than in 1776.

The recognition of Juneteenth is a reminder of two of the most powerful forces in American history, forces that are opposed to one another. One is the idea of equality, and the other is the idea of slavery and the white supremacy that undergirds it. These have been warring ideas in American history. The idea of equality — the vision that all human beings are created with equal dignity — is a powerful one in American history. It was born in Europe, but it found its deepest expression in the colonies of America. This idea of equality is one of the great and unexpected gifts of the American experience. It is a revolutionary idea, and it calls out to all structures — class structures, racial categories, gender categories — that their time is winding down, that a new way of looking at ourselves and at one another is emerging in the world. That way is the idea of equality, the idea that we are all created equal. That way is the idea that the institutional and structural foundations of society should be reformed to reflect this radical idea.

There is no small irony that those who developed this idea of "equality" in American history meant it only for white males of property. They meant it only to stand against the old class structures of Europe, but this idea of equality is so strong that they could not contain it. The very people who were enslaved as the living contradiction of equality — they heard this idea, and they believed that it applied to them. The people whose land was stolen from them by Europeans in the very name of equality — they heard this idea and believed that it applied to them. Women, long seen as property of white males — they heard it and believed that it applied to them. People who loved people of the same gender, long penalized and persecuted because of whom they loved — they heard that it applied to them. This list could go on and on, because the idea of equality undercuts so many repressive and oppressive categories of the world. It will continue to call out to people who are not yet recognized as people, as equal siblings in the world.

The idea of equality is so strong and so radical that the European founders immediately began to qualify it after it appeared in the Declaration of Independence in July 1776. The battle over it in the Constitution was huge and dramatic, and as we know, the idea of equality was erased from the

From Juneteenth *continued on page 7*

'Though the earth should change ...'

By Joyce Hollyday

God is our refuge and strength,
a very present help in trouble.
Therefore we will not fear,
though the earth should change,
though the mountains shake
in the heart of the sea;
though its waters roar and foam,
though the mountains tremble with its tumult.
—Psalm 46:1-3

I have often turned to Psalm 46 for comfort. But I realize that, until now, "though the earth should change" was always a metaphor to me.

As I write in mid-August, libraries and senior centers throughout Massachusetts are being designated as "cooling centers" as the thermometer heads toward triple digits — rare for our state. Two days ago, an international panel of scientists looking at the effects of climate change released a devastating report. In his public response, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres called it "code red for humanity." As he spoke, the second-largest fire in California's history reached half a million acres of destruction, fueled by a heat wave and drought. Southern Africa also suffers from extreme drought, while south Asia and parts of Europe try to recover from massive flooding. Glaciers are melting, sea levels are rising and tropical storms are gathering strength.

After decades of warning, it is now too late to avoid catastrophe. It is here. The only question is just how catastrophic the future will be. How many lives will be lost to roaring winds, persistent famines and disappearing islands? What will life be like for our children's children's children? And how do we mourn the end of the world as we've known it?

It has been thirty years since I felt this deeply distressed about the state of the world and our failure to care for it and one another. In the spring of 1991, nuclear weapons and doomsday scenarios were proliferating. Three teenagers I knew were senselessly killed — one stabbed, two shot — on the deadly streets of my neighborhood in Washington, D.C., then known as the "murder capital" of the country. On Ash Wednesday, as we at Sojourners Community gathered for worship, we got word that hundreds of women and children died that day when U.S. military forces bombed a shelter in Iraq.

I was unable to sleep that night, kept awake by police and ambulance sirens from shootings and drug busts nearby, preoccupied with people on the other side of the world for

Though the Earth *continued on page 6*

Trying to Stay Sober While Dancing on the Floor of Paradox

By Catherine Meeks

The Promise of paradox is the promise that apparent opposites — like order and disorder — can cohere in our lives, the promise that if we replace either-or with both-and, our lives will become larger and more filled with light.
— The Promise of Paradox, by Parker Palmer

Clearly most of us would prefer certainty to uncertainty, and living in the upside-down world that paradox creates is difficult. The invitation to embrace that world is often resisted and refused. This is a response that supports addictions and fundamentalism and is as common for people of faith as it is for folks who make no such claims.

Paradox requires one to hold ideas in the tension that is created by them and learn to live in that space.

Before going further, I want to say a word about paradox itself. Paradox is best understood as two competing ideas that appear to be contradictory but are not, and that are equal in their value. Paradox invites us to see in a new way. It is quite possible that the opposite of the truth might be another true statement. For instance, what are we to make of statements made by Jesus such as, "If you seek your life, you will lose it, but if you lose your life, you will find it." "The last shall be first and the first shall be last." Or think about the idea that we know there is a God, but it is quite difficult to claim to know that God who exists. These ideas appear to be contradictory unless there is another way to view them.

There is another way to view them and it is called "paradox," but this way brings a challenge because it does not allow for the categorizing that brings comfort, if a false sense of certainty, or for putting everything into neat little boxes to be carefully managed. Instead, paradox requires one to hold ideas in the tension that is created by them and learn to live in that space. Parker Palmer calls this space the "tragic gap," a space that allows for great healing, expression of creativity and encounters with the Holy if we are able to navigate the dissonance that results.

One of the most profound examples of the complexity involved in this notion of living and dancing on paradox's floor can be seen in race relations. As many of us engage in the work of racial healing, it is difficult to stand in the gap. There is a clear mandate to see all of the Creator's children as equals beloved by the Creator. But for the oppressed people of color in this country, African Americans, Latinx, Asian Americans and Indigenous alike, it is difficult to love the white children who have chosen to follow the path of oppressor.

The greatest difficulty comes from the deep understanding that relationship is the only remedy to the problem of racism, but the effort to see each white person as individual instead of simply a cog in the oppression wheel is challenging. It is so challenging that many people of color simply are not going to try. Why should anyone work to be in relationship with someone who is the benefactor of their suffering and who continues to search for ways to justify parts of the system that make it possible? But how is healing going to be achieved and the systemic oppression dismantled if relationship is avoided?

