

HOSPITALITY

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

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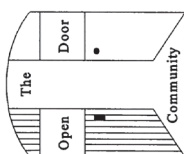
Hannah Murphy Buc

**Murphy
Davis**
1948 - 2020

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Incandescent Incarnation

By Joyce Hollyday

This reflection was offered at Jubilee Partners in Comer, Georgia, on the morning of April 14, 2024, just before the burial of Murphy Davis' ashes in the cemetery there.

I'm grateful to be here with all of you, and I feel honored by the invitation to offer a few words. Thank you, Ed and Hannah.

A few years ago, during an evening service at Circle of Mercy in Asheville, North Carolina, my co-pastor Nancy Sehested related the story of Jonah and the Whale with dramatic flair to our children. A couple hours later — when the mother of the 3-year-old

being crushed by the world's apathy, neglect and cruelty. Just like the prophets of old.

As I had the privilege of working with Murphy on her memoir, *Surely Goodness and Mercy*, in the last years of her life, I began to understand solidarity as a sort of ultimate form of incarnation. Solidarity was what Murphy and her beloved Ed had sought when they abandoned their career tracks to become co-founders of the Open Door Community in 1981 with Rob and Carolyn Johnson and people from the streets in downtown Atlanta. Matthew 25 was at the heart of their work. Murphy wrote a beautiful adaptation of that foundational passage that she called "The Final Evaluation." Here's a part of it:



Calvin Kimbrough

The Human One will sit on his foot-washing stool, and the people of the global village will be gathered round. He will put those who have hungered and thirsted for justice on his right and those who didn't care or were too busy on his left.

He will say to the people on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by our mother who art in heaven! I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you received me in your homes. Naked and you clothed me; I was sick and you took care of me, in prison and you visited me."

The Justice Seekers will answer him, "When, servant-leader, did we ever see you hungry and feed you? Do you mean on Tuesday morning in the front yard, or in the Wednesday Soup Kitchen? When did we clothe you? When Big John, Clive, and Quiana offered showers to 15 folks on Thursday? Which one was you?"

triplets who were part of our circle was wrestling them into their pajamas — Will flexed his muscles and declared proudly, "I'm Jonah!"

Connor puffed out his cheeks, spread his arms wide, and crowed, "I'm the big fish!" Jack's little shoulders slumped, and a crestfallen look overtook his face, as he sighed sadly, "I guess *I* have to be *God*."

In the story as Jack heard it, Jonah was a superhero, the big fish was... well, a big fish. And God was a disembodied voice behind the scenes with a bit part. But we know better. If there's anything that our dear Murphy wanted us to know without a doubt, it's that Jack had it wrong. In her living, in her writing, in her tireless advocacy for people on the margins, she reminded us over and over that God took on flesh, entered into the world and all its pain, and continues to be at work among us in glorious ways.

Incarnation — what an amazing idea. It happened in a particular way 2,000 years ago when God chose to appear as a Palestinian Jew under imperial occupation, born to refugee parents, his first

The names of those who were welcomed, fed, healed and visited in prison by the Open Door Community are legion. And each of them was Jesus in the flesh. Murphy ended her Matthew 25 adaptation by declaring that the folks who are cruel and apathetic — the "dead ones," as she called them — "will be sent off to serve the domination system; but those who have Abundant Life will share the Eucharist in the Beloved Community, plus have a feast after the Benediction." Solidarity is its own reward.

Over the years, Ed and Murphy prayed for deeper solidarity with the humble ones whom Jesus claimed as his siblings. When that solidarity came in the form of a lethal cancer, as Murphy put it, they "practically gagged on the fruit." They were plunged into the world of overloaded and underfunded public clinics and Grady Hospital, where they had to fight for Murphy's survival.

When she was first diagnosed, cards and letters poured in from her friends on death row. "You've been with us all these years," said one. "Now you really know what we're going through." "You are one of us," wrote another, "you have a death

It is good and right that we are burying Murphy today close to some of the friends she served on death row and some who died on Atlanta's streets.

sentence, too." One friend expressed his hope that Murphy would "get a stay." That solidarity meant all the world to her.

She wrote in *Surely Goodness and Mercy*, "The good fruit of accompaniment was flowing around me in showers of blessing, as those I had been with in prison now joined me on my own perilous journey. I felt a deep communion with my friends on death row — the many who had died by execution, suicide, or medical neglect — and those on the streets who had died from exposure or malnutrition. The life-changing experience of solidarity with the poor had begun prior to my life-threatening illness, and it was a

Incandescent Incarnation continued on page 3

Witnessing for Life in the Midst of Death

A Review of *A Bag of Snakes*

By Rosalie G. Riegler

What would you do if you were handed a bag of snakes? Throw it back at its givers? Doing so would probably spill them out, ready to attack both you and the givers. Poison them? Probably impossible, but address the problem you must. You are forced to do something immediately and to keep on doing it. That's what Murphy and Eduard and others at the Open Door did.

In February of 2004, more than 20 years ago, Murphy Davis, may she rest in peace, defined the bag of snakes she spent her adult life fighting. These snakes were first defined by Fr. Daniel Berrigan in *The Catholic Worker* newspaper in 1978 as the horrors of prison life. Davis and her husband, Eduard Loring, have spent their lives working and protesting and praying and prison visiting and writing about the trauma that racism and poverty and homelessness and mental health and "getting tough on crime" has inflicted on those in our country whom the white power structure wants out of sight and out of mind. Murphy and Eduard have insisted that we do something about this bag of snakes that is the prison system.

