

HOSPITALITY

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

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“The degree of bleakness in our criminal justice system depends greatly on the color of a person’s skin, the size of their pocketbook, and random chance — a level of arbitrariness that undermines the rule of law beyond recognition.” — Steve Bright, Southern Center for Human Rights

We who courtwatch in Athens-Clarke County can attest that virtually everyone trapped in our criminal legal system’s expansive web is either a person of color or poor — likely both. There can be no doubt that one’s race and income level will likely determine how much due process defendants receive and whether they’ll be able to gain their pretrial liberty or obtain effective and zealous legal representation. We see over and over again where our judges, lawyers and law enforcement personnel seem to work hand-in-glove in failing to ensure that an indigent defendant’s basic rights are recognized.

In August 2023, Mario Noel was new to Athens. No one seems to know how he got to here. He says he walked. Maybe from Atlanta. Or New York. Or Louisiana.

Mario Noel is from Honduras. He speaks no English. He had just turned 22 years old on August 28, 2023 when Athens police arrested him along the Atlanta Highway for public indecency and loitering, both misdemeanors. He went to jail that night, and twelve days later left the jailhouse on an unsecured judicial release (no cash) bond.

Then on September 18, young Noel was found walking around a motel parking lot on the outskirts of downtown Athens. He was arrested and charged with felony entering auto and returned to jail. His bond was set at \$2,500. This time he stayed in jail.

At a hearing in early November the felony charge was reduced to misdemeanor loitering and trespassing. Still locked up a few weeks later, his bond was lowered to \$1,000. No matter. The homeless Noel was unable to purchase his pretrial liberty.

Mario Noel has languished in our jail — *presumed innocent* — since September 18, 2023. That’s over one year. During most of this time he’s been isolated from other prisoners, held in a restrictive pod in the jail and rarely allowed outside of his cell. He was booked into the jail weighing 122 lbs. He weighs in at 100 lbs. today.

Had he pleaded guilty to the misdemeanor charges last September and received the maximum sentence allowed of 12 months confinement, Noel would be a free person today. (County prisoners generally receive 2 days credit for every 1 day served in our jail.)

Athens Area Courtwatch Project volunteers have been in State Court each and every time Mario Noel has appeared in front of Judge Ryan Hope. The young immigrant always looks frightened, and out of fear resists interacting with either his public defender Ryan Ignatius or the Court’s Spanish-speaking interpreter. Mostly he remains mute, wrists and ankles cuffed and wrapped with a belly chain. It is evident to observers Noel mostly doesn’t understand what is going on.

At his arraignment last November, Judge Hope appeared poised to reduce Noel’s bond so that he could live with an uncle in Louisiana.

“Where in Louisiana does your uncle live?” inquired Judge Hope.

“He’s not sure,” attorney Ignatius answered through the interpreter.

“How would you get to Louisiana?” the judge asked.

“Caminar,” Noel muttered. “Walk.”

Judge Hope kept the bond at \$1,000 and continued Noel’s case to yet another, and then another, and then another day.

And all along, our criminal punishment system seems purposely stuck in neutral while this 22-year-old immigrant wastes away in Athens-Clarke County’s “misdemeanorland.”

During the year Noel has been incarcerated, he’s been visited by the Honduran Consul General from Atlanta (12/14/23) who reached out to his mother in Honduras and father in New York (who doesn’t want his son to live with him); undergone a mental health evaluation by a private Spanish-speaking psychologist (1/24); entered a plea of mental incompetency (1/12/24); had a



John Cole Vodicka

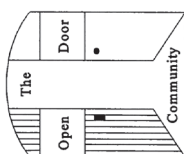
bench trial “in absentia” where Judge Hope determined Noel to be incompetent (1/19/24) and after which the judge ordered that Noel be “restored to competency” (1/27/24).

In February, Judge Hope ordered that Georgia’s Department of Behavioral Health and Developmental Disabilities (DBHDD) provide him with an update of Mario Noel’s progress and status “no

Pretrial Punishment *continued on page 4*

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How the Past Haunts the Present

A Review of *Our Trespasses* by Greg Jarrell

By Peter R. Gathje

When the wrecking ball hit 910 Ponce de Leon the wounds to the building were reflected in the hearts of those who loved the Open Door Community that had resided there for some 35 years. During that long tenure of hospitality, resistance and community, the neighborhood around the Open Door changed as gentrification wiped away residences for low-income people, and housing prices skyrocketed. This process accelerated as the Olympics came to Atlanta in 1996 and whole neighborhoods were bulldozed to build dorms for Olympic athletes and various athletic venues. After the Olympics, the dorms, venues and other spaces were transformed in ways that fulfilled the long-term desires of city planners to eliminate low-income African Americans from proximity to Atlanta's "revitalized" core. This was but one more step in Atlanta's history in which city planners, with the blessing of a church-going business and political elite, wiped out African American neighborhoods and then profited from the business and residential buildings erected in their place.

Greg Jarrell, in *Our Trespasses: White Churches and the Taking of American Neighborhoods*, describes and analyzes this pattern of urban renewal and gentrification and how it played out in Charlotte, North Carolina. Jarrell tells the story of how race, politics, economics and theological convictions intersected to

Our Trespasses

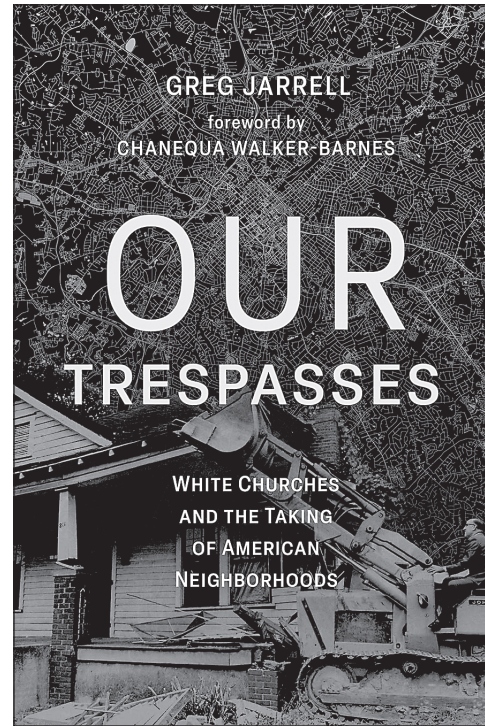
White Churches and the
Taking of American Neighborhoods

by **Greg Jarrell**

Fortress Press
267 pages
February 2024

Decolonization. Like them, he is concerned with how the past haunts the present and the theological/discipleship work we need to engage that haunting to bring justice and healing. But Jarrell's focus is on that work in an urban setting in the South and on the tangled history of race and class that typifies Southern cities. He deftly delineates "the continuity of Urban Renewal [and gentrification] with slavery and Jim Crow, earlier forms of racial domination."

