

**LISTENING, LEARNING, LOVING,
AND LAUGHING**

Frank Young

The 2022 Jonathan Plummer Lecture

Presented for
Illinois Yearly Meeting
of the
Religious Society of Friends

June 19, 2022



Frank Young is my older brother, a support during good and hard times. He learned from our parents and Quakers the importance of caring for every individual. I learned about his care for others when I was six years old and in the hospital. Visiting hours were limited in those days. Only my mother could visit me, and it was for a short time. I was lonely and scared. Then one afternoon Frank appeared outside the hospital window to my room holding his bicycle and waving at me. His hands waving were a lifeline for me.

During the Vietnam War, he was a draft counselor and helped young men understand the requirements to obtain conscientious objector status. This work included examining decisions by their draft boards to be sure their rights were not violated.

More recently another man in the retirement community where he lives did not have any family or local friends, and Frank voluntarily became his medical power of attorney and his advocate.

Over and over, Frank's concern for another has meant being asked to do something which was new to him but resulted in a lifeline for the recipient. The insights learned while being there for another requires time and energy which results in him receiving a gift. He only recognizes the gift(s) when they are needed in his own life. He will share his message out of waiting worship, and we will continue our worship after he finishes.

–Introduction by Janice Domanik

LISTENING, LEARNING, LOVING, AND LAUGHING

Thank those who asked me to give today's Plummer Lecture. Note that when my name came up, I was very quiet (since I was a member of the informal committee selecting speakers). What I should have done was to speak up, saying "That name is not one that would have occurred to me!"

In preparation for today, I diligently searched for an instruction manual for giving a Plummer Lecture. Alas, I could not find one. Still searching for guidance, I read previous Plummer Lectures. I found multiple references to spiritual growth. Now doctrine did not attract me to Quakerism; it was testimonies and social concerns. Discussions about beliefs have never appealed to me. To paraphrase James 2:18, I try by my works to demonstrate my faith. Any discussion of my spiritual growth will need to avoid analysis of my beliefs and focus on my lifelong attempts to live a life based on my beliefs.

I do have some practice telling stories—my software engineering students called my course “Story Time with Frank.” Let me begin by telling some stories. The stories will be about experiences and decisions that have had significant and often unexpected effects on my growth as a human being and on improving my ability to live a life that is in accord with my beliefs.

When I was young (no pun intended) our family attended the Methodist Church. I liked the organ music, the choirs, the minister, and (most of all) the “covered dish suppers.” Sunday School and the weekly recitation of the Apostle's Creed were not as appealing. When the minister changed, our family decided to find another church. That changed my life.

Princeton Friends Meeting was a small “united” meeting, affiliated with both the Orthodox Arch Street Yearly Meeting and the Hicksite Race Street Yearly Meeting. When my parents were composing a letter to request membership in the meeting, they asked me if I wanted to sign the letter. I did so and that is how I became a Quaker. I have never regretted that action and have remained a Quaker for the past 70 years.

Princeton Meeting is where I learned that there were things more important than differences in the language used to express religious beliefs. I learned that focusing on such differences was not a good way to create understanding or agreement. The meeting was a living demonstration that people who used different religious language and had different religious beliefs could respect each other, could learn from each other, and could work together effectively.

When I joined the Princeton Meeting, there were many children in the meeting but only two of high school age. I only had one year of First Day School before aging out. But during that year I learned a lot about the Hebrew Bible. Our teacher was Rachel Stoddard, who had grown up in a Jewish family. Later, in college, I found out that my First Day School Bible study was substantially equivalent to major parts of the “Introduction to Biblical Literature” course at Haverford.

Princeton Meeting did have some difficulties. The meetinghouse we used in the summers dated from the early 1800s. It was owned by a distant Orthodox meeting that had difficulty achieving unity on selling it to a meeting that was not Orthodox. When we finally owned the meetinghouse and were meeting there in the winters, we had to use two large fireplaces to heat the building. If you were too close to a fireplace, you roasted; too far and you froze. And the cold wind always came up from the gaps between the ancient floorboards. We loved that meeting and that meetinghouse. However, until a forced air heating system was installed, we were careful to dress appropriately for the unusual weather conditions found inside the meetinghouse.

It was easy to listen to the people in Princeton Meeting. I learned about the importance of acting on one’s beliefs. I saw many women in leadership positions. I discovered that I was a conscientious objector to war. I met Quakers whose lives and work were strongly influenced by their Quakerism. And I went to Haverford College.

