

HOSPITALITY

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

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March 20, 2024 at Jackson State Prison during the execution of Willie Pye. Cathy Harmon-Christian, Executive Director of Georgians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty (GFADP), holds his picture.

AJC | Natrice Miller

For Whom the Bell Tolls

By Mary Catherine Johnson

One year ago, in March of 2024, an intellectually disabled man named Willie James Pye was executed by the state of Georgia. Since I began my work to end the death penalty in Georgia in 2008, I have been a part of over 30 executions, and all of them have affected me deeply, but the execution of Willie Pye was particularly hard. It was the first execution in Georgia in over four years, and I had grown delightfully accustomed to my execution-free state.

But then March 20, 2024, arrived, and once again I had to lead a vigil on the night of an execution, a short distance from where Willie Pye would be put to death. A familiar rush of emotions came flooding back — sadness, despair, anger — and grief overcame me. Even during dark moments like that, I know from experience that resurrection always comes, and hope is always restored. Love always wins, and grace bats last, but in the midst of an execution, it's often difficult to see the path that will lead us there, and that night I was overwhelmed with hopelessness.

Our beloved U.S. Senator Raphael Warnock from Georgia loves to quote Psalm 30, "Joy comes in the morning," and it did come for me the morning after Willie Pye's execution. This time my comfort and joy came in the form of pictures and stories from Georgians For Alternatives to the Death Penalty's (GFADP) state-wide vigils the night before. As I scanned the internet and social media for news about Willie Pye's execution, I came across photo after photo of people standing up and showing up for Willie — beautiful people holding signs of justice and love, singing and praying, and showing the world the path away from death and toward the light of life.

That morning someone sent me a video of the bells chiming at Central Presbyterian Church in Atlanta at the designated hour of execution, across the street from the GFADP vigil at the Georgia State Capitol. Tears came to my eyes as I listened to those majestic bells ring out, signaling to our fellow citizens that our brother Willie Pye had been unjustly murdered by the state, and that we envision a day when the barbaric practice of executions has ended.

Then as the day continued, I heard stories about other churches throughout Georgia that rang their bells for Willie the

night before. Thinking about the sound of those bells, and all of the people who kept vigil for Willie the night before, filled me with hope, and I felt the fog of the execution lift.

A Call To Action

The expression "for whom the bell tolls" was coined by the poet John Donne in his meditation on the inter-connectedness of all people, surmising that a tolling church bell during a funeral was not just for the person who died, but meant to remind us of our kinship with, and responsibility to, our fellow humans. The phrase was popularized later when Ernest Hemingway titled his 1940 novel about the Spanish Civil War *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, which extolled the virtues of solidarity with the allied groups fighting the fascists of Hemingway's day, and our moral duty to resist fascism.

A year after Willie Pye's execution I can still hear those bells tolling in his honor as I watch a new president do his best to undo the progress we have made in purging the U.S. of the death penalty. He issued a mandate in his first days in office that resumes federal executions and offers federal support to the states as they ramp up their efforts to maintain and carry out capital punishment. Willie Pye's bells are a call to action, an antidote to the helplessness that many of us are feeling in the face of fascist ideology taking hold in our country.

I speak from personal experience when I tell you that taking part in your state's legislative process is not only effective, it is also an incredible jolt of good energy that will inspire and sustain you in these difficult times.

It is often hard to know what type of action to take, or even where to begin. I'd like to suggest that you start at your state legislature. Discern which causes are nearest and dearest to your heart and then align with the local groups working on those issues. Find out how and when those groups will be lobbying for their causes at your state capitol and then show up for their lobby days. Find out who your legislators are and call them or email them to let them know how you feel about your causes and about any bills

that may be on the agenda that will impact your causes.

I speak from personal experience when I tell you that taking part in your state's legislative process is not only effective, it is also an incredible jolt of good energy that will inspire and sustain you in these difficult times. You will meet kindred spirits who care about the same things that you do, and who will stand by your side as you summon the courage to speak truth to power. Even when your cause does not prevail, you have taken part in a vital exercise of seed-planting that will blossom later.

This year one of my chosen groups – GFADP – led the charge to introduce HB123 in the Georgia state legislature. This bill seeks to amend Georgia law relating to criminal procedure in cases where the death penalty is sought when the accused has an intellectual disability, thus ensuring that the accused is not eligible for the death penalty. Had this law been in place at the time of Willie James Pye's crimes, I seriously doubt he would have received the death penalty.

I took part in the course of HB123 at every step of the way, and it was exhilarating. A highlight was the GFADP Lobby Day in February, where I called my local representative "to the ropes" — an expression that means I sent a request to him through a legislative page to come out and talk to me at the series of red ropes outside of the House chamber. I knew that my representative, as a conservative Republican, would not be politically aligned with me in many, if any, ways, but I also knew that I had to take the chance that he would be willing to listen to my views as his constituent. I hoped that we could relate to one another as fellow humans seeking justice for some of the most vulnerable citizens of our state.

Not only was my representative willing to engage with me in a meaningful discussion about HB123, it turned out he was also on the committee that was vetting the bill before sending it to the House for a vote. That committee eventually voted unanimously to send HB123 forward, which means my rep voted for it! I'll never know for sure if my interaction with him made a difference, but it sure did feel good to lend my voice to the process.

