

TO LISTEN WITH MY WHOLE HEART

Judy Jager

The 2014 Jonathan Plummer Lecture

Presented at
Illinois Yearly Meeting
of the
Religious Society of Friends
McNabb, Illinois

June 22, 2014



photo by Gwen Weaver

Since 1961, it has been our custom to conclude our annual sessions with the Plummer Lecture, named in honor of Jonathan Plummer, the first Clerk of Illinois Yearly Meeting.

I am honored to introduce Judy Jager, from Evanston Friends Meeting, who will deliver this year's Plummer Lecture.

Living her faith has meant for Judy a lifetime of social activism. Throughout her life, she has worked to reconcile those who have been able to see only their differences, and not their common humanity.

Judy is one of the people who has shown me what it means to be a Quaker—that being a Quaker makes a difference in everything we do, both large and small, in every moment of our lives.

Judy will speak to us out of the silence. When she is finished, we will move directly into Meeting for Worship.

—Introduction by Gwen Weaver

TO LISTEN WITH MY WHOLE HEART

As I began preparing for this talk, I read something that our (that is, Illinois Yearly Meeting's) Ted Ehnle wrote last winter about the importance of sharing our stories. He helped me to understand that, if we are to achieve community, live in community, be more connected to Spirit, then sharing with each other our spiritual journeys is not an option, but an actual necessity. Ted quoted the beautiful words of Sue Monk Kidd in *The Crucible of Story*: "When we share our inner stories, we allow others to enter our lives and partake of our deepest truths."

We live in a time when human beings are deeply divided, and when neither our political leaders nor people of faith know how or whether the mutual distrust can be overcome. As Quakers we have a testimony on Community. We can and do work hard to remove barriers to community within our monthly and yearly meetings. And we are blessed to have caring and gifted spiritual leaders pushing and pulling us in new directions.

A part of my spiritual journey, and the story I will share today, has been about unity across barriers, how unity brings us closer to God and how we need God in order to achieve it. A deep belief grows more strongly in me with each year. I have a concern for unity in the broader Religious Society of Friends. The divisions in the Society of Friends are serious, and for us liberal Friends they often have to do with justice.

But, as with all disunities in the world, they are so very much the work of our human hands and not God's. I believe that we are called by the Spirit to reach across these divides, first to enter into and stay in relationship, and then to open ourselves to new truths not our own—and how this obedience would please God! The differences among us will continue, and must not be minimized. When we witness unjust behavior, it is right that we be distressed by it. But, I would contend, no more so than John Woolman was distressed by Quaker slaveholding. Woolman's life, I believe, teaches us that God loves unity as well as justice. Was there not that of God in the slaveholding Quakers? For John Woolman there was. And he found it. I want to share with you some of what I've learned reaching across barriers during my life.

What happens when we take the risk and tell our stories? Again, I will turn to *The Crucible of Story*: “Creating personal stories is an act of soul-making that does not happen automatically. It comes only as we risk stepping into the chaos of our lives and naming the angels that inhabit the shadows. It comes as we give expression to our struggle for individual meaning, identity, and truth, as we wrestle with angels, both light and dark, and celebrate the places where God stirs.”

I will be sharing a lot about my life the way it actually happened. I will tell you how, in the face of very bad conditions, when I was most vulnerable I was guided and loved and cared for, and how at a very young age I understood that the Spirit was working in my life and how I know that God has always been present.

My older brother, Craig Johnson, a deeply informed and confirmed Christian, converted to Catholicism in the eighth year of his fourteen-year struggle with AIDS. One of the things he liked about being Roman Catholic was the mystical connection to the communion of the saints. He said to me once, “You Quakers! You people! You try to do it for real, with other actual living Quakers! That’s really hard stuff! Most people wouldn’t even try it!” He understood, as we ourselves do not always understand, how ambitious a task we set for ourselves when we resolve to live in community as Friends.

Though he lived in New York, Craig and I were very close. He, my sister Lois, and my brother Norman were primary caretakers of my younger sister, Penny, and me as children. They bathed us, walked us to school, and intervened to protect us from big-kid bullying and other, worse, dangers. When I was ten and Penny eight they helped tell us that our father had died suddenly during the night, and they held and comforted us. Lois was eighteen. Norm was twenty-one. Craig was seventeen.