And do something they did. Their actions are amply chronicled in this fascinating book, complete with the biblical underpinnings that defined and guided and supported their life at

Murphy and Eduard have insisted that we do something about this bag of snakes that is the prison system.

the Open Door Community in Atlanta, Georgia. I visited them there and went with them to visit prisoners at the Georgia state prison. I remember getting up on Sunday morning and having to step over the sleeping bags that filled the front room, warming homeless men and women who took shelter there on an unseasonably cold night. And they were fed, as well. As Eduard said almost daily, "Supper is essential."

I learned so much on that visit, and it all came back to me as I read this book, which chronicles their tireless work against the death penalty, their work with prisoners, their accompaniments of those who walked their last walk down death row, and their unshakeable faith in Jesus Christ our Savior.

The longest part of this book consists of their published writings from 1992 to 2020. They write about Prisons and Streets, the Criminal Control System, Prison Slavery, Women and Families, Prison and Death Row Visiting, The Death Penalty and finally their long journey with the victims. Murphy's unpublished notes, her commentaries on scripture and her poetry are also included, as well as the journeys of others at the Open Door. It includes an essay by

A Bag of Snakes

Selected Writings on Prisons and the Death Penalty

by **Murphy Davis** and **Eduard Loring**
edited by **Barry Lee Burnside**

Open Door Press
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their granddaughter, Michaela Murphy Buc, and an afterword by their daughter, Hannah Murphy Buc. It also contains a bibliography, an appendix, and photographs. Such a complete book!

In fact, Murphy Davis began to plan this book and its compelling title back in 2002. She fought cancer for years, recovering several times before finally going to God in 2020. Along this perilous way, she worked and talked and wrote, publishing *Surely Goodness and Mercy: A Journey into Solidarity and Illness* five months before she died. It fell to editor Barry Lee Burnside and other friends of the Open Door to complete *A Bag of Snakes*, a tribute both to her writing and to her life. One thing I noted in her writings is that almost all of them end with a note of hope and prayer to God. But despite the work of many like Murphy and Eduard, the majority of U.S. states still have the death penalty. See <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/states-landing>.

Among the evils of the prison system is the separation of families, and in 1992 the Open Door began driving families to visit their loved ones who were imprisoned. Murphy points out that, following emancipation, slavery was replaced by convict leasing, then chain gangs, then mass incarceration of mostly people of color.

Murphy and Eduard worked with many in Atlanta and throughout the country in establishing communities and activist groups to grapple with the victimhood of the death penalty. This book is crammed with stories of their friendships with people like Sr. Helen Prejean and others who work to end the death penalty. We also read beautiful stories of the friendships Murphy and Eduard and others at the Open Door forged with those on death row, how they said goodbye, vigiled and grieved and finally often buried their bodies, many at Jubilee Partners. Indeed, Murphy's ashes were buried at Jubilee on April 14. No more fitting place could be found for this saint who spent her life serving the homeless and caring and working for those in prison. Deo Gratias!! ✚

Rosalie Riegler is a grandmother; an oral historian and emerita in English from Saginaw Valley State University in Michigan. Now living in Evanston, Illinois and active with St. Francis Catholic Worker in Chicago, Rosalie's latest books are Doing Time for Peace: Resistance, Family, and Community, and Crossing the Line: Nonviolent Resisters Speak Out for Peace. (riegler@svsu.edu)

A Bag of Snakes

Selected Writings on Prison and the Death Penalty



*Murphy Davis and
Eduard Loring*

Edited by Barry Lee Burnside

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Please join us on Facebook for the continuing journey of the Open Door Community in Baltimore.

poetry corner



Julie Lonneman

The Ballad of Murphy Davis

When I get to heaven
For my pie in the sky
I hope Rock Johnson's busy
With some other guy.
I'd rather have Murphy
In charge of my keys
'Cuz I know she'll unlock
Every damn gate she sees.

Politicians may try to sneak in
As they will
With their old bag of snakes
And their hands in the till.
Same as bankers and bosses
Make no mistake
Parole boards and wardens
And cops on the take.

But Murphy has always been
Standing her ground
On the side of the people
Those cats dogged around.
She did all she could
'Til she couldn't and then
She finished her book
And we all said, "Amen!"

Now she turned down that harp
For a twelve-string instead
She heard music in the air
Up above her head.
Soon we'll sing Midnight Special
And O Freedom, too
From Mockingbird Hill
We Shall Not Be Moved.

At that great Welcome Table
We'll all take a seat
With Leadbelly, Utah
Odetta, and Pete.
There's a muscadine river
That never runs dry
Bowls of Butler Street grits
And Majestic French fries.

So, if you can't wait to see her
While stuck here below
Just visit a clinic
Or someone on death row.
Check behind an alley dumpster
Or your local hoosgow crew
And you'll find Murphy Davis
Looking for you.

— Barry Burnside

Barry Burnside is the editor of A Bag of Snakes, a former resident at Koinonia Community, and a former auto worker and mediator from Michigan where he still resides with Esther, a retired educator and Hospice volunteer.



Barry Burnside

Incandescent Incarnation continued from page 1

wonderful resource in a crisis.” It is good and right that we are burying Murphy today close to some of the friends she served on death row and some who died on Atlanta’s streets.

Murphy also understood the limits of solidarity; the privileges that came with her shade of skin and the sheltering protections of love, community and financial resources. Among the most moving passages in her memoir is her experience of going to have a port for the administration of chemotherapy surgically implanted in her upper arm. Her right arm was strapped to an extender attached to the surgical table. A technician swabbed it in preparation for anesthesia, but was then called away to an emergency. Murphy was strapped down, unable to move for an hour and a half while she waited. Later she wrote:

That time on the table was one of the extraordinarily rare moments when I was absolutely alone, and it prompted some of the most intense reflection I have ever experienced. I was in a darkened, quiet room. Tears began to pool in my eyes as I realized that, only a few days earlier, Jose had been strapped to an almost identical table, with both of his arms lashed to extenders, his body arrayed in the form of a cross. I never felt so close to my friends on death row. I felt like I was “one” with them.