When a bill comes up for a vote in the Georgia House of Representatives, the Speaker of the House rings a bell over and over again as the votes are illuminated on a large monitor. During the voting for HB123, the bell ringing only lasted about 30 seconds, but it was an incredibly thrilling 30 seconds — matching the accelerated beating of my heart — as I realized the bill was not only going to pass, but it was going to pass with 172 yeas and zero nays.

As the potential impact of this victory sank in, I began to think of some of the people on death row whom I have known over the years — the ones who struggled, and often failed, to prove their intellectual disability to a judicial system indifferent, or even hostile, to their situation. At the committee level, the prosecutors who opposed HB123 claimed that no one with an intellectual disability had ever been executed in Georgia, which those of us who work

directly with the people on death row and their attorneys knew to be a lie. Now we were one step closer to exposing that lie and protecting the Willie Pyes of our community from execution.

Epitaph

I am writing this article on March 5th, on what would have been the 77th birthday of Murphy Davis, my beloved mentor and co-founder of the Open Door Community. I think of Murphy often, and I feel her presence in so much of what I do at New Hope House, of which she was a founder.

The first time I met Murphy was at the Georgia State Capitol in 2009, at a GFADP Lobby Day. Of course I knew about Murphy's work to end the death penalty prior to that day — everyone in the anti-death penalty community knew who Murphy was — but that was my first time seeing her in the flesh.

Like all who were present that day, I was drawn in by Murphy's passionate speech at the press conference — words that were formed by her long-haul activism and her direct experience with the stories of the people impacted by the death penalty in Georgia. In those days, we viewed our lobbying efforts as mostly symbolic, laying the groundwork for the day when one of our bills related to the death penalty actually had a chance of being passed. Murphy's words gave us both the strength and the roadmap for pressing ahead. She knew that the day would come when the bells of the Georgia legislature would be tolling in support of people facing the death penalty in Georgia, and that day finally came in March of 2025 when HB123 passed the House with no opposition. Whether this bill becomes law in Georgia remains to be seen. It still needs to pass the Senate and then avoid a veto from Georgia Governor Brian Kemp. It's an uphill climb to victory, but with so many beautiful people helping to push this bill up the hill, and with the soundtrack of



*Mary Catherine Johnson
at Willie Pye's Vigil.*

gorgeous pealing bells in our ears, I trust that HB123 will make it to the other side.

**For Murphy Davis
For Willie James Pye
And Everyone With Intellectual Disability
Who Has Been Executed In Georgia ♣**

Mary Catherine Johnson is Executive Director of New Hope House, a ministry that accompanies the people on Georgia's death row and their families. <http://www.newhopehousega.org> (mcjohnson78@yahoo.co)

Editor's Note: As this issue was published, both the Georgia House and Senate passed HB 123. It awaits the governor's signature to become law. More to come in the next issue.



Murphy Davis ¡Presente!



Hospitality and Support
for People on
Georgia's Death Row
and Their Families



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404-273-0621
www.newhopehousega.org

2024 MURPHY DAVIS CHRISTMAS PACKAGES FOR GEORGIA'S DEATH ROW



Because of your generosity, every person on Georgia's death row received a bountiful box of Christmas gifts that included cookies, candy, popcorn, chips, condiments, notepads, toiletries, socks, and a warm hat.

"I just got my Murphy Davis box and I absolutely love it... I am wearing my socks right now and they truly are the softest socks ever :-) Thank you so much for making my Christmas so special. The Murphy Davis volunteers and donors are the rarest of gifts. And I appreciate you all so much. Words can't even really express the depth of my gratitude. It still surprises me that people that I don't even know and that don't gain anything from being kind to me can be so compassionate and generous. It gives me hope for humanity truly. Oh and I was just thinking about how good some blue cheese dressing would be in my rice and chicken wrap that I make and now I have it. That is so crazy lol when I got it, I knew it was a God wink. So special." **-Tiffany Moss, Georgia's Death Row**



THANK YOU
DONORS &
VOLUNTEERS!

Layout by Mary Catherine Johnson

My Season with Kenyatta

By John Cole Vodicka

I've known Kenyatta Booze for almost two years. On July 12, 2023, I met him at the Clarke County jail in Athens, Georgia, after I'd handed \$21 to the release officer to purchase Mr. Booze's pretrial liberty. He'd been unable to post this small bond and been locked up seven days for trespassing at one of Athens' public parks. Since that day in July 2023, my church's community bail fund has posted seven small bonds — ranging from \$1 to \$33 — on Mr. Booze's behalf.

In fact, since July 5, 2023, the 58-year-old Mr. Booze has spent a total of 531 pretrial days in our jail. He's been arrested more than a dozen times over the past 20 months, *all* arrests alleging he committed misdemeanor offenses. He's been busted for trespassing in our parks, in a local drug store's parking lot (a half-dozen times), behind a grocery store (where he was sleeping in a shed), outside a chiropractor's office (where he was using a garden hose to wash himself). Back in September 2023, Mr. Booze committed his most serious misdemeanor crime, shoplifting, after he went into Walmart and attempted to walk out with "Payday candy bars, a package of Snickers, Blow-Pops, a Coke Zero, Reese's Peanut Butter Cups, a pair of socks, blue jeans and earbuds."

Kenyatta Booze has been in jail more than out over the past several years. When he's out, I've managed to spend time with him whenever I provide transportation to his courthouse hearings, or visit with him on the streets of Athens. He has two adult children.