When Craig died in 1992 North Side Meeting helped me arrange his funeral at Mary Hannaford’s Catholic Church in Chicago. A priest friend from twenty five years of Saul Alinsky community organizing came up from the southwest side to give Craig communion in his last weeks, and then to assist with the funeral mass. Full-blown AIDS is ghastly and cruel, and the Jagers—Tom and I, and young Katharine and Tommy—were his hands-on support system, part of his life. And he was part of ours. Until 1984 his sickness did not have a name, and treatment did not come until well after Craig’s death. Energy and hope would sometimes drain away, but we were surrounded and sustained by patient and loving friends, my brother Norm, my sister Penny, and many in the Religious Society of Friends.

My sister Lois, eight years older than I, died in 1971 at age thirty-eight. She, as Craig, died after years of suffering. And in her case, too, it was long afterward that appropriate medications appeared. Her affliction was clinical depression, deep and destructive. Family, including myself, had all been forcefully ejected from her life. Her few associates, from what we knew, had unsavory lives and inclinations. She died violently, apparently at the hands of one of these acquaintances, in her own apartment in Cicero, Illinois.

Craig's life, as well as his death, taught me that we as humans can find meaning in even the worst suffering. Lois, who had immense courage, found no meaning in her suffering. For me, neither of these deaths made sense. Nor can I make sense of what Craig and Lois had been handed in life. There is no question for me that they each sacrificed their own childhoods to care for and make me safe. I wish every day that I could thank them.

Reflecting on the theme of this year's Annual Session, "Call to Community—Listen, Speak, Welcome, Belong," my thoughts went to a deep and ancient drive common to the human species. This is the drive for *connectedness*. We can imagine metaphysical reasons we were created with this drive. But the physical, biological ones are inescapable. There is the helplessness of a human newborn or even of a human five-year-old or twelve-year old. And think about evolving with big brains but scrawny bodies, wandering and slow on the savanna, easy prey for lions, not even protected by fur, or provided with huge teeth or horns. And then, as brain researchers are now insisting, our big brains required eight hours of sleep each day. Pretty vulnerable, weren't we?

It is true that we developed cleverness and inventiveness. We could plan, and make choices and hide in caves and make ourselves less visible. Fire and hunting skills and tools helped us to be stronger and safer than before. But what about the human infant whose brain would take years and years to fully develop? Who for a full year could not move about on her own, never mind find her own food? Who remained small in stature and strength for many years, requiring food and shelter, but able to help very little? Overall we are looking at a really silly and untenable situation, I think. But something very powerful enabled us to survive despite all this vulnerability.

To me we are here today as a species because we are hard-wired for connectedness. Let us think about it. We do not just *prefer* connectedness, or feel better when we have it. We *must* have it in order to survive. It is a part of who we are to need other people, to depend on

each other, to allow others to depend on us, to belong, and to love. Psychiatrist Victor Frankl wrote that one of the three ways of finding meaning in life is “by experiencing another human being in his [her] very uniqueness—by loving him [her].”

Of course, as we know, some of us have a much greater sense of love and belonging than others. I would like to look at one of the impediments to achieving connection. I believe we are blocked from connectedness when we believe, deep within ourselves, that we do not in fact belong. And this, in turn, is because we have not come to fully accept what God tells us in so many ways: “You are enough, just as you are.”

Social Work researcher Brene Brown asserts that to achieve connectedness we must allow others to enter our lives, we must be vulnerable. In her words, “...in order for connection to happen, we have to allow ourselves to be seen, deeply seen, vulnerably seen; to love with our whole hearts, even though there’s no guarantee—and that’s really hard,...”

Brown says that for some of her research subjects, there was “...this unnamed thing that absolutely unraveled connection...and it turned out to be shame.” She found that those who struggle with letting themselves be vulnerable and seen, and therefore struggle with connection have a deep sense of not being good enough. They ask: “Is there something about me that, if other people know it, or see it, that I won’t be worthy of connection?” This is something we all worry about. Among Quakers that might translate as not smart enough, not well-educated enough, not accomplished enough, too dependent on unhealthy relationships or perhaps on substances.

When we find ourselves struggling to feel connected as Friends in community, I would like us to ask ourselves as individuals whether this sense of not being worthy is keeping us from being open and vulnerable? Brown says, “the people [in her study] who had a strong sense of love and belonging...know they are imperfect.... But they have courage, courage to reveal their less than perfect selves, and to believe ‘I’m enough’.” I hope that each of us as Friends knows that “I am enough,” and can live into a place of courage “to be seen, deeply seen, and to love with our whole hearts”—even though there is no guarantee.