At Haverford I majored in extra-curricular activities, Quaker-related peace and social action activities, and mathematics (in approximately equal portions). But the event that changed my future occurred at the beginning of my sophomore year—I failed the entrance examination for “Beginners Tennis Instruction.” I failed because it was highly unlikely that I would ever become a junior varsity tennis player.

The emphasis of the Physical Education Department was on intercollegiate athletics and not on the physical education that I needed. So, I informed the head of the department that I would no longer take their physical activity classes. I was told that I would not graduate if I did not fulfill the college physical education requirement. I responded that I would gladly take physical *education* classes when there were any offered. I was then called in by the administration to explain the situation. I was again threatened with denial of a Haverford degree.

For the next three years I took social service courses that could be used to satisfy a portion (but not all) of the physical education requirement. One of these courses involved participation in a Weekend Work Camp sponsored by the Friends Social Order Committee and run by David Richie. I often went on these work camps and learned much about the poverty and discrimination that were too frequently a part of urban Philadelphia.

In October of my senior year, I again went on a work camp. At the Friday evening meal, I managed to sit between two young women who were both working at the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC). I joined one of them on Saturday to help paint some rooms in one apartment. On Sunday I managed to accompany her to Police Court followed by a very long Baptist church service.

By the end of the weekend, I had arranged to take Julie (yes, it was Julie!) to a Philadelphia Orchestra concert a few weeks later. Things progressed rather rapidly. We were engaged in April and in August we were married under the care of both Princeton and Shrewsbury Meetings. Last August we celebrated our 60th wedding anniversary.

I should note here that I never did satisfy that physical education requirement. I did graduate from Haverford but have never been informed about how that happened. I should also warn any young people present here that refusing to satisfy a

college graduation requirement is not a guaranteed way to acquire a life partner.

My graduate studies in mathematics began immediately after our marriage. We lived in Powelton Village, near the University of Pennsylvania campus. We attended the small Powelton Meeting, and I was active in the Friends Peace Committee, anti-war demonstrations, draft counseling, and the Society for Social Responsibility in Science. Everything was going well, just as we planned.

In November when all our parents were visiting us in Philadelphia, we were able to share the joyful news that their first grandchild was expected early in June. This led to some major changes. Julie was earning nearly twice what I earned as a teaching assistant, but the high cost of childcare for infants meant that she would have to stop working outside the home. I would need to find additional part-time employment.

I first spent six weeks at Ursinus College substituting for a professor who was seriously ill. But it was not practical to continue teaching there. Travel time was difficult, they wanted me to teach several courses, and I would have to stop my graduate mathematics education. Luckily, I learned about Haverford's need for an instructor to teach one early morning class. I taught at Haverford for the next two years—at which point the department needed a full-time instructor.

Our son, Jonathan, was born in June of 1962 on a Monday morning. Julie had worked the previous Friday. Couples that were part of Powelton Meeting, several AFSC employees, friends, and relatives helped us out by providing hand-me-down baby clothes and diaper service. Jonathan slept in the bassinet that my sister Janice slept in as a baby and, when he outgrew that, in the crib that I (and all my siblings) had slept in. We learned that there are real benefits to being part of a caring community. We also learned the benefits of joining a baby-sitting cooperative.

Our life was not perfect. Money was short. Breaking a five dollar bill required a family conference. During the summer when Jonathan was one year old, Julie and I both worked part-time. Julie was back at the Service Committee and I taught summer school. One day Julie was eating lunch with a Service Committee executive. He asked how things were going, and Julie gave an honest assessment—we had little income, no car, not much savings, and the new chair of the mathematics department

believed that graduate students had no business having children (or even being married). Before lunch was over Julie had learned about a job caring for an historic house in Germantown.

We applied, agreed to be at the house every single night, agreed to stay at least one year, and agreed to show visitors through the house and care for the grounds. In return we would be able to live rent-free in an adjacent three bedroom house with all utilities paid including local telephone. We quickly accepted the offer and became caretakers of Grumblethorpe, John Wister's Germantown home, built in 1744. Half of our house was built in 1740 and the other half in 1801.

One advantage of this move was that we became sojourning members of the large Germantown Meeting for the next five years. Many of the members of that meeting were working for or retired from the Service Committee or other Quaker organizations. Others were doctors, lawyers, educators, social workers.

They all were kind, welcoming, friendly, listened to others, and rarely mentioned their many activities and accomplishments. As years have passed, we have gradually become aware that there were people we knew in that meeting who were quite famous. Harold Evans was the attorney for Gordon Hirabayashi when Gordon's conviction for disobeying the special rules that were applied during World War II to persons of Japanese descent (whether US citizens or permanent residents) was appealed to the Supreme Court. Elizabeth Gray Vining was the tutor to the Japanese Crown Prince. In the 1960s, Dr. Jonathan Rhoads developed a method for providing total intravenous nutrition and by 2013 it was estimated to have saved the lives of more than ten million children. Spencer Cox led the Pennsylvania ACLU when the Schempp case against required Bible reading in the public schools was brought before the Supreme Court.