He played football in high school. He drove 18-wheelers for a living. I've also gotten to know Mr. Booze's 83-year-old mother, Dorothy Griffin, who lives an hour away in Lawrenceville but still has managed to get to Athens to attend some of his court hearings.

"My son is not a criminal," Ms. Griffin told me. "Something happened to him several years ago, and he's not right anymore. He's never been like this." Dorothy Griffin is convinced that her son needs neurological treatment in an appropriate care facility. "Just to look at him and to hear him speak should be obvious to anyone that Kenyatta isn't right," she said. "He has a hard time putting a sentence together now. He stumbles when he walks, and his hands and arms are always flailing about. When he's sitting, his head jerks back and forth."

But try telling any of this to the court officials in Athens, Georgia. Three months ago, on January 6, 2025, Mr. Booze appeared at a misdemeanor court status hearing. He'd been in jail over four months this time around, again charged with trespassing at the local grocery store. In a bewildering turn of events that day, Mr. Booze's public defender Sydney Crudo brokered an agreement with the prosecutor that allowed her client to plead guilty to two of his twelve outstanding misdemeanor cases. The remaining

ten cases would be dismissed. The guilty plea would result in Mr. Booze being sentenced to 12 months confinement, suspended upon his entering a long-term, inpatient recovery program in nearby Jackson County. According to lawyer Crudo, the sober living facility had already conducted a telephone interview with Mr. Booze and had accepted him, sight unseen.

Kenyatta Booze entered his plea of guilty to the two trespassing charges. "Are you entering this plea freely and voluntarily?" Judge Charles Auslander III asked Mr. Booze.

"Yessir."

"I'm happy for this outcome," the judge announced from the bench, as the shackled Mr. Booze stood spasming and tossing his head from side-to-side. And then the judge offered this off-handed comment: "Mr. Booze, I enjoy seeing you in court. You're always so positive."

Kenyatta Booze remained in the Clarke County jail for 42 more days waiting for a bed to become available at the treatment facility. On February 17, I picked him up from the jail to take him to the rural institution. On our way there, I asked him if anyone had been present with him when he did the telephone intake at the jailhouse. Was his lawyer there? The public defender's social worker? "Nope, just me." He said the interview lasted at most ten minutes. When we pulled into the treatment center parking lot, a gentleman appeared at the car and escorted Mr. Booze into a nearby office building. "We have to drug test him and then we'll be back out to get his belongings." I had purchased



John Cole Vodicka

socks, underwear, t-shirts, toiletries and a few clothing items to leave with Mr. Booze.

Kenyatta Booze has been in jail more than out over the past several years.

I had sat in my car for thirty minutes when Mr. Booze walked out of the office building, now accompanied by a female employee. "Are you family?" she asked me. "A good friend," I replied. "Well, we're not going to be able to accept Mr. Booze," she announced. "Does he have anywhere else he can go?" I was dumbfounded.

"I was told he'd been accepted here, and that you all had agreed to admit him after you had a phone interview with him. He has no place else to go — except back to jail." "We didn't know that he had physical limitations," the young woman apologized. "We're a program that requires the men to work while they are with us, to help pay for their room and board. He doesn't meet that requirement." The staff member told me she would make a few phone calls to see if there might be another program that would consider accepting Mr. Booze.

Forty-five minutes later we were still sitting in the car. No one ever returned with any information. Kenyatta Booze and I drove back to Athens to the courthouse, where Mr. Booze's public defender was busy entering guilty pleas for other indigent clients. She told us her social worker was on the way to the courthouse to speak with Mr. Booze.

The social worker never showed up. Instead, while the three of us were sitting outside the courtroom, Ms. Crudo phoned a for-profit company called "Sober Living America." Sober Living America is an addiction-recovery corporation that owns and operates a half-dozen facilities in Georgia. Ms. Crudo explained to whoever answered the phone that her client needed an inpatient treatment bed ASAP, and what would he have to do to gain admission?

"Put him on the phone." Here is how Kenyatta Booze answered Sober Living America's intake specialist's questions: "I'm 58." "I'm homeless." "I really don't have a problem with drugs or alcohol." "Okay."

And then he handed the phone back to Ms. Crudo. "Do you know how soon?" she asked the intake person. Then, "Thank you. Bye." "You've been accepted," she told Mr. Booze. "Maybe as soon as sometime this week." The judge ordered Mr. Booze to return to jail to spend a few more days serving the 12-month sentence until he could be transported by the sheriff to the Sober Living America's Jonesboro, Georgia franchise, two hours from Athens. That all happened on Monday, February 17.

Four days later, on Friday, February 21, Kenyatta Booze was still in the Clarke County jail. He was brought back to court because apparently Sober Living America, like the Jackson County treatment program, was having second thoughts about accepting him. Their program also required residents to maintain employment and pay for room, board and treatment costs. Clearly frustrated (and I'm convinced ready to wash his hands of Mr. Booze), Judge Auslander announced he was ending the case altogether. "Mr. Booze has already spent nearly five months in jail, and if he were to get a day's credit for every day served he'd be just a few weeks shy of serving the 12-month sentence," the judge reasoned. "I'm concluding this matter. Mr. Booze, you'll be able to get out of jail Monday morning. I'm ordering that the sheriff release you to Mr.

Vodicka at 10 a.m., Monday, February 24." Really, Judge? Released to what? And where?