Most compelling in this story are Jarrell's biblical and theological reflections on the issues of race, urban planning and gentrification. He shows how the theological reasoning that supported urban renewal and the relocation of a white church to a bulldozed



haunting the land we inhabit. He invites us to the terrain of our souls, to prayer informed by the "something [that] used to be there," to envision a different world, a different politics and economics, a different way to be Christian. He offers one possible path of creating land trusts, even as he recognizes there is no easy answer there either. In the end, we are left like the disciples in Mark's Gospel, with an empty tomb and a call to meet Jesus in Galilee, to find in our story how to faithfully go forward. Jarrell has given us a method for considering the land, and the way our cities are organized by

The individualized and spiritualized theology of white Christians made it possible for them to disregard the systemic factors that created "blighted neighborhoods" and thus see in Black spaces only poverty due to personal moral failings.

destroy an African American neighborhood and offer the cleared land for a white Baptist church to build its new sanctuary (with extensive parking lots and other amenities). Jarrell intertwines the larger structural, racial and cultural forces with the personal story of African Americans who were forcibly displaced, and white ministers and church leaders whose theological perspectives provided a rationale for their participation in the process of destruction and displacement.

In this story there is a clear call to consider this pattern within our histories and cities. We are invited to ask, as Jarrell does throughout, how did our city come to be the way it is? What is the history of the land, of the people who have lived on the land? How have race, class, economic and political power and religion shaped that history? Jarrell reflects the work of Ched Myers and Elaine Enns in *Healing Haunted Histories: A Settler Discipleship of*

African American neighborhood was informed by whiteness. The individualized and spiritualized theology of white Christians made it possible for them to disregard the systemic factors that created "blighted neighborhoods" and thus see in Black spaces only poverty due to personal moral failings. Jarrell convincingly shows how "The spiritual, the architectural, and the political all worked together to reinforce one another." In this way, the white Christians "did not see the ghosts" of the destroyed neighborhood, but only the hand of God's providence in providing them a space for their new church. This "innocence" of history, Jarrell points out, is integral to whiteness.

Jarrell does not leave the reader mourning from encountering the ghosts, as important as mourning is as part of the process of coming to justice. Rather, he invites us to meet and wrestle with "The Ghosts of Christians Present," that is with the ghosts

race and class. He also points to a hope that could inform a different Christian discipleship, a different "set of theo-political commitments" so that "all our neighbors have secure places in thriving neighborhoods."

Peter Gathje is Professor of Religion at LeMoyne-Owen College, 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*. (peter_gathje@loc.edu)

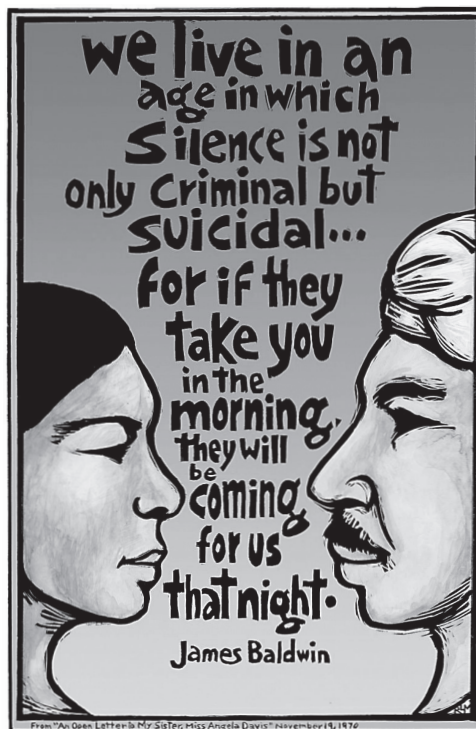


HOSPITALITY

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



Ricardo Levins Morales

Newspaper

Founding Editor Murphy Davis
Editor Ed Loring
Managing Editor Nibs Stroupe
Photography and Layout Editor Calvin Kimbrough
Poetry Corner Editor Ed Loring
Associate Editors Peter Gathje, Catherine Meeks and John Cole Vodicka
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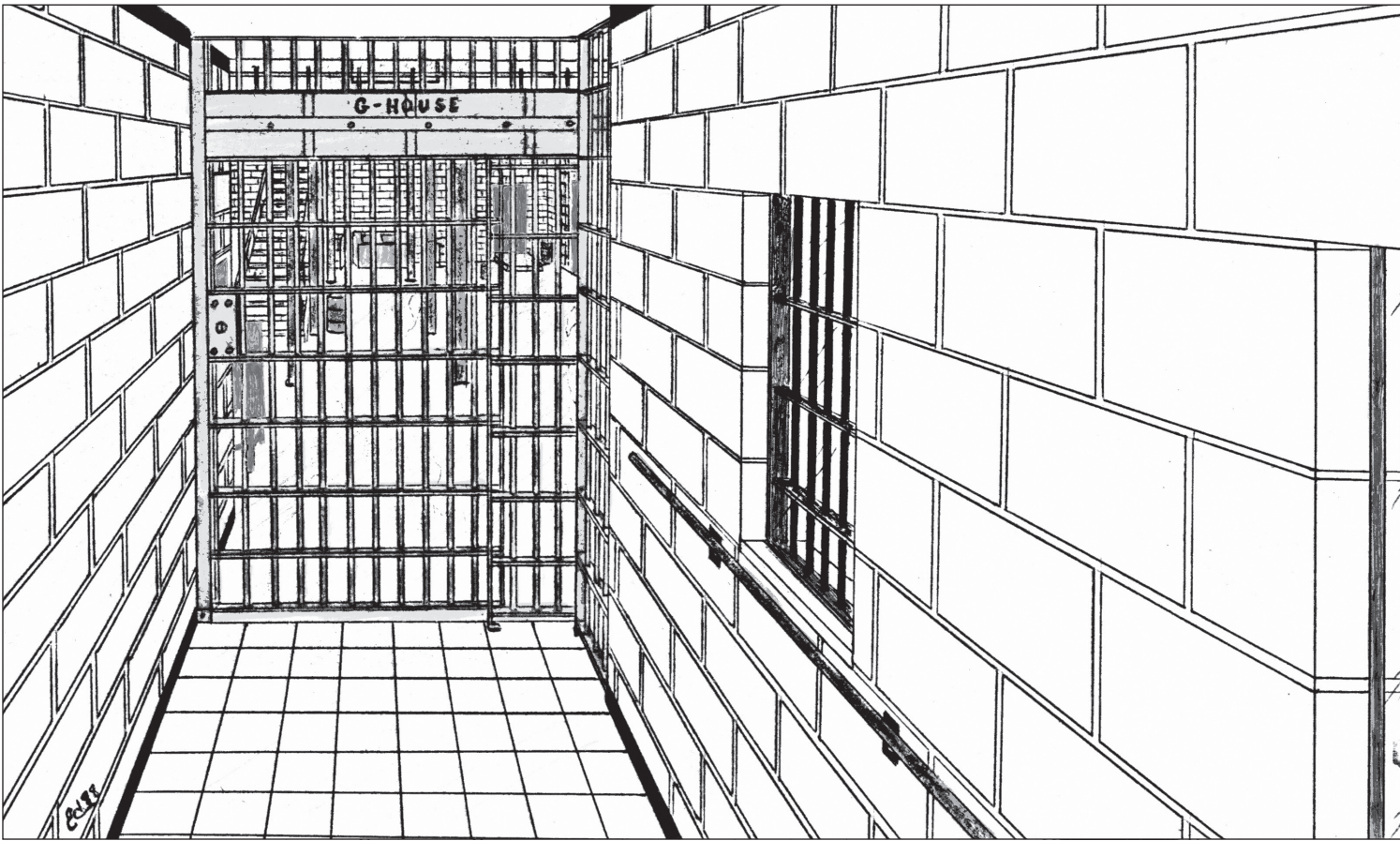
For more information about the life and work of the community, please contact either of the following:

