

DO UNTO OTHERS

Grayce Haworth Mesner

The 2024 Jonathan Plummer Lecture

Presented for
Illinois Yearly Meeting
of the
Religious Society of Friends

June 23, 2024



Grayce with children

left to right: Sharon, Margie, Grayce, Dave

One of the highlights of Illinois Yearly Meeting each year is the Jonathan Plummer Lecture. After spending the early part of our gathering hearing from speakers from outside ILYM, for this talk we look inward to one of our own. I am pleased today to introduce Grayce Haworth Mesner who will share her spiritual journey with us.

I have known Grayce for nearly 40 years, beginning when her daughter Margie and my son Zach came up through the children's and high school programs together here at Illinois Yearly Meeting. And for most of the last 20 years, I have had the privilege of having Grayce as recording clerk alongside me as I have served as clerk or co-clerk of Clear Creek Monthly Meeting where she works tirelessly to keep us organized. Grayce is truly the glue that holds Clear Creek together.

Grayce is not one to step into visible leadership positions, yet no one works harder behind the scenes to accomplish the work of Illinois Yearly Meeting. Whether she is performing duties as a steward, washing towels during Annual Sessions, sorting the contents of the east porch tool shed, picking up the ever-present sticks on the campus, or making sure Neil's truck is available for workdays and site prep, Grayce is always there. Most of us have had the joy of working beside Grayce, or being put to work by her, on all kinds of projects.

We have all seen Grayce demonstrate her love for Clear Creek, Blue River Quarterly, Illinois Yearly Meeting and this place. Today we will get a glimpse of what goes on inside. Grayce will speak out of the silence and when she has finished her remarks we will return to the silence.

Beth Carpenter

DO UNTO OTHERS

I remember once while I was in Peoria seeing a man with no feet. I do not remember if I gave him money; I do remember thinking what a good strong voice he had and how he could use it to reach out to people. This was a plus, in my estimation because I did not feel that I had a good voice and did not use it any more than I had to. Until I saw a person who could not talk, I complained about my voice.

In high school and during college vacations, I babysat for a family and enjoyed interacting with the children. Many years later, I got a call from Ann Weisberg, the oldest child, telling me of her mother's passing. The one thing I remember in that conversation was her comment, "Oh you sound just the way I remember!" My voice affected me my whole life and possibly caused me to have an inferiority complex, speaking no more than I had to. I was always reticent about meeting new people, because once I spoke to them, they would know how I sound. I always feared going on to a new grade, a new school, having to get used to new teachers. When I was a senior in high school, I was told that I needed to have speech therapy in order to graduate! Nothing had been mentioned of that, in all the previous twelve years. Well, enough of my voice, but I do feel that it contributed to making me the person I am today.

I have turned down the offer to give the Plummer Lecture in the past—one, because of my voice, and two, because I was always too busy in life to take the time to write one. It is a talk about one's spiritual life, and I did not feel that I was a spiritual person as much as a hands-on-doing person. However, we do speak of God being in everyone, so are we not all spiritual from birth? Everything we do can be spiritual. My spiritual being attempts to help others—isn't to help others why we are on this earth?

My parents both grew up in Iowa, Myron Glass in Albia and Kathryn Bolibaugh in near-by Eddyville. Both of them, though not Quakers, graduated from William Penn College in Oskaloosa, Iowa. Dad was hired by Bell Telephone in New York City and he went back to Eddyville to find a wife. He evidently first asked Esther Bolibaugh (a college classmate of his as well as being Mom's older sister) and when Esther turned him down, he asked my mother. They moved to New Jersey and ended up in West Orange, home of Thomas Alva Edison. My sister Ann was born first, I came along three years later in 1937, then another sister, Carol, came along 16 months later. Ann and I were born in New Jersey but Carol was born while we were in Iowa. I was envious of her being born there. I always enjoyed the trips to the Midwest every summer to visit the grandparents, I liked being on the farms. At an early age I decided that when I was older I was going to live in the Midwest and marry a farmer. I managed to do that twice!