Thus, the challenge before all of us is whether or not we are going to navigate the dissonance that is created by holding the historical truth in one hand and the mandate to see the Creator in everyone and to love them in the other. We cannot change the truth to suit us. We cannot both avoid the paradoxical dance floor and find the path to healing and wellness. We have to listen to our hearts' desire to be free and turn ourselves toward the love and support in our communities. And we must continuously seek the courage to stand in the gap, gazing at the possibility of a better way to live than succumbing to addictions, fundamentalism and deep unconsciousness as remedies to manage the uncertainty of it all. Paradox is a fact. Whether we accept it or not does not change that truth. It is directly related to the quality of our life, and the invitation to dance on its floor is always being extended. May we be brave enough to say, "Yes." ⌖

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)*

HOSPITALITY

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

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

Murphy Davis ¡Presente!

A Posthumous Letter to Murphy Davis, a Saint for Our Time

By Greta Reed

Dear Murphy,

Here it is, Murphy, almost Valentine's Day, and we are confronting the numbing pain of absence, of empty spaces, day after day. As if losing you was not enough, our country is nearing the half-million mark in lives lost to COVID, each, as in your case, a set of ripples moving outward toward the circumference of a pond, until all the water is disturbed. For each life, so many affected.

But I don't have to tell you about death. You already learned so much, and shared that intimate knowledge, as best words can. I savored your memoir that came out last summer, so much so that I allowed myself only one chapter a day in order not to get to the end too soon. Your life was speaking to me, to us, and I needed to listen.

You wrote about the permeability of boundaries between this world and the next — so I'm encouraged in writing to you. You described how you hovered between the two long enough to taste what was yet to be, but briefly enough to return and tell us about how you and your dad were fixing to have a party, and what a great talk you all had. But you didn't reckon with those prayer warriors of yours — your friends at Dayspring, and Ed wailing in the hospital, Hannah sobbing on her way there. We weren't going to let you go so soon; and we got another 16 years of you. What a gift to us! You embraced it all, the joy and the pain, which is a big part of your gift to us — showing us how it's done.

> Your life was speaking to me, to us, and I needed to listen.

You encountered death so fearlessly — not that you welcomed it, but that you were not afraid. And you explained why. You and Ed had already made the decision to live in solidarity with the poor, not only among them, but sharing in their poverty. Before you ever got that fateful diagnosis, you were becoming closely acquainted with death, you told us — through exposure of the poor to the elements, to hunger and starvation, to untreated medical conditions, not to mention untreated mental health issues. And when you add to that your presence in our prisons, particularly with death row inmates — *there* was death, up close and personal.

What you showed us by being in solidarity with those on death row! About answering Jesus' call to us to love each and every human being without condition, regardless of what someone had or had not done, embodying that love for all to see. And the heartbreak of any execution, but especially after all of us worked so hard to establish that person's innocence! I remember well the devastating struggle — the one that became world-wide — to spare Troy Davis' one and only precious life.

To no avail, as far as the arm of the law was concerned. But in your acts of solidarity on his behalf, and of others condemned to death, you raised up for all to see the irreplaceable value of each life. That was in itself a precious gift to the condemned *and* to the loved ones left behind. They were not alone. They got the message. They were affirmed, through your advocacy and bonds of friendship with them, that despite the judgment of the State, Troy's life, and the lives of others, were singular and worthy.

One of your gifts to us has always been your ability to find humor in what others might consider life's grimmest moments. And so, when you, then a beggarly patient in Atlanta's public hospital, received your dire cancer diagnosis, with the warning to get your affairs in order — some 25 years ago! — you could not help but reflect on the absolute irony of getting what you prayed for: to live your life in solidarity with the poor. There you were, even unto death!

Oh, my! How you bore that in stride. No self-pity. Yes, grief, deep grief that you might not live to see Hannah graduate from high school, or find her life's partner, or meet your grandchildren. You had no way of knowing how this would play out.

You chose to fight, to fight for life, as far as you were able.

A continuing thread in your story is your gratitude for not having to journey alone: first of all for your dear life-partner, Ed, at your side and as you said, for *every single medical appointment!* And Hannah, who was called into service at an early age, and grew with the challenges, finding her own call in health care delivery and teaching.

Your gratitude extended to all the exceptional medical folk to whom your body gave the royal run-around. It wasn't going willingly to give up its secrets about the source of your mysterious symptoms. I was continually amazed by the persistence of the sometimes baffled doctors, by their diagnostic thinking and their great dedication to care for you, not merely as a patient, but as a person. That too becomes a thread in your story — the incredible love poured out upon you by people who, moments previously, might have been total strangers.

Another lesson — how to wait! I loved the story about spending the entire day in the Grady waiting room, packed with patients, like you, with no other option but to be there; and how the "wait" turned into a virtual banquet, with recipes exchanged, cuisines described for various tastes, as appetites were whetted. And these would-be patients refused to complain, thanking God for their blessings. I try to picture a packed waiting room of white folk, privileged or not, and I seem to envision an entirely different scene, full of demands and complaints. I will try to re-imagine how I will wait when caught in crowded waiting rooms.

And now I come to the crux of what I really want to say to you, Murphy. You taught us, and you are *still* teaching all of us, how to *live* — and how to die. For you left us your story. We so much need models who show us how to live in the face of death, how to become so intimately involved with death that we lose our fear, if not our entirely appropriate regrets. I'm all for re-imagining what it means to be a "saint." The church of long ago got it wrong when it failed to see that the *real* miracle is to *live out* one's faith with love and courage, *even in the face of death.* For us mortals with our clay feet, our "devices and desires" in control, that is one high calling. *You* show us how it's done: with love, solidarity, humility, persistence, prayer, Scripture and constant discernment.