Eduard Loring Activist/Advocate/Ally
He/Him/His
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Please join us on Facebook for the continuing journey of the Open Door Community in Baltimore.



Murphy Davis ¡Presente!



Eddie Crawford

Our Liberating God

By Lauren Ramseur

This essay was adapted by Lauren for Hospitality. It is from Lauren's Introduction to A Bag of Snakes.

Everywhere Murphy Davis went around her home at the Open Door Community at 910 Ponce de Leon Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia, she was teaching those around her. People came to learn from her, to learn with her, or just to soak in the joy of her company. I was and still am one of them. Always a student and a teacher, Murphy carried deep wisdom that came through education and reading alongside standing at the foot of the cross as she pastored men on death row. That wisdom was born of suffering through her accompaniment work, through her battles with cancer, and through soul-challenging advocacy to enlighten the heart of the legislature of

making their way inside this hellhole. It was a bizarre juxtaposition of forced positivity and optimism as people entered a giant locked steel box, where on the best days they would control the movement and the bodies of other fellow humans, and where they were all, guards and prisoners alike, locked in cages together. On the worst of those days, the same employees, who were told to have integrity and be successful, would coordinate and carry out the murder of one of those humans with whom they spent the majority of their daily lives. Once through that portal and up the stairs, we passed the warden's office, which always elicited stories of the battles with power that had been fought there just to be able to make pastoral visits. Then we entered the large visitation room where families gathered on weekends, breaking the bread of life made manifest in the form of Snickers and Cheetos from the vending machines. The room was empty on weekdays when pastors and lawyers visit, but

actions in that space. But when Murphy and Eduard visited, there would be laughter and singing, because when they came, they brought church with them. Murphy and Troy sang out, "Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound. . . ." Conversations quieted as the surprising sound of that joyful noise made its way down the corridor to death row. And then the singing grew, and how could anyone not join in with Murphy's beautiful voice leading us? The attorneys' conversations stopped, and they too began to sing and soon the entire visitation room erupted in song, "and grace will lead me home." For those minutes, none of us were in prison anymore. The walls of death row came tumbling down, and we were at church together singing mightily of the unending grace of God that held us all in Her hands.

Our God is a God of Liberation and when you sing with Her, there is freedom even in the places where the systems of death seem to have the tightest rein on human life. Murphy sang with our Liberating God, so beautifully and with such a welcoming grace that you could not help but join the song.

So often now in my work accompanying children in prison and detention in Virginia, Murphy's grace shows up alongside us. Each December we assemble 300 care packages for children in detention and prison, and once again Murphy's love is multiplied through the love of community. She shows up for me with courage when our visits get canceled, and we must navigate complicated relationships with prison officials to gain access again. Voices of Jubilee began as a Gospel choir in a children's prison, the Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center in Richmond, Virginia. One of our youth told us that when he was singing with us, he felt like he wasn't in prison anymore, and I heard once again Murphy and Troy singing, Eduard and Jack joining in, and God's faithful song of hope tearing down the prison walls.

In her writings, Murphy meets us, telling us the truth that shakes the shingles from our eyes. She is an open door inviting us to walk beside the Shepherd, and though we walk through the valley of the shadow of death, she invites us to BE NOT AFRAID. Murphy invites us to take a seat at the welcome table, under the shelter of Grace's wings and to join her in the long struggle and unending song of Liberation. Murphy Davis, ¡Presente!

Rev. Lauren Cogswell Ramseur is the Co-Pastor of Voices of Jubilee, a community of pastors, returning citizens and volunteers who meet isolation with connection by accompanying incarcerated youth and their families in Richmond, Virginia.
www.voicesofjubilee.org

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the horrors of state-sponsored murder. Despite those soul-crushing challenges, her faith grew into a radical hope filled with joy and encompassing grace, formed through God's love and her commitment to scripture and community. Her life and now her writings continue to bear witness to what the Holy Spirit can do with a faithful journey of solidarity and great courage in a human life.

The rides to Jackson, where death row is located, were some of my most treasured times, as an hour of uninterrupted time with Murphy and Eduard was a rare thing when you lived and worked in community. Once the long road stretched before us, Murphy and Eduard would share their journey with the men of Georgia's prisons and death row over their decades of work. It was through these stories that I first began to carry in my own bones a deep love and commitment for those who are imprisoned. Under Murphy's tutelage, I found the hope of the Gospel that is the resurrection of life even in the face of the most brutal death that the systems of oppression can dole out.

After long waits to get through security screening, we would trek through the underground hallway into the Jackson prison. The hallway was lined with pseudo-inspirational posters, extolling the virtues of "integrity," "success" and "leadership" to the prison staff

the spirits of that family love remained there, as persistent as Murphy herself. Somehow, there was always a trustee there buffing the floors as if they were assigned to scrub away that love so it couldn't get any further inside.

On one occasion, Eduard, Murphy and I were all visiting in the long narrow room, spread out the required six feet apart from one another as we each visited our friends. It was a joy to visit together because we would set up four visits each, and as every person entered the visitation room Murphy would have the opportunity to speak with and bless each of them like a pastor standing at her church door. Instead of four visits, she would get twelve; like the Biblical story of the loaves and fishes, Murphy's visits were multiplied through the love of community. On this day, when the singing began, the room was packed with our visits and public defender lawyers meeting with their clients. I don't remember who Murphy was visiting with that morning; it must have been Troy Davis or Jack Alderman who asked Murphy to sing. Murphy was a gifted preacher, an exceptional writer, public speaker and advocate, but on top of that she had the amazing gift of music. It should come as no surprise that the visitation room for death row was not usually a place where singing happened. It was not on the list of approved

The Resurrection Made Visible

A Review of *A Bag of Snakes*

By Dennis Apel

“Trying to tell people the truth about prison is like trying to hand them a bag of snakes. Nobody wants it, and it seems like a tacky thing to do to nice people — especially people you like. It’s just simply no fun — we don’t want to touch it or look into the bag. We’d rather settle for the accepted political line.”
Fr. Daniel Berrigan, S.J.