But our physical position had opposite meaning for us. I was strapped down waiting for someone to cut my arm and insert needles. So were my friends. But they waited for needles that would cause suffering, harm, and death. I waited for needles that were intended for healing, good, and restoration of life. They were subjected to crucifixion, and I was on the way to resurrection.

Murphy experienced more resurrections than maybe anybody, ever.

The season of resurrection is upon us now, friends. Last Tuesday I was walking around our pond at the Kirkridge Retreat Center in Pennsylvania, where I live, and I noticed that a beautiful cluster of daffodils had burst into bloom on the bank. All were a very pale shade of yellow — almost white — except for the one front and

center. It was a bright, bold, dazzling yellow, about the color of the roses on the altar here beside me. When I saw that bright daffodil the color of her favorite roses, I thought immediately of Murphy — who always stood out in a crowd, who led with courage and who showed the rest of us how to shine. Standing there on the front edge of resurrection.

I also thought of words from the author E.B. White, which came to him as he was watching his wife Katherine, planning the planting of bulbs in her garden in the last autumn of her life. He wrote:

There was something comical yet touching in her bedraggled appearance...the small, hunched-over figure, her studied absorption in the implausible notion that there would be yet another spring, oblivious to the ending of her own days, which she knew perfectly well was near at hand, sitting there with her detailed chart under those dark skies in dying October, calmly plotting the resurrection. Katherine was a member of the resurrection conspiracy, the company of those who plant seeds of hope under dark skies of grief or oppression, going about their living and dying until, no one knows how, when or where, the tender Easter shoots appear, and a piece of creation is healed.

I expect that Murphy is smiling on us today, rejoicing that we are able to be here together, in the flesh, remembering her. I also think she would want to say to us, “But don’t just look back at what was. Keep hoping and dreaming. Plot the resurrection! Join the conspiracy and know Abundant Life.”

Amen. ✝

Joyce Hollyday has been a friend of the Open Door Community for more than four decades. She is the author of several books — most recently Pillar of Fire, a historical novel — and the editor of Murphy Davis’ memoir, Surely Goodness and Mercy. Joyce is part of the intentional community at the Kirkridge Retreat Center in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania.

HOSPITALITY prays
Prayer is the heart of a genuine Christian radicalism. — Ron Ferguson
Deliver Us From Seductive Idols

O Yahweh, you are the creator of all that is faithful, just, and loving!

Through the ages you have called us
to be loyal to you,
to reject our golden calves, our false gods.

Yet
we are easily lured away from you by our idols,
offering them our energy, our resources,
our allegiance, our obedience,
even our love.

All too often we worship ...
big-name entertainers and athletes who dazzle us with their gifts,
messianic politicians who promote themselves more than the public good,
egotistical preachers of “prosperity gospel” and cheap grace.

Above all, we worship money — our modern-day golden calf —
thinking that wealth will bring us power, happiness, and status.

Forgive us, O faithful God, for worshipping such idols instead of you.
Forgive us, O just God, for loving ourselves while ignoring neighbors in need.
Forgive us, O loving God, for embracing false gods that cannot bring fulfillment.

Teach us to trust in you, to love our neighbors as you have loved us.
Deliver us from being so easily seduced by the idols in our lives.
Make us forever thankful for the gift of Jesus, who embodied in his earthly life
a passion for honorable peace, true justice, and life-giving loyalty to you.
Amen.

— Lee Carroll, Lent 2024

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



Murphy Davis ¡Presente!



Courage, Compassion and Joy

A Celebration of the Life and Witness of Murphy Davis

By Nibs Stroupe

On April 13, over 130 people gathered in the gym/hall of First Iconium Baptist Church in Atlanta, pastored by the Reverend Timothy McDonald III, to celebrate the life and ministry of the Reverend Murphy Davis: life partner, momma, sister, grandmother, mentor, a sister to many on death row, in prisons and on the streets. The saints and supporters of the Open Door diaspora gathered from all around the country: Atlanta, Michigan, California, New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore and many other places. Murphy was a mighty force, a wind powered by the Holy Spirit, blowing through the alleyways of the city and into the darkened

with people in prison, especially those on death row. Reverend McDonald remembered sitting on toilets with Murphy and Ed and the Open Door Community in a public demonstration of the need for public toilets: the “Pee for Free with Dignity” campaign, and at that point Ed called out: “Like Jesus did in Galilee.” Reverend McDonald remembered that on one of their marches together, he and his wife, Shirley, were pregnant with their daughter at the same time that Murphy and Ed were pregnant with daughter Hannah, who was now emceeding today’s celebration!

Dr. Catherine Meeks followed Reverend Mac with an emphasis on Murphy’s courage. She was struck with the depth of Murphy’s courage wherever she was: on death row, on the streets of Atlanta, at City Hall, confronting the many wardens in prison, and in facing the cancer that threatened her life for 25 years. The result of Murphy’s courage was to offer the possibility of liberation to all of us who are held captive by the powers and principalities. Catherine



above: **Amy Vosburg-Casey, Kathryn Evans, Mary Sinclair and Susan Casey**

left: **Tensie Hernandez, Dennis Apel, Ched Myers and Elaine Enns**

right: **Christine and Steve Clemens**

below: **Hannah Murphy Buc** welcomes to the Celebration at First Iconium Baptist Church



and lonely prison cells and in the killing rooms of death row in Georgia. She was such a powerful witness that it was hard to believe that anything could knock her down, but a 25-year struggle with cancer finally wore her body down and carried her away.

