

LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK

Virginia Schelbert

The 2023 Jonathan Plummer Lecture

Presented for
Illinois Yearly Meeting
of the
Religious Society of Friends

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I am happy to introduce Virginia for her Plummer Lecture.

We have known each other since our daughters—mine, Dorothy, and hers, Kirsten—were on the soccer team and the cross country team at Evanston Township Highschool. That was many years ago as both of our daughters are in their 50's.

Since we are both nurses who worked in community health settings, we often went to medical education conferences together in the Chicago area.

She is also the person I turn to for a “curbside consult” about my own health problems. Her medical knowledge is very deeply rooted, detailed, and practical.

I look forward to hearing her Plummer Lecture. She will speak out of the silence.

Phyllis Reynolds

LET YOUR LIFE SPEAK

I am now pleased that the ILYM Planning Committee felt led to invite me to share my life's spiritual journey with you and for Phyllis Reynolds' kind introduction. It's an opportunity to acknowledge the persons as well as the experiences which made a marked influence on the journey of me becoming the person I am—attempting to live a faithful life. Although a rather recent newcomer to Illinois Yearly Meeting and a lifelong Friend, preparing this talk has been a challenge. I am not a writer nor a speaker; my strength is the mutuality of one-to-one conversations with people.

My birth to John and Dorothy Branin took place in Philadelphia since my mother, a registered nurse, didn't trust any of the local New Jersey hospitals. I grew up in a prerevolutionary house, the former Cedar Lake Inn, with a history. It had been a part of the Underground Railroad, with a long 24-inch-wide false attic space between the front and back dormer rooms. At the turn of the century, Eayrestown was a bustling port town on the Rancocas River. The house evolved into an 18-room inn, popular for its picnic grounds with a carousel, a brick tennis court, and a lake for rowing. As children, my younger sister and I loved to explore the long-abandoned buildings that had once been a general store, a grist miller's cottage, an icehouse, a blacksmith shop, and an old barn containing the remnants of the carousel. The property became a small farm where I lived with my parents, a sister, a flock of chickens, a dog, and numerous cats. My father maintained a small wildlife refuge. The county game warden brought several rescued orphaned animals for my father to raise and return to nature when they matured, including deer and racoons.

As children we had fields to work, meadows to roam, a creek to swim and woods to explore—a paradise. I cherished nature throughout each of the seasons on long weekly walks with my taciturn father, who would point out all the changes in each of the seasons, so I became aware, so acutely aware, of the importance of not interfering but caring for the life in the fields and forest. These experiences made me feel spiritually closer to our Creator and a lifelong appreciation of stewardship of property. We would talk about that every living thing after its creation has a time to grow—some flourish, some struggle, and some wither away before maturity. It is our task to work with the environment, so that each plant, each creature, is able to develop to its full potential during its lifetime. I was often able to apply these thoughts while rearing each of our children, in nursing practice, and during the clinical learning of nursing students.

There was always something to do or needed to be done, feeding chickens, gathering eggs, harvesting the vegetables, canning what we couldn't eat, carrying in the days' supply of water from the well. In spare time, we were voracious readers. It was a life of simplicity.

Christmas was not celebrated in our Quaker clan, each day needed to be seen as holy and lived accordingly, but mother insisted on having a Christmas tree. On December 24th each year we would trek into our woods and after much deliberation, select the most perfect tree among those that my father designated whose cutting would benefit the growth of the woods, saw it down, and haul it back to the house. The next morning, we would awaken to a beautifully transformed tree with a gift for each person. My parents tried to avoid encouraging any possessions that suggested materialism.

Before my father's accident, we attended Medford Meeting. When my mother became our family's breadwinner, working seven days a week, neighbors took us to their orthodox Presbyterian church each Sunday. It was here that we were taught to memorize Bible verses and learn the stories in the Bible.

In the days before Intensive Care Units, physicians would often order Private Duty Nurses for their sickest or most complicated patients. Mother was one of those chosen for this role, which she cherished. I was impressed by her total dedication to each of her patients and her gratitude for being able to nurse

the critically ill as they either regained or lost their health. She considered it a privilege to be with the family at the bedside of those who were dying. We loved to hear the stories of her work the next day.