Two lives, tenaciously and unconditionally immersed in the radical teachings of Jesus of Nazareth, document decades of stories and interactions with prisoners and death row inmates. Some of those encounters are stories of glorious redemption; others are stories of brutal and heart-wrenching endings. While being handed this book may be for some like being handed a bag of snakes, for those who have the strength and the stomach to stand with Mary at the foot of the cross (as have Murphy and Eduard) this book is an open door into the unexpected and elusive Kindom to which Jesus introduced us through parables, metaphors, the sermon on the mount and his life. “I was in prison and you visited me.”

In her introduction, Lauren Cogswell Ramseur recounts her hour-long travels in the car from the Atlanta streets to the death row visiting room in Jackson, Georgia, and the gift of undistracted stories from Murphy and Eduard. To read this book is to be a silent, invisible passenger in that car.

The writings in this book were published in the decades-old newspaper *Hospitality*, a publication of the Open Door Community in Atlanta, Georgia; or are the transcripts of talks or sermons given at universities, award ceremonies, churches and Senate hearings. They contain the wisdom and truths that come from lives spent in

The Spirit of God has laid many experiences on the hearts of both Eduard and Murphy whether in the prisons or on the streets of Atlanta.

service to the poor, either on the streets of Atlanta or in the Georgia prisons. They give us a small but clear glimpse into the brutality of incarceration and the dehumanization of those who are subjected to its dysfunction. They open our eyes to the unchecked atrocities of those who wield power over others’ lives by virtue of being employed by the prison system. And they pierce us like a sword with the tender humanity of people whom society has cast aside as irredeemable refuse, as if God somehow had given up on them, only to find it was just us, not God, who had written them off.

The reader will find stories of life and ministry on the streets in Atlanta, of visiting in prisons, and commentary on the death penalty and death row. Analysis is intertwined with experience; clarification of thought is wedded to matters of the heart and soul. The gospel becomes real, palpable and immediate. The essays and stories in this book are the resurrection made visible.

Questions of crime and punishment and our attitude toward offenders as well as our response as disciples of Jesus, are addressed most notably in Eduard’s prophetic piece entitled, “Cain and Abel: Murder as a Given of the Human Condition.” Especially today, we need analysis that helps us when the dominant view presents

challenges to those of us on “The Way” set out by Jesus. Aside from powerful and sometimes soul-stirring essays written by both Eduard and Murphy, Barry Lee Burnside has included some of Murphy’s unpublished notes for the book that her death left unfinished. We can only give praise to God that Eduard, in the deep void of his grief for the loss of his beloved, sifted through Murphy’s boxes of files and, finding her notes, passed them on to Barry and, by extension, to us. In one of those notes Murphy relates one of the greatest compliments she ever received. It came from Earl Charles, a man she had accompanied on death row and who had been exonerated for a crime he had not committed. He said of her, “You cannot ever know or understand what it is like to be sentenced to death. It is such an overwhelming experience that only those who have gone through it can know how terrifying it is. But Sister Murphy Davis does know this. She knows not because she has been to death row but because the Spirit of God has laid that experience on her heart.”

The Spirit of God has laid many experiences on the hearts of both Eduard and Murphy whether in the prisons or on the streets of Atlanta. From the writings in this book one witnesses the fire that has consumed those sacred hearts that the Spirit has touched. Barry Lee Burnside has also included writings by some who have caught that wild fire including David Payne of the Open Door Community, and Eduard and Murphy’s daughter, Hannah, and granddaughter, Michaela. And the fire spreads.

Toward the end of the book are the testimonies of two death row inmates who were both redeemed and liberated, and who now live the lives of free men, dancing in gratitude and singing God’s praises. Both men are living witnesses to the power of accompaniment, commitment and selfless and unconditional love...the balm to

“make the wounded whole and to heal the sin-sick soul.” Redemption, liberation and the stubborn conviction that love is the answer may, in these days of cynicism, meanness and intolerance, seem like follies of the past. But this book, if one has the courage to read it, to hold the bag in one’s hands and look inside, will renew and reaffirm our faith in the truth of the gospels. It demonstrates that we all have available to us the possibility of being conduits for the unconditional love of our God, that redemption is real and that we can participate in it and thereby be filled with the grace that it has to impart. In this book, Murphy Davis and Eduard Loring speak with authority. As with Jesus, that authority has its roots in lives lived authentically in love with those Jesus calls the least among us. These writings will change us for the better if we allow them to. And that is no small gift.

Dennis Apel, along with his wife, Tensie Hernandez, founded Beatitude House, a Catholic Worker house in Guadalupe, California. For the past 28 years the house has provided hospitality and services including food, clothing and medical care to the underserved, mostly field workers. (jdapel2@gmail.com.)

Pretrial Punishment *continued from page 1*

later than April 27, 2024 at 11:00 am.” That date came and went and still no update from DBHDD. This was no surprise. In-patient mental competency restoration treatment, usually handled at the Augusta State Medical Prison, now takes between eight months and a year, sometimes longer, to complete. When I last checked with the Clarke County Sheriff’s office, there were a dozen prisoners locked in our jail — pretrial — awaiting competency restoration treatment. Half of this number of pretrial prisoners, most accused of misdemeanor offenses, had been confined for longer than one year.

Long time prison abolitionist Dr. Ruth Gilmore’s mantra is “Where life is precious, life is precious.” She defines the abolition movement as “politics of care, anti-violence and optimism.” Dr. Gilmore believes our criminal legal system — prisons, jails, courts,


police — contributes to the “organized abandonment of vulnerable communities.” Our jails, she says, “*exist to absorb folks abandoned by our community.*”

Judge Hope has refused to reduce Noel’s \$1,000 bond. The solicitor’s office is not interested in dismissing the misdemeanor case altogether. The public defender hasn’t gotten him back into court in months. “Jail is not the answer for someone like Mr. Noel,” Judge Hope said several months ago at one of Noel’s last status hearings, but then in the same breath, added, “But I’m not comfortable letting him out without a place to go.”

So Mario Noel, accused of loitering and trespassing, unable to post bond and deemed incompetent to stand trial, remains in an Athens, Georgia, jail tonight, thirteen months and counting.

A Bag of Snakes

Selected Writings on Prison and the Death Penalty



Murphy Davis and Eduard Loring
Edited by Barry Lee Burnside

A Bag of Snakes
Selected Writings on Prison and the Death Penalty
by **Murphy Davis** and **Eduard Loring**
Edited by **Barry Lee Burnside**

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It is cruel. It is shameful.
“Simply punishing the broken — walking away from them or hiding them from sight — only ensures that they remain broken and we do, too,” Bryan Stevenson tells us in his book *Just Mercy*. “There is no wholeness outside of our reciprocal humanity.”