Murphy died at home at the Open Door Baltimore on Fleetwood Avenue on October 22, 2020. Her life was memorialized in a Zoom service soon after her death, but the Covid pandemic prevented any in-person gathering for a long while. Murphy lived in community for most of her adult life, and there was a great longing to gather together in person in her name and in her memory to celebrate her life and to give thanks for all the gifts that she shared with so many of us. Also delaying such a gathering was the great reluctance to finally let her go, expressed so powerfully in the lines from “Will the Circle Be Unbroken,” written by Ada Hadershon and made famous by the Carter family:

“Undertaker, undertaker, undertaker
Won’t you please drive slow
For that lady you are haulin’
Lord, I hate to see her go.”



left: **Rev. Timothy McDonald**

right: **Dr. Catherine Meeks**

Yet gather we did to hear testimony about the power of Murphy’s life, to renew our own commitments to the justice work that fired Murphy so well, to break bread together (“Justice is important, but supper is essential”), and to launch a new book of Murphy’s writings, *A Bag of Snakes*, edited lovingly by Barry Burnside with assistance from Ed Loring, Hannah Murphy Buc, daughter of Murphy and Ed,

presided over our celebration, and she began by stating a powerful theme of her mother’s life: courage. Hannah passed around a “courage rock,” and asked each of us to touch it, to receive courage from it, and if we had some courage to spare, to impart that to the rock, so that we could each take renewed courage within us.

Hannah then introduced the Reverend Timothy McDonald, in his 39th year as pastor of First Iconium. He is a longtime friend and colleague of Murphy’s and Ed’s, known for his preaching and his marching and his singing on behalf of justice and compassion. He began his welcome to us that day by leading us in a song that he sings often in troubled places: “This Little Light of Mine.” He added a second characteristic of Murphy’s witness: compassion. He knew Murphy through her fierce advocacy for those assigned by our society to live on the streets, and he was always impressed with her ability to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. He also knew her through her powerful advocacy and ministry



Photographs by **Calvin Kimbrough**

urged us to carry that courage with us and to use it and show it, always looking for the liberation that Jesus came to share with us. As Catherine often puts it, “be a little braver every day.”

The great song leader Elise Witt led the Open Door Band (Elizabeth Dede and Calvin Kimbrough) in several songs throughout the service, including “Open the Window” from the Sea Islands, and by writing music for “The Ballad of Murphy Davis,” a poem by Barry Burnside (see Poetry Corner in this issue), and “Amazing Grace.” The Open Door Community Choir — those assembled in the gym — gladly joined in the singing.

Three of Murphy’s “sisters in ministry” also shared reflections about Murphy’s mentoring of them. Lauren Cogswell Ramseur, co-director of Voices of Jubilee in Richmond, shared from her Introduction to *A Bag of Snakes*. Lauren said that she wanted to add another characteristic of Murphy’s ministry: singing. She celebrated Murphy’s ability to take over the visitation room on

death row in Jackson, Georgia, sometimes being asked to sing by an imprisoned person, and sometimes initiating an acapella song on her own. She remembered one particular occasion when Murphy sang “Amazing Grace” in the visitation room with a power so evident that the entire room of death row prisoners, visitors and even some guards joined in.

Elaine Enns, part of the Bartimaeus Collective in California, recalled Murphy’s influence on Elaine’s ministry in restorative justice. She called Murphy a “radical disciple of Jesus,” and said that she was always impressed with Murphy’s ability to put the ideas of restorative justice and prophetic vision together. Sometimes in the work of restorative justice, the vital power of the prophetic call to justice is diminished. Murphy, however, was comfortable with both and worked hard to make certain that both were used with dignity and power.

Mary Catherine Johnson, director of New Hope House in Jackson, Georgia, used

on Thanksgiving Day in 1977, and she was one of the first people to help him hear that he was valuable, that he was a “child of God.” Murphy and many others worked hard to get Andrew’s death sentence changed to a sentence of life in prison, and in 1983, his conviction was overturned by the Georgia Supreme Court, after he had been sentenced to death as a juvenile. He was convicted two more times and given the death penalty again, but each time the sentence was overturned. In 1992, the Board of Pardons and Paroles changed Andrew’s sentence to life in prison, and in 2005, he was paroled out. He gave great thanks to Murphy and Ed for all their hard work in changing his life and his sentence.

Billy Neal Moore was seven hours from execution when he learned that things would

with a petition seeking a commutation of his sentence. Billy’s next execution date was set for fall 1990, and Murphy and Ed were with him as he awaited the execution. But twenty hours before the execution time, the family of his victim showed up at the Board of Pardons and Paroles, urging them not to execute Billy Moore. The Board not only stayed his execution, but they commuted his sentence. He was released from prison in 1991, and his first trip was to the Open Door at 910 Ponce de Leon, where he stayed for a while to get ready to go back out into society. “Murphy Davis saved my life, and I am so grateful to her for it!” He also thanked Jack Boger, who was his attorney and who was in our midst in the congregation for the celebration.