An important fact of my early life was my family and home. In the 1940’s on the near west side of Chicago there were five of us children, plus my parents, plus employees, political friends, artists, writers and relatives coming and going night and day. My father had started a neighborhood newspaper in 1932 to challenge West Side machine politics; it was printed in the shop behind our home and put together mostly by my mother, my father

and gifted brother, Norman. Using press passes, my father took the entire family, even the tiny ones, to the national political conventions, in those days all held at the Chicago Stadium three blocks from our home.

The front part of our building was Johnson's Book Store, started as a school supply store by my Swedish-immigrant grandfather in 1892 on Halsted Street near Hull House. In our basement was a used-textbook rebinding operation. There was also a book-cover business, a publishing company, and at one time two additional school book stores elsewhere in the city. At age three, I thought my name was Judy Mary Ann Johnson's Bookstore. World War II began when I was three months old. A friend dropped in one day and asked, "Well, Johnson, how are you going to make money off this war?" My father was stunned and repelled at this thought. Instead, he volunteered and served as East Garfield Park Commander for the Civil Defense Corps. As with all the other ventures—*not one of which was laid aside*—he counted on my mother's heavy involvement, and she co-organized and co-led countless meetings, rallies, and events until the war ended. It was all pretty amazing.

As columnist Paul Krugman would say, *but here's the thing*: My father was seriously mentally ill. The dreaming, the creativity, the ability to inspire, the courage, the idealism were all very real. But, as time passed, so were the swings to immobilizing depression, unrelenting sadness, withdrawal, and hopelessness. The careening back and forth carried with it bad judgment, increasingly unrealistic thinking and decision-making, and even a slide into quite appalling ethics. In brief, our family life was filled with chaos, stress, blame, fear and sadness, conflict, loud anger, alcohol, rats, roaches, bounced checks, and a fire. Money was irregular for food, heat, water, or electricity. There were "close calls," as when senseless delay cost my brother a burst appendix and a narrow escape from death. It was confusing, and I did not understand, and I knew my world was not intact. And the others were just as overwhelmed as I.

My father saw a psychiatrist one time. Today his illness is called bi-polar personality disorder. It was called manic-depressive psychosis in 1948, well before doctors knew about drugs like Lithium. So this evil demon continued to run untrammelled among us, wild and totally untreated, for the rest of my father's too-short life.

Mental illness drives people away, so we became gradually isolated as a family unit. Friends were alienated. Extended family withdrew and did not serve as a source of strength or hope. Nor did faith in a higher power. My parents did not go to church or observe any faith tradition. Interestingly, however, both my parents liked to tell us about my mother's mother, who

was born into Hopewell Monthly Meeting in southwestern Ohio in 1872. She had died before I was born, so I did not know her, but both of them were fond of her and proud of her memory. We heard about her work for women's suffrage and temperance, and her integrity. In 1918, recently arrived in Chicago from southern Indiana, my grandmother was either unaware that there were meetings in Chicago, or simply had no way to get to one. So she was an active attendee at the Western Avenue Methodist Church, where she and the minister became very good friends. My unchurched parents told us proudly how much the minister trusted her and relied on her leadership and service. The part they really liked to tell was how, despite her minister-friend's persistent cajoling, she let him know that there would be no baptisms of her and her little girls, and no communion—not ever. But their friendship did not suffer.

Until he died, when I was two, my father's father lived with us. He was a born-again Christian, bitter and constantly hectoring family members about not being saved, and telling them that they were going to hell. My parents seemed determined to immunize all of us children against this toxic application of belief. So we heard a lot about the importance of being an ethical, moral person of integrity. And we were told to reject out of hand any claims that there was one and only one true religion. I can hear them exhorting us, "God doesn't care at all what religion anybody is! Don't let anybody tell you otherwise." My mother told us we must love our siblings. My father taught us by example to help and share what you have with those in need, and to try and make the world a better, fairer place. And none of us kids were baptized, though we had a beautiful 1900 photo of my father in his baptismal gown. I thought the "no-baptizing" thing was odd, but interesting.

So, except for these few teachings, for which I am grateful and to which I hold even now, the Spirit was pretty much on its own—but managed to find other quite wonderful ways to reach my siblings and me.

One time, when I was about four, I awoke in the middle of the night. Next to the double bed where I slept with my older sister, my mother was on her knees desperately begging Lois to pray with her for God's help for our father. My sister was too angry. There were no more such praying incidents or references to prayer or God. So what made me think prayer might help us? What made me so sure that God was there, and could hear, and wanted to hear? I cannot say. But it seemed right and that praying might just help. So I began. I prayed. I prayed a lot. And I trusted at first that God would indeed intervene and bring healing and peace to our family. Nothing changed. I continued to pray, and to

beg. Still nothing changed. Except for one thing. Gradually I did not feel alone the way I had before. It is not that I was not just as frightened and overwhelmed and worried and sad. But I did not feel alone.

