

Plummer Lecture Given to Illinois Yearly Meeting, Seventh Month 2002

Roxy Jacobs



Introduction of Roxy Jacobs, by Marlou Carlson

My friend Roxy and I may have unknowingly crossed paths many years ago as students at the same high school in Hammond, Indiana. Twenty-two years ago when we met as attenders of Duneland Friends Meeting there was between us an undefinable connection that has endured and developed into friendship and spiritual companionship. Roxy has served our monthly meeting as Presiding Clerk, Treasurer, First Day School Coordinator and teacher. She has served our yearly meeting as Reading Clerk and as a member and clerk of the Ministry and Advancement Committee. She is now serving as our Field Secretary and carries a Traveling Minute from this yearly meeting. In retirement from many years of teaching, Roxy loves to write. She will share some fruits of that love with us today.

Throughout her teaching and committee work Roxy has carried a special concern for helping people become responsible parents and for assuring safe, non-abusive places for our children. We have seen in her work continual faithful efforts to feed the hungry, give drink to the thirsty, invite within the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the prisoner. Those of you who have enjoyed her generous hospitality know that Roxy is also an animal lover. There's a cat she rescued from under the hood of a car at a rest stop. She adopted a retired greyhound and made him part of her family until he died. But most amazing was Jules, the donkey. While driving along a country road Roxy observed a farmer beating the donkey in

*frustration. After thinking about it for a few minutes, with the image of the mistreated animal in her mind, she turned around, went back and asked the farmer how much it would cost to buy the donkey. The surprised farmer agreed to sell and Roxy became the pleased owner of a donkey. Jules contentedly lived out his life in the pasture opposite the kitchen window helping to fertilize surrounding flower beds (and my garden). I can still hear the unearthly sound of his bray. And I hope that you can hear echoes of Jesus' teaching from Matthew 25, "to tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me."
(NIV)*

And grace will lead me home.



As a teacher I often taught through story telling. I used not only my own stories, but enjoyed building lessons around the stories of my students as well. I found great joy in creating a space that would invite these incredible stories to come forth and be given voice. Story telling is part of my Celtic heritage. Both of my Irish grandmothers were keepers of our family's stories and my Welsh/Irish father could transport a room full of people anywhere a story might lead. My son Carey, a natural mimic, uses his whole body to tell a story.

I am aware that my story touches upon and becomes a part of the stories belonging to other people. I speak today from a place of love. The metaphor of journey is a common one when telling of our spiritual lives and I have found that this image is helpful to me also. The writing of this account has become a significant marker for me on the journey, a place to pile stones.
This is a story about GRACE.

**Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a soul like me!**

It was 1943 when my mother brought me home from the hospital to live at grandma's house. I was born into a world of ration stamps and victory bonds; a time when the government asked grandma to turn in her pots and pans to become scrap metal for the war effort; a world where even one's forks and spoons were made into instruments of war. There were only four people in my life: mother, grandma, grandpa, and my uncle, who was somewhere in the South Pacific building airstrips for allied bombers. My mother was one of thousands of "Rosie the Riveters" working in munitions plants.

The memories I have of those first few years are just fragments. My earliest recollection is one of sound -- the sound of the treadle on grandma's old Singer combined with the rapid up and down *tck-tck-tck-tck-tck* of the needle. Grandma could sew so fast! That needle was a constant devourer of all yard goods fed into its path. As she sewed, lengths of fabric passed under the needle's sharp tooth and were spit out behind where they fell in colorful folds onto the floor.

While grandma sewed, I sat in a small chair next to the machine and struggled to sew odd buttons onto a square of cloth using a large needle and coarse thread. By the time I was four, I regularly stitched together crude little dresses for my dolls. I sewed small squares of scrap fabric into little quilts for the many doll beds and cradles I had made from small boxes or cardboard cylinders that had contained oatmeal or cornmeal. I played with the wooden spools that had held grandma's sewing thread as well as the squat cardboard tubes that were the center of her balls of crotchet cotton. I always had pencils, paper, scissors, crayons, and paste. I had a blackboard that could serve as an easel, and plenty of chalk and paints. I spent most of my time with grandma or quietly playing alone. Grandma would not tolerate idleness -- her hands were always busy, sewing, embroidering, tatting and crocheting, quilting, or making rugs. She expected me to be occupied as well. These were times of grace. How fortunate I was to have this time of learning and constant opportunity for creativity. These gifts have nourished and enriched all of my life.

Grandma also taught me to read. I was quite a good reader by the time I entered kindergarten at the school directly across the street. My first books were ones that had belonged to my mother and my uncle when they were children growing up in that same house. They were wonderful books. As my skills increased, there were fairy tales and stories of magic; tales of adventure, exploration and danger on the high seas; some were hero tales from history, like the stories of Socrates, Joan of Arc, and William Penn, my first Quaker.