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)

On the Road to Jericho: The Year 2040 Is Upon Us

A Review of *The False White Gospel* by Jim Wallis

By Nibs Stroupe

Early in my ministerial career, Caroline and I were co-pastors at St. Columba Presbyterian Church in Norfolk, VA. It was a small mission church in a massive low-income housing complex, and Norfolk Presbytery funded the ministry. We would go to churches to talk about the St. Columba mission and to seek their support. One Sunday afternoon I was driving back to Norfolk in my VW bug from a small church in a rural part of the Presbytery. As I was driving, I was listening to the radio, and all of a sudden a crazy preacher came on, talking about how much God hated us and hated the direction that America was going in the 1970s. I thought to myself: “This guy is crazy — he will never amount to anything with that kind of vitriol.” Later in the broadcast, I heard the preacher’s name: the Reverend Jerry Falwell from Liberty Baptist Church in Lynchburg, VA. He would co-found the Moral Majority, and my prediction of his passing into obscurity could not have been more mistaken.

The efforts of Falwell and others like him have given birth to a horrible and scary movement: white Christian nationalism. Jim Wallis, one of the co-founders of Sojourners community and magazine, has written a fine book about this movement and about the present dangers of the white Christian nationalist (WCN) movement. From his vantage point in hell, the Reverend Falwell is no doubt relishing the prominence that the WCN has taken on in the current climate. In his book *The False White Gospel*, Jim Wallis gives us a thorough analysis of the current state of this movement.

Wallis notes that this movement has gained prominence because of two factors in American life: the continuing power of white supremacy and the ascendancy of a narcissistic, would-be dictator in Donald Trump, who has played the WCN like a piano. Despite evidence to the contrary, white supremacists can count, and they are well aware that by 2040, there will be no majority racial category in the United States. Many of us have seen this as a good development, as a sign that political power will have to be shared with other groups. Wallis notes that Trump and the WCN are work-

Jesus of Nazareth, who lived a life of love and service to others, especially those on the margins, has become the Jesus who despises those who are poor and who loves those classified as “white.”

ing as hard as they can to mitigate this numbers shift, working so that those classified as “white” will retain political power, no matter what the demographics indicate. No Great Replacement Theory allowed here — the march in Charlottesville in 2017 and the storming of the Capitol in 2021 are only the beginning of the march of those classified as “white” toward seeking permanent political power in a multiracial USA.

Wallis understands well the power of white grievance — especially white, male grievance — and he notes that in hitching our wagons to racial classification rather than to the Biblical Jesus, we Christians have opened ourselves to the possibility of stunning violence and the rule of a man who knows nothing and cares nothing for the faith that we so proudly and loudly claim. He notes that Jesus has become the victim of identity theft in America. Jesus of Nazareth, who lived a life of love and service to others, especially those on the margins, has become the Jesus who despises those who are poor and who loves those classified as “white.” Wallis understands Donald Trump as a self-seeking and self-serving narcissist who will gladly turn to fascism to promote and sustain himself. He cautions us liberals and progressives to take seriously this heretical and dangerous marriage of WCN and Donald Trump. Do not be like me on my drive in Virginia — these folk mean serious business. They intend to reinstate the vision of white, male America, and they will use any means necessary to accomplish it, including a complete perversion of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

One of the weaknesses of this book is that Wallis does not give an adequate history of how we got from the backroads of Jerry Falwell to the corruption of Clarence Thomas, all in the name of Jesus. No reference to Nixon’s “Southern Strategy,” nor

The False White Gospel
Rejecting Christian Nationalism, Reclaiming True Faith,
and Refounding Democracy
by **Jim Wallis**
St. Martin’s Essentials
304 pages
April 2024

to the presidential campaign of George Wallace, to the decision to pump movie star Ronald Reagan as a born-again savior, nor even a thought of a “compassionate conservative” like George W. Bush (with a cynical Dick Cheney pulling the strings.) More historical analysis would have been welcomed.

Wallis does offer some strong prescriptions to help us begin to turn this ship around, to seek to recover the authentic Jesus who has been captured by John Wayne and his successors. He offers six Biblical passages for us to explore and use in seeking to recover the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a time of deep falseness and manipulating politicians: Luke 10:25-37, Genesis 1:26, John 8:32, Matthew 25:31-46, Matthew 5:9, and Galatians 3:28. Here’s a short summary of Wallis’ six chapters on these essential passages.

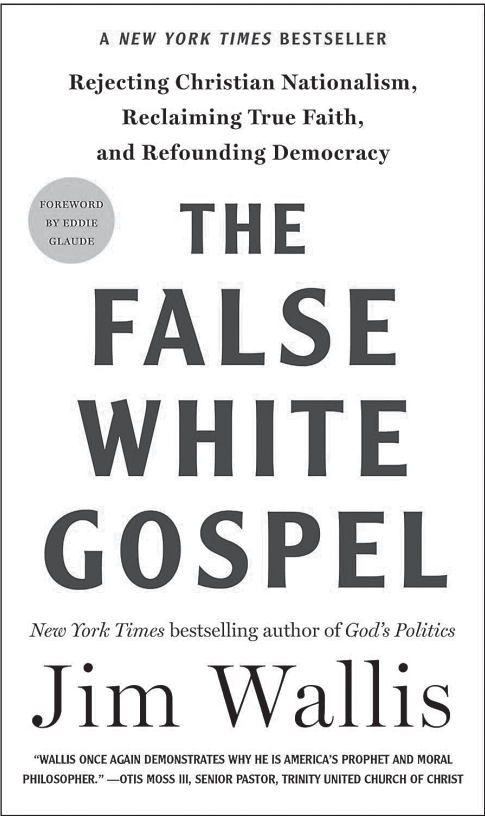
The first is the parable of the Good Samaritan, with its central question, “Who is my neighbor?” Wallis notes that erasing “the other” and their culture is at the center of WCN, and that Donald Trump ran his 2016 campaign on fear of “the other.” The Luke pas-

sage serves as a strong counter to the push from WCN, because we are on the road to Jericho now.

The second passage is from the first creation narrative in Genesis, in which all people are made in God’s image. Flowing out of this is the idea of equality before God, by whichever name we call God. This passage is incompatible with WCN. The third passage is John 8:32: “You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” Here Wallis hammers on Trump’s big lie about the 2020 election and on how many Republicans and WCN people have accepted the lie about the 2020 election results. It is only one of many lies coming out of this movement, and the fascism that Wallis warns us about thrives on such falsehoods.