Elementary School

My parents valued Quaker education and decided to send us to Moorestown Friends School from 1st through 12th grades. To this day I remember each of my very special teachers who helped us be mindful of others and to bring our individual faiths into action. In first grade, we began collecting dimes to purchase paper and pencils for the French Bleville Elementary School which was devastated during World War II. The next class, we began to exchange our best drawings with the French second graders who by the end of the year wrote back to us little notes of appreciation in English. I still remember being addressed as “Dear little girl” from my pen pal friend Bernadette.

In 4th, 5th and 6th grades we were introduced to Meeting for Worship every 5th day in the former Hicksite meetinghouse. In 7th through 12 grades, we attended in the older original meetinghouse for a full hour of Meeting for Worship. Several members from the community would join us every Thursday and offered vocal ministry. I still remember some inspiring messages. During these years, stillness within the silence was sometimes experienced.

Middle School

In Junior High or Middle School, I was greatly influenced by the life of Albert Schweitzer after reading and rereading his book *Reverence for Life*, which spoke to my Quaker values. His writing reinforced my love of nature, although I never made peace with spiders. I could watch for hours their faithful constructing of their beautiful intricate webs, which would be rather tattered by morning. Trying to make peace with spiders, I read and reread the Polish legend, a story of the spider weaving with patience and persistence the silken blanket providing warmth for the baby Jesus born in the manger with no swaddling. For many, spiders are a symbol of good luck. My mother-in-law never killed a spider no matter how inconvenient their web. I loved watching tiny newly hatched spiderlings that turn their spinnerets upward,

waiting for a breeze to help them balloon forward on a glistening thread to their new homes—absolutely adorable. But then they grow up. Ugh!

It was in 8th grade that I decided to have Jesus as the guide and role model for my future life. He seemed so much kinder, gentler, and more loving than a God who didn't seem to intervene in a world with so much cruelty, violence, and injustice all over his creation that He had once proclaimed was good.

High School

In high school religious discussion groups, we learned to respect the multiple perspectives of our classmates from different faith traditions and that Quakers did not have a monopoly of the goodness performed throughout the world.

One had to be 15 years old to participate in Weekend Workcamps led by David Ritchie, a former teacher at Moorestown Friends School whose motto was “Work is love made visible.” After waiting impatiently for years, I could finally sign up for the first weekend after my 15th birthday. Saturday we worked in pairs painting rooms together with family members, and were surprised by the numbers of cockroaches that emerged from the moldings as the fumes penetrated the cracks in the walls. Our host mother put a plastic placemat on the floor and said to listen so that we could hear their feet clicking as they scurried away. One must appreciate this insect that has survived over the millennia.

Sunday mornings after worshiping at a nearby church, we attended Magistrate's Court where the appointed official processed all the arrests of Saturday night.

These days were valuable times of fellowship and were eye opening to see how people lived with so little in this overcrowded and poverty-stricken area of Philadelphia. My experiences of this nearby city were limited to school chaperoned field trips to various museums and the once-a-year trip to see the festive department stores' windows during the Christmas season.

College

My forward-looking mother decided that preparation for nursing was changing. Indeed, the traditional 3-year nurses training with a diploma was being replaced by 4-year collegiate

nursing programs providing a baccalaureate degree. I am forever grateful to her. After a daunting orientation on our first day, we were told to first look at the person to our left and then to our right and that one of us would not be present for the next semester. I was determined that would not be me.

Our exceptional nursing faculty designed a rigorous program to prepare us to establish a trusting relationship with each of our patients. Interpersonal interviewing technique was used to teach us to utilize empathy, compassion and to honor the dignity of each individual. We were encouraged to incorporate ethical principles into our clinical practice, which enabled us to provide competent comprehensive nursing to meet the health care needs of the diverse population of Newark, New Jersey. By the end of the program, I felt truly blessed that my career would be congruent with my Quaker faith. I'm totally indebted to the College of Nursing faculty at Rutgers University.

During our psychiatric rotation, I experienced raw human rage for the first time in my life. A new patient verbally accosted me, then began menacingly advancing with clenched fists. I quickly learned that there was another response besides fight or flight to a serious threat and that was freeze. My instructor immediately came over and asked him "Who does Miss Branin remind you of?" Apparently I looked just like his sister, who had had him committed to the state mental hospital. I watched as my instructor had him talk out his rage with quiet questions, encouraging descriptions, clarifications, and when calm asked him how I was different from his sister. With a new skill, I was able to work closely with this disturbed child of God for several months until he was discharged with insight, medication, and some effective coping skills.