I did not know any other children and, except on rare occasions, I was never allowed to play outdoors. I was not without sunshine, however. In late afternoons I was able to swing on the old green porch swing that hung on grandma's front porch. I have wonderful memories of the hours that I played school with my dolls on that porch. As an older child, I curled up in the swing to read or to write my first stories and poems. When I think of that porch, I can still smell the ailanthus trees that grew at each corner. Some people called them "Tree of Heaven," but grandma never did. I made believe that they were palm trees. In later years I often did my

homework there, even if I had to be bundled up against the cold of a late fall or an early spring. Grandma's house was my first home and would be my anchor long into adulthood.

My grandpa was a big man and I think he loved me right from the start. His special name for me was "Sugar." As a boy, he had traveled up and down the Mississippi with his mother and though he had only two years of formal schooling, he was one of the smartest men I have ever known. He was a knifsmith, a gunsmith, an inventor, and an artist who worked in oils and sculpted in metal. He was a grand storyteller and played the harmonica as well. One of my favorite memories is standing on grandpa's shoe tops while he danced me around the room singing "*Casey would waltz with a strawberry blonde*." Another comfortable memory is of grandma crocheting while grandpa read aloud from the *Saturday Evening Post* and I drew pictures to illustrate the stories. Grandpa frequently mispronounced words, but grandma was quick to correct him. There was always a discussion after the story and I was encouraged to participate. Years later I would become a literature teacher and continue to hold discussions like these with my students.

Life with grandma was a life with rules. Grandma had absolute power over everyone in the family. She created rules for all facets of daily life. Grandpa was expected to be home from work at the same time everyday. At 4:10 PM Grandma and I went outside to wait for him. If he were late by even 10 minutes, grandma's anger would last late into the night. Every day

Grandma checked his mileage and wrote it in a little book. Grandma had to know the whereabouts of everyone in the house at all times. After supper, Grandpa might be allowed to go to the basement where he worked with his tools or he could sit in his chair in the living room where he painted or read. We were not allowed to move from one room to another without permission. There were hundreds of rules covering everything from which way the spout on the teapot was pointed, to the precise minute the short window shade on the front door could be raised its exact 4 inches. All of the other windows were kept permanently covered, some by black paint. There were no visitors and we seldom went out except for errands. When I started school, I instinctively knew that I was not to talk about anything that concerned my family or home.

Grandma, grandpa, and mother are gone now, but I feel that I have their blessing to tell of my life in the way that I remember it. I often sensed their presence near me as I was writing and I feel that they are with me today, healed from life's hurts and whispering words of encouragement to my heart.

If one lived by the rules, grandma was content and sometimes even playful. If a rule was broken, the consequences were harsh. I was never spanked at grandma's house; my punishment took another form. I became a non-person. I was not looked at or spoken to. Sometimes I would hear grandma telling grandpa about "the bad little girl," but otherwise I did not exist, often for a couple of days. If grandpa broke a rule, we were not allowed to go to bed, sometimes all night. We had to sit in the front room in the dark while grandma talked for hours about how bad we were and how she suffered because of us. At those times she ceased to be grandma and became, instead, a disembodied voice coming terribly out of the darkness. We were not allowed to respond unless she asked a specific question, but then our answer would only provide more fuel for her rage. To this day I have a difficult time with questions

and generally just become quiet. I was always included in grandpa's punishment somehow, even though I had been good. Actually, I was good most of the time and I knew all the rules. I tried very hard to help grandpa with the rules and to cover up or divert grandma's attention when he failed. I seemed to be able to feel when those times were coming, even hours in advance.

My early life at grandma's was not without interruption -- every now and then my mother would come and steal away with me. Where we went and how we got there, I do not remember. I do know that one time we went as far as Michigan where I became very ill. Grandpa came to take me back home. Another scrap of memory from that period is of my mother holding me, wrapped inside her coat against the cold, while we waited on a street corner for grandpa to come for me one more time. Mother said we ran away many times before I was four.

My mother's name was Memory. Grandma said that when my mother was born many of the female relatives wanted grandma to name the baby in their honor. As grandma did not wish to alienate any of them by them choosing one over another, she named her "Memory" as a way of remembering them all. Whether or not this story is apocryphal I do not know, but it is one of the family stories that I treasure. My mother was darkly beautiful with a great capacity to love that was often over shadowed by deep depression. In many ways she was quite child like and unable to make wise decisions in her personal life. She was generous to all who were in need, often giving most of her paycheck to buy food, pay rent, or to provide clothing for those whom she knew had very little. The result was that she could not pay her own bills and was deeply shamed by the poverty that her own children endured.

My mother was first and foremost a dreamer. She did not always live in the world of "here-and-now" and when the realities of life at home pulled at her, she found it hard to cope. Mother was a gifted artist who painted lovely murals on any wall that for awhile, she could claim as her own. She often painted beautiful castles with cloud shrouded turrets over looking peaceful green valleys. My son Ron inherited her gift and years later would cover his bedroom walls with wonderfully elaborate drawings. Mother was also an excellent seamstress. When Tom and I were married in 1985, she made my wedding dress.