The fourth passage is the most powerful from my point of view — Matthew 25:31-46: “Lord, when did we see you hungry and not feed you?” The Presbyterian denomination has taken this passage as our central motivating Biblical passage, and Wallis calls this “the final test of discipleship.” Jesus tells this story right before his betrayal and arrest, and for Wallis and many of us, it is the final exam of discipleship. How do you know if you are following Jesus? It will be reflected in how we engage those who are in need.

The fifth passage is from the Sermon on the Mount — “Blessed are the Peacemakers, for they will be called children of God.” Wallis notes the stark contrast: Jesus calls us to peacemaking, while WCN calls us to grievance and conflict-making out of these grievances. Wallis emphasizes that Jesus is not asking us to be passive or to avoid conflict, but rather Jesus is asking us to work for justice so that peace may flow from that work. He describes a very effective exercise in which all participants in some groups with whom he works are asked to tell the stories of their encounters with



the police. In these narratives it becomes clear what peacemaking and justice-making are really about.

His final scripture is also a powerful one — Galatians 3:28: “There is no longer Jew nor Greek; there is no longer slave or free; there is no longer male and female, for we are all one in Christ Jesus.” Wallis notes that this verse is the Magna Carta of the abolitionist movement. He reminds us that in the days of slavery, those who proclaimed Jesus Christ

to enslaved people often left out much of the Bible, especially the Exodus stories, because those who owned people understood the liberating nature of the Biblical story. He suggests that this verse was part of some of the early baptismal formulas, thus putting the church squarely on the side of liberation. Breaking down the cultural dividing walls in Jesus Christ was not a casual suggestion; rather it was a defining characteristic of the Jesus movement. This verse and this approach stand as a strong rebuke to the MAGA movement, which would dehumanize people and make the “other” a threat to our way of life.

I would have added a seventh scripture if I were writing this book: I Samuel Chapter 8, where the people of Israel demand that Samuel anoint a king for them. Samuel warns them of the dangers of such a move, but the people reply loudly and strongly: “Give us a king!” Samuel consults with God, and though God is hurt by this demand, She tells Samuel to grant the people’s wish. It will be a wish that they come to regret. It seems to me that we are close to that with the WCN demanding that Donald Trump take the reins again — only this time, he will seek to be more king-like than President-like.

Wallis contends that we need a third founding of America, following in the footsteps of the American Revolution and the Civil Rights Movement, a founding in which “becoming white” is not the basis of citizenship but rather the idea of equality is the basis of citizenship. He notes that we are at a fundamental fulcrum point in American history, and he quotes from Heather McGhee, who wrote the fine book *The Sum of Us* about where we are: “I’m feeling like we have the wind at our backs. There is obviously a fire ahead. There’s a burning white-supremacist, conspiracy-theorist, anti-democratic fascist movement. . . . But they are the reaction to and the dying gasps of a force in politics that’s always been there since the founding of our country.”

The False White Gospel pulls no punches on the heretical and dangerous nature of the white Christian nationalist movement, a movement used and propelled by an unscrupulous Donald Trump. Wallis is both scared and hopeful at this juncture in our history, and the November election will tell us a lot more about which way we will turn at this point. But the WCN has been unleashed, and it will be difficult to get it back into the underground of American history. As Wallis puts it, that work falls largely to the churches and to church leaders. We can either work for an atmosphere that builds on loving, on justice and on welcoming, or we can work for an atmosphere that is hateful and mean and excluding. We are the Samaritans on the road to Jericho, and it is now our turn to respond.

Nibs Stroupe is a longtime friend of the Open Door; retired pastor and author of Deeper Waters: Sermons for a New Vision and She Made a Way: Mother and Me in a Deep South World. 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)

Annual Starvin' for Justice


FAST AND VIGIL

to abolish the death penalty

June 29 - July 2
Washington, DC

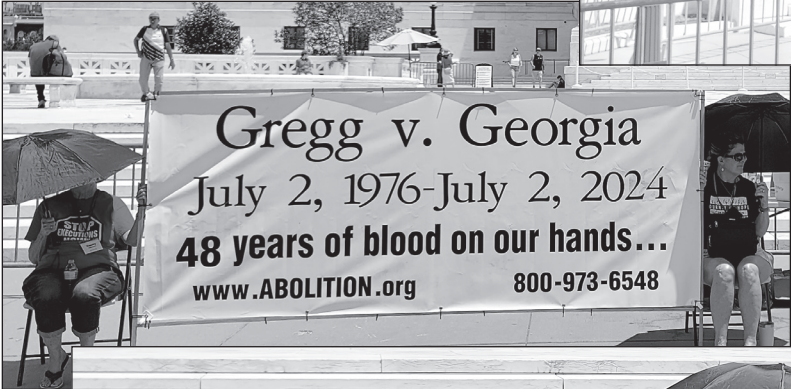
an energizing, grassroots week of training, advocacy, action, community and education in front of the U.S. Supreme Court

abolition.org





The 31st Annual Starvin' for Justice Fast and Vigil at the U.S. Supreme Court was held June 29 - July 2. June 29 is the anniversary of the 1972 *Furman v. Georgia* decision in which the U.S. Supreme Court found the death penalty to be applied in an arbitrary and capricious manner. At that time more than 600 condemned inmates had their death sentence reduced to terms of life imprisonment and all states wanting to have a death penalty were forced to pass new death penalty laws. July 2 is the anniversary of the *Gregg v. Georgia* decision which allowed executions to resume in the United States. The four days between these two historic anniversaries provide a natural opportunity for a demonstration of conscience on the issue of judicially-sanctioned state-sponsored killing. On July 2, Ed Loring and David Payne represented the Open Door Community at this year's Vigil.

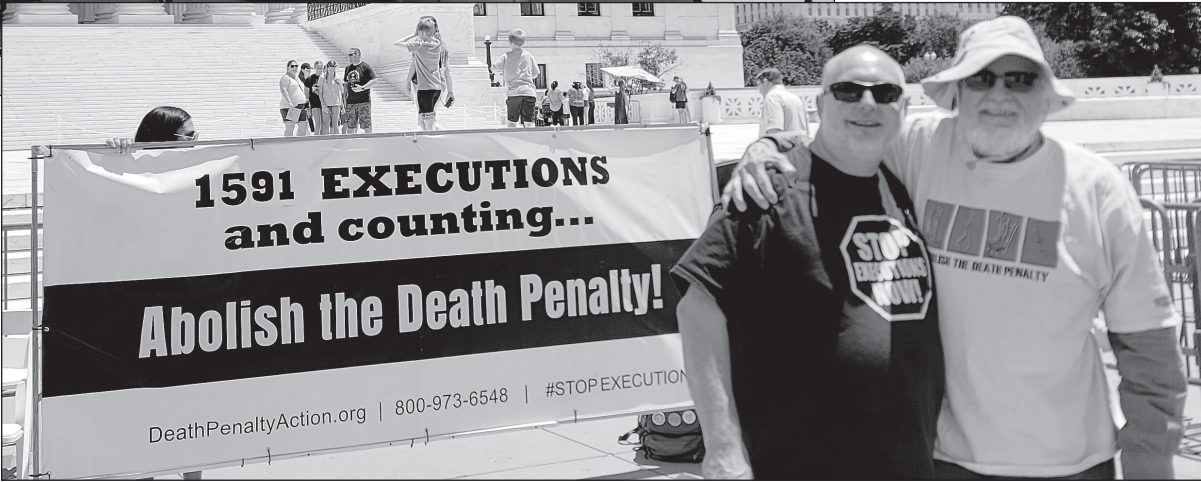


above: **Ed Loring**, **SueZann Bosler**, co-founder of Journey of Hope, and **David Payne** at the U.S. Supreme Court.



above: **Ed Loring** signs copies of *Bag of Snakes* at the Vigil.