Prayer then became something different. From then until now I often go for days without consciously praying, but feeling God present and alive, with and within me. My life and my days go better now that I have also incorporated intentional prayers of gratitude. But there are very few times when I fall into petitionary prayer, perhaps out of an old conviction that my early imploring prayers were, if not displeasing to God, then silly and pointless. There are others who seem to agree, who write and teach that God knows our needs and what is best, and faith requires us to ask only that God's will be done. However, a gentle challenge put to me just recently by an Ohio Conservative Friend suggests that a begging, imploring prayer can be just what God wants, that it means "asking" and sometimes God likes it when we knock at the door and ask. There is humility here, and a wish to be closer to God, to be in relationship. I am beginning to understand some of what Tom Stabnicki shared a few months ago in his *Spiritual Journey*: in other monotheistic traditions people worship the powerful God of the universe, who rules from on high, separate from humans. But, Tom said, the Christian God, the Quaker God likes company, and wants us close. "Christ has come to teach his people himself," wrote George Fox.

Not surprisingly as small children my younger sister and I were only barely supervised, whether in the house or in the neighborhood. Our parents and even older siblings were preoccupied with fixing recurring crises and with being drawn into my father's latest ambitious schemes and projects, hoping to temper the excesses. I used my freedom to get to know a whole lot of interesting people. At the end of World War II there were huge human migrations world-wide, and Chicago's Near West Side was a port-of-entry neighborhood. Single family houses were broken up into multiple apartments; large apartments were cut up into many small ones. People lived in basements, attics, everywhere. They came as displaced persons from Europe, as immigrants from Puerto Rico and Mexico, as white and black job seekers from the rural south, as former detainees of the Japanese-American internment camps. My older sister was friends with the Castaneda family; my brother Craig had friends from Armenia and China. Could it have been any more interesting? It is easy to see this as the root of my lifelong interest in—and sometimes academic study of—other cultures and traditions.

Small children are welcomed easily into people's households, and most of our new neighbors were from traditional cultures where this

was especially true. What an adventure! I could escape the tension and stress in my own house and family by latching onto elderly neighbors and the families of my friends.

Frequently I would spend the night in one of their crowded apartments, and maybe have biscuits and gravy for breakfast. It was fun to try plantains, black-eyed peas, barbecue, and collard greens with a little vinegar. I learned their views of life and the world, and how different some of these were from my family's views. How homesick they were! The southern whites, especially, were forever "going down home" every chance they got. I learned some of their hymns, like "When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder," sung with foot-stomping vigor. I learned to speak very respectfully of FDR, and I learned why!

Silver-haired Mrs. McElhaney, a white lady from Kentucky considered all the children on the block her substitute grandchildren, made us treats, and took us to Brookfield Zoo. Once she sewed three of us new dresses. She was always, always happy to see us. One Saturday she took me in a taxi to a movie—a big event. We entered the theater, and took our seats. On the screen there was a crowd of angry, shouting men in white robes and hoods, waving torches. Mrs. McElhaney after a short minute or two, stood, took me by the hand and said, "Come, Judy, we're leaving." I could tell she was distressed. She did not explain. We just went home.

Of course I could not grasp at age six all the ways God was working though this loving and decent person to help care for and guide me. And there were others, black and white, younger and older, who sheltered and fed my sister and me and were kind and caring, with no gain to themselves. I savor the memories of feeling warmed and joyful at what I was being freely given. And, though I lacked the words, I understood clearly that I had done nothing to earn these gifts. Later when the Presbyterians talked about Grace, I knew exactly what they meant.

In a secular American manner our family celebrated Christmas and Easter. These are good memories. Mysteriously, my older siblings and our parents always pulled off a great Christmas, at least for my younger sister and me. We knew that even if there was no tree in sight on Christmas Eve, in the morning a gloriously lit and decorated tree with Santa's presents would be sure to greet us. I loved them all for doing this. My brother Craig, somewhere around age 12, became interested in the real story of Christmas. He hosted annual Christmas caroling in his bedroom, and did not mind if only his two little sisters joined in. Soon Craig, still quite young, discovered the neighborhood Presbyterian Church, a welcome and welcoming respite for him. He drank in the Bible, church music, liturgy, and church history.

Gradually I tagged along for Sunday School. Learning Bible stories was fun, and the people were friendly and cheerful and consistent. Our parents neither encouraged nor discouraged us.