Before the cancer even presented itself, you expressed your concern that "something is terribly wrong with my life." Your observation is a reminder to us, especially those who work for justice in a world seemingly bent on injustice, that even when our goals are lofty, we cannot pursue them at the expense of our souls and our bodies. As I see it, what came to you was the verse from Isaiah 40.31: "but those who wait upon the Lord will renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles …."

You waited upon the Lord, and got your strength renewed and showed us how to do the same. You have all my gratitude for being one of my "saints." We *need* them, dead or alive! Thank you, thank you, thank you!

In Jesus' wide, all-loving arms, we are here and we love you.

Greta
February 12, 2021 ✠

Greta Reed moved to Tallahassee in December 2015, after spending her first ten years of retirement in Decatur, Georgia, where she wrote a book, Sacred Enticement: A Skeptic's Journey to Faith*. The first part of her adult life was spent studying and then teaching philosophy, ten of those years at the University of Tulsa. But something called her outside of academia, and to her surprise she ended up studying for the ministry and then serving in churches and developing an AIDS ministry in South Florida. She has one son who lives in western Massachusetts and enjoys coming to Florida for spring break when the cold and the gray snow have gotten old.*

Death Clothes; Resurrection Love

By Peter Gathje

I spent part of Thursday morning at Manna House sorting through clothing donations. On this particular morning, among the clothes I sorted were some from a young man who died a little more than a week ago. His sister and her husband brought the clothes to Manna House on Tuesday. Such donations of clothing from the deceased are not unusual. Over the years, we have often received donations of clothing that belonged to someone who died.

But this was the first time I started to reflect on how the receiving and sorting of clothes from those who have died is a holy task. I think I am beginning to see this now because I am still reflecting on my mom's death this past February. After she died, I sorted through her belongings with my sister and brothers. Though we certainly kept mementos, we had to let go of a great deal, including most of her clothing. In our grief, we had to let go of many things that would remind us of her. In my grief I am trying to learn how to live with love in the face of death. I am trying to nourish compassion and love and openness to God by acceptance of vulnerability and death.

This shapes how I see the giving of the deceased's clothing as a holy moment. Those who have lost a loved one come to donate clothing they have seen the deceased wear. The old saying that "clothes make the man" points to an intimate reality about clothing: what we wear reflects our personalities, our work, our leisure, our sense of style (or lack thereof). In this way, the clothing of the person who has died still reflects something of his or her spirit. To give away their clothing is an acceptance of their death. It is part of the hard work of grieving. To let go of the clothing of the deceased is to let go, again, of the person who has died. For me to receive that clothing is to acknowledge the loss of those who grieve and to participate in their time of grieving. This is holy work, to grieve with those who grieve.

There is a graciousness in letting go while in grief so that others may receive.

The giving of the deceased's clothing is a holy moment, too, because the people who are grieving also affirm their desire for others to have this clothing. They honor the deceased by offering the clothing of the deceased for continued use, for people on the streets to be well-dressed, as well-dressed as the person they loved. The clothing is handed on so that others may have what they need. There is a graciousness in letting go while in grief so that others may receive. At the same time, the grief itself is lightened by the knowledge that others will use this clothing, others will appreciate in their lives a good pair of pants, or a comfortable shirt.

In light of my faith and my mom's death, I reflect on this holy moment of receiving the clothes of the dead by recalling a central mystery of Christianity — the cross and the resurrection. The clothing to be donated comes to me as a sign of death. I know from my mom's death that death's power was palpable in the grief I felt, not only when my mom died, but also when her belongings were gathered up to be given away. How hard it was to bag up the very clothes that reminded me of the one I loved. Yet, as I found after her death, and as I have seen at Manna House, the giving of the clothing for others to use is a sign of compassion and love in the midst of grieving the loss of a loved one. This clothing offered for others to use moves beyond the reality of death to the reality of ongoing life. Giving the clothing of the one who died is an act of love. And this love is not only what makes life possible, this love is not ended by death. ✞

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)*

poetry corner

Julie Lonneman

An Old Black Woman, Homeless, and Indistinct

1.
Your every day is a pilgrimage.
A blue hubbub.
Your days are collected bacchanals of fear and self-troubling

And your nights! Your nights.
When you put you down in alley or cardboard or viaduct,
Your lovers are rats. Finding your secret places.

2.
When you rise in another morning, you hit the street, your
Incessant enemy.

See? Here you are, in the so-busy world.
You Walk. You walk.
You pass The People.
No. The People pass you.

Here's a Rich Girl marching briskly to her charms.
She is suede and scarf and belted and perfume.
She sees you not, she sees you very well.
At five in the afternoon Miss Rich Girl will go Home to brooms and vacuum cleaner and carpeting, two cats, two marble-top tables, two telephones, shiny green peppers, flowers in impudent vases, visitors. Before all that there's luncheon to be known.
Lasagna, lobster salad, sandwiches.
All day there's coffee to be loved.
There are luxuries
Of minor dissatisfaction, luxuries of Plan.

3.
That's her story,
You're going to vanish, not necessarily nicely, fairly soon,
Although essentially dignity itself a death
is not necessarily tidy,modest or discreet.
When they find you
your legs may not be tidy nor aligned.
Your mouth may be all crooked or destroyed.

Black old woman, homeless, indistinct—
Your last and least adventure is Review.
Folks used to celebrate your birthday!
Folks used to say "She's such a pretty little thing!"
Folks used to say "She draws such handsome horses, cows and Houses,"
Folks used to say "That child is going far."

— Gwendolyn Brooks, September, 1992

Gwendolyn Brooks is a major American voice and poet of Black experience. Go to PoetryFoundation.org for many of her poems and a fine biography. And be not afraid.