Photographs by David Payne



right: **Abraham Bonowitz**, Executive Director and co-founder of Death Penalty Action, with **Ed Loring**.

The Box

Compiled by Ed Loring

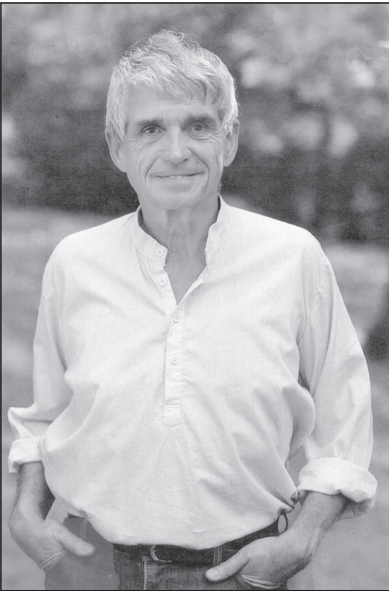
Where we are in the USA today

The Holy One says, I am the Lord your God, who led you out of Egypt. You have no God but me. I alone am your savior. I took care of you in a dry, desert land. But when you entered the good land, you became full and satisfied, and then you grew proud and forgot me.

— Hosea 13:4-6

Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that. Hate multiplies hate, violence multiplies violence ... in a descending spiral of destruction. The chain reaction of evil — hate begetting hate — must be broken, or we shall be plunged into a dark abyss of annihilation.

— Martin Luther King Jr., *Loving Your Enemies*, from *Murphy Davis Prayer Book #2*



Know where you stand and stand there.
— Dan Berrigan

You shall know the truth and the truth will make you ashamed:

1. **Hate:** A central theme of American white history.
2. **Original sins:** Genocide and slavery. Genocide of Native Americans and economically successful African Americans. (*See Tulsa Massacre and Hamburg, South Carolina*)
3. **Fear:** of whom? That's why our defense budget is off the charts. Nuclear weapons. CIA/FBI. President Woodrow Wilson's Espionage Act that Obama dug up.
4. **Fear of truth:** Julian Assange.
5. **The Homeless:** Now against the law to sleep outside. What the hell?

Reveals *The Truth* of who we are & our cruelty.
— Ed Loring

poetry corner



Julie Lonneman

How Brave You Are

How brave you are for slowing down. For not finishing that to-do list.

How courageous you are for not crossing that finish line, because your body said “enough.”

How fearless you are for choosing the quiet of your soul over those voices driving you always towards more.

How bold, how rebellious –
you, out there,
honoring your own natural rhythm,
going against the culture’s breakneck speed.

We tend to make heroes of those hungry with ambition, relentlessly doing, producing always more.

We applaud those who refuse to stop or rest. Who push themselves so hard in the name of achievement, that they sacrifice their body and soul and heart in the process. We celebrate those who are ill or aging but never show it, never slow down, never reveal a moment of vulnerability.

This drivenness can be heroic, at times. It can be necessary for our survival or the greater good.

But,

I want to make heroes of those who slow down.

I want to make heroes of those who listen to their bodies, who do not strive for more than what the soul truly needs.

I want to make heroes of those who do not force or push, but surrender to each moment as it opens.

I want to applaud those who may not be driven towards success as we know it, but instead are nurturing something deep and subtle and needed.

I want to celebrate those brave enough to cease all doing, even for a second, and sit with the ache in their hearts. A task many find harder than summiting the highest peak.

I want to make heroes of those who honor their limitations.

Who are unable to keep up with the busy-ness of our times, yet show up to each profound, necessary moment.

It is truly an act of courage and rebellion to do any such thing, in a world demanding you resist your own self, your own rhythm, your own soul.

And the paradox is, that often when we cease our incessant doing, even for a minute, and listen to that quiet voice within, we discover what it is we absolutely must do, and what instead can fall away.

We finally hear the call towards what serves our soul, and what then will serve the world. Nothing more, nothing less.

A hero is simply someone brave.
So come, be softly brave.
Be a new, quieter kind of hero.
Few may applaud, it’s true, but your soul certainly will.

— Leyla Aylin

Leyla Aylin is a trained psychotherapist, poet and group leader in the development of the soul. She has a master’s in Depth and Jungian Psychology. “How Brave You Are” was written in 2021.

Caroline & Nibs


Congratulations to Nibs Stroupe and Caroline Leach on their 50th wedding anniversary on May 18! Here is a photo from their wedding day with a poem from Walt Whitman’s “I Sing the Body Electric.” Rev. Ed Loring read it at their wedding and was a co-officiant with the Rev. Sandy Park at their wedding in Ed’s backyard in Decatur, Georgia in 1974.

I SING THE BODY ELECTRIC IV

*I have perceived that to be with those
I like is enough,
To stop in company with the rest at
evening is enough,
To be surrounded by beautiful, curious,
breathing, laughing flesh is enough,
To pass among them or touch anyone,
or rest my arm ever so lightly
Round his or her neck for a moment,
what is this then?
I do not ask any more delight,
I swim in it as in a sea.*

*There is something in staying close to
men and women and looking on them,
and in the contact and order of them,
that pleases the soul well.
All things please the soul,
but these please the soul well.*

— Walt Whitman
Read by Ed Loring, May 18, 1974

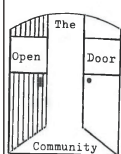


Giving thanks to each of you for sharing
all your gifts with us
over these 50 years!!

Love,
Nibs and Caroline
May 18, 2024

HOSPITALITY

newspaper issues
from 1982 to the present
are now available at:
www.opendoorcommunity.org



HOSPITALITY

Volume 1, No. 1
January, 1982
910 Ponce de Leon Ave. N.E. Atlanta, Ga. 30306 404-874-9652

What Is The “OPEN DOOR”?