My mother had an appreciation of beauty and saw loveliness in all things and in all beings. One of her favorite songs was the hymn "Whispering Hope." She had it on an old 78-rpm record that she played over and over when I was young. It touched my life and I named my first daughter Hope. Mother liked stories of unselfish love, courage, and triumph over evil -- and she loved Bible stories. My mother, the self-described atheist, particularly loved stories and films about the life of Jesus. In her heart I know that she wanted them to be true. Once, when I was three or four years old, mother and I walked to *The Calumet*, a movie theatre where we saw Cecil B. De Mille's silent classic *King of Kings*. Even though I was small, one scene is still vivid in my mind. It is that of Jesus stumbling beneath the weight of the cross. I think that scene was given me to remember because there is a lesson in it for me, one that I am still in the process of learning.

Mother, having divorced my own father either shortly before or after I was born, remarried when I was four and took me to live with her. This had a profound effect on my life because the man she married was a pedophile. Life with mother, my stepfather, and a new little brother was one of extreme poverty and chaos. There were times of violence, hunger, no shoes, and the breaking up and burning of our scant furniture to keep warm. We were always on the move, from house to house and school to school. We often had no electricity or indoor plumbing. Life was full of secrets and I moved back and forth between mother and grandma. As the years passed, the sexual abuse at home continued and other men, both in and outside of the family, joined the list of perpetrators.

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**I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.**

God came for me when I was nine. I know I had a sense of God when I was even younger, but lacked words to speak of it. I had read a collection of Bible stories written for children that included *Noah and The Ark*; *David and Goliath*; *Samson and Delilah*; and *The Children in the Fiery Furnace*; but these were not related to the unnamed god in my heart.

I asked for and received a Bible for my ninth birthday. There were no Bibles among the books my family owned. Grandpa, who was quite vocal about being an atheist, expounded Darwinism whenever a subject called for it; and this was the one area where grandma seemed to have no opinion. My mother also thought herself an atheist as I have already mentioned, but I have reasons to doubt if that were really true. There was no one I could talk to about God, and even if there were, by this time I had mostly stopped talking. I stayed in my room or outdoors as much as possible. I read my books and intermittently studied my Bible. Even when I couldn't comprehend the full meaning of the words, the poetry of the ancient biblical writers sang in my heart. I was not completely without understanding; I did understand that God loved those who repented and lived a life of virtue. Repentance was easy, but the sexual abuse continued and I felt I beyond redemption.

At age thirteen I made a friend at school. We were both very shy and it is a wonder (grace perhaps?) that we found each other. Shortly after we met, Juanita invited me to attend church one Sunday with her family. I had never been in a church before. There was music from a piano and an organ. When the organist played, I felt the notes of the hymns vibrating deeply within my body. There were candles, flowers, and beautiful stained glass windows. Toward the end of the service the minister invited those who wanted to give their life to Christ to come forward. As the powerful organ breathed its sacred sounds into every nook and cranny of the church, the choir and congregation began singing,

"... whiter than snow,
yes, whiter than snow.
Wash me and I shall be
whiter than snow."

Somehow, I was on my feet moving forward. I was no longer aware of the important looking people around me; ladies in hats and gloves, men in dark suits, gleaming white shirts, and sober ties. I did not know what was going to happen to me when I reached the front of the church, but on I went. It was probably a good thing that I didn't know, because after repeating the words of the minister in a public confession of faith, I was given a white robe and led to a deep tank of water where I was immersed in baptism. I say a good thing, because I've always been very afraid of water. Through the years my baptism has become ever more meaningful to me. This ancient sacrament was the outward sign of an inward grace. I was invited to walk in the newness of life with Jesus; Jesus who had been called and *Christed* by God; Jesus, the Gentle Shepherd, who for me stands between heaven and earth with one hand in the Father's and his other hand in mine.

I continued going to church through the years, in fact, many churches. I was seeking one that could meet me where I was, while at the same time encourage me to be open to an experience of faith that was even greater. I wanted to be part of a community that was made up of real people who experienced real joys and genuine struggles, a place where I could be real also. It was equally important that I find a church that could celebrate the wonders of scientific discovery and not feel that God was somehow diminished. In 1980 I found such a place; it was here among Friends.

Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

I married at age 17, two weeks after high school graduation. My fiancé was a friend that I met at church on the day that I was baptized. I was fond of him and his family, but I was not in love. He had given me a ring when I was 14. My mother and grandma liked him very much and as a high school graduation gift I received a beautiful wedding gown. I think that I was much younger than my 17 years and I did not enjoy being married. What I did love was having an apartment of my own where I could be totally alone all day long. I still treasure my solitude.

I started classes at Purdue Calumet in the fall of 1961. The following year my beautiful baby, Hope Dawn, died in the struggle to be born. I continued in school and a year later gave birth to my second daughter Heidi. I named her after a little girl who lived in the mountains with the grandfather who loved her, searched for her, and brought her safely back home. My own Heidi was born with an incomplete esophagus and had to be tube fed the first year. Years of surgeries would follow. I was so fearful that I would lose her that I held her almost 24 hours a day. God seemed very distant and punishing. My marriage ended.