More important is that Germantown Meeting has produced many Quakers who have become leaders. One should note that there is at present one leader in this yearly meeting that we first knew when she was a young child whose parents were attending Germantown Meeting.

We liked having a son so much and our expenses were so modest that we decided to have another child. Richard was born in July of 1964.

My activities now included the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting Peace Committee, the Germantown Meeting Peace Committee,

board member of the Society for Social Responsibility in Science, draft counseling with the Central Committee for Conscientious Objectors, and training sessions in techniques of nonviolent direct action.

When the City of Philadelphia required all citizens to “take shelter” during misleading and futile atomic bomb attack “drills,” I helped organize a demonstration against the drills. The demonstrators all brought umbrellas to provide their own “shelter” in an open public plaza near City Hall. There were several stories in the papers about the demonstration including pictures of our “shelters” and accurate information that we had presented about the known effects of atomic bombs and the ineffectiveness of the shelters that people were supposed to use in case of an atomic attack. Combining humor with truth is an effective nonviolent tactic.

When we lived in Powelton Village we had become acquainted with a pregnant college student who was considering placing her child for adoption. As a direct result of this experience, we sought approval to be foster parents for pregnant teenaged girls whose parents had thrown them out of their home. The agency unexpectedly needed us to care for a newborn. So, in the spring of 1965 we were caring (very temporarily) for a foster infant in addition to our two boys. Luckily, an adoptive family was quickly found for the foster child.

At Germantown Meeting one Sunday we learned of an AFSC program to bring talented high school seniors who were attending inadequate southern high schools to schools in the North. The goal was to better prepare them for success in college. When we tried to apply, we found that the program had already found enough host families. We said we would apply the next year.

Then in August we received a call from the AFSC. It was not about an AFSC program. A small group of people in the Washington, D.C. area had arranged for a talented high-school sophomore to attend Friends Select School in Central Philadelphia. A host family was needed. We immediately arranged to meet with her and discuss arrangements. We said that we would be glad to do this until a “more suitable family” could be found. We felt a family with a teenaged daughter would be more appropriate. So, in the fall of 1965, when we were in our middle 20s, we became the “parents” of sixteen year old Barbara. Of course, a “more suitable family” was never found.

This was *not* a disaster. It *was* a lot of work. But as we have often said, we received more benefits from this arrangement than Barbara did. We tutored her for a few months because her previous schooling had left serious gaps. We gave her an opportunity to ask us questions and discuss things with us. She taught us many things that we did not know, but should have been aware of. She changed us for the better.

Traditional Hawaiians would sometimes place a child with another family to be raised. Such a child was called a *hanai* child. Such children were full members of the new family. Barbara is our *hanai* daughter and the grandmother of three of our four great-grandchildren. I now joke that the AFSC provided me with both a wife and a daughter.

We had not been very active in the civil rights movement. Grumblethorpe duties and our two young boys tended to limit our activities. But we found out about a summer program at Tougaloo College in Jackson, Mississippi. If we could get substitute caretakers for Grumblethorpe, we could teach in the program. So the summer of 1966 was spent at Tougaloo getting admitted students ready for college level work. You may recall that 1966 was only two years after the Mississippi Freedom Summer and the murders of James Earl Chaney, Andrew Goodwin, and Michael Schwerner. Some thought we were crazy to go to Mississippi. Their fears were well-founded, but our students were deeply appreciative of our teaching and loved getting to know our boys. We were glad we had gone there.

We had now duplicated ourselves and thought that adoption was a more responsible way to increase the size of our family. So we searched for an infant girl to adopt, since we already had two boys. In April of 1967, I walked a block down from my office to the Women's Christian Alliance to begin the process of adopting an infant daughter. Five months later Susanna arrived—five days old.

The next ten months were very busy with four children in residence, one of whom was thinking about where to go to college. I was trying to finish up my dissertation and starting to search for teaching jobs. Julie was caring for a new baby and keeping everything all together. And, in the midst of all this activity, I had to tell our teenage daughter, Barbara, that Martin Luther King, Jr. had been assassinated.