Supper was, indeed, essential! Because of all the tributes and sharing, the celebration of the life and witness of Murphy Davis went a bit long, but we did pause for a wonderful supper, prepared by Mary Catherine Johnson, Elizabeth Dede and a host of other witnesses — Open Door vegetarian chili, Willie D. Wimberley combread, salad,



Nelia Kimbrough

clockwise from left: **Hannah Murphy Buc, Joyce Hollyday and Michaela Murphy Buc**

Lauren Ramseur

Calvin Kimbrough, Elise Witt and Elizabeth Dede

Mary Catherine Johnson and Elizabeth Dede

Barbara Segal and Barry Burnside

Andrew and Mary Palmer Legare

Billy Neal Moore and Jack Boger



her love for movies to begin her tribute to Murphy. New Hope House was started by Murphy and Ed as a place of hospitality for families who came to visit their loved ones on death row. Ed and Mary Ruth Weir were the first directors of New Hope House. Mary Catherine believes that Murphy’s life and ministry deserve a movie, and if one is forthcoming soon, she could see Meryl Streep playing Murphy and “that woman who played Barbie [Margot Robbie] playing me.” Mary Catherine spoke of the grind of this death row ministry — often discouraging, often hemmed in by the prison system, and then the terrible plunge into executions. In the midst of all these defeating factors, Mary Catherine was awed by another characteristic of Murphy’s ministry: joy. Murphy’s joyful approach in a place of death and violence called deeply to Mary Catherine, and it was Murphy’s ministry that called Mary Catherine to be director of New Hope House. Paraphrasing the Irish poet Seamus Heaney, she noted that “the space surrounding Murphy abounded in grace and music.” Mary Catherine added that other characteristic that surrounded Murphy in the most morose places: joy.

Granddaughter Michaela Murphy Buc, who was the delight of Murphy’s eye and soul, shared her thoughts of her “Grandmama Mamotes,” with many hugs and stories and laughter. Michaela also shared a story of being with friend Joyce Hollyday when Joyce had come to Baltimore to help motivate Murphy to finish her first book, *Surely Goodness and Mercy*.

Then came the culmination of this part of the celebration: testimony from two men who previously had been sentenced to death and were housed on death row in Georgia. Andrew Legare and Billy Neal Moore stepped forward to speak in gratitude to Murphy and to Ed for their work in getting them off death row, then their work on getting their sentences reduced. Andrew indicated that he first met Murphy in prison



above: **James Walker and Mo Mosley**

be changing for him. He first met Murphy in 1978 at Reidsville State Prison, when death row in Georgia was housed there. He proclaimed unequivocally that Murphy saved his life. He killed a man in Wrens, Georgia, during a burglary, and he was sentenced to death in 1974. He faced the possibility of execution several times, but each time a stay was

Photographs by **Calvin Kimbrough**

found a folder labeled “Bag of Snakes.” It was part of a particular attempt by Murphy to put together a book of her many writings and columns and articles. In the fall of 2021, Ed approached his friend Barry Burnside about editing this book, and as Barry indicated, he took a minute to consider it, then said “Yes.” This began a long and winding road of collaboration between Ed and Barry.

Barry is a native of Michigan, and he and his family moved to Koinonia Community in south Georgia in 1988. While there, he met Murphy and Ed, and a strong relationship developed. Barry also worked with the Americus Mennonite Fellowship and created a criminal justice ministry with an emphasis on mediation and restorative justice. He and Esther moved back to Michigan in 2002, where he continued his restorative justice work. Thanks to his hard work and creativity, we have Murphy Davis’ *A Bag of Snakes: Selected Writings on Prison and the Death Penalty*.

The book was available at the April 13 celebration, and many were purchased for personal use and for sending to friends in prison. Barry and Ed graciously added their signatures to the books. If you’re interested in purchasing *A Bag of Snakes*, contact the Open Door to get your copy, and of course, one for a friend! ✦

chocolate chip cookies of all varieties. We all enjoyed the food and the opportunity to visit with longtime friends. Then, it was on to the debut of the snakes — *A Bag of Snakes*, that is.

A Bag of Snakes finally published after many fits and starts. Murphy had worked on it prior to her death, and in looking through her many papers, Ed

The Rough and Rutted Roads of Life

Laying Down the Body of Murphy Davis

By Nibs Stroupe

On Sunday, April 14, about 40 of us gathered at Jubilee Partners in the dining room of Jubilee Farms. We arrived with a mixture of sadness and celebration in our hearts and minds. We were there to lay to rest the remains of the body of Murphy Davis, whose ashes have resided in a special place at the Open Door in Baltimore since her passing on October 22, 2020.

We gathered at Jubilee because of its long history of serving humanity and because it offers burial to all sorts of people — some have no other place to be buried; some, like Murphy, chose to be buried there. The path from the dining hall to the cemetery is about half a mile, winding over rough and rutted trails and roads, and that terrain serves as metaphor for the ministry of Murphy Davis. She chose the roads less traveled by.

Jubilee Partners was founded as a Christian service community in 1979 in rural Georgia, near Comer in Madison County. Their primary work is to offer hospitality to immigrants who have experienced violence or persecution. Jubilee has also served as a burial place for people executed on Georgia's death row. Almost all of the graves are dug by hand, using shovels, mattocks and pickaxes. The ground in

On this day, we gathered to remember the astonishing life and witness of Murphy Davis, and we worshipped God together in order to find comfort and strength in the loss of Murphy. We also worshipped together to find the fire of renewal, so that we, too, could continue to go out and proclaim the gospel of justice and mercy and peace in the rough and rutted roads of life, wherever we live. The Reverend Nelia Kimbrough led us in the worship service, and we were blessed to have several outstanding speakers. Elise Witt once again led us in singing in worship, and it was a powerful sound, echoing out into the world of woods, workers, wanderers.