In 1965 I moved to Columbus, Georgia, where I married a young soldier that I had quietly loved since we were both high school seniors. Heidi and I lived in a small apartment near Ft. Benning where my new husband was completing Officers Candidate School. Ron was shy in person, but his letters to me had been full of love and poetry. After completing the military

service that was expected of the men in his family, he planned to return to Indiana University to complete his studies. He wanted to teach history. Little Ronnie was born just nine months later in Groton, Massachusetts, near Ft. Devens. We had not planned for him, but perhaps God knew we had little time. Four months after our son was born, my husband was shipped to Viet

Nam where he was killed in action on October 31, 1966. His few letters had been full of longing for home and concerns that the babies would not remember him. He also questioned why he was there and did not believe in the terrible job that he had been given to do. Ronnie was four months old, Heidi was three, and I was twenty-two when we returned home to Indiana. I resumed classes at Purdue and the little ones and I began attending church a few blocks from our rented home. I felt that I might drown in grief.

It was when I first attended yearly meeting about sixteen years later that the sorrow of that loss found a voice. God had led me to two Friends who were strong enough to accept my anger and tears. They held them carefully and respectfully and allowed me to own them. They cared enough for me, a stranger, that they didn't let me go. In the years that followed God would speak to me through your many voices. From you I learned that my grief could become love, and love leads to peace. Since then, in my own small ways, I have written for, marched for, spoken for, and taught for PEACE.

I graduated from Purdue in 1969, later remarried, and two years later gave birth to my second son, Carey. In 1973, I was awarded a master's degree and began teaching special education in an inner city school in Gary, Indiana. My years of university study had not prepared me for that first year. God sustained me and the children taught me. In 1975, after a difficult pregnancy, my youngest son Darian was born. By the time he was three, the unmistakable signs of autism could not be ignored. My marriage was ending. In 1976 I left special education and my work in the inner city to begin teaching in a small country school surrounded by cornfields. How I loved it! And how I enjoyed teaching high school literature!

There were more changes to come. Four years later I would leave that job, end my eleven-year marriage, and begin a new life. It was the year 1980. I did not yet appreciate how grace had been working in my life, but in looking back, I claim these lines from *Amazing Grace* as my own:

Thro' many dangers, toils and snares,
I have already come;
'Tis grace that brought me safe thus far,
And grace will lead me home.

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Gifts of Grace

I do not believe that God is the author of suffering. I do believe that through grace we can take the hard lessons and experiences of our lives and transform them into gifts of love and service. Grace is God's gift of himself to us. Grace is God with us and in us. Grace is God loving us,

holding us, and sorrowing with us when we are in pain. Grace is knowing that we are never alone. The apostle Paul wrote:

- 35 Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?
Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or
famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?
- 37 Nay, in all these things we are more than
conquerors through him that loved us.

Romans 8: 35, 37 (KJV)

I chose to relate some of the "*dangers, toils and snares*" of my earlier years in order to explain more fully the workings of grace that would come later. I have already spoken of the many opportunities for learning and creative expression that were mine as a child growing up in the home of my grandparents and the important place my mother holds in my heart and of her gifts to me. How did all of that come together into a somewhat useful life that has included family, f/Friends, and faith, with a great measure of happiness thrown in?

I only began to understand the answer to that question in 1986 after I heard Friend David Finke talk about "God, The Cosmic Recycler" in his Plummer Lecture. Certain phrases and passages have come back to me many times since then and I have placed them into my own context, I hope he does not mind that I found a portion of truth that is personal to me shining out from among his words. David wrote, "I am convinced that nothing of value is ever really lost." It was not until I came to Friends, that slowly I began to understand that I had value. I was a child of God and was loved enough that I carried a portion of the Light within my deepest being. I had never been lost to God, only to myself. My true identity was beginning to emerge from the protective coloration of emotional illness.

David also wrote, "Once more I became convinced that God is working in our lives, bringing good out of apparent evil, building something finer out of something that appears to be garbage." God *was* and *is* working in my life. Together, God and I have been building something finer; a life beyond abuse, poverty, and isolation; a life where joy arrives unexpectedly in a flutter of feathers, or in the smile and laugh of a beloved grandchild. God helped me to hold on to the many gifts I had received from my family. Outside of my awareness, God saw a place for me. The hurt that I endured would not be wasted; God would transform it into love and teaching for more than three thousand children of poverty, neglect, and abuse.

As a child I had been extremely sensitive to the pain and inner turmoil of the people in my world. I could feel what they were feeling, though I could do nothing to ward off the emotional storms that gathered beneath the calm. Was such sensitivity a gift? I don't know. It caused me great anguish. As I look back on my childhood, it seems it was a cross I had not asked for. Years later, though still a cross and a source of pain, I accepted it because it

informed my work with incarcerated teens that were suicidal, hurting, angry, or desperate. Through grace, I could help them to find words to name their hurts.

Jesus understood the importance of "naming" as a path to healing. In the book of Mark, a man who is tormented night and day by an unclean spirit comes to Jesus. First, Jesus orders the spirit out of the man and then he asks the spirit to name himself.

Mark 5: 9 And Jesus asked him, What is thy name?
And the spirit answered, saying, My name
is legion: for we are many.