Kenyatta Booze walked out of the Clarke County jail that Monday morning. Sitting in my car in the jail parking lot, we talked about his options. He'd stayed at the Salvation Army shelter on previous occasions, but that shelter was closed indefinitely for renovations. The only other adult shelter in Athens, Bigger Vision, has a first call-first serve policy. If you are seeking an overnight bed there, you have to call them at 4 p.m. and hope your call is among the first received. Even if you are lucky enough to land an overnight bed, you can't check in until 6 p.m. and have to leave the building the following morning at 5 a.m.

"Take me to the church downtown," Mr. Booze said. "I'll get some lunch there." We drove to First Baptist Church. I gave Mr. Booze a used backpack stuffed with the socks and underwear and t-shirts I'd bought him for his now abandoned treatment program. I added a gray hoodie to the mix. I gave him a little spending money and walked back to my car. We hugged. "It gonna be alright, John." An hour or so later, I spotted Mr. Booze, walking alone on Prince Avenue, heading in the direction of the grocery store from which he's been barred.

The very next day, Tuesday, February 25, around 10 a.m., almost exactly 24 hours from the time he'd left the jail with me the day before, Kenyatta Booze was arrested and jailed. This from ACCPD officer Kalina Thurmond's report:

"The suspect was identified as Kenyatta Booze. Wearing a gray sweatshirt with the hood up and blue jeans. I went to speak to the manager of Bell's, who stated that they had video footage of Mr. Booze on their property. After viewing the video footage of a B/M wearing a gray sweatshirt with the hood up and blue jeans identical to what Mr. Booze was wearing when I encountered him, he was placed under arrest for criminal trespass." ♦

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. (johncvodicka@gmail.com)

I'm Dying

"Just kidding," my friend said,
"But I do have a skin cancer, which could get me.
I'm over 80, no spring chicken, and with more aches and pains.
While happy with my life, I miss more friends who are starting to die off.
It's sobering to be an activist who may not live to meet my goals.
I feel so helpless against earth's heating and pollution,
Yet rejoice we can still give and receive love,
And I'm so very grateful for this moment!"

— Ed Crouch

Born in China, the son of Presbyterian missionaries, Ed Crouch is a retired Seattle social worker seeking to promote love and justice. He organized Occupation-Free Seattle to persuade the city to stop investing in three American corporations that engage in gross human rights violations in the Occupied Palestine Territories: Caterpillar, Hewlett-Packard and Motorola. (gecrouch61@gmail.com)

In Trumpworld

By Nibs Stroupe

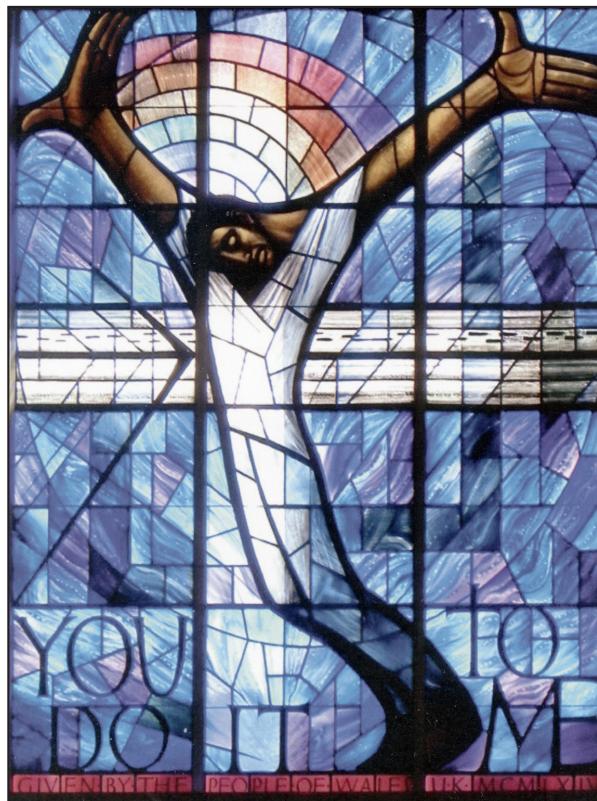
The Season of Lent began on Ash Wednesday, March 5. It is a season of reflection, action and purpose as Christians prepare for the climactic events of Holy Week when Jesus of Nazareth is executed by the Roman empire because he was seen as a threat to their order. It is a season when we are reminded of our captivity to the powers of racism, sexism, materialism, militarism and homophobia.

This season came none too soon for those of us in American society, where Trumpism culture seems to be in its triumphant mode. The first two months of the second Trump administration have demonstrated that he means to be emperor this time, and that his minions will carry out his orders, which seek to drag us back to a time when everybody acknowledged that white men should be in charge of everything. He has shown us his scorched earth policy, both literally in regard to the environment and figuratively in regard to human rights. Though he is not yet the Roman emperor type he aspires to be, his policies seem hell-bent on destroying any small gains in terms of equity and inclusivity.

It is a very old story in American history, where we must always confront our original sin: the development of the system of race in order to justify slavery, in order to justify the idea espoused by those classified as "white" — those classified as "colored" or "non-white" are not quite the human beings that "white" people are. This split in the categories of humanity allowed the slavers to hold other human beings as slaves, all the while heralding the idea of equality and all the while calling ourselves "Christians." It allowed my generation in neo-slavery times to maintain an iron, oppressive hold on those classified as "Black." Many dedicated freedom fighters made it possible to destroy neo-slavery with the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965. But, whenever some progress is made in American history to move us toward the ideal of equality, there is a reaction among white people

that calls out leaders and demagogues who seek to take us back to the days of white supremacy.