Ched Myers of the Bartimaeus Collective in California led us in a Bible study

reason was that they were bustin' it for the border, seeking to get out of Jerusalem before the authorities who killed Jesus apprehended them also. His own theory is on loan from Dan Berrigan: Jesus was so beaten up by the authorities that he was not easily recognizable.

Ched noted that this was the “traumatic somatic,” the suffering carried in the bodies and the hearts of poor people and of people like Murphy who served them. Murphy certainly knew that traumatic somatic, with 25 years of suffering and scarring and struggling with the cancer that eventually took her life. Ched reminded us that even in the suffering of Jesus, he was still teacher and mentor — he led the disciples in Bible study and catechism as they walked to Comer. In this way, Murphy also sought to teach us and

mentor us, even in and especially in her suffering.

When the risen Jesus and the disciples came to the village, the disciples demonstrated that at least they had learned about hospitality from Jesus: They invited this still-unrecognized man to stay with them for the night, for life is rough out there on the streets. Jesus stayed with them and had bread and fish with them, and it was in the breaking of the bread that their eyes were opened and they recognized him. That idea that “justice is important, but supper is essential,” which was a hallmark of life at the Open Door, is based in the depths of this passage in Luke. In showing hospitality to a beaten-up stranger, their hearts caught fire and they had eyes to see. They noted that their hearts burned within them as Jesus taught them on the journey to Comer.

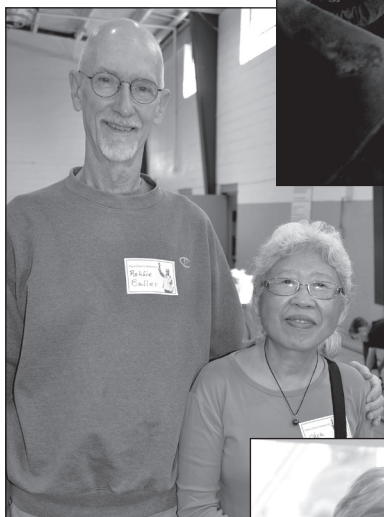
“Loaves and fishes,” said Ched — that is a phrase that catches part of the essence of the life that Murphy made for herself and for others. From Dorothy Day to the Catholic Worker to the Open Door Community, Murphy's heart was burning within her

as she chose to serve and to advocate for the least of these. Recognizing that she would be burned up and burned out if she tried this on her own, she lived in community with Ed and with others as they all sought to find their way to be witnesses to the Gospel vision of justice, kindness and humility. Ched noted how important Bible study was to Murphy and to the

Open Door; indeed, he noted that of all the Catholic Worker communities, the Open Door was the most literate in its Bible study.

Joyce Hollyday helped Murphy complete her first book, *Surely Goodness and Mercy*. Joyce spoke of Murphy's being a powerful light, using Jesus' metaphor from the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5: “You are the light of the world. . . so let your light shine before all people.” She deemed Murphy's ministry to be an “incandescent incarnation,” and she gave thanks that Murphy did not hide her light under a bushel or in the maze of middle-class life. Murphy chose a different way to let her light shine — in solidarity with the poor, those on the streets and those in prison, especially those on death row.

Murphy's guiding Gospel lesson was Matthew 25:31-46, where the Human One comes back to gather all people before him to judge them. He thanked those who served him when he was in need, and those who served people in need — the hungry, prisoners, homeless, afflicted, thirsty, naked — were welcomed into the reign of God. Those who did not do such service were sent to the other



counter-clockwise from top right: **Elise Witt**

The gathering space in Koinonia House at Jubilee Partners

Robbie Buller and Chou Ly

Nelia Kimbrough

Rob Johnson

Mary Catherine Johnson

Todd Moyer & Rachel Feit and Heide Ervin & Al Davis-Smith



Photographs by **Calvin Kimbrough**



the cemetery — mostly packed clay and mud rock — is not easy to dig in, but there is meaning in the labor. Their website tells the story this way:

“At the time when some of the earliest graves were dug, Jubilee was hosting refugees from the wars in Central America, where it was common for people suspected of anti-government sentiments to be kidnapped and murdered by government-sponsored death squads. When Jubilee was preparing the graves for death row prisoners, some of the Central American refugees saw a connection with their friends and family who had been executed by the death squads in Central America. They joined in the digging as a way to remember their loved ones, whom they had never been able to bury. Robbie Buller remembers the liturgical rhythm of the digging as these war survivors worked in the graves. With each swing of the pickaxe, they named the people they were remembering: “Esta para mi Madre. Esta para mi Padre.”

of the Gospel lectionary reading of the day: Luke 24:13-43. That passage is the “Road to Emmaus” story, in which the risen Jesus appears to some of his followers but they do not recognize him. Ched renamed the story

to be “The Road to Comer.” He wondered aloud why the disciples of Jesus could not recognize him. He speculated that part of the

place. The losers complained: “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or in prison or homeless and did not serve you?” Jesus replied: “Whenever you did not serve those in need, you were refusing to serve me.” Joyce noted that it was good and right that Murphy’s body was being buried close to those who had been executed; she maintained solidarity with the marginalized in life and in death.

Joyce also lifted up Murphy’s belief in the power of the Resurrection, not only for its meaning for life after death, but also for its meaning while we are living. Murphy’s life and witness reminded us that we should not look at the Resurrection as a thing belonging to the past. It is also an event that calls us into the future, as we too are resurrected from our many captivities to the principalities and powers of the fallen world. Joyce read a paragraph from one of Murphy’s 1996 *Hospitality* columns that is featured in *A Bag of Snakes*:

“A bittersweet truth about Resurrection is this: we are rarely given the privilege, or the luxury, of sitting in front of the empty tomb to bask in the glorious light of the Risen One. “Run.” says the angel. “Run and tell it! Run with all your might, powered by the glorious truth of the vision! Run with the exuberance and joy of your grief suddenly and unexpectedly healed! Run, carrying this unbelievable news! Run, knowing that nothing else in the world matters anymore! The truth is the Truth that will overshadow everything else and set the course for all of life. Run!!!”