Closing the Distance

By John Cole Vodicka

"There is plenty to do, for each one of us, working on our own hearts, changing our own attitudes, in our own neighborhood." –Dorothy Day

Donald Driggins sleeps nights in my neighborhood in Athens, Georgia. It's me though, who has a roof over his head. Donald is homeless. He will tell you he "sleeps on the concrete." I sleep in a queen-sized bed. Still, Donald and I close our eyes most nights just one city block apart from each another.

While sitting at home one evening I got a text from Donald. It read in part: *This is Donald. I need a can opener do u have one. Am laying under a tree. My low back is hurting. Am looking to rent bedroom. Or garage. I get SSI 1st of the month. Need place to sleep and get out of the rain. If it rains. Somewhere safe.*

I provided Donald with a can opener that night so he could enjoy a Vienna sausage supper. But I can't provide him with a bedroom or garage or even my back yard. I've offered to help him access a shelter bed in Athens, but alas, Donald has worn out his welcome at the few shelters that exist in our community. He's barred from Salvation Army. He's persona non grata at an overnight shelter called Bigger Vision. He has a love-hate relationship with the Homeless Day Shelter folks. And truth be told, even if he could access a bed at one of these overnight shelters, he prefers his autonomy to bunk-bed living. In Donald's 52-year-old mind, and from years of personal experience, "trust" is a dangerous concept for him to latch on to.

When Donald first moved into my neighborhood, I didn't know who he was. I would see him sitting on his milk crate under the lone shade tree at a busy intersection. If it was at night, he'd be lying on a blow-up mattress he kept stashed at a nearby liquor store. I was always in my car, so a wave of my hand was all I offered to him.

One day I noticed that someone had smashed out most of the windows on the CVS store kitty-corner from Donald Driggins' campsite. Yellow police tape roped off the area and plywood had replaced an entire row of storefront windows that ran along one side of the building.

At the same time, Donald Driggins disappeared from the neighborhood.

Several weeks later, while I was observing felony proceedings at our courthouse with other volunteer "court-watchers," I learned where Donald was. In jail. Sitting with other volunteers from our Athens Area Courtwatch Project, I spotted Donald Driggins sitting across the aisle from me. He was dressed in jailhouse orange and cuffed at the wrists and ankles, wrapped up with a belly chain. All prisoners — most of whom have not been convicted of anything — are shackled when they appear in an Athens courtroom. I nodded Donald's way. He raised a cuffed hand in recognition.

The judge called Donald's name and he shuffled forward to the table and sat alongside his public defender. The assistant district attorney read out loud the charge — second degree criminal damage to property, the CVS windows. The felony warrant stated that Donald had "struck 18 windows in total with 9 of them completely shattered and 9 of them having some damage to them."

Donald was also facing an additional misdemeanor charge in another court for criminal trespassing. Just weeks before the CVS windows were demolished, he'd been arrested and accused of cursing and threatening a convenience store clerk who'd told him, no, he could not help himself to a soda and pack of cheese crackers.

Unfortunately, like the CVS, the convenience store is also across the street and less than fifty yards from Donald's campsite. He's now barred from both stores, but after he finally bonded out of jail, he stubbornly reclaimed the little piece of earth that doubles as his bedroom.

Photographs by John Cole Vodicka

Top: *Donald Driggins awaiting his hearing in Superior Court.*
Above: *Donald at his campsite.*

This spring, I accompanied Donald to yet another status hearing in Superior Court. Donald came dressed in cutoff shorts and a green "Just Chllin'" Snoopy sweater. His public defender told me that the criminal legal system was attempting to have Donald evaluated, with an eye toward in-patient mental health treatment, maybe even civil commitment. At the five-minute hearing, the judge announced a date and time to have a court-appointed psychiatrist testify as to Donald's competency. "I'm glad you are staying out of trouble," the judge told Donald at the hearing's conclusion. "Thank you, your honor," my neighbor responded. "Thank you for carin' about me."

In June, Donald and I took a neighborly walk together. I was out for some exercise and he was heading up the street to visit a "mechanic friend" of his. While he sipped on a can of Sprite, we walked and talked.

"It's Father's Day on Sunday," he said. "It is heavy on my mind."

"Why's that?" I asked.

"My daddy was my best friend. He died in 1998."

"That's the same year my dad died. Is your mama still alive?"

"Yea. And I've got three sisters. I still talk to one of 'em."

"How about you, Donald? Are you a dad?"

"Yes. But the FBI took my son when he was an infant, in 1992. That's why Father's Day is heavy on my mind."

"I'm so sorry. How horrible! Are you from Athens, Donald?" I asked him.

"No, I'm from Cohutta."

"Where's that?"

"In Whitfield County, near Dalton."

"How'd you get to Athens?"

"I was in prison for two years down at Rutledge (State Prison, Columbus, GA). When I got out, I got a ride and got dropped off here in Athens."

Donald and I continued talking as we walked past the Salvation Army shelter, where he's also barred. "I'm tryin' to get into a detox program," he told me. "One that lasts 45 days. At least I'll have a place to sleep. I was supposed to meet someone this afternoon to get in the program, but it's too hot to make my way to the other side of town."

"Well, Donald," I said, "here's my street where I turn. Good to see you and to have some time to talk! You be safe and let me know if I can help."

We shook hands.

"I'll be alright," he told me. "I'm doin' okay. Tell everyone God bless."

In August I got a text from Donald asking for help. He was scheduled to be admitted into the detox program the next day. Though I had never experienced Donald inebriated, I had seen him drinking a beer a time or two at his campsite. "I drinks a bit," he admitted to me. "They think I have a problem."

I can't have my cellphone while I'm in detox, he explained to me in the August text message. Like so many who experience homelessness, Donald's cellphone is his lifeline. He has apps to play games, listen to music and the news. He calls his friends and sometimes his lawyer even reaches out to him. Now he realized he was going to have to give up his iPhone while confined in the detox facility.