This tendency began in its most recent iteration in the *Brown v. Board* decision in 1954. In that decision, the Supreme



The Wales Window for Alabama

Created by John Petts, the window was a gift from the people of Wales, UK to the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama.

Court unanimously overturned *Plessy v. Ferguson* of 1896, when SCOTUS ruled that "separate but equal" was the law of the land. Fifty-four years later on May 17, 1954, SCOTUS declared that "separate but equal" was unconstitutional. White people, especially white Southerners, have resisted that ruling ever since. It flowed into Richard Nixon's "Southern Strategy" and then into Ronald Reagan's kicking off his presidential campaign in 1980 in Neshoba County, Mississippi, where three civil rights workers had been kidnapped and murdered in 1964. George H.W. Bush continued it with the Willie Horton campaign, and Donald Trump has made it explicitly clear that an iron-clad return of white supremacy is his goal as president.

We are in one of those reactive times now, though the Trumpster seems to bring an especially virulent strain of this deadly curse. In the season of Lent, we are asked — indeed, it is demanded — to find ways to resist this captivity, to resist this magnetic pull back toward white supremacy.

Most of the Lenten practices over history have emphasized giving up something in a fast for Lent. I want to suggest that in this Lenten season in 2025, that we dedicate ourselves to at least five practices that will steel us and fire us for the hard days to come.

First, the season of Lent is a time of despair, a time when we are reminded of our deep captivity to sin, to powers like racism and sexism and materialism. We are asked to face the Cross of Jesus straight on, with no filters. The Trumpster takeover of American politics is one of the current incarnations of that captivity, and our despair is great. I was reminded recently by one of my African American friends that their history is what many white people are experiencing now — a deep sense of despair and oppression and loss. They also reminded me that those of us classified as "white" need to learn from them and their experience: in the midst of despair, find ways to express the deep pain, and then seek sources of hope and even joy. So, our first step in this Lenten season is to express our pain, then seek to find sources of hope and joy in a depressing and oppressing time.

The second Lenten practice is more practical: boycotting those businesses and industries which seem to be yielding or even trumpeting the Trumpster: Walmart, Amazon, Target, Hobby Lobby and many others. The total boycott on February 28 was just a beginning step in this. And don't forget to support businesses who are resisting the Trumpster's attack on diversity, equity and inclusivity.

The third Lenten practice is to find your voice for justice and equity, to speak up and act out. You can participate in demonstrations and marches against the Trumpian capture of American culture. Fortunately, there are many of those around,

and the more prevalent they are, of course the more likely that the Trumpians will respond with threats and other actions. These do make a difference, so find your place in them.

The fourth practice is to contact your political reps by email, letter and phone, especially by phone. In the state of Georgia, we've heard that for state legislators, ten phone calls on any issue means that the house is on fire, and they must respond. This is not a time to be silent and wait for the crisis to pass.

The fifth Lenten practice is to be in dialogue with others, and this works on two levels. First, be in discussion with friends and allies about these issues, so

that you can build a community of support that will sustain us all in these hard times, especially when more overt suppression comes. And, if we resist enough, those persecutions will come. Second, be in touch with Trump supporters, so that you can learn their discontents and longings that led them to support Trump in the first place. There will be openings for movement as Trump begins to alienate those supporters also.

In this particular season of American history, it is much easier to understand the season of Lent, the stunning and destructive power of the Cross. Lent is a time when we are asked to remember our captivity to sin, and in our current political

situation, that captivity is front and center. Let us keep that before us and let us find ways to resist, to speak up and act out. Let us look for the Resurrection. ♣

*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)*

Manifesto: The Mad Farmer Liberation Front

Love the quick profit, the annual raise,
vacation with pay. Want more
of everything ready-made. Be afraid
to know your neighbors and to die.
And you will have a window in your head.
Not even your future will be a mystery
any more. Your mind will be punched in a card
and shut away in a little drawer.
When they want you to buy something
they will call you. When they want you
to die for profit they will let you know.

So, friends, every day do something
that won't compute. Love the Lord.
Love the world. Work for nothing.
Take all that you have and be poor.
Love someone who does not deserve it.
Denounce the government and embrace
the flag. Hope to live in that free
republic for which it stands.
Give your approval to all you cannot
understand. Praise ignorance, for what man
has not encountered he has not destroyed.

Ask the questions that have no answers.
Invest in the millennium. Plant sequoias.
Say that your main crop is the forest
that you did not plant,
that you will not live to harvest.
Say that the leaves are harvested
when they have rotted into the mold.
Call that profit. Prophesy such returns.

Put your faith in the two inches of humus
that will build under the trees
every thousand years.
Listen to carrion – put your ear
close, and hear the faint chattering
of the songs that are to come.
Expect the end of the world. Laugh.
Laughter is immeasurable. Be joyful
though you have considered all the facts.
So long as women do not go cheap
for power, please women more than men.
Ask yourself: Will this satisfy
a woman satisfied to bear a child?
Will this disturb the sleep
of a woman near to giving birth?