Murphy Davis ran this race of life so well, over so many rough and rutted roads. Mary Catherine Johnson of New Hope House shared this poem by Emily Dickinson that Ed read at Murphy’s bed as she struggled with the power of death at her end.

Because I Could Not Stop for Death

Because I could not stop for Death –
He kindly stopped for me –
The Carriage held but just Ourselves –
And Immortality.

We slowly drove – He knew no haste
And I had put away
My labor and my leisure too,
For His Civility –

We passed the School, where Children strove
At Recess – in the Ring –
We passed the Fields of Gazing Grain –
We passed the Setting Sun –

Or rather – He passed Us –
The Dews drew quivering and Chill –
For only Gossamer, my Gown –
My Tippet – only Tulle –

We paused before a House that seemed
A Swelling of the Ground –
The Roof was scarcely visible –
The Cornice – in the Ground –

Since then – ‘tis Centuries – and yet
Feels shorter than the Day
I first surmised the Horses’ Heads
Were toward Eternity.

Then it was time to take the remains of Murphy Davis up to their resting place at the cemetery of Jubilee Partners. Many of us

who were able walked the half mile up to the cemetery, traversing the rough and rutted roads, while others were transported in a van.

It was a sunny day, and Elise Witt led us in singing as we walked, forming sort of a “second line” New Orleans style

processional, with Ed leading the way. We arrived and found the hole dug for Murphy, right next to Ralph Dukes’ grave. Nelia led us once again in these closing moments, blessing Murphy’s life and ministry.

Al Lawler of Jubilee Partners read the final prayer of the service, a prayer from Cardinal John Henry Newman: “O Lord, support us all the day long, until the shadows lengthen, and the evening comes, and the busy world is hushed, and the fever of life is over,



above: **Hannah Murphy Buc** with **Murphy’s Urn** and **Ed Loring**

right: **The Walk to the graveyard**



above: **Nelia Kimbrough** gathers a circle for the interment

right: **Ed Loring**

below: **Michaela, Ed, Hannah and Jason Buc**



Photographs by **Davis Ramseur** and **Calvin Kimbrough**

life that taught all of us how to be a servant of the Lord by serving humanity. We all lingered a long while, not wanting to leave this spot, knowing that leaving this spot would bring a finality that we did not want to have, and yet that we must have.

We returned to the Jubilee dining hall, where we broke bread together with a meal prepared by Mary Catherine Johnson and Jubilee Partners. As Murphy would have wanted it, we told stories of Murphy’s life and witness, many laced with the humor that was another hallmark characteristic of her life. I don’t know if our hearts burned within us while we broke bread together, but I do know that we all had the stuff of recognition — our eyes and our hearts were opened, and we could all hear Murphy telling us: “Run and tell it! Run, carrying this unbelievable news! Run!!!” ✠

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 is managing editor of Hospitality. He writes a weekly blog at www.nibsnotes.blogspot.com. (nibs.stroupe@gmail.com)



Grace and Peaces of Mail

David,

Could you help me with an order: our community would like to request five copies of *Surely Goodness and Mercy*. I have the order form, but it takes us a while to generate a check (and we are hoping to use them in our upcoming study). If possible, we can make a credit card donation of the amount. Anyway, could you give me a hand making this purchase? We appreciate you all, and several of us knew and dearly loved Murphy. For those of us who have already read the book, we are thrilled at this study. Thanks again.

Peace,

Russ May
Winston Salem, North Carolina

Dear Ed and David,

I just got my copy of *Hospitality*. (I haven't finished it yet.) But I am *very* thankful for the article about Gaza from Joe Groves because he shared a lot of important things I had not been aware of.

I want to order a copy of *A Bag of Snakes* for myself, and for anyone else you would like to send a copy to.

I am so thankful to be connected with you all.

Blessings,

Nancy Davis
Los Angeles, California

Dear Ed, David, Open Door Family, Jason, Hannah & Michaela,

Thank you so much for the tribute to Murphy. The work from you, those who prepared food, arranged the seating — everything — was more than perfect. The sharing of Charlotta's quilt was a great gift. What amazing talent and what an amazing experience to behold such a work of art.

Congratulations to all for a successful and memorable event. Congratulations to Dr. Hannah for completion of the requirements for the Ph.D.

And I will let Gabriel Eisen know that you asked about him. The Memories, the love, the connecting with people I had not seen for decades ... all that and more, was priceless.

Thank You,

Mary Howard
Atlanta, Georgia

Hello my dear friend Ed,

Thanks for writing and for all the acts of kindness you have shown me over the last 33 years. You have blessed my life in so many ways, and I could never thank the Lord God our Father by Jesus Christ enough for you.

All is well, Ed. After this MLK Jr. Day, I will have about 10 more cancer treatments to go: cancer treatment is a "necessary evil." This radiation therapy sucks! I can only imagine what our Murphy Davis went through with chemo, which I heard is far worse! But she is well now and all healed in Christ Jesus. Murphy is not sad or her body hurting anymore, Ed. She is more alive now than she ever was and more than we are now.

Jesus is the God of love, justice and liberty. Thanks for your prayers. You, Hannah, Michaela, David and a host of others remain in my prayers.