Wearing a nurse's uniform, I was transformed from quiet person into an empowered patient advocate. However, sometimes my Quaker values needed adjusting. The only patients getting infections on the Burn Unit were mine. I was sure that I was using good technique with the painful dressing changes. I asked the charge nurse to observe me, she said "You are much too gentle, sometimes it's kinder to debride the wounds aggressively. It's quicker too." I always tried to provide adequate pain control for each patient, but even morphine only took the edge off of the pain of an extensive burn, so one had to be creative in finding helpful

coping strategies. In addition to giving the rationale for each step of the dressing change procedure to reduce the risk of infection, I found that doing the Lamaze breathing techniques used during childbirth with the person seemed to be most effective. And best of all, none of my patients ever had an infection again!

There was no nearby meeting, so I began attending a local Presbyterian church with my roommate, and was mesmerized by the pastor's sermons, the organ music, hymns, and singing of the choir whose director had a doctorate in sacred music. We were invited to join the choir. Singing unedited choral works by the masters provided such deep joy, adding a new spiritual dimension to my life. The beauty of voices joining together reminded me of the meaning of the angels and the heavenly host. After being baptized, I joined this church. A wonderful older Irish couple "adopted" me, and I finally had the grandparents I had so longed for during childhood

I met Leo Schelbert at Rutgers in a History of Western Civilization class. Students had to maintain a C average to keep our state scholarships, so several of us saved a freshman survey course in which nurses traditionally did not perform well until our senior year. Leo appreciated the more mature nursing students because we had already grappled with the questions of life and death. We were fascinated with his teaching, beginning with the pre-civilization world, making us aware of other evolving life in the middle and far east, making history alive and meaningful. He taught that the United States was not an empty continent to be settled, but a peopled land whose natives lived in harmony with their environment until invaded by Europeans, either as conquerors, traders, or colonialists. He included the folk who came not by choice, but by enslavement.

By the end of the year, my roommate had a serious crush on Leo and his Swiss accent. She would insist that I ask him her questions in class, which I reluctantly did. Professor Schelbert responded, "That's an interesting question, would you please expand on that?" Not prepared for that, I expounded on something until he seemed satisfied. With Peggy's pleading, we invited him to accompany us for a tour of a museum with relevant historical artifacts, which he happily did.

After graduation, when I moved back home to take on the role of the evening charge nurse of the local hospital's pediatric

unit, Leo and I began going out together. He had recently left the Roman Catholic Church. Hearing about my former Quaker heritage, I soon learned he knew far more about Quaker history than I ever did and together we widened our spiritual awarenesses. We began attending Mt. Holly Monthly Meeting, which still had many of my relatives as members. After our engagement, a clearness committee for membership and another for marriage were held. We joyfully married under the care of Mt. Holly Meeting to which John Woolman had earlier belonged. Later I was asked to serve as an elder and Leo shared the teaching of adult First Day School. When the caretakers of the Woolman House went away on vacation, they asked us to house sit which we happily did. Although there were only a few of the original furnishings remaining, we slept on a vintage rope bed and cherished caring for this lovely, simple home until their return.

Our oldest son Kenneth attended meeting with us from the week he was born. Our second son Erik was not as easy; it was ever so much more difficult to center and find stillness during worship with 2 young children. When Leo was awarded a 2-year research grant, our daughter Kirsten was born at home in Switzerland with Leo's large family nearby. It was the first time in my life that I was truly homesick for my mother, missing her presence after the birth of our third child. The closest meeting to us was an early train and bus ride away, necessitating awakening at 4:30 a.m. Kirsten was immediately at home during worship; Swiss Friends were so welcoming to us.

After returning to the United States, Leo was offered a tenure track position at University of Illinois at Chicago (UIC) teaching Western Civilization, History of World Religions, and his specialization History of Immigration. Our fourth and last child GionMatthias, although made in Switzerland, was born in Evanston.

We attended Evanston Friends Meeting several times but never felt at home, even after my teaching a world religion class to the middle school group. Mt. Holly was encouraging us, and over the years strongly encouraging us, to find a new spiritual home. Leo was reluctant to leave the meeting of John Woolman. This finally happened in 2013 when we felt fully comfortable transferring to Evanston Friends Meeting. Becoming more involved with attenders, we grew to love this community. I never knew why my family stayed at Medford meeting when Mt. Holly

was nearer, especially after they sold the farm and moved into town. Family members were in both burial grounds. The clerk remarked, “Well your father remained Orthodox and your cousins’ families were all Hicksite.”