Go with your love to the fields.
Lie down in the shade. Rest your head
in her lap. Swear allegiance
to what is highest your thoughts.
As soon as the generals and the politicos
can predict the motions of your mind,
lose it. Leave it as a sign
to mark the false trail, the way
you didn't go. Be like the fox
who makes more tracks than necessary,
some in the wrong direction.
Practice resurrection.

— Wendell Berry

Wendell Berry was born in Kentucky and is an American novelist, poet, essayist, environmental and political activist, cultural critic and farmer. He is a 2013 Fellow of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences and, since 2014, a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He has been arrested several times for his political activism. "The Mad Farmer" poem is from his book *Country of Marriage*, published in 1973.

Doing The Hard Work

A Review of *She Made a Way*

By Anthony Granberry

We were headed somewhere in my father's Buick. I was only six years old and did not know where, yet I was guardedly excited that we were all together. It was usually just my mother and us kids. We all lived together, but my parents often bickered, so harmonious family time was a rarity. Sunday drives to church were a family ritual, but this drive was not on a Sunday. After a relatively short ride from the Florida panhandle, we arrived at a restaurant in a small South Georgia town.

We parked and walked toward the restaurant. We had never eaten dinner together at a restaurant. This outing had the potential to become a wonderful, much needed family moment. But suddenly we turned around and walked back to the Buick. I'm not sure I actually saw the white man shoo us away — it all happened so fast. I believe I did because his image is clear in my memory. I did hear him say, "Y'all can't eat here!" Maybe the restaurant was closing for the day? I did not know. My father's anger told me that there was more to it. My mother focused on consoling us kids. Once safely back in the Buick, she explained that we would need to find another restaurant. She left it at that. My father was still exchanging choice words with the man. My sister recalls hearing our father say, "I'll burn this god-mn restaurant down!" These were bold words for a Black man to shout at a white man in the mid-1960s. We did not find another restaurant. We returned home. Our family had been robbed of quality time we so desperately needed. At least, I needed it. Did the white man understand why he sent us away, why he refused a Black family an opportunity to dine in his restaurant? Or was he only mimicking what he had seen and learned?

How often do we dive into the rationale behind our unwelcoming and unkind behaviors or seriously consider how these behaviors impact others? Do we understand why we were taught to view and treat others unkindly and whether or not we should carry these lessons forward? Author Nibs Stroupe seeks answers to these questions in his book, *She Made a*

Way: Mother and Me in the Deep South World.

Stroupe takes the reader back to Porter Street in Helena, Arkansas, where he, his mother and his maternal great-aunt created a loving home during the neo-slavery era. The reader will get to know Stroupe's mother well through this touching memoir, coming to love, respect and empathize with her as she struggled to raise her son in the 1950s Deep South where white supremacy and patriarchy reigned. Her routine

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

by **Nibs Stroupe**

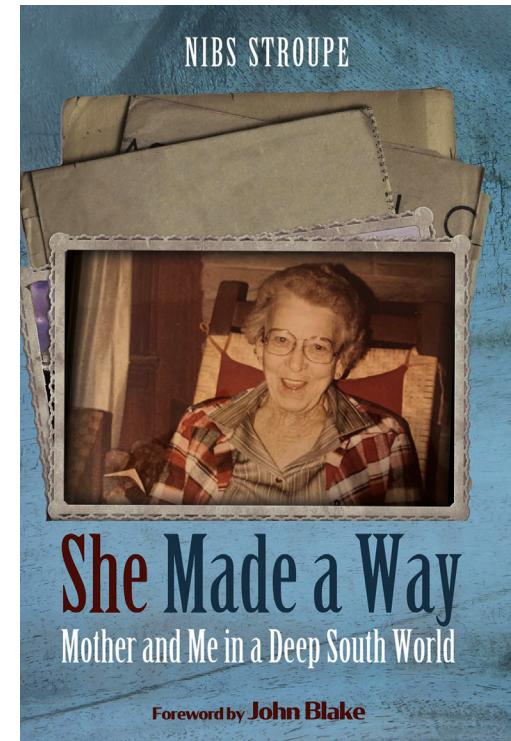
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defiant behaviors that gently pushed back against racism and sexism undoubtedly emboldened her son's search for a better, more Christ-like way. Nevertheless, the Deep South and its prejudices formed Stroupe's worldview, a worldview wrapped in the unconditional love and acceptance his mother gave him.

Our families, friends and communities often provide love and unconditional acceptance. These same people, however, are equally capable of teaching disdain for others. How do we perpetuate the unconditional love and acceptance we experience and not perpetuate the disdain that has bred prejudice and hate? Stroupe wrestles with this question.

Once he secured some degree of independence, he was able to avoid perpetuating the negative aspects of his indoctrination. His work revealed something that we are all likely to discover: The disdain for others that we learn through our family and community is so intertwined with the love and the nurture that the love, nurture and disdain feel like one and the same. We develop an affinity for all three. Thus, maintaining loving and nurturing relationships while rooting out the disdain is challenging.

It is worth noting that early on, Stroupe recognized the inconsistencies between what his church preached versus what they practiced. He describes his church this way: "We swam in the sea of



white supremacy and segregation, and no Black people were allowed to worship or be members there, although they cooked and cleaned and kept the nursery." It would have been easy for Stroupe to bask in the love of his community and to toe the line where its disdain for certain others was concerned, yet Stroupe was disturbed by the inconsistencies.