It took a long time and professional help for me to come face to face with my own dark material, my own unclean spirit. In naming the hurt that we carry inside us, we take a "real" selves. Being real also allows us to enter into a closer relationship with God.

Archbishop Anthony Bloom wrote,

As long as we ourselves are real, as long as we are truly ourselves, God can be present and can do something with us. But the moment we try to be what we are not ... we become a fictitious personality, an unreal presence, and this unreal presence cannot be approached by God.¹

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A New Life

There are many reasons that I am here speaking with you today, but the most important of these are my walk with God and my relationship with the Inward Christ. Next in importance is the love that is mine from Tom; my children and grandchildren; and you, my family of Quaker Friends.

The year 1980 was the most eventful year of my life. It was a year of tremendous upheaval that saw both great losses, and wonderful new beginnings. I found that my life was leading in unknown directions. I started moving toward a place of personal independence. I was feeling strong enough to end my marriage, which had been unhappy for some years.

In 1980, Tom and I officially became a couple after his high school graduation. I had known Tom for four years and had been his literature teacher for both his junior and senior year. The age difference between us was difficult for some at first and we were the talk of the town, both his town and mine! Eventually people got used to us as they discovered new things to be concerned about. After five years of dating, solid preparation, and clearness, we were married

in 1985 under the care of Duneland Friends Meeting. Out of the silence Marlou and Roy Carlson sang *Amazing Grace*.

I could never adequately explain what Tom's presence has meant in my life and the lives of my children. He is a big man of few words who became a parent, older brother, and friend to my children. He has been loved and respected by them from the beginning when two were in high school, one in elementary school, and the youngest was just three.

Tom has been a farmer since he first started operating a tractor alone at the age of eight. He taught my children what it means to work hard and the importance of giving an honest day's work for a day's wage. Tom taught them about perseverance and following dreams. They saw him graduate as an honors student from Purdue University with a degree in engineering after twelve long years of taking part-time classes, keeping a full-time job, operating a thousand-acre farm, and being a husband and a father. He was the only male role model that my children had for many years. He attended every band concert, school play, and ball game and was quietly, but immensely proud of their achievements. He helped with school projects, towed and repaired cars, and made numerous trips to the emergency room usually with our Carey, the daredevil athlete, who often needed stitches. Tom never missed an opportunity to see our actor son, Ron, perform on stage.

Tom's relationship with each of our adult children is different, but loving and committed. He has been there for our Heidi from the early days of teaching her how to drive, to moving her back and forth between college and home, his pickup truck looking like the "Clampett mobile" with her beloved rocking chair tied on top. Carey, who is in many ways the most like Tom, works side by side with him planting and bringing in the harvest. He golfs at the country club with Ron, now a successful banker, and helps our Darian, the youngest to build his remote controlled cars and trucks. He has helped to build or remodel four of their homes. Tom is now a loving grandpa to our four little ones. When our first granddaughter was learning to talk, she named him "BaPu." I was later told that in the Urdu language it means *great soul*. She could not have known that, but it fits, and now six years later he is still her BaPu.

The other wonderful thing I want to tell you about Tom is that *he loves me!* This is an amazing thing. His life style is planned, organized, linear, and concrete. I prefer a softer, less structured approach, and tend toward a circular or seemingly random thought process that is more spontaneous and comfortable with the abstract in life. Tom needs facts and details, while to me the exact hows and whys of a thing are relatively unimportant. I am more attuned to the feeling and intent of a communication and it is to that, that I respond. Needless to say, we have had some difficulties getting our messages across.

I felt that it was important to tell you about Tom because it is through loving him that I have become a better person. In his love, I have grown and matured. He challenges me to new things and has patience when I am in full flight. Though he himself is not a Friend, he understands that being a Quaker is not someplace you go to worship on Sunday, it is a way of life that is not always mainstream. He has always encouraged and supported me in my work for Friends even though it takes away from our time together. He is sensitive to, though not always in agreement, with choices that I make on the basis of conscience. He helps me to

discern the voice of God when many voices are clamoring to be heard. I want to say once again in the presence of Friends, "I love you, Tom."

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On Being Led

A few months ago, I was reading *Listening to the Light* by Jim Pym who gives this advice:

Be aware of the spirit of God at work in the ordinary activities and experience of your daily life. Spiritual learning continues throughout life, and often in unexpected ways. There is inspiration to be found all around us, in the natural world, in the sciences and arts, in our work and friendships, in our sorrows as well as in our joys.²

I, too, have discovered that God speaks to me in many different ways. Sometimes it is through my dreams or the voice of a friend, sometimes through "happy accident," and only once in an audible voice. God also comes to me in the form of a bird.

In the Shelter of his Wing

It may sound very strange and unbelievable that God often comes to me as a bird, but it is an important part of my relationship with the Divine. Ever since I was a child first reading the psalms, I treasured the image of being sheltered beneath the wing of God. Perhaps this is the reason that God has chosen so many birds to come into my life with messages of hope, forgiveness, and love. Two birds appear most often. I am visited in the world of dreams by an eagle, while in the natural world a great blue heron appears. Herons always bring comfort and reassurance.