By summer of 1968 everything was finally coming together: My dissertation had been completed. A job offer from Knox

College had been accepted. We had purchased a small house in Galesburg. My degree had been awarded. Barbara had returned to Washington for the summer and, thanks to a very generous scholarship, would attend Oberlin College in the fall. Jonathan had finished kindergarten. And Susanna's final adoption hearing had been held. One morning in August a moving van arrived to take our possessions to our new home in Galesburg, Illinois. The new caretakers moved into Grumblethorpe that afternoon.

We soon joined the Galesburg Worship Group, and helped it transform into the Peoria-Galesburg Meeting. That required attending Illinois Yearly Meeting in 1969. Some people there discovered I was teaching mathematics at Knox. They assumed I could add and subtract and arranged for the Nominating Committee to include me in the group that prepared the annual budget. I remained the leader of that group for about six years, probably because I really could add and subtract.

In 1970 we bought a larger house, one that would be big enough for an additional child. Early in 1971 we adopted Margaret, who was three months old when she arrived. In 1972 the six of us traveled to Oberlin College for Barbara's graduation and heard Pete Seeger give (or more accurately sing) the graduation address.

In 1975 we had the opportunity to hold our first grandchild, Barbara's daughter Hope. The rest of us spent a year in Nigeria where Julie and I were teaching, and the four younger children attended local schools.

In 1980 the unexpected death of the Presiding Clerk of Illinois Yearly Meeting and an equally unexpected resignation of his successor catapulted me into becoming Presiding Clerk of Illinois Yearly Meeting. I was also teaching temporarily at the University of Iowa, living in a room in Iowa City, and going home weekends. Work, commuting, significant leadership positions with FGC and the Illinois ACLU, as well as changing my teaching from mathematics to computer science, managed to keep me very busy.

In 1983 I entered graduate school to formally study computer science and software engineering, spending fall semester and summer each year at the University of Illinois while teaching full-time at Knox for two of their three terms. After four years of this I applied to be Head of the Department of Computer Science at Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology. I was offered the

job and accepted. We moved to Indiana in August of 1987. For the next 15 years I continued in this position, as the number of computer science majors (and the number of faculty members in the department) tripled. I was also doing volunteer work with Friends General Conference, the Indiana ACLU, and Illinois Yearly Meeting.

Julie and I both retired in 2002, and a year later we spent a year teaching and volunteering in Hawaii. We returned to Hawaii each winter for 15 years, worshiping with the Big Island Friends Meeting. We also spent five springs as Friends in Residence at Woodbrooke Quaker Study Centre near Birmingham, UK. We were a Quaker presence during the day and performed reception and emergency service duties at night. Ten years after my first retirement, I briefly served as Interim Executive Director of the Indiana ACLU Affiliate. Significant volunteer service involving the juvenile courts, education, computer science, software engineering, and engineering accreditation also kept me busy and traveling after retirement.

I have now “retired” more than 15 times after my original retirement in 2002. There are some additional retirements that will be added later—Clerk of the ILYM Development Committee, member (with Julie) of the AFSC Campaign Committee, ILYM Representative to the AFSC Corporation, and Westminster Village Residents’ Association President.

We have now lived in the Westminster Village community for more than seven years. We are both very active in Residents’ Association committees and governance. But let me tell you a story about poetry.

A group of Westminster residents has several times given formal readings of their favorite poems to evening audiences. As a member of this group, I have read some of my favorite poems. Not surprisingly, the poems I select could be interpreted as being advertisements for Quakerism.

Here are some examples. First here is one that I think about whenever I come to McNabb, the conclusion to “The Meeting” by John Greenleaf Whittier:

And so, I find it well to come
For deeper rest to this still room,
For here the habit of the soul
Feels less the outer world's control;

The strength of mutual purpose pleads
More earnestly our common needs;
And from the silence multiplied
By these still forms on either side,
The world that time and sense have known
Falls off and leaves us God alone.

The first line of “Live Your Creed” by Langston Hughes is
I'd rather see a sermon than to hear one any day.

The poem ends with the following lines:
And the lectures you deliver may be very fine and true
But I'd rather get my lesson by observing what you do.
For I may misunderstand you and the fine advice
 you give
But there's no misunderstanding how you act and
 how you live.

Finally, let me quote one of my favorite poems, “The World
We Seek” by the Friends Committee on National Legislation:

We seek a world
free of war and the threat of war.
We seek a society
with equity and justice for all.
We seek a community
where every person's potential may be fulfilled.
We seek an earth restored.

When one has reached my age, one often thinks about what
has been constant in one's life. The first constant in my life is
teaching. When I retired from Rose-Hulman I made these
comments about what teaching means to me:

I have taught for 41 years, almost all of them full time.
I have tried to draw out the potential of every one of
my students. I have not tried to make them copies of
me (one of me is probably enough). I have tried to
help my students discover themselves—their talents,
their integrity, their essence. For me this is a religious
commitment. I believe that each human being has
something that is of supreme worth—something that
needs to be recognized, respected, and fostered. I
would like to thank my students for giving me the
opportunity to live my beliefs.