Can you bring me today's newspaper, and a People magazine, and a pack of cheese crackers?

As I write this, Donald Driggins is still in detox. The 15x15 foot patch of land he calls home has been empty for twenty-five days. No one else has claimed it. I expect I'll see him again in about three weeks.

He'll be sober when he returns to my neighborhood, but he'll still be homeless. And he'll still be waiting to see if the criminal legal system keeps its boot on his neck with the threat of more jail time. You see, Donald, like the rest of this nation's homeless poor, is arrested more often, incarcerated for longer periods, and then almost always released from jail without adequate discharge plans. Nationally, 26% of people in jail reported being homeless within the year before. In Athens, close to half of our homeless population has been in jail — most for minor infractions.

Just the other day, Donald Driggins sent me a one-page letter from the detox facility. He asked me to contact his lawyer to let him know he was there. His words to me were reassuring, but a gentle reminder that my journey with my neighbor is far from complete.

"I am o.k. Fine. Hope to hear from you soon. I send my regards to everyone. Emmanuel, Donald Driggins." And the postscript: "*Waiting on reply*."

I give thanks that Jesus, Dorothy Day and Donald Driggins stir up in me the notion that I must daily and persistently make the effort to, as Dorothy says, "move *toward* my sisters and brothers who are poor." These three tell me I still have much work to do, with my own heart and with my attitude, and that, like Donald, the poor will be waiting on my reply. ⌖

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)

Raising Children for Revolution

A review of *The Sandbox Revolution: Raising Kids for a Just World*

By Kateri Boucher

I've always loved kids, but I've never been sure if I wanted to have any of my own. As my commitment to justice work has grown over the last few years, I've feared that having kids would end up shifting my focus away from that commitment and pulling me into a more individualized, consumerist lifestyle. And as I've learned more about the climate crises at our door, I've been filled with fear too, wondering what it would mean to bring a child into this aching, uncertain world.

I am still holding these questions tenderly and seriously in my heart. But through reading *The Sandbox Revolution: Raising Kids for a Just World*, I've begun to realize there might be other ways of framing my fears. What if having children didn't take parents further from justice work, but actually invited them deeper into it? What if bearing children in this moment is not a denial of the world's unraveling, but a deeply powerful witness to it?

Edited by Lydia Wylie-Kellermann and woven with the voices of 18 other parents, this anthology is written by folks who are living their way into these questions, asking what it means to raise children with "a love of the earth, a cry for justice, and commitment to nonviolence."

The book is held by three sections. "Nitty Gritty Decisions as Radical Practices" centers on the choices that parents have made around (in)fertility, money, school, place and spirituality. "Confronting the 'Isms' in our Families" describes the ways that family life has intersected with identities of race, class, gender, sexuality, religion and ability. And "Reclaiming Community" focuses on movement and resistance work, ancestral connections and raising children in community.

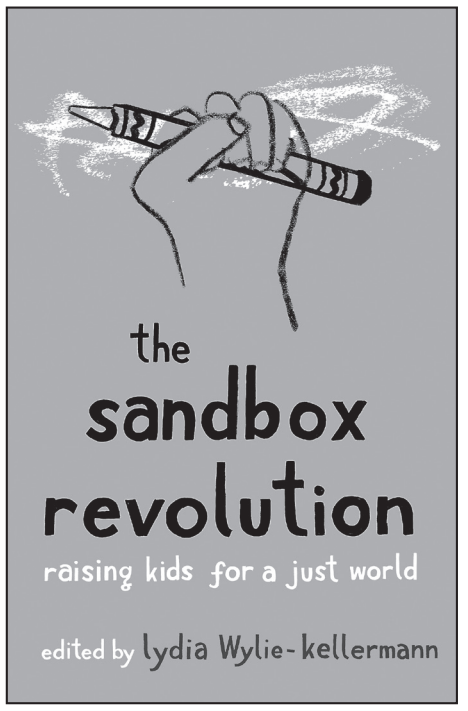
Indeed, community is a thread that runs through every chapter and editorial interlude. In a culture where parenting often entails isolation and loneliness, Wylie-Kellermann writes that this book was specifically intended to provide companionship and support. "Parenting is the hardest thing I have ever done. ... We need to remind one another that we are not alone in our fears, our grief, and our hope." The book itself was designed to foster deepening connections, with reflection questions that can be engaged in our own circles and families, and contributors who share their hearts openly and vulnerably.

Although all contributors' voices and stories are unique, one common experience of parenting emerges: this work is messy. Messy as in complicated, unpredictable and alive with possibility. And also literally messy, as in kitchens full of dishes and crayon drawings on the walls. This messiness is the stuff of being human, and we are each invited to bring our own messes and questions with us as we enter these pages. Wylie-Kellermann writes: "May these pages be covered with applesauce and breast milk, sand and slime, sweat and tears. May they push us into necessary discomfort. May they inspire small shifts in our patterns — or compel us to uproot our lives and change course."

Even as contributors share about the changes and choices that they've made throughout their parenting, the book also acknowledges that parents don't — and can't — make all the choices for their kids. Children are shaped and affected by the world(s) around them, growing in ways that parents never could have predicted or planned for. And furthermore, children themselves have their own lives, questions and inherent autonomy. In the final chapter, "Confessions of A Bad Movement Parent: Raising Children for Autonomy," Laurel Dykstra writes that "good parenting is not about having children who are just like me. Parenting for autonomy means supporting children who are just like themselves."

This message is affirmed in the earliest pages of the book, which opens with words from Kahlil Gibran's *The Prophet*:

Your children are not your children.
They are the sons and daughters
of Life's longing for itself.