One night I was sorrowing deeply for my youngest son, who was living in a state hospital. I had traveled to southern Indiana to visit him and late that night I walked along the Ohio River that flowed at the foot of the bluffs on which the hospital was located. Suddenly there was the Heron, a solitary fisher, standing in the wet moonlight against the soft shape of Kentucky hills rising into the darkness. I was comforted and my heart filled with words that later I felt I had to write.

Great Blue Heron

Suddenly and unexpectedly you are here,
standing in the shallows, poised and still.
My heart informs me of your presence
and I glimpse eternity in your eye.

I feel myself opening
and the world falls away.

I am light,
ethereal,
shimmering.

I am one with the water flowing at your feet;
I'm the sound of ripples
washing over the stones.

I'm in the soft-wind
breathing through the reeds
slow-dancing near the mossy bank.

Guardian of my days,
you come to me when grief
is more than I can bear.
You invite me to rest in the shadow
of your great wings.

Then, when joy pulls me
laughing out into the world,
you meet me at water's edge
to share with me the blessing of the day.

A path leads me along the
great flowing Ohio at midnight;
my heart is peaceful and tonight
I walk my prayer.

I see you now, not far off,
wading in moonbeams.
I hear the dark, lapping water
teasing the shore.

The words of a song come to me
and I sing it to the silvered night,
"It is well,
it is well,
with my soul."

"Happy Accidents"

In 1980 I also left the teaching job that I loved and was led to the next phase of my life as an educator. This was one of those "happy accidents" that was life changing. I was desperately seeking employment, as I was now a single mother with four children to care for. I had put

applications in everywhere; I was either inexperienced or over-educated for most of the positions. One day I answered a classified ad for a juvenile officer. I had a mistaken idea of what a juvenile officer did and I did not notice that it was in the "men wanted" column. I called and after being told that a male was wanted, I asked what kind of educational opportunities were offered to the juveniles who were incarcerated. When I heard that there was no teacher and no funding for an education program, I asked if I could come as a volunteer teacher a few days a week. God had led me to the children who needed me. Within a month I was hired as a detention officer and not many months later as a teacher. I held both positions for fifteen years and retired after teaching for an additional five years.

Over that period of time I had been able to lead our county to fund an education program that included a good basic curriculum and house a tremendous GED program. Many of my students received high school credits for the classroom hours they spent with me. Several were graduated from their home high school while still attending my classes. Our program became a model for the state of Indiana. Two decades later, when I left our new facility on my last day as a teacher, we had two full size classrooms, a small library, several computers, and a large gymnasium. The last several years I had served as the director of educational services and, in addition to teaching, I had helped to train all incoming staff. The training that I developed was based in part on Friends testimonies of respect and equality. The result was an ongoing discovery of peaceful alternatives to the physical management of the residents. I had acted as a liaison between our education program, the juvenile court and probation, and all of the county schools. I guided the work of a second teacher, several volunteers, student teachers and interns. I know that it was God at work, but still I feel proud of all that was accomplished.

A Friend's Voice

In 1980 it was the voice of a friend that invited me to my first Quaker meeting. When I first began working at the juvenile detention center I met a young part time juvenile officer named Paul Landskroener. One day one of the other employees had left a religious tract on one of the desks in the office. This was the first day that I met Paul and when he asked me if I had read the tract, I replied that I had. He then inquired what my thoughts were regarding it. I told him that it did not fit who I was. When he asked me about my beliefs, I struggled to put them into words and finished by telling him that I couldn't find any place that I belonged. *He told me that he thought I was a Quaker* and invited me to visit Duneland Friends Meeting. It is now twenty-two years later and I am honored to speak to you today.

In Dreaming

I hear God speaking to me most clearly through my dreams. The most important was one that occurred in February of 1997 during the time that IYM Friends were training for the Listening Project. I was in Columbia, Missouri, where the training sessions were being held. I was sleeping in the home of dear Friends when I was awakened from a dream. It was a dream of healing. I was walking in a forest where I came upon a wounded eagle that was near to death. My stepfather was the one who had injured the lovely bird and as I knelt beside it, he stepped

from among the trees onto the forest path. I was very frightened because he was the man that had sexually abused me for so many years.

I was consumed with a hatred for him that was ever present and unrelenting. Even a mild suggestion that I move toward forgiveness would send me into an internal rage that is beyond describing. I had carefully nourished my hatred for him from the age of four up until that very moment when I was then in my fifties. In the dream I was torn between fleeing and staying to minister to the bird dying painfully at my feet. I stayed and talked to my stepfather about what he had done to the eagle and to me. In real life I had never confronted him. He seemed confused and explained that he had never really meant to hurt me, that he hadn't actually even thought about how I might be hurt by what he did. I began to see him as a young needy child. At this point in the dream he disappeared and the eagle began to heal. A friend arrived in the dream and we went up to a high mountain peak above the forest and set the eagle free. It soared so beautifully and strongly into the heavens that I felt my heart bursting with joy. At this point I was awakened and I physically felt something leaving my body. It was the sickness of hatred pouring out of every cell. I remained in a state of ecstasy for the rest of the night. I slept no more and when I boarded the train for home in the morning I was still in the grip of an internal excitement. This lasted another day before it gradually diminished.