On a wall in our home there is a cross-stitching created by two former students. It reads “A teacher affects eternity. One can never tell where a teacher’s influence stops.” I am thankful that I have had this opportunity to affect eternity.

The second constant in my life is service and volunteering. Many nominating committees, administrators, and organizations have asked me to undertake tasks for which I sometimes had minimal or no qualifications. The pay was non-existent, and the work was frequently difficult. Invariably, I said “yes.” This may be a sign of a serious speech impediment—the inability to utter the word “NO.” In addition, when I see needs, I have a habit of seeking new volunteer activities.

The third constant in my life is Quaker testimonies and queries. The idealistic goals of the testimonies help us recognize that there will always be more to accomplish. The embarrassing questions in the queries make us aware of ways that we may be preventing or ignoring needed change. Quakerism to me means always working to create Heaven here on Earth. The testimonies set the goals; the queries help us see the needs and our shortcomings.

Of course, there are also the advices, which in the 1800s were used to tell Quakers, in elaborate detail, exactly how they should behave. The advices were much more specific than the goal oriented testimonies. Our favorite one is found in the Advices and Queries of Britain Yearly Meeting. Number 17 starts with extensive and very specific exhortations, queries, and advice about how to be respectful, courteous, and careful when working and talking with those who have different ideas, language, and beliefs. The last sentence is “Think it possible that you may be mistaken.” That is a wonderful and very helpful piece of advice.

The fourth constant in my life has been seeking out Quaker worship whenever possible. Julie and I (together with any accompanying children) have attended meetings in Nigeria, London, Bourneville, York, Orkney, Copenhagen, Auckland, Hawaii, and many places in the continental United States. Getting to know Quakers from different countries and different yearly meetings, together with the experience of different meeting places and environments, helps one appreciate what unites us, despite our many differences. Quakers meet in homes, office buildings, meetinghouses (both historic and modern), even

spare rooms in churches or schools. One meeting meets on a beach in Hawaii, a meeting place that the members affectionally call their “Quaker cathedral.”

The fifth constant in my life is change. We all change as we mature and gain experience. Social attitudes change over time. Life activities and work may need alteration because of technology developments or political events. We must adapt to these changes without losing track of important truths. Students must prepare to live and thrive in new and different worlds, worlds that do not yet exist. Everyone, no matter their age or education, must be able to do things that they were not taught in school. Some examples in my life include counseling students, handling estates, arranging funerals, serving as a medical power of attorney, being a social worker, serving as a Court Appointed Special Advocate for children, doing personnel administration as Assistant to the Vice-President for Finance, doing fundraising, giving sermons, and writing a Plummer Lecture.

It is time now to mention the title of this talk that I have so far ignored. The title that I have given to this talk is simply the four things that I have found most meaningful in my life: *Listening, Learning, Loving, and Laughing.*

Listening helps us understand each other. Listening requires respect. Listening means that one is aware of the environment, of the situation, of each other. Listening can change us for the better.

Learning is the result of good listening. Learning helps us grow and understand. Learning allows us to continually prepare for an uncertain and frequently unexpected future.

Loving must include closeness with the environment and with all life on earth. We must act with love towards our environment and our community. We must also love our family. In Hawaiian the word for family is *ohana*. One’s *ohana* includes more than just relatives. It includes all the people who are important in your life. When I was growing up there were people that we considered family who were not related to us. This was considered strange by many of our friends. I learned in Hawaii that the strange thing is to define family to include *only* relatives. We have been fortunate to have a large and varied *ohana*. When I was attending the University of Illinois and living in Urbana weekdays, Frankie and Mahlon Day and their daughter Dorothy became members of our *ohana*.

When we love one another, there is joy and laughter in our relationships. Those in our ohana are joyful and we laugh together a lot. My life has also been filled with another kind of joy—the joy that results from trying to live in accord with one’s beliefs. If we love one another and show that love by our actions, then the results bring us much joy.

I now will stop telling stories and stop talking about Quakerism and just simply say what has made my life wonderful—lots of listening, lots of learning, lots of loving, and lots of laughing. For this I am very grateful. I have experienced much joy as I have tried to witness to my beliefs. May each of you have the good fortune to have a life filled with joy as you:

*Listen carefully, learn constantly,
love deeply, and laugh often
while always witnessing to your beliefs.*

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.”