The Sandbox Revolution
Raising Kids for a Just World

Edited by Lydia Wylie-Kellermann

Broadleaf Books
March 30, 2021

The Sandbox Revolution is a book about parenting, yes, but it is not just for parents. At its core, it is about the big-L Life that Gibran speaks of, and the ways we are each learning to live in this moment of unraveling and transformation. The stories in this book turn us closer toward that just world we strive for. They invite us to listen to the wisdom of the children in our lives and those who are raising them. They remind me that what we long for is connection, and we must continue turning toward each other — to our children, elders, ancestors, neighbors and the more-than-human world around us — in order to survive.

Kateri Boucher is associate editor for Geez *magazine and a member of Detroit's Catholic Worker community.*

'Though the earth should change ...' *continued from page 1*

whom sirens signaled bombs raining from the sky. The world was not at all the way I wanted it to be. Too many children were dying — in D.C. as well as Baghdad. I decided to keep a fast during Lent. I didn't know what else to do to keep from lapsing into despair.

My fast brought me a sharpness of vision, a feeling of looking at the world differently — and a deepened sense of the presence of God. When my physical strength gave out, the assurance of God's sustenance took powerful hold. But still, I didn't feel hope. I had to go to the desert to find it.

I decided to keep a fast during Lent.
I didn't know what else to do to keep from lapsing into despair.

In the third week of Lent, I traveled to the Nevada Test Site to join a Lenten witness against the testing of nuclear bombs there. After a worship service at the edge of the site, I ventured off to a spot where there was just me and the gravelly sand and an occasional Joshua tree with spiny branches outstretched like arms toward God. There, like pilgrims to the desert have for centuries, I fell to my knees and discovered an emptiness beyond any I had ever known.

In that parched place, I had a vision of famished children around the world, crying out for water and food. Feeling bereft and powerless, I began to weep. And there, on the twenty-fourth day of my fast, I recalled God's promise found in the thirty-fifth chapter of Isaiah: "Be strong, do not fear! ... For waters will break forth in the wilderness, and streams in the desert."

I imagined my tears dropping and forming a pool. I pictured people all over that desert, weeping for the agony of the world. They were of all ages and human hues, children and women and men, dressed in the clothing of many nations and faiths. Their tears mingled in the dry sand and formed streams of water. These joined and swelled until they flowed into a great rushing river. Led by the children, we jumped in, hand in hand, laughing, while the heavens opened and poured forth more water, baptizing us in joy.

Perhaps at no other time in human history has the prophet Isaiah's water-in-the-wilderness image of hope seemed so poignant and relevant. It, too, can be more than a metaphor. Droughts do not have to be inevitable. Maybe, friends, rivers appear in parched lands when enough of us have been moved by the earth's pain to weep; when enough of us choose to add our ounce of empathy to the world's great need.

It is not too late for us to act to avoid the worst of the catastrophic climate scenarios. Hand in hand, trusting God and inspiring one another to courage, together we can create a mighty torrent of loving compassion — bold and strong enough to transform the world. And then, "though the earth should change," our fear will turn to jubilation. As brother Isaiah described it:

The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.

Joyce Hollyday has been a friend of the Open Door for almost four decades. She is the author of several books — most recently Pillar of Fire*, a historical novel about the inspiring witness of the medieval mystics known as Beguines — and the editor of Murphy Davis' memoir,* Surely Goodness and Mercy.

From Juneteenth to July 4: The Meaning of America *continued from page 1*

original Constitution, with Africans and Indigenous peoples being recognized as only 60% human. It is why those on the right wing love the "originalist" theory of the Constitution — they know that it was "originally" meant for white men.

The tradition is that Frederick Douglass never spoke about equality and justice on July 4, because he saw July 4 celebrations as a mockery as long as people were enslaved in America. In his famous and powerful speech about Independence Day in 1852 in Rochester, he said these words: "What, to the American slave, is your Fourth of July? I answer: a day that reveals to {him}, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which {he} is the constant victim."

Douglass finds the essence of the struggle in the tension between the idea of equality and the idea of slavery/white supremacy. How can we celebrate the idea of equality while still holding onto the idea of white supremacy? Douglass and others knew how we do it: we deepen and refine the idea of race and racism. How could we believe in equality and still hold people in enslavement? We developed the idea of "white supremacy," the idea that people of color, and especially those classified as "Black," were not full human beings in the same way that those classified as "white" were. The idea of equality, then, does not apply to those classified as "non-white." Thomas Jefferson and most of the other "founding" fathers did not believe that those classified as "Black" and "Native Americans" were equal human beings. It was this belief that led them to hold human beings as slaves and to kill and remove Indigenous people from their lands.

After the Civil War, this idea was revived and deepened even further in order to repudiate the outcome of the Civil War (and to deny the value of the 700,000+ lives lost in that war) and in order to re-establish "slavery by another name," to use Doug Blackmon's powerful phrase. This idea of white supremacy retains its power today, as we have seen in the rise of the Party of Trump, dedicated to the idea that white males should be in charge of everything, not because we are greedy and insecure, but because God and nature intended us to be on top. Those of us classified as "white" are watching the demographics, and we are aware that the time of plurality is not far away in the future, the time when there will be no majority racial classification in the USA. We are willing to support a despot like Trump because he is telling us what we want to hear: those classified as "white" should always be in charge, especially white males. This fear of the demographics is driving the Big Lie of the stolen 2020 election, voter suppression acts, censorship on "critical race theory," and anti-immigrant work.