My father's decline continued as did recrimination and blame heaped on him. The common refrain was that if he really wanted to he could "pull himself together." One couple stayed in his life until the end. Bill Beaudry and his wife Janet were gracious and warm people of faith. He was a practicing Baptist and a recovering alcoholic; she was a Unity Church minister. They would come regularly to our house and visit my father and sit with him and talk. They found face-saving ways to give my mother cash. They would usually ask to pray, which made my father uncomfortable. But he was desperate, and grateful for the caring friendship extended. It was not hard for me, even at ages 8 and 9, to understand that this was God's work, and that Mr. and Mrs. Beaudry were allowing themselves to be the means for it. How would I begin to describe the gratitude I feel even now for the comfort they provided?

Too young to know why they were so enraged, I found I could not be angry with my father the way the older kids and my mother and my aunt were. Before he died I only wished for some way to comfort him. But afterward, a troubling, and different, feeling arose. We all understood immediately that with him had died the demon controlling him and us, and we knew we were not sorry for that. Not at all. Later my own anger surfaced and I was a very confused young adult.

There were soon discussions and plans for picking up our lives. But a year later, as connected as we all had been before my father's sudden death, somehow we could not get our individual lives back on track, and could not stay bound together as a family. I have learned in therapy since then quite a bit about post-traumatic stress disorder. My mother went to work every day, but otherwise was overwhelmingly depressed and beginning a lifelong dependence on alcohol. My older brothers and sister fell into assorted conflicts with my mother and soon left home. My younger sister was sent to live with an aunt and for a year I was the only child living at home. I missed all my brothers and sisters; it was awfully lonely without them.

It would only be part of the story if I did not also tell you that there were gifts derived from this strange chaotic childhood—a childhood that I could not escape and could not change. I did not learn to be a risk-taker. I am only a very careful dreamer. I struggle to this day with not feeling safe. I am prone to being harshly judgmental. And I still do a lot of hiding. I spend far too much energy in worry

and self-doubt. Nonetheless, I came away with what I believe are important gifts and strengths. Some of them are:

- Knowledge that very often one need not look far for what one needs, that usually in front of me or next to me is a person to connect to, to appreciate, and to savor—like those in the loyal and faithful family into which I married
- A capacity for acceptance when realities are harsh
- An ability to believe in the future and find meaning during times of suffering
- Gratitude for good physical health
- A comfort with solitude
- Resourcefulness and ability to develop new skills and to build things, often from very little—like making myself a scooter, getting myself to and through college and graduate school, learning to speak and teach French, and learning accounting in middle-age
- A facility for deep connections to wonderful friends, each one wise and vibrant
- Appreciation that I was not traumatized by organized religion, so I do not need to recover
- Lifelong, repeated lessons that culture, ethnicity, race, religion, gender-identity—far from being barriers—are in fact the richest of natural passages to connectedness

In addition, I know that my childhood is the source of my ability to be surprised by the ordinary and to never take it for granted. I find true delight in a comfortable bed, clean clothes, waking up in the same house every day to the same reliable, loving husband, on a quiet street with green trees. These are still just as amazing to me as when I first reached the relative safety of adulthood. I look around and a spontaneous prayer of thanks simply erupts! And then, when God added children and grandchildren? This wonderful, miracle—or two—is in my arms? How could this be?

Finally, I was led as a young adult to seek professional help. For many people, finding an excellent, compassionate and fully suitable psychotherapist is a long and arduous task. But, it is my belief, divine guidance sent me to exactly the right person and right place, and I have received a gift of caring, compassion, and healing. Another miracle, in a long list, that from my childhood I knew to be Grace.

At age eleven, making my own decision, I joined the Presbyterian Church. As I was entering high school a trio of amazing young adults

arrived fresh from Princeton Seminary: a minister, his musician-spouse, and a combination Director of Christian Education and Music Director. They were idealistic and determined that this particular church remain viable through the massive out-migrations and bull-dozing that lay ahead for Chicago's West Side. To them, Jesus intended that his Church be a place that served the people, and stood with them in adversity. They reached out to the neighborhood, they opened their homes, they brought in McCormick Seminary students, and started programs for kids of all backgrounds. There was controversy. They worked hard. As a teen-ager I taught Vacation Bible School, attended worship and observed in awe these people who had a living faith, and who let their lives speak. It was not my first experience being touched by a spirit beyond myself, and I had also known courage and healing coming from loving human beings before. But now I understood for the first time that these gifts were from the same source.