Hopefully we are all disturbed from time to time by the inconsistencies in our treatment of others, or how welcoming or not we are of certain others. Our society and world have experienced an uptick in incivility and meanness based in the "isms," resulting in a more hostile, unsafe world. What role have we played in this uptick? *She Made a Way: Mother and Me in the Deep South World* offers each of us a path to work through the negative teachings we received from those who love us and whom we love. To read Stroupe's book was to sit with him as he told me his life story. His sharing caused me to relive and to share portions of my own life story. Our dialogue was not simply about recalling warm, unforgettable and transcendent moments in our respective lives. Rather, our dialogue allowed us to critically revisit our experiences and to identify both the explicit and implicit lessons that caused us to perceive certain others as different from or inferior to us, legitimizing our mistreatment of them.

Stroupe's willingness to revisit his life story and to deconstruct the racist and sexist lessons he learned early on positioned him and his spouse to build a congregation that became known as "a vibrant multicultural community where a rainbow mixture of Black, white, straight, gay, affluent and working-class members not only shared pews, but power." Stroupe's difficult and redemptive work allowed him to discern solutions to problems faced by the Decatur, Georgia church that the prejudices of his youth would otherwise have disallowed.

For a number of reasons, my family

never dined together in a restaurant. I cannot blame this solely on that day in 1966. Other factors contributed to this unfortunate truth. But on that day in 1966, that man deprived us of what could have been a cherished family moment. Did the man understand why he sent us away that day? Do we understand why we send others away, even if we do so in more subtle ways? Do we consider how our incivility impacts persons, families and communities? Let's stop perpetuating our prejudiced teachings and begin perpetuating love and acceptance. Our world desperately

needs more love and acceptance. By sharing his own story, Nibs Stroupe offers us a path. ♦

Anthony Granberry is a pastoral counselor and psychotherapist in Decatur, Georgia. He is a licensed professional counselor and marriage and family therapist. He has over 30 years of counseling experience in professional settings as well as the parish. Anthony also served as pastor of Hartwell First Baptist Church, Hartwell, Georgia for seven years and provided pastoral care and counseling to the Open Door Community for 15 years. (agranberry@tacg.org)

HOSPITALITY prays

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

Deliver Us from Evil

O holy and loving God,

Jesus taught us to pray, "Deliver us from evil." (Matthew 6:13)

But in these chaotic and anxious days, we often feel overcome by evil.

We have elected officials who tell manipulative lies to gain power,
exploiting our fears when we are most vulnerable.

We have economic leaders who hoard personal and corporate wealth,
ignoring far too many who live in grinding poverty.

We have nations, including our own, which threaten war on weaker countries,
seeking to control their resources and policies.

We even have religious leaders who preach a so-called gospel of "Christian nationalism,"
disregarding your call for personal integrity and social justice.

So, dear loving God, in these difficult times we humbly pray...

— that you will *deliver us from evil*, so that we shall hear afresh your call...
to feed the hungry and quench the thirsty;
to welcome strangers into our homes, into our nations, into our lives;
to support those without adequate clothing and other essentials;
to care for the sick and imprisoned. (Matthew 25:31-46)

— that you will *deliver us from evil*, so that we shall...
do justice,
love kindness, and
walk humbly with you (Micah 6).

— that you will *deliver us from evil*,
calming our fears of the evil that swarms about us,
empowering us to speak and live your truth
amidst the narcissistic voices of greed and idolatry.

We are bold to offer these prayers,

trusting that our world — broken as it is — is indeed your *realm*, your dwelling place,
trusting that you will use your amazing power to bring justice and peace to all nations,
trusting that your glory will always be evident in the ways we serve you.

Amen...and amen!

— Lee Carroll, January/February/March 2025, in the months following Inauguration Day

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

Grace and Peaces of Mail

Dear Ed,

I wanted so much to send you and David a Christmas card, but this place is so lame. They didn't have any Christmas greeting cards in the store. On top of that, normally we would get Christmas cards from the chaplain, but the chaplain had a stroke about three weeks ago, so no cards were passed out to the compound. He came to Riverbend less than a year ago.

We came up short on winning the best dorm Christmas decorating competition this year. I think I told you and David we won it last year. The prize was two slices of pizza to each person and there's 64 guys in the dorm.

The dorm next door beat us out. The warden and her staff were more impressed with them. They were creative. They had a Christmas Lego decoration. They made a giant Lego Santa and have him on the door. But we were more creative with our Santa than they were. We had our Santa in a band with Santa on lead guitar and his bandmates were his elves. One was on drums and one was on the saxophone. Had them on stage with speakers and amplifiers. Four Christmas songs were

being played by the band. One of them was by the Jackson 5, one of my favorites: "I saw Mommy kissing Santa last night."

Just by looking at all the different decorations and all the dorms, you will probably find it hard to believe everything was made from cardboard and paper. We got robbed because some of the people on the warden's staff didn't want to see us win it back-to-back. Despite coming up short on winning it again this year, we were served the good Christmas dinner. Roast beef. It was a little tough for my taste. I ate it because I was hungry. They surprised us with Bojangles fried chicken. Christmas dinner was way better than what they gave us for Thanksgiving. For dessert, we were given a slice of pumpkin pie. I would rather have had some sweet potato pie or some pecan pie, which is my favorite. If I can get my hands on one of the pictures of our decorations, I will send it to you because I want you and David to see it. Happy New Year.

PS. My first letter of 2025.