This is the first edition of The Open Door’s newsletter and needless to say, we are excited about it! Hopefully you will hear from us 5 or 6 times a year with news about our ministry, our common life and the needs of our sisters and brothers on the streets and in the prisons. We value such a newsletter as a very important way to keep in touch with you, our co-workers and supporters--the folks who make our work possible.

Our website is back, please stop by for a visit!

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Ed,

When I got my hot-off-the-press copy of *A Bag of Snakes* I went right at it. Reading quickly, I still knew there was a lot in there to absorb and treasure.

A couple of weeks later I picked up the book again, this time to read more carefully to deepen my understanding of your and Murphy's work.

Murphy's bold description of prison as housing for the poor is compelling. Her passion for justice is a lot more than just words. Murphy steadily advocated for the poor, urging care & love (loving care) for those whose skin color or poverty create an "us and them" imbalance.

Ed, your prison sermons made it clear why David chose to become part of ODC. Way to go, David!

My experience at Alderson (WV) Federal Prison Camp showed the possibility of building community in prison. Sister Carol Gilbert drew a lot of women to her, and many became "Sisters." But men? C'mon Ed, your sermons made it really seem possible.

I'm halfway thru a second reading and getting a deeper understanding of the passion & endurance of your work.

Thank you,
Nikki Day
Greenville, South Carolina

Dear Ed,

I was moved by your wonderful book, *A Bag of Snakes*. What a tribute to your & Murphy's ministry!

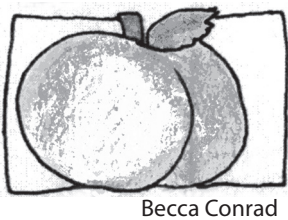
You both have been tireless & stalwart! I had no idea how you managed to minister, year after year, and stick up for those left behind in prison & especially at their electrocution. What a legacy for you both!

Much love,
Ed Crouch
Seattle, Washington

Dear Friends:

I so appreciate receiving *Hospitality*, as well as all of the prophetic ministry in which you are engaged. Thank you, and many blessings as we continue to follow the one who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

Rev. Alexandra Lusak
Asheville, North Carolina



Becca Conrad

Dear Ed & David,

I am so grateful for the two copies of *A Bag of Snakes* that I was sent, bringing back memories of when I first connected with you in Atlanta & onward. Intimate stories, history & continuation of the life & lives of so many that influenced me in my journey for justice.

So good to see & hear from the never-ending power of love that starts with a few impassioned disciples who lay down their lives in solidarity with Jesus in all his guises to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom spelled out in the Beatitudes for those able to see into the cloud of witnesses.

I have been appreciating looking deeper into both of your contributions to the book as well as Murphy's, what a labor of love! I've shared the book with our Presbyterian husband & wife pastors & so the beat goes on.

My sincere love & respect,
Pat Tompkins
Bakersville, North Carolina

HOSPITALITY prays

Prayer is the heart of a genuine Christian radicalism. — Ron Ferguson

Prayer for Political Vision

O God of all,

Some folks advocate for a president
who will bring more prosperity to the wealthy, and oppose "free rides" for the poor,
who will oppose health care for all, and erect walls to keep out frantic immigrants,
who favors arming all citizens in order to save lives.
who will "make America great again."

Others advocate for a national leader
who will inspire equity among all people,
who will seek peace in Gaza, Ukraine, our Southern border and other war zones,
who will help us end our epidemic of gun violence,
who will bring hope to those who are poor, unsheltered or uninsured, and
who will reform our broken criminal justice system.

Still others see no viable presidential candidate, have elected to disengage, and will not vote.

So now our nation's political diatribe is erupting into hatred and violence.
Competing visions for the nation are dividing us.
Friends and family are clashing.
Truth is being bent to justify self-serving opinions.
Power is used to keep people "in their places."

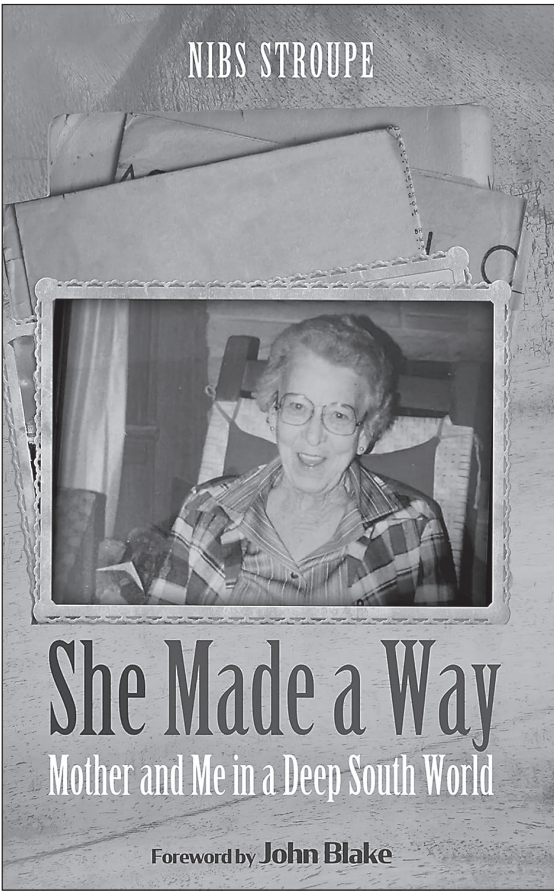
O God, please *deliver* us from being so deeply fractured.
Help us to set aside our war-like ways and to seek Your vision for the nation.
Make us hungry for a just peace and grace-filled compassion.
Remove from us the fears that make us blind to the needs of others.
Inspire us to trust YOU more than any political ideology.
Grant us the wisdom faithfully to discern Your way.
Raise up honest leaders who unite us for the common good.

Thank You, O God, for Jesus the Christ...
who embodied Your vision for a godly public life,
who brings hope amidst our despair, unity amidst our division, and
who invites us boldly to follow in the Way of Jesus.

Thank You for the gift of love that heals and emboldens us for YOUR mission. AMEN.

— Lee Carroll, July 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)



She Made a Way
Mother and Me in a Deep South World

by **Nibs Stroupe**

Wipf and Stock Press
275 pages
June 2024

I know this story so well because I was one of those journalists who stopped by Oakhurst to write about Nibs and the church. But unlike the other journalists, I stayed and joined Oakhurst. And what I discovered was that the story behind Nibs' conversion on race was no racial kumbaya story. It was much richer, confounding, and ultimately more inspiring than any brief news report could capture. And today I would make another argument: At a time when the United States is more divided than arguably anytime since the Civil War, Nibs' story is more urgent than ever. Nibs is one of the most insightful and thought-provoking commentators on race and religion in contemporary America. His range of experience is virtually unmatched by any of the leaders that the media traditionally go to for commentary on race and faith.

— From the Foreword by John Blake

Order your copy today:
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or from Nibs: nibs.stroupe@gmail.com