At age 17, I won a scholarship and left for the College of Wooster in Ohio. Naively and wrongly I had anticipated that the college would feel very familiar, that it would be a larger version of my dedicated little inner-city church community. But on Sundays, nothing in the formal, orchestrated Presbyterian Church service spoke to me. So here I was, feeling so much a stranger, and not even church for a refuge. My brother Norman had found the Society of Friends while turning toward pacifism in college. He came to visit and was sympathetic. He listened to my dilemma, and asked me, "Is there a Quaker worship group on the campus?" I had not ever attended 57th Street Meeting with him, so I did not know what to expect.

As have countless other convinced Friends, I sensed immediately that this was home. I attended for my entire four years at college. During that time we had visitors from Cleveland Meeting and also Friends in plain dress from Barnesville. I was very interested that people who looked and spoke so differently would so effortlessly move together into deep silent worship. In 1963, back in Chicago, I applied for and was accepted into membership at 57th Street. Soon I was serving on committees and eagerly receiving inspiration from an array of true Quaker elders, such as George and Elizabeth Watson, Dorothy Troutman, and Alice and Harold Flitcraft. One 57th Street member became a very important lifelong friend to me and my husband Tom and, then from their births, to Katharine and Tommy. Josephine Coats was 54 and I was 22 when we began traveling together with two others from the Near North Side to Hyde Park every Sunday. By 1968, the midweek meetings at Josephine's house had evolved into North Side Meeting, and I served as its first Clerk.

At 57th Street I especially enjoyed learning that there was yet a third kind of Quaker out there (now I know there are four) and that 57th Street belonged to two, not one yearly meeting, one from each tradition! Quite intriguing, I thought. A lot of the very active members of 57th Street had been raised in and belonged to programmed meetings with pastors; others were raised in unprogrammed meetings. Still others were convinced Friends, like myself. Again, as in Ohio, I was drawn to the unity evidenced in deep corporate worship. There was also an energetic corporate witness in the world on issues of peace and especially on civil rights.

In 1965 I attended an American Friends Service Committee Midwest Summer Institute and met Rev. James Bevel, one of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s lieutenants. When he explained that he was doing advance organizing to bring Dr. King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference to Chicago, I asked if there was a way I could volunteer to help. I had few skills but nonetheless spent the summer researching West Side slum property records at the Cook County building, helping out in the SCLC office, and marching to end school overcrowding in the African American communities. That fall I joined the staff of an AFSC program in East Garfield Park that established and supported inter-cultural, interracial groups of pre-adolescent children. There I met Clyde and Jeanette Baker, and worked with Carol Zimmerman and Jesse Jackson—and continued to attend rallies, open housing marches, and speeches and sermons by Dr. King at West Side African-American churches. Our staff meetings at Project House were meetings for worship. And AFSC staff and program committees—the latter were made up largely of Chicago Quakers—provided consistent spiritual support, eldering, and opportunities for discernment to those of us Friends doing this work.

SCLC and Chicago organizers, including some AFSC staffers, spent the next year working to end the slums and to create open housing in Chicago. In the summer of 1966 we marched several times in Chicago's all-white Marquette Park neighborhood. It is no exaggeration to say that the hundreds of spectators were seething with rage. They shouted obscenities and some threw bricks at us. Dr. King was cautioned to avoid these marches, but he said at the time: "I have to do this—to expose myself—to bring this hate into the open." "I have seen many demonstrations in the South, but I have never seen anything so hostile and so hateful as I've seen here today." On August 6, a brick struck Dr. King and brought him to the ground. We went back the next day in greater numbers, and the violence against us escalated. The police lost control and the angry mob drove us out

of the park pelting us with stones. My car was set on fire, and along with dozens of others, rolled into the Marquette Park lagoon.

Two years later, on April 4, 1968, Dr. King was assassinated. Rioting erupted in Chicago and many other U.S. cities. The whole world was mourning Dr. King, and those of us in the multi-racial civil rights movement were finally jolted into understanding that white racism had to be addressed, and the white community was where white organizers must turn their attention, not to the African American community. There was a brief period when U.S. political leaders, scholars and leading clergy insisted urgently that America must purge itself of white racism. To me this made perfect sense. More to the point, in the wake of Dr. King's death, did we not understand that this was what God wanted of us? Did I understand that this was what God wanted of *me*?