Then came the busy years of raising our family. While performing everyday chores like washing dishes, doing laundry, or cleaning, I tried to utilize the time to be thankful for having a family, enough good food, and a comfortable home—being very aware of those who were not so blessed.

After the childrens’ bedtime, Leo and I had coffee and tea, quietly reviewing the events of the day. A Hindu priest had once told us that how one fell asleep was how one awoke in the morning. We found several things each day for which to be grateful and then tried to clear our minds of anything troubling, turning over to the Lord what we couldn’t change or control.

New Year’s Eve was Leo’s favorite holiday—a time of quiet reflection, a kind of State of the Soul assessment followed by New Year’s Day to wonder what the New Year would bring to us

I began to work the night shift, eventually becoming a head nurse. Leo offered to spend his sabbatical year as a house husband so I could complete graduate school. I then began a long tenure as a nursing educator at North Park, the university of the Swedish Covenant Evangelical Church. I really grew to appreciate the Quaker faith and was able to listen to and counsel our students struggling with the rigors of nursing school.

While at Swedish Covent Hospital, I became deeply influenced by Victor Frankl’s book *Man’s Search for Meaning*, a copy of which had been placed in each patient room. The resilience and incredible will to survive of this young Austrian psychiatrist writing about his experiences as a prisoner of Nazi concentration camps during World War II was truly inspiring to me. Hopefully, we can find meaning in our own lives by how we respond to our unique circumstances, our relationships, and our experiences. During my own sabbatical, I became an Adult Nurse Practitioner and later a Family Nurse Practitioner.

Each of our children developed so uniquely but each eventually was successively launched and found joy in his and her chosen careers. We now have nine wonderful healthy grandchildren ranging from 8 to 32 years of age.

UIC’s history department had an exchange program with Dusseldorf University in Germany. We couldn’t find housing for

our family of six. A realtor suggested renting 2 apartments, putting in a door to join them and then at the end of our lease replacing the wall at our expense. Leo found an advertisement on the bulletin board for available rooms in an old country farmhouse in the nearby village of Gohr. The living space turned out to be a commune of idealistic young people who had become ideologically alienated from their parents, who had to survive in Nazi Germany. We grew to appreciate their communal way of life and they couldn't believe that they enjoyed having a family living with them. Two interesting things happened during our stay. It was good for the children to have other adults say "yes" and "no" to them. When Leo's term was ending, the young people wanted to have a party for us. We agreed on the one condition that they also invited their estranged parents. Initially horrified, then reluctantly, they sent out the invitations. We spent many hours discussing how their parents probably did the best they could under horrific circumstances. The day arrived. Awkward at first, it evolved into wonderful conversations. The parents were surprised that a professor would bring his family to live with their children. It was a healing evening for each of us. We could leave with truly grateful hearts.

Evanston Friends Meeting

As mentioned earlier, we had not felt at home attending Evanston Friends Meeting for several years. I began to realize that we had come from a very homogenous meeting where many members were related. Years later, I grew to treasure the numbers of our community who were convinced Friends. I almost envied their seeking as they defined their newly found spiritual lives in the Quaker faith. I cherished being a part of the clearness for membership committees and later the welcome dinners as each new member became part of our community. By serving on committees, I gained additional insight enabling me to appreciate other members.

COVID, as for so many, opened a new spiritual dimension for Evanston Friends. Zoom enabled us to see and worship with individual faces while on lockdown. In the fall of 2020 and late spring, we met outside six feet apart wearing masks, weather permitting, until June 21, 2021, when most of us who were vaccinated were able to meet in person. There are still problems,

but through our love for each other, many of us have faith that these will eventually resolve as new ideas are considered.

One blessing during the pandemic, besides being able to worship with Friends from distant meetings, was an invitation from Lake Forest Meeting to join their virtual Saturday evening Adult Religious Education classes. We saw and met familiar and new Friends while we faithfully discussed videos, books, spiritual articles, and selected Pendle Hill pamphlets. This was such a deep, meaningful and enriching spiritual experience for those of us from Evanston who attended, and we are profoundly grateful.