Love,

Eli Beck
Georgia prisoner

Dear Open Door Community
Murphy Davis Prison Project,

Can we please have six calendars for the Chaplaincy Dept.? Thank you in advance.

If available, the other ladies would appreciate a calendar on the compound.

Sincerely,

Chaplain Gary Lucas
Pulaski State Prison
Hawkinsville, Georgia

Hello Ed:

Very strong article in current *Hospitality* about how you and Murphy have carved a solid path for the forgotten people in our country. I was impressed! We just subscribed to the online version — though nothing can quite replace the power of paper accounts (wasteful as they are).

You are still needed!

Love,
Ed Crouch
Seattle, Washington

The Box

Compiled by Ed Loring

A Service of Witness to the Resurrection in Celebration of the Life of
Dr. Ludwig Richard Max DeWitz
April 29, 1916-November 1, 2000

November 6, 2000

The first flag I stole from a church sanctuary was on November 6, 2000. At the conclusion of the funeral for Dr. DeWitz, I stood in the Narthex greeting old friends and enemies. I waited until everyone was gone. I took the flag and pole and went to a side room. I took the flag off the pole, folded it up, put it inside my shirt and departed undisturbed. Why? Because flags are a heresy of allegiance in the church. Dr. DeWitz was a German Jew who, with his mother, got out of Nazi Germany. The Nazi swastika in the German churches was a sign of allegiance to the Führer. In America it is the allegiance to American citizenship, not to Jesus.

— Ed Loring

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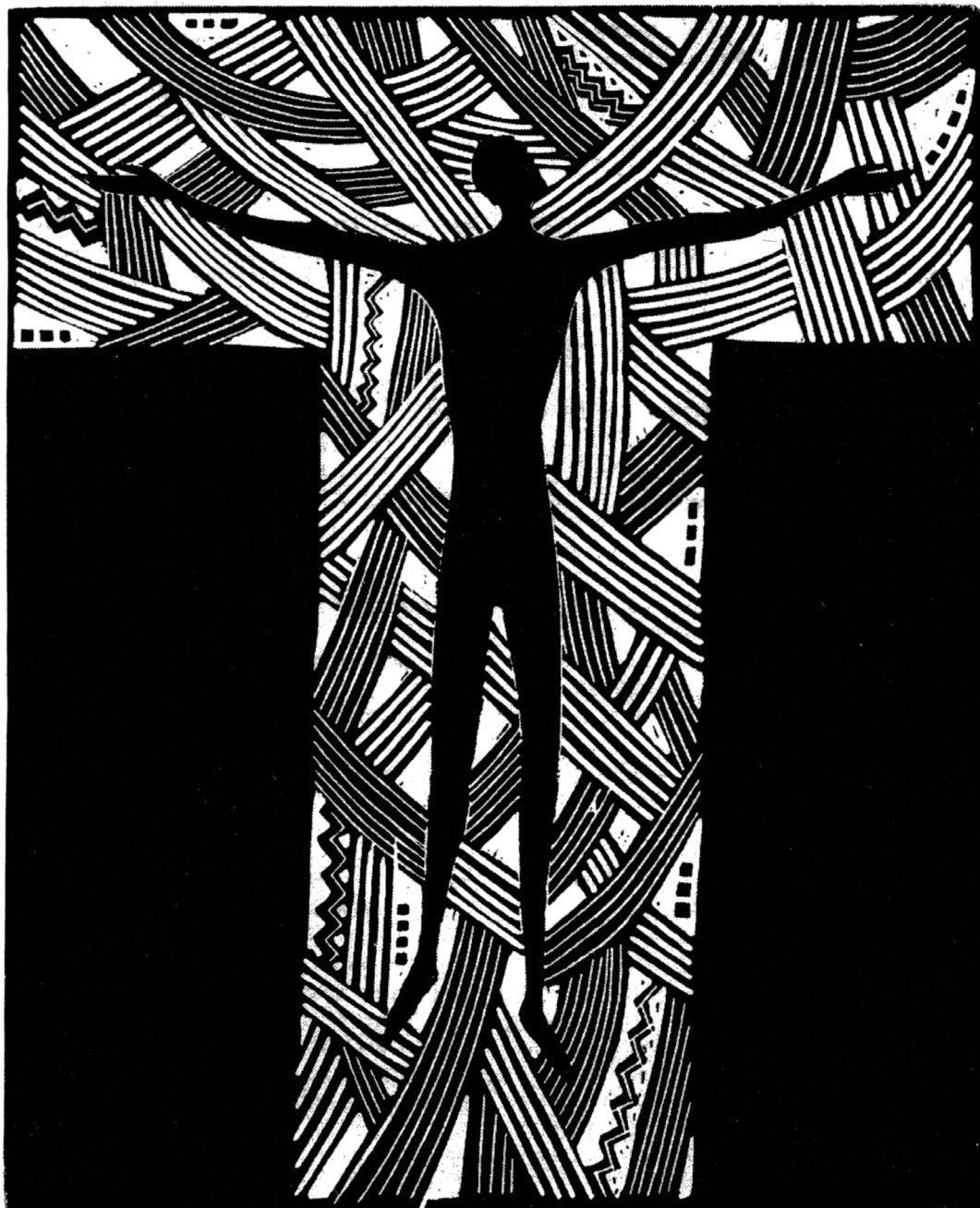
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He Is Risen | Lavrans Nielson