I was finishing a social work degree with a concentration in community work. I contemplated who might hire someone to go and do this work, and cast about to see if others had heard this call, as I had. There was no groundswell. This at first surprised me. But after Dr. King's and Robert Kennedy's assassinations plus the escalation of the Vietnam War, a kind of cynicism had taken hold in many quarters. Just a couple of years earlier I would have naturally approached AFSC, at least to ask for some kind of advice, discernment, or perhaps oversight for what seemed to be emerging as a leading. But in 1968, AFSC was necessarily focused to a great extent on the Vietnam War and the draft, and it had begun moving in a new direction, to stand in solidarity with and help liberate politically oppressed and alienated peoples.

So I scaled back my expectations. Could I find at least one service organization with a presence in one of Chicago's large all-white areas? Maybe I could persuade them to let me go there to work. It was not easy, but I identified two metropolitan-wide associations, one with a small presence in Marquette Park. I recalled the faces, contorted with anger, of the people screaming at us two years before. I had an uneasy sense, as one who had marched, that I did not really understand what lay beneath all that rage, but I admitted to myself that we marchers had deliberately provoked them, expecting them to become violent. In fact a truth was emerging for me: I had not seen these people as real human beings. There had been arrogance in my dismissive judgments and easy willingness to answer to the worse angels of their nature.

Nothing felt even slightly comfortable about going there to do community work. I yearned for a community of Quakers who believed strongly in this work and who would challenge and elder me and hold

me accountable. In his book *Doors Into Life*, Douglas Steere describes what might have happened to John Woolman had he not been a part of a community deeply rooted in the Spirit: “Without such a community...the one who feels called to this deeper devotion may hesitate, falter, or stop short, or he may develop willful eccentricities or grievances which may end by making him only a queer enemy of the people and cut him off from the true life of full devotion.”

What could I, at age 28, possibly bring? I certainly did not want to develop willful eccentricities! Did I think I was going to walk into a family’s bungalow and open conversations about race or racism? And I knew no one there. What kind of work was required to eliminate racism? I had no real idea. But by then, I felt I was being led, and that somehow I would be given what I needed, and at least do no harm. There was some assurance knowing that even John Woolman and Dr. King had repeated bouts of uncertainty, and struggled frequently with whether their leadings were true and rightly ordered.

As a means of gaining new understanding, according to Douglas Steere, Woolman always relied on *personal exposure*. Steere writes, “Woolman owed to this very exposure the deepening and broadening of his own concern.” And, “His method was one that was always deeply respectful of those he visited. It presupposed a divine center in them that was open to approach. His task was to answer to that of God in them.”

Woolman himself journaled about his need to go and spend time with the Indians, so “...that I might feel and understand their life and the spirit they live in, if happily I might receive some instruction from them, or they might be in any degree helped forward by my following the leadings of truth among them.” With John Woolman and some of my own living Quaker role models for inspiration, I was certain that I would be guided and cared for and that way would open in time.

Tom and I, just married, moved to an apartment in Alderman Burke’s 14th Ward and I became administrator of a community center with a staff of three, including myself. My monthly meeting was caring and supportive. As well, I relied on personal friendships that deepened in those years, and they were an invaluable help as I inched my way up a very steep learning curve.

Chicago has long been infamous as the most segregated city in the country. It was why SCLC chose Chicago for Dr. King’s campaign in the north. Tragically, it is no better today, according to recent research reports. In 1968, blockbusting, panic peddling, and mortgage redlining were rampant. Blocks were re-segregating in a matter of weeks on the

Southwest and West Sides of the city. Though placed in the midst of it, I knew of nothing I alone could do in a crisis on this scale.

Getting the lay of the land, I learned that among the 250,000 white people on the greater Southwest Side lived 25% of Chicago's policemen and a high portion of its firefighters. There were electricians, plumbers, grocers, teachers, clerks, nurses, bookkeepers, and construction workers. Most of their grandparents had immigrated to Chicago from Poland, Ireland, Lithuania, Italy or elsewhere in Europe to work in the stockyards or in similarly dirty, dangerous places. About 90% were Roman Catholic. A tiny portion were Jewish and members of the synagogue on Kedzie Avenue. Some families had seven, ten, or even eleven children. Ordinarily, extended family members lived nearby. Their places of worship were the center of community and family life. With scarce resources I decided to reach out and try and meet others who might welcome a partner in whatever community work they might be doing. Quickly I met people who would talk to me, a young priest here, a young minister there, mothers active in PTA.

From the outset there was an Inner Guide I learned to trust. First of all it helped me to be patient. I listened and listened, and tried to pay attention. Fortunately I could call on my skill, developed in childhood, for working my way into people's spaces, and then listening some more. As in my community of origin, it soon became a fine adventure to learn all the ethnicities and parishes and how they related to each other, to taste their foods and dance the polka at their family weddings. I was beginning to "feel and understand their life and the spirit they lived in."