After retiring from full-time undergraduate teaching at North Park, I began a part-time position of monitoring student nurse practitioners in their clinical practice at various clinics in the Chicago area, often ethnic and underserved areas. My Quaker roots were so helpful in having students learn to truly respect the varied beliefs and traditions of their clients. It was often challenging, but could be rewarding to incorporate folk remedies with current medical practice to formulate an individualized treatment plan that would be followed. It was also demoralizing to see that lack of good health care and resources were often dependent on the zip code where one lived.

I had retired from a part-time position of making house calls to the homebound, usually elderly, population who only saw a medical doctor in the Emergency Room. As Nurse Practitioners, we could visit these individuals, assess their state of health, order lab studies, x-rays, consultations and needed services in the home, diagnose and then treat the presenting illness. We have saved Medicare hundreds of thousands of dollars by minimizing costly ER visits and lengthy hospitalizations for serious complications of often easily managed health care problems, if addressed at an earlier stage. I also took blood pressures, screened blood glucose levels, and offered a monthly topic of health education as a wellness nurse at a senior center in Chicago.

When senior centers were closed during the pandemic, the city arranged for the nurses to make wellness calls, giving us lists and Google phones to check on seniors in various designated neighborhoods throughout Chicago. I volunteered for the Roseland community, making monthly calls to several hundred people often living alone in a single room efficiency apartment in a locked down building. Though they were initially wary of me

who was obviously not of their community, I gradually earned their trust by offering a health topic each month on a common health problem like diabetes, hypertension, asthma, immunizations, etc. I started by saying, “You may not have this condition but maybe some of the information may be helpful to a relative or a friend.” I knew that the ice broke when one person who always responded with “uh huh, uh huh, uh huh,” after 3 months said, “You don’t have to wait a whole month, you can call me back next week!” Needless to say, I got very close to so many telling their family milestones, stories, illnesses, faith traditions, and everyday concerns during the three years the call program lasted. I just wanted to meet each one in person to thank them for the sharing of their lives with me.

Death was not unknown to me, having cared for, then losing, each parent, a younger sister, and several close friends but the night Leo collapsed it took on a new meaning for me. With his last breath, my dearest living soulmate of 57 plus years, my best friend was gone. Although released from life, his spirit still seemed present.

It now took an inordinate amount of strength to come home each time, with him not being there.

The celebration of Leo’s life at his Memorial Meeting for Worship provided so much comfort for us and over the time of this past year, has become a source of quiet joy for me. Several times people observed how fortunate his students were to study immigration history from an immigrant’s firsthand experience. Leo happily responded, “But I am not an immigrant, I am a Swiss working abroad!” After hearing this story for a couple of months, it felt strongly right to take half of his ashes back to Switzerland.

We were looking for a rock that Leo and I particularly liked that he had passed on his way to and from school during the five years he had lived in Tischinas. It had been over 50 years since we last saw it, and over 10 years since our son had seen it with Leo. Everyone was a little skeptical because at first we had some trouble finding the location but GionMatthias and Leo’s youngest brother Tarcisi finally did. It turned out to be the perfect place with a wonderful view, a good place that felt absolutely right for Leo—quiet, peaceful, and beautiful.

After choosing and clearing a small area, Tarcisi prepared the space. I placed his ashes and covered them with some earth, then others put in stones and Tarcisi poured some Kirsch over the

stones, then we covered them with more earth, some moss and leaves. Tarcisi had found a thin Giacometti type branch in the form of a cross and that too was placed. After a period of silence, grateful for all the years together, I shared George Fox's guidance to let one's life speak, a favorite Stephen Grellet quote: "I shall pass this way but once. Any good therefore or any kindness I can show to any fellow creature, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it for I shall not pass this way again", a special Wendell Berry poem, and then Kirsten did Leo's rain dance. We reminisced, each had a small libation of Leo's favorite Kirsch in his honor and then we left Leo to solitude, which was such a cherished part of his being.

In spite of being blessed sharing a long life together and having so many rich memories, there is still a such a huge hole in my heart and an incredible void. I so miss his presence, his thereness which was especially noted while preparing this talk. I am reminded of Mother Theresa's definition of prayer which often spoke to me during this past year: "Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God at His disposition and listening to His voice in the depths of our hearts."

I hope that when it's time to leave this world and after my and Leo's remaining ashes are placed in the Memorial Garden at Evanston Friends Meeting, that people will be able to say that my life did indeed speak as I continue to try to live faithfully in these times of change.