My parents were not church-goers, but when Ann met other playmates in the area, she started going to Sunday school with them. The closest church to where we lived was the Ridgeview Presbyterian Church—one to which we could easily walk. I have many fond memories of that church, and I still keep in touch through annual Christmas letters with my college-age junior high Sunday school teacher and with two other girls who were in the class.

I had a fairly good relationship with my two sisters. I looked up to my older sister, Ann, however Carol and I did argue off and on. When I was in junior high school I went with my Sunday school class to a Word of Life Revival in Newark. I made a clear decision to walk down the aisle with others and accept Christ as my Savior. I was hoping that He would change me so I would get along with my younger sister. I figure if I can remember that, I must have been the cause of our verbal arguments. After that I made concerted efforts to be nice to her. We did have many good times of playing together and with neighborhood friends.

The family next door had six children, the oldest being a year younger than I. They attended a Catholic School instead of being in the public school system. When I was 12 years old, the four oldest of these children plus Carol and I formed a club, "The Happy Helpers." I took the minutes. I wonder if this activity was a sign of what my life would be like many years later, being a recording clerk. At our club meetings we planned how to raise

money for the Fresh Air Fund—an organization that we had heard about on the radio. It sent inner city children in New York City to camps during the summer. That year in late June we put on a carnival in our backyards and made all of \$11.00. We felt good about doing something for others.

I did many things that I felt I was lead to do. I do not remember praying about decisions. Even God was not asked to help me decide. Some people I know trust that God leads them in all of their decisions of life. Not me! Right or wrong, I just forged ahead. We have a mind as well as thinking powers and decision-making abilities. I made decisions based on my past experiences and my feelings about the subject. For example, though I have never successfully gone through a car wash, I traveled solo to Chicago to visit a friend who was in the Masonic Hospital. Al had joined Clear Creek Meeting, but then moved away. When Clear Creek considered dropping him from our membership, I volunteered to try to find him and through his parents in Peoria, was able to. He did come back, eventually moving into the mobile home on my property where he lived about six months before becoming ill and going to the hospital. Soon after I had visited him in Chicago the facility called me. Would I consider taking him into my home for hospice care? At the time I had a teen-age niece living with me, plus the business to run and I did not think I could take on any other responsibilities, so I declined. I felt bad about that, but knew my limitations. His mother in appreciation for my kindness to her and her son, during his final illness, left me some money in her will.

Another example of just going ahead and doing something was in 1984. My son Dave had been home on leave from Camp Pendleton, California and was intent on buying a truck before he returned. He did not find one in time for him to drive it back so I volunteered to drive it for him. I took Margie out of school and we ventured forth. We stayed in the home of Neil and Kay Mesner in Nebraska, then with John and Elsa Haworth in Denver, delivered the truck, and flew home.

Two of my not asking others, quick-to-decide incidents were picking up hitchhikers. I was driving back to Earlham College from New Jersey and the car transmission failed to work. I was towed to a service station where I talked to a couple of young soldiers who also had a vehicle problem and were due back as

soon as possible to Fort Leonard Wood Army base in Missouri. So I, of course, offered them a ride. In Richmond, Indiana I put them on a bus to St. Louis at midnight and returned to Earlham College the next morning.

The other hitchhiker that I picked up was a young man who had mobility issues. He was at a rest stop, where he had been let off by a previous driver. I made a stop in Winchester, Indiana to see some of Dick Haworth's relatives and I had him get out of the car, saying I would pick him up when I finished visiting. Which I did. I have a recollection of him being in a different place – closer to where I was visiting, so I wondered if he was worried that I would not go back for him. However, I was a firm believer that I should follow through on anything I told someone I would do, unless I thought there was some danger.

My first real encounter with Quakerism was around 1954, when I was reading literature from different colleges. What the Earlham College brochure said about Quaker beliefs resonated deeply with me—"That is what I am! That is what I believe."