Since the Supreme Court eviscerated the Voting Rights Act in its Shelby v. Holder decision in 2013, we are once again back in that same struggle between equality and white supremacy. We are now at that tipping point again in the struggle. As we celebrate both Juneteenth and July 4, let us remember the tension between them. Indeed, in the years to come, let us set aside the two weeks between these two national holidays to be in dialogue on the struggle between these two powerful ideas in American history. May the profound vision of equality — a vision so frightening that its very authors immediately repudiated it — may this vision go to our own core as individuals and as a nation, and may we live out its creed for all of us. ✞

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

Dear Ed,

I hope you are recovering well from your surgery. You had all of us quite concerned!! Many thanks to Hannah for posting the announcement about the initial visit, surgery and then the follow-up that you were recovering. Michaela looks *so* much like young Hannah in the photo with her hugging you outside the rehab facility. You are surrounded by an amazing, loving, kind and generous family (in the largest sense possible). So I feel you will make it through this and once again enjoy feeling good physically. Emotionally, you've been tested so many times: You are a sensitive man (thank goodness, we need more like you), but you are also standing on a strong foundation that will help you get through rehabilitation.

God works in mysterious ways (for lack of a better word). The night before you had the heart attack, you entered one of my dreams. Maybe it's not so mysterious. I recall in Murphy's book how she described a similar type of scenario — the one about her seeing her father when she was in a bed at Grady and the Open Door folks were praying for her at Dayspring. My, oh, my.

About Murphy's book, I am profoundly moved by it — wow — what words to use? The title is absolutely fitting; every word is perfect as revealed in the narrative. What a journey, what beauty, what challenges, what calls to witness, what merging of self, family and community. The week you had surgery I read the book in a day and a half. I could hardly put it down. I learned so much about Murphy, you, Hannah and the Open Door Communit(ies). I think I might be forever changed by its reflection on how to live and die. What a gift.

Thank you, Eduard, for sending me so many wonderful mementos over these last few months and years: the Imperial Hotel key!; three wonderful posters; books and various pins, buttons and stickers. I am deeply moved that you would take the time and energy to send these to me. You are a thoughtful, kind man with a heart of gold (and conviction). Thank you for thinking of me.

I have enclosed a chapter I published in the *Routledge International Handbook of Working-Class Studies*. I wouldn't expect you to read all of it, but I have bookmarked pages where you, Danny Solomon and Todd Moye appear. Meeting you and being a part of the extended Open Door Community is a gift that keeps giving.

Another thing about Murphy's book: I was really glad to see that Bill Hendrix came out of retirement to oversee the publishing of the book. How wonderful. I'm not surprised, as I'm certain he was attuned to the Open Door Goodness and Mercy. I was also glad to see Barbara Segal and Julie Martin also worked on the book — what a dynamic duo!

All is good here at home. Theodore turns 10 in less than a week, and he brings us joy every day. He did a full year of "Zoom" school. He will return in person this fall. Theresa and two co-workers purchased Small Carpenters at Large from Danny Feig-Sandoval, who retired two years ago. They will be moving in December to a renovated 1800s home on Dekalb Avenue (they are converting it from a home to an office). I continue to do what I can to raise the voices of working-class people in my courses at University of North Georgia. Most recently, I have developed a course on migrant workers from Mexico using history texts, songs, films, photographs and novels. I will turn 57 this year and I'm starting to show signs of wear and tear — I had cataract surgery on both eyes and sinus surgery within the last 3 months.

All my love to you and those who are there to assist you both far and wide. In particular, I'm certain life would be extremely challenging for you without the loving hands and keen talents of Hannah and David.

Sincerely,
Terry Easton
Decatur, Georgia

Dear Ed,

A couple of Sundays ago, our worship theme was "Love and Truth in Action" from "Let us love not in word or speech but in truth and action." (1 John 3:18) I shared how our "action" must be grounded in God's Love and guided by the Truth of Jesus. Our other scripture was Psalm 23. Marg read Murphy's Psalm 23 in worship.

I shared my sermon on Zoom that included stories and pictures of six women who embody love and truth in action and inspire me. This photo of you and Murphy is the slide I shared when I talked about Murphy. Of course you embody love and truth in action as much as Murphy! While I include you in the photo and mention you, I focused on Murphy because we included Murphy's Psalm 23 in worship. Here is what I shared with this photo story:

Weldon Nisly

Oh, my beloved Friend
you are my shepherd….
Even though I walk through
the valley of the shadow of death
I am not afraid
because you never leave me
and your love casts out fear….

Murphy and Ed founded the Open Door Community in Atlanta and Baltimore. For 40 years, they devoted their lives to ending homelessness and capital punishment in the struggle against cancer in the *body politic*. For 25 years, Murphy also struggled against cancer in her own body. Last Oct 22, Murphy fulfilled life on earth, entering fullness of life with God. Before she died, Murphy published her story, taking her title from Psalm 23: *Surely Goodness and Mercy: A Journey into Illness and Solidarity.*

Thank you, Murphy for embodying Love and Truth in Action!

I also add, thank you beloved friend Eduard for embodying love and truth in action! I love you dear Ed!

Weldon Nisly
Seattle, Washington

Weldon Nisly is a frequent contributer to Hospitality.

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Ed,

I hope when this letter reaches you it will find you and David doing well. Just wanted to let you know the money hit my account this week, thank you for sending it. I really do appreciate it. I got my first Moderna shot last month as well as the entire Riverbend prison population, at least for those who wanted the shot. Of course you had some to decline the offer to get vaccinated because they want to wait around to see if anybody were going to fall out dead after taking the shot, which didn't happen.

I had no adverse reaction to the shot so far. My shoulder was sore for a couple of days from where the nurse stuck me with the needle. A few of the guys here got sick but they are feeling better now. I asked the warden yesterday when will we take the second shot and he said probably at or around the end of the month.

He said once the prison population takes their second shot everybody is going to get a bag of goodies. I heard the state prisons is getting vaccinated as well. President Biden said he was going to shut down these private prisons; when that happens I do not know but he said he would not renew their contract so whenever the contract run out and if he's still in office he's going to shut it down.

What makes the 6th-grade student in Idaho take a gun to school and shoot two people? I'm willing to bet she was being bullied. I am glad to hear the two people she shot are going to be alright. Did you send out the latest issue of *Hospitality*? If so, I did not get my copy. It could get here this month, just got to be a little patient I guess.