Last year when I was reading the biography of Dwight L. Moody, the great Christian evangelist, I found that he had had a similar experience. After a long period of wrestling with areas of personal darkness, he had a close encounter with God. He would later write,

Ah, what a day! -- I cannot describe it, I seldom refer to it, it is almost too sacred an experience to name -- Paul had an experience of which he never spoke for fourteen years - - I can only say that God revealed himself to me, and I had such an experience of his love that I had to ask him to stay his hand.³

Like Moody, I had felt that experience of Divine love. A great healing took place in my soul that night that is as real today as it was then. I can now think of my stepfather with forgiveness and, because he is no longer living, my prayers for him have been that he was healed, even in death; that Christ would gather him up in joy as though he were a lost sheep that had at last been found. Eventually, I told of my experience to two dear Friends who both encouraged me to write it down. That article was published last year in *Friends Journal*.

"... a still, small voice"

I mentioned that only once did I hear God speak to me in an audible voice. I heard the voice more clearly than I have ever heard any other. The voice spoke only a few words, but I knew they were from God. I have never forgotten even one of them. I have only mentioned this to a few people before today and have never repeated the exact message that was given me. I must continue to keep that as belonging only to me.

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Peace in the Garden

Since my retirement two years ago, I have found great joy in doing things that I lacked sufficient time to do when I was teaching. One thing that has given me great happiness is creating my own Indiana version of an English garden. I was not prepared for the sense of sacred *mystery* that I would find in the life of my garden. It began with an old, charred wisteria vine.

In 1922 my grandma, carrying two small children, traveled alone from Wisconsin to Indiana. She was coming to join my grandfather who had made the journey earlier in order to find work. My uncle was just two and my mother was an infant. Grandma brought very little with her. Around her waist she wore a hand-stitched money belt with a few gold coins sewn inside and in a travel bag she carried food for the journey, a few articles of clothing, a crocheted tablecloth, and a piece of wisteria vine from her mother's garden.

This vine, which grandma would plant on the west side of her house, flourished over the years and eventually twined onto the roof and along the eaves. My first recollection of the vine is the way it transformed the somewhat shabby house into a glorious display of dripping lavender flowers every spring. By the time my own children were born, the vine at its base was as thick and gnarled as an old tree trunk.

Shortly after my grandma's death a few years ago, mother and I were staying over night at the house where we had been sorting through the mountain of papers that grandma had accumulated through the years. I was sleeping on the floor when I awoke to a sense of heat and light. At first I thought it was morning and that the sun was in my eyes. Actually the house had been set ablaze by arsonists in the first hours of the morning. Because I was on the floor where the air was better, I was able to rouse my mother who was overcome by the smoke and would not have awakened. The fire's point of origin was on the west side of the house, right next to the wisteria vine. The fire destroyed much of the house, which later had to be demolished. In the conflagration, many precious things were lost and grandma's vine was burned to the ground.

Months later, when Tom and I were cleaning up the property, I noticed the stump of the old vine. I asked him to dig it up and bring it home. It was not easy; the root was massive and deep. He could only get a portion of it and it didn't look like it would ever grow again. We planted it and waited. One spring day some years later I noticed green shoots. Something was growing! A couple of more years and the vine was so heavy that Tom had to build a trellis for it. Last year my daughter Heidi had a plaque made for the garden path where the wisteria entwines overhead. It says, "*Wisteria Walk*." It is now a massive vine that drips lavender flowers in the spring. Its lush green leaves and tendrils cover an arch that Tom built for it at the top of the porch steps; it reaches up to the roof and grows along the eaves. Some of its leaves are deformed, and it grows that way every spring. I think it was scarred by the fire, as was I.

Life in the Garden

The garden is bright with flowers that nestle among the rocks that Tom and I have brought home from all over the world. In addition to the flowers, there are other inhabitants and visitors to the garden. Last year, the family of groundhogs that have a burrow under our back porch often came to the garden. One of the babies enjoyed eating the petunia petals and was sometimes around my feet as I worked among the flowers. Numerous butterflies add fluttering traces of color and a moth that resembles a hummingbird comes to drink from the nectar. Of course there are rabbits and ground squirrels. Recently, a red squirrel has joined us and a wren moved into the little wren house that was made by IYM children a few years ago.

Of the many birds, three have become so personable that they were given names: *Cardinal Bernadine (Bernie)* is a bright red cardinal who follows me all around the yard talking to me in a very loud and friendly way. He comes to the window every morning and is one of the last birds to become quiet at twilight. He has a varied vocabulary and we have long conversations.

If, in attempt to add variety, I whistle one of his other calls he gets upset with me and flies away. Another is *Chirpy*, a large robin who has a nest in the wisteria vine where his two ravenous hatchlings wait to be fed. He often sits on a low branch of the mulberry tree or perches on the top of the bird feeder. He does not eat the seeds, as he prefers bugs and worms, but he does like to perch there to talk while the little chipping sparrows enjoy the breadcrumbs I put in the feeder.