Thank you, Friends

Previous Plummer Lectures

- 2022: Frank Young, *Listening, Learning, Loving, and Laughing*
- 2021: Phyllis Reynolds, *Healing and Wholeness*
- 2020: David Shiner & Nancy Wallace, *From Sleepiness to Light*
- 2019: Gwen Weaver, "What Canst Thou Say?"
- 2018: Bonni McKeown, *This Little Light*
- 2017: Alice Howenstine, *Life is a Gift and a Responsibility*
- 2016: Nancy Duncan, *Journeys with Bodies and Souls*
- 2015: Fernando Freire, *My Family, My People, My Life*
- 2014: Judy Jager, *To Listen with My Whole Heart*
- 2013: Sarah Pavlovic, *With Open Eyes and Open Heart*
- 2012: Mark Mattaini, "Do I contradict myself? Very well then, I contradict myself ..."
- 2011: Dick Ashdown, *Quaker Roots in Nurturing Soil*
- 2010: Tom Paxson, *Opening Oneself to God*
- 2009: Janice Domanik, *Anatomy and Physiology of Spirit*
- 2008: Elizabeth Mertic, *Joy Like a Fountain*
- 2007: Margaret Katranides, *Knowing and Not Knowing*
- 2006: David Rutschman, *Honrar la Vida*
- 2005: Clance Wilson, *This is My Father's World*
- 2004: Janet Means Underhill, *The Mystery Of It All: I Give Thanks*
- 2003: Chris Jocius, *Friends and Strangers: A Time of Gifts*
- 2002: Roxy Jacobs, *And Grace Will Lead Me Home*
- 2001: Marlou Carlson, *Seek Ye First The Kingdom*
- 2000: Katherine Trezevant, *Hearing and Giving Voice to the Spirit*
- 1999: Paul Schobernd, *When You Dance With God, Guess Who Leads?*
- 1998: Maurine Pyle, *Follow Me*
- 1997: Marti Matthews, *As If We Are Perfectly Safe: on Fear, Faith and Destiny*
- 1996: Tom Stabnicki, *I Saw It Shine Through All*
- 1995: Judy Gottlieb, *Flow Afresh In Me*
- 1994: Pat Wixom, *Awakening To The Life Within*
- 1993: Blanche V. Frey, *Ruminations On Faith*
- 1992: Bill Howenstine, *Loving the Universe*
- 1991: Eldora Spiegelberg, *Walk Cheerfully Over All The Earth*

- 1990: Mary Fyfe, *Creativity and Spirituality*
1989: Carolyn Wilbur Treadway, *Healing Our Inner Violence*
1988: Richard Boyajian, *Where Have I Come From? Where Am I Going?*
1987: Franky Day, *Leadings and Pushings*
1986: David Hadley Finke, *Angels Watching Over Me*
1985: Agnita Wright Dupree, *Widening The Circle*
1984: James L. Garretson, *First The Kingdom*
1983: Robert L. Wixom, *Seeing Together—The Seen And The Unseen*
1982: Betty Clegg, *The Eloquence Of Silence*
1981: Flora McKinney, *Lest Ye Become*
1980: Richard B. Haworth, *Together*
1979: Rebecca Caudill, *From Hardshell Baptist To Quaker*
1978: William O. Brown, *Transcendence In The Pursuit Of Wholeness*
1977: Robert Clark, *The Most Exciting Adventure*
1976: Alice Walton, *Quaker Saints And Other Ordinary People*
1975: Kale Williams, *Great Tides Of Human Yearning*
1974: Royal Buscombe, *A Little Lower Than the Angels*
1973: Helen Jean Nelson, *Let There Be Light*
1972: Dorothy Nash, untitled (not published)
1971: Elizabeth Watson, *You, Neighbor God*
1970: Thomas Forsythe, *Loving Reason*
1969: Lucretia M. Franklin, *Reflections*
1968: Doris Peters, *As the Way Opens: An Experience of Faith*
1967: Orval Lucier, *The Seed and Society*
1966: Francis Hole, *When God First Begins to Taste Sweet* (not published)
1965: Rachel Fort Weller, *Contemplation in a Twentieth Century World of Action*
1964: Gilbert F. White, *Sharing the Earth's Riches*
1963: Sylvia Shaw Judson, *Universal or Particular?*
1962: Robert Oakes Byrd, *A New Heaven and a New Earth*
1961: Mulford Sibley, *Conscience, Casuistry, and Quakerism*

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 1893 World's 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.