God Bless.

Take Care.

Love,

Eli Beck

Georgia Prisoner

Dear Ed,

I am really enjoying Murphy's book — such a story of courage and love! Thanks again for sharing it with me. It brings back lots of memories! I started and served at Maisha House of Prayer in Atlanta for 15 years (1990-2005). Our fist location was on Glen Iris Drive and then Parkway Drive. I left in 2005 to become my community's vice-president. In 2008 I left the Sisters to join my life with that of my loving partner, Denise! It has been quite a journey. In my early Maisha days I volunteered at the Open Door — an amazing time of awakening — which offered me guidance in my way of being present to the people of the city, for which I remain grateful.

Now I live on an 11-acre walnut orchard in northern California. It is a constant wonder to me that my city-girl self loves being here. So different and so fulfilling. Today's adventure is watching Marie shear the 16 sheep who have been grazing on our orchard grass — weed control at its best!

Love & Peace,

Loretta

Upper Lake, California

Rita Corbin

Good morning,

I would like two copies of your book, *Surely Goodness and Mercy*, and two for prisoners or poor persons. I was given the book as a gift. I have passed it on but have to share more, because it is such an amazing story.

Beth Murphy

Rockledge, Florida

Dear David,

Thank you for publishing, "In Memory of Barbara Schenk". It spoke to my heart. She was a tortured saint, patroness of all who endure the trials of life and recover a smile out of the dust. The article smacked of the Real, a breath of fresh air deep from the Heart. Thanks a lot.

Donald F Cuddihee, Sr.

Greer, South Carolina

The Box

Hannah Arendt wrote that lonely people are drawn to totalitarian ideologies. "The chief characteristic of the mass man is not brutality and backwardness, but his isolation and lack of normal social relationships," Arendt concluded in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, describing those who gave themselves over to all-encompassing mass movements.

Dorothy Day (1897–1980), one of the founders of the Catholic Worker Movement, understood the Sermon on the Mount as the foundational plan for following Jesus: "Our manifesto is the Sermon on the Mount, which means that we will try to be peacemakers." She observed that "we are trying to lead a good life. We are trying to talk about and write about the Sermon on the Mount, the Beatitudes, the social principles of the church, and it is most astounding, the things that happen when you start trying to live this way. To perform the works of mercy becomes a dangerous practice."

If I beg and pray you to set me free, then bind me more tightly still.

—Homer

But who can detect their own failings? Who can expose their own hidden faults?

— Psalm 19.12

Dear Mrs. Ramseur,

I read your front page article in *Hospitality* [March/April 2021] with great interest.

First of all, I don't know if it was you or your editors who placed the inscription, "Jesus Was a Victim of the Death Penalty," on the right side of your article. That is pure nonsense. Jesus was not a victim at all. He said, very plainly, in the gospel of John, chapter 10, verses 17 and 18: "Therefore My Father loves Me, because I lay down My life that I may take it again. No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again. This command I have received from My Father."

You obviously abhor the death penalty. But this is a political statement, not a spiritual one. If it was purely a spiritual statement, then the Word of God would have preference. Instead, even as a Pastor, you do violence to the Word of God. For example, Jesus said that His reason for coming to the earth was to die. John 12:27 says, "Now my soul is troubled, and what shall I say? 'Father, save me from this hour?' But for this purpose I came to this hour."

It would be a great blessing to you to read the whole Bible, and not let your feelings (or anyone else's feelings) interpret what the Bible has to say.

I have serious doubts as to whether this letter will reach you or not, but if it does, I look forward to any further comments you may have or any reply that you would like to make.

Yours very truly.

Alan Mendelsohn

Port Ewen, New York

Lauren Ramseur responds:

Dear Alan,

Thank you for reading the article I wrote in the March/April *Hospitality* newspaper and for engaging your faith so deeply as to write me a letter. As a follower of Jesus, I do believe that Jesus was a victim of the death penalty in his time in history. Then and now, state-sanctioned killing was and is still used today as a weapon of fear, control and domination. In Jesus' time, the Roman government gruesomely publicly executed people who were threats to their empire. Jesus was a victim of the death penalty because his love, life and teachings of jubilee economics, radical inclusion, non-violence and transformative justice threatened the power and privilege of the Roman empire and the religious leaders who were in collusion with them. And so Jesus was executed by the Roman empire with the support of the religious leaders.

Just as you quoted, Jesus does talk many times about laying down his life. I understand this in light of the whole life and teaching of Jesus. He laid down his life not just once but daily by following the path of love, non-violence, mercy, forgiveness and liberation. To lay down your life is to daily choose the path of love and mercy over the path of greed and hatred. Throughout his ministry and teachings Jesus actively resisted the death penalty, as in John 8:1-8, when Jesus stopped an execution when the community sought to stone a woman to death. Jesus overturned the system of retributive justice when he taught his followers (Matthew 5:38-48) to turn the other cheek and overturn violence by the means of non-violence. Jesus repeatedly taught and lived the primacy of love and mercy. If Jesus is the Son of God, how can God require torture and murder and at the same time teach and live the exact opposite? Jesus followed the law of love even to the point of death, even death on a cross. To me, to believe that the execution of Jesus was something that God demanded is to say that God is a murderous, vengeful God who uses the means of torture and violence as tools of redemption. That is not the God who is revealed to me in the life of Jesus of Nazareth. I believe that God is love, and the means and the ends of God's works are love.

Thank you, Alan, for your letter and your engaging with me on this theological issue. I continue to be deeply thankful that my state of Virginia and your state of New York are no longer participating in this barbaric practice that defies the teachings of Jesus. Thank you for your deep and abiding faith.

With grace and peace,

Lauren

Rev. Lauren Ramseur

Co-Pastor, Voices of Jubilee

www.voicesofjubilee.org

Richmond, Virginia