Within a fairly short time I discovered something not reported in the media or discussed outside the southwest side, or at the University of Chicago. It was that for several years, but particularly since the Marquette Park marches, numerous religious leaders throughout the greater southwest side had been taking strong, clear stands on the need for racial justice, teaching their people that God called them to love their neighbors and to seek just solutions to social issues. A substantial minority of residents still agreed with the brick-throwers, to be sure. And with *them* these clergy were quite unpopular. But in dozens of congregations there were study-groups, and regular educational events. A couple of parishes were active in a diocesan program for pairing churches in black and white neighborhoods. But also, to my surprise, I learned that all of them, Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, had invited in and were sponsoring Saul Alinsky-trained community organizers. An organizing convention was in the planning stage. An umbrella

organization, the Southwest Community Congress, with 103 member-groups was founded in 1969. In a huge decision, from its founding it was not to be an all-white organization. Its eastern boundary was deliberately drawn to cross over the tense racial dividing line. Now the brick-throwers were definitely out of sorts.

A community, a whole class of people had been labeled as unredeemable racists. But while the “establishment,” that is the politicians, the scholars, and the media leaders, was paying no attention God’s people were pulling off a stealth revolution.

At this point, for me, it was time to stop and pay attention on an altogether deeper level. I joined in their work while creating a grass roots women’s organization, Southwest Women Working Together. For ten more years these people, lay and clergy alike, served as my daily teachers and indeed my spiritual mentors. The labels fell away, and I was honored to become quite close and connected to them and their lives. What did John Woolman say after connecting to the Indians? “...happily I received instruction from them.”

Time does not permit my sharing details of the myriad specific lessons I received—the more complex understanding of fair housing, a nuanced perspective on abortion, the layers of identity that women can have, why some people have guns, the things a policeman endures in a day, and much more. But from this extended time of trusting the Spirit I learned that indeed I could “answer to that of God,” in people with quite different life experiences and understandings. I had been rightly led to walk *into* and not away from this maligned community. I learned that to be tolerant and open is a necessary, but only small, beginning step in moving to answer that of God in every person. Much more was required of me. After tolerance came listening, deep listening. And then I had to listen with my whole heart. And, then, and only then, came connection and community.

Instruction—divine instruction—could begin.

THE JONATHAN W. PLUMMER LECTURE

Beginning with the 1961 sessions, Illinois Yearly Meeting of Friends proposed to annually honor its first clerk by designating the principal or keynote address, the Jonathan W. Plummer Lecture.

Jonathan Wright Plummer, acknowledged by Quaker Torch Bearers, as the father of Friends General Conference, was born in 1835 at Richmond, Indiana. He died in 1918 at 83 years of age and lies interred at Graceland Cemetery in Chicago.

When he was 39, he moved to Chicago, where he was first with E. R. Burnham & Son, wholesale druggists. Later, this was the Morrison-Plummer Company, wholesale druggists, and is now known as McKesson & Robbins.

He introduced profit-sharing in his business and he practiced tithing, giving one-tenth of his private income and one-tenth of the income from his drug business. He also loaned money freely to people in need. He advocated prison reform.

“He did go to Meeting, headed committees of action, and notably in 1878 wrote letters which were albatrosses about the neck of pious epistolary correspondence. Illinois Yearly Meeting, which he helped to create in 1875, was housed in the country near McNabb, Illinois. Here he came once a year by train to meet with Friends from 10 neighborhoods of Nebraska, Iowa, Illinois, and Indiana, as well as with spiritual leaders from other Yearly Meetings.

“In 1878 he came with a project as clear as a blueprint. Its framework was a conference and its aim to co-ordinate widely scattered activities. . . . Jonathan Plummer desired a conference that would consider all the social testimonies of Friends. As a result, minute 52 of Illinois Yearly Meeting’s proceedings in 1878 set him at liberty to prepare an address of invitation to the several Yearly Meetings for holding a general conference once in five years or oftener.”

He gave the opening address at the World’s Parliament of Religions (held during the ‘93 Fair), expressing hope for greater helpfulness and for co-operation among all faiths.

“He was not a pronounced religious mystic, as were many earlier Quakers. He listened to the ‘still, small voice,’ and this prompted both charity and vocal ministry.

“He measured up to the test of greatness set by Goethe in that he expressed clearly what others felt but were unable to express. He lived in the midst of what shall not pass away. Whoever is the messenger of its truth brings surprises to mankind. Such was Jonathan W. Plummer.”