

January 30, 2024, Update. A Bag of Snakes

Dear Friends,

Barry Lee Burnside, a gaggle of great writers and copy editors and I are finishing up “A Bag of Snakes: Selected Writings on Prisons and the Death Penalty by Murphy Davis and Eduard Loring. Edited by Barry Lee Burnside.” I am writing to you today asking you to pre-order your copy. Your donation will give us a needed financial boost for our printing costs. The suggested donation is \$20 for one copy; and \$30.00 for your copy and an additional copy for a prisoner or someone in need. Any donation is appreciated. More or less you will received the book.

A Bag of Snakes

*Selected Writings on Prison
and the Death Penalty*



*Murphy Davis and
Eduard Loring*

Edited by Barry Lee Burnside

Barry and the team have spent over two years putting this book together. We began with outlines and notes I found in the boxes of materials Murphy left when she ascended. The work is a work of love and everyone of us involved is proud of the fruit borne by seeds nourished in good soil.

A Bag of Snakes will be available on April 13, 2024 at a gathering at First Iconium Baptist Church. We will celebrate the life of Murphy Davis and The Open Door Community along with presenting the book.

If you wish to attend. I need to know a number because we will serve and Open Door Supper—vegetarian chili, Willie Dee Wimberly cornbread, salad and chocolate chip cookies. David Payne will send out invitations next month. Please let us know.

Below are endorsements by people who know what the hell they are talking about with some inflation to bemuse the reader. Please see:

Pete Gathje

I was introduced to Christ in the prisoner by Murphy Davis and Ed Loring some 35 years ago. Their liberative work with prisoners, especially those on death row, remains a key resource for those who seek justice in resistance to the criminal justice system. In their writings, the Bible and theology are put into creative theological interrogation of the realities of imprisonment, always informed by Jesus' words, "I was in prison and you visited me."

Dr. Peter R. Gathje

Co-Founder of Manna House

Professor of Religion, LeMoyne-Owen College

Jack Boger

This remarkable work takes us inside the minds and hearts of two contemporary American disciples of the radical gospel, Murphy Davis and Eduard Loring, who somehow, with divine foolishness, took seriously the teachings of Jesus: to love the poor, to stand with the prisoner, to break bread with the oppressed. Not a word of sanctimony, but instead a decades-long, joyful embrace of the homeless on the streets of Atlanta, the condemned on Georgia's Death Row, and marginalized families who faced years of struggle, sorrow, and loss. Called not merely to 'believe' but to 'act,' Murphy and Ed carried on an open-hearted 'Open Door Ministry' over the decades as their hospitality to the poor mixed with daily religious and philosophical reflection. The tone of the meditations, sermons, and accounts of their lives and interactions in this wonderful book is fresh, sometimes amusing, and always deeply humane. Their bravery is stunning and their kindness seems inexhaustible.

John Charles Boger is a longtime NAACP Legal Defense Fund lawyer who, for years, worked closely with Murphy Davis in support of the men on Georgia's Death Row.

Wade Crumbly

When Reverends Murphy Davis and Ed Loring started their lifelong journey together, they made a decision that only a few have the courage to make: they entered the strait gate and followed the narrow way members of our society reside and the limits of Christian faith are constantly tested. Murphy and Ed encountered many metaphorical serpents on their journey. *A Bag of Snakes* is the story of that journey, of the human suffering they observed, and of their ceaseless efforts to relieve it. Every person interested in the justice system should read it.

Wade Crumbley

Attorney at Law

Judge, Superior Courts of Georgia (2006-2021)

Amy Harwell

I never step into a prison without hearing Ed say, “There are people dying in here and it is good to visit them.” In *A Bag of Snakes*, Murphy and Ed are unflinchingly honest as to the emotional cost and spiritual challenge of living in solidarity with incarcerated people—and the gifts of answering Jesus’ call. *A Bag of Snakes* invites all of us to grab hold of that goodness and keep holding on.

Amy Harwell

Assistant Chief, Capital Habeas Unit

Office of the Federal Defender, Nashville, Tennessee

Mary Catherine Johnson

I feel the presence of Murphy Davis and Ed Loring every time I visit the prison in Georgia where death row is located. The love and acceptance that they brought there for over 40 years surrounds me as I walk the prison halls, and the liberation theology that they wrote and preached and lived at the Open Door Community guides and sustains me in my prison ministry. How wonderful that Murphy and Ed’s writings on prison are now all in one place in *A Bag of Snakes* to inspire the next generation of activists who are ready to break down the prison walls with boundless love.

Mary Catherine Johnson, Executive Director of New Hope House

Catherine Meeks

Murphy Davis and Ed Loring demonstrate in this volume and in their ways of being in the world that one has to confront the bag of snakes with courage and resistance. Their resistance was best exemplified by their work at the Open Door, Atlanta with poor people. They looked at the snakes and named them. They took the snakes on in

resistance through multiple ways of protesting and this book stands in witness to that while it reminds us that the night is long and we are still far from home.

Catherine Meeks, Ph.D

Author, Founding Director of Turquoise and

Lavender Institute for Transformation and Healing

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Stacey Rector

Murphy Davis dares us to look honestly at the criminal legal system in order to see how it treats people who are poor, Black, or vulnerable. After spending decades visiting people in prison and on death row, she saw firsthand the damage the criminal legal system inflicts, not just to those inside, but on every person and every community it touches. Through *Bag of Snakes*, we hear Murphy's prophetic voice calling us to take a hard look at the destruction wreaked by this dehumanizing system. She challenges us to share these truths in order to help us move away from inflicting more harm and towards creating communities of healing, to move away from our thirst for vengeance and towards the wellspring of mercy. Murphy hands over this bag of snakes for us to carry now, so that one day, no one has to.

Reverend Stacy Rector serves as Tennesseans for Alternatives to the Death Penalty Executive Director, a vocation that she began discerning as a member of the Open Door Community in 1996. For 10 years, Stacy visited Steve Henley, a man on Tennessee's death row, and served as his spiritual advisor when he was executed in 2009.

Amy Vosburg-Casey

My monthly digestion of the sustaining words of *Hospitality* has been essential to my ability to accompany and advocate for clients in jails and prisons in Georgia. To be with their family and friends, to argue for their freedom and lives in Georgia courts, I so often lean on the teachings and preachings of Murphy Davis and Eduard Loring.

A Bag of Snakes is a treasury of the inspiration and truth-telling that keeps my lamp lit in the fight for those who are incarcerated to be treated humanely and one day freed. I am so glad to have more of Murphy Davis's & Eduard Loring's words to feed me!

Amy Vosburg-Casey, Co-Director of Mitigation Casework, Advancing Real Change, Inc., Baltimore MD

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