In early-June a most unexpected visitor arrived. One early morning I heard a crow calling who sounded quite close. I stepped out to the porch and there he was sitting on the rain gutter about two feet above my head. He cawed insistently as he walked back and forth keeping a close eye on me. I sat down at the table in the corner of the porch where the wisteria is very thick. We continued in conversation when suddenly he flew down to the tabletop. I inquired if he were hungry and went inside for a biscuit and a bowl of water. I crumbled the biscuit in my hand and extended it to him. He walked around my hand and studied it from various angles before he picked up the first piece. After eating the biscuit he hopped off the table and began exploring the porch. He was most fascinated with my shiny garden shears. I checked on him frequently during the day, and one time found him using the garden fountain as a birdbath as he would come to do regularly. When I went out later to work among the flowers, he followed along, pulling at petals with his beak and from time to time jumping onto my back as I stooped over. This would become a daily routine for us.

He always joined me when I rested on the swing, and would sit in my lap to have his neck scratched. He also enjoyed combing through my hair with his beak and occasionally giving sharp pecks, which were very uncomfortable. He remained in the garden for three weeks and we spent many wonderful hours together. During the last three days of his time with me, he came to the garden for only brief visits. The last day that I saw him, he perched for a short time in the top of a big maple and cawed in response to my call but did not come to me. I called him *Poe*, although his formal name was *Edgar Alan Crow*. Thank you God for this wonderful visitor. Is it merely coincidence that he came to me as I struggled through my first

draft of this talk and did not leave until the editing was almost complete? The answer does not really matter. He gave me such pure joy!

Small Gardens

There are different sections in the garden that are named for my grandchildren. The first section is called "The Muffin Garden" after my first granddaughter Ashly, whom I call Muffin. She is now six. Last year most of the flowers in The Muffin Garden were purple, her favorite color. She loves to help "Ma" (which is her special name for me) water the flowers with her own little watering can and ring the garden bell. The second section is "The Bunny Garden" named for Muffin's little sister, Nicole, who is two years old. She is my "baby bunny" with soft blonde curls and big blue eyes. The "Dragonfly Garden" is Mark's garden. It is a long fence section of mums and Black-eyed Susans. Mark is my five-year-old grandson, and the only grandchild with dark eyes. He is a wonderful, strong, sturdy, rough, and tumble boy. The final section is a plot of zinnias of every color imaginable. This is "The Sarah Garden" for three-year-old Sarah with the wild dark curls and china doll complexion. In her bright clothing of every color and hue, she rivals the flowers. Sarah has also claimed a small shade garden as her own, which she named "The Ladybug Garden." I hope my grandchildren feel the peace of their gardens when they come to visit. Perhaps they will plant their own gardens someday.

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Garden Prayers

The Scriptures tell us that prayer begins with God. Our desire to pray is an inner movement in response to God's desire to commune with us. God knows our needs before we come to him with prayers on our lips or in our hearts. In Isaiah 65:24 the Lord tells us about prayer: *"It shall come to pass that before they call, I will answer; and while they are speaking, I will hear."* The apostle Paul further develops this theme in his letter to the Romans:

8:26 Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weaknesses: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

I am sure that most of us have had the experience of being stopped in the midst of our daily routines to watch in silent wonder as darkening clouds with edges burnished gold move across an azure and lavender sky. It is as if an unseen hand holds us fast when we are faced with the beauty of our Illinois prairie, or the sight of craggy mountains, flowing rivers, and star-filled heavens. The sounds of beautiful music, inspired poetry or even children at play can make our hearts tender. These are times that God is whispering to us, reminding us, "I am with you."

This softening of our hearts is a divine call to prayer, not a long formal prayer, just the recognition of grace. God is with us, all around us, and in us. In John 14, Christ promises:

- 16 And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever;
- 17 Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you.
- 18 I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you ...

I understand why Jesus went to the garden to pray. My garden invites me to prayer and meditation every morning and evening. These are special times of quiet and resting in God. Sometimes my prayers have no words -- they just are. While prayer comes more easily to me in the garden, surprisingly I have found it difficult to read there; the flowers keep interrupting.

The wisteria bloomed again two days before I left to come to yearly meeting. I've never known it to bloom a second time in the same year, but there, hanging just over my head were a few lavender blossoms. It seemed a special blessing had been given me for today. When my daughter arrived here yesterday, she brought this vase of wisteria blooms to remind me of my garden.

That old wisteria vine still has much to teach me about roots and adversity, but I am learning. I look forward to my own blossoming in some future springtime when at last grace shall lead me home.

[Out of the closing silence, Friends joined in singing *Amazing Grace* more beautifully than I have ever heard it sung before.]

¹ Anthony Bloom, *Beginning to Pray* (New York: Paulist Press, 1970) p.30.

² Jim Pym, *Listening to the Light* (London: Rider Books/ Random House, 1999) p. 166-167.

³ Lyle W. Dorsett, *A Passion for Souls: The Life of D.L. Moody* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1997) p. 156.