Love you Big Bro,

Harold
Georgia Prisoner

Dear Open Door Community,

Your March/April issue knocked it out of the park. I read every word in one sitting. I especially appreciated the article about Dick and Gladys Rustay for they really were the rock of the community. I remember back in 1995 or thereabouts when I was visiting my husband-to-be Michael Galovic — a Resident Volunteer who also was the managing editor of *Hospitality*. I had parked my car in the parking lot as I visited Michael. Dick was on house duty that night and he saw a strange car in the parking lot, so he had it towed. When we went for my car later, it was gone. Michael knew exactly what had happened and he went to Dick in a, shall we say, "agitated" manner. We weren't yet engaged so we were still in the "trying to impress" stage. The Open Door paid the fee from the towing company, and I got my car back. Dick, the rock of the Open Door, was doing his job perfectly. Michael and I are now married and I remember Dick fondly as the heart and soul of the Open Door Community. RIP Dick and Gladys Rustay.

Rev. Tamara Puffer
Minister of Vulnerability
Grace Covenant Presbyterian Church,
Asheville, North Carolina



Triune Mercy Center - Seen | Heard | Valued Mural

Dear Ed,

Yesterday I listened to two of Rabbi Brous' sermons. ["Connections, Connecting the Dots, Intersectionality" January/February Hospitality] She's wonderful — love and community — what can be better? Thank you for telling me about her.

The mural [above] on the front of this card is quite something! As beautiful as it is, Jennifer [Fouse Sheorn, Pastor and Director - Triune Mercy Center] has had a lot of crap on Triune's Facebook page calling it a desecration and questioning the colors. Rainbows? Queer-friendly? Of course Triune's Queer-friendly — it's everybody-friendly! Thank God. If you look at the African American man, top right, that's Don Austin, former homeless alcoholic. Don & I have been engaged for maybe 3 years. It's one of our happiest jokes. For me, it's a perfect way to end applications! Don's property manager and bouncer at Triune.

I love you Ed, ever so much Always,

Nikki Day
Greenville, South Carolina

Dear Folks,

Sending the enclosed to help your worthy cause, especially to keep the pantry filled!

Blessings,

Isabel Fleming
Goodlettsville, Tennessee

Dear Friends at the Open Door Community,

I look forward to reading my copy of *A Bag of Snakes*. Having read the writings of Murphy Davis and Ed Loring before, I know it will be instructive and inspirational. Rare are those individuals who speak with such authority about the prison system in America.

The check enclosed is to cover the cost of my copy. Please use the remainder as you think wise.

Peace,

Frank Gulley
Nashville, Tennessee

Note from Ed: Frank Gulley is my last living link with my student days at Vanderbilt. Frank was the Divinity School librarian and I worked for him opening boxes and recording new books. Frank and his beloved deceased wife, Anne, have been supporters of the Open Door for 36 years.

Over the weekend of April 13-14, the amazing death row activist Rev. Murphy Davis was celebrated, honored and re-membered by many in our community. She died on Oct 22, 2020 from a rare form of cancer.

Hearing the many stories of her life of advocacy for an end to the death penalty, as well as her joy, courage and friendship with those on death row inspires and reminds us to continue this important work. Murphy, Ed Loring and the Open Door Community took a personal and communal stand against the death penalty after it was reinstated by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1976, and created a movement.

Early on in my work as Executive Director, I asked Mary Catherine Johnson for a photo of Murphy for my wall so I could talk to her, ask her for guidance, honor her. She is still there, along with this new addition:

"The flagrant destruction of the earth and its precious resources and the destruction of human hope and human dignity are part of the same death-dealing spirit that says: serve yourself."

— Murphy Davis, *Americans Who Tell the Truth*

Thank you, Murphy!

M. Cathy Harmon-Christian, PhD
Executive Director,
Georgians for Alternatives
to the Death Penalty (GFADP)

Hi Ed,

Good to hear from you! Sorry about the spinal stenosis, I have osteoporosis, and all things "Osteo-." Fortunately, I can walk with a cane.

Maybe we should have taken better care of ourselves! Ha! Guess those metal beds in jail are not good for back bones.

I remember when a policeman was helping me into a paddy wagon, he remarked, "Lady, have you thought about getting a new hobby?" Guess I never did. With all that comes with getting older, I find the physical limitations of not being able to travel to Palestine the most difficult, especially with all that's happening now. I remember how bad it was during the second Intifada, but I was glad to be there, to be present with the people I loved.

Today I stay in touch with a family I've known since 1999. The oldest son graduated from Purdue with a Ph.D. and is doing medical research in CA.

Enough for now, old people have lots of stories to tell and I've already run out of space.

Take care, Love,

Jo Anne Lingle
Indianapolis, Indiana

Dear Open Door Community Staff,

I am writing to thank you for all the newsletters, they are very informative. The Calendars, and all the work your organization does for prisoners, and the community. Thank you to "Everyone" that makes the Open Door Community possible. Your hard work does not go unnoticed, all of your efforts are appreciated!

Respectfully,

Desmen Best
Sing Sing Prison
Ossining, New York

Welcome Pantry Needs:

- ☐ Small OJ Bottles, Shelf Stable Milk
- ☐ Pop Tarts
- ☐ Single Serve Oatmeal Packets
- ☐ Assorted Small Cereal Boxes
- ☐ Pretzels
- ☐ Crackers
- ☐ Granola Bars
- ☐ Baby Wipes
- ☐ Travel Tissue Packs and Toothpaste
- ☐ 2 in 1 travel shampoo - 1oz. size
- ☐ small hand sanitizer containers

We have an Amazon Wish List: <https://tinyurl.com/yfjcr3bm>