One, there is that of God in every person. It may be hard to find sometimes, but it is there and it is that part that should be loved when God said to love your enemies as well as your neighbors. Two, your body is a holy place—God is there. That would mean no smoking or drinking, no doing anything that would harm God's house. Three, you were not just a Quaker on Sundays, but every day of the week. To be a Quaker meant being one at home, at work, in all aspects of life. I was drawn to Quakerism because it is a way of life, not just a religion.

In my high school there was a family whose two oldest sons, one by one, were no longer in the school system. They lived several blocks from me, but eventually moved to Montclair. I found out that they were Quakers and one Sunday I drove to Montclair and attended my first Quaker Meeting. Years later I learned the reason these boys, the Stratton's, were disappearing from our school system—they were attending Olney Friends School in Barnesville, Ohio, then they all went to Earlham College.

Having an inferiority complex caused me to root for the underdogs, the Brooklyn Dodgers, for one, in my early life. Here were the Quakers who had such concern for others, that they helped those less fortunate. Throughout history Quakers have been the religion that was tolerant of people different from them.

They gave equal rights to women when it was not the fashionable thing to do. They gave freedom to slaves when it was not the economical thing to do. They helped other slaves escape when it was not the legal thing to do. And throughout US involvement in wars, the Quakers opposed them when it was not the popular thing to do. William Penn said, "Right is right, even if everyone is against it; wrong is wrong even if everyone is for it." Many ideas that Quaker groups got behind were unpopular at the time, by most others. Over the years the ideas were embraced by the general public.

I identified with the caring for others that Quakerism taught. Each generation of Quakers must do its own work. We cannot rely on the "good works" of Quakers in the past. Unless we live the life encouraged by this group, we are not doing a very good job of living. I hope this talk will show how my life was lived, in helping others, in doing unto others acts of kindness.

At Earlham I majored in Elementary Education. I did not know what I wanted to do with my life, but I knew I enjoyed working with children, volunteering in day camp situations, working as a camp counselor, as well as babysitting. I had met Dick Haworth at the end of my freshman year, and we were on-again-off-again as a couple for the next three years. He graduated two years before me, but stayed in Richmond to do his alternative service as a Conscientious Objector at a psychiatric hospital, the Richmond State Hospital. He was a grounds keeper, having charge of hospital patients who worked with him. Dick also worked at other odd jobs around Richmond, one of which was at the Doanes Funeral Home. When working there he often showed up at the dorm with flowers.

The day after I graduated, in 1959, Dick and I got married in the Stout Memorial Meetinghouse on the Earlham College campus, under the care of the Richmond Clear Creek Meeting and the Chicago 57th Street Meeting. We then moved into the "barracks" at Quaker Hill. I taught fourth grade at Charles School in Richmond for two years. My second year there I was forewarned by a third grade teacher that I would have to deal with Nils, a troublemaker. One of the "rules" in my classroom was to keep all four legs of your chair on the floor, no tipping back on two legs. I thought it was not only dangerous, but hard on the chairs. One day after reminding him a couple of times, I asked him to

stand up next to his chair. I explained that he was making the chair stand on only half of its legs and I wanted him to stand on half of his legs. He joyfully did it and I never had any problems with him again. A little humor went a long way. Also, he really liked snakes and evidently previous teachers shied away from even talking to him about them. I asked him questions and later he invited me to his house to see his snakes, which I did. Our respect for each other was mutual.

Dick decided to study Agronomy at Iowa State in Ames, and I got a job teaching third grade in the Nevada school system in a rural school not far from the trailer court where we lived outside Ames. We were there for two years. Though I had attended meeting for worship regularly as a student at Earlham, Dick and I did not regularly attend while we lived in Richmond, and we only attended Quaker Meeting in Ames a few times.

When Dick and I traveled during those years, we would camp along the way. After we set up our homemade camper, Dick would lie down and sleep. I usually wanted some action! One time I walked through the campground and came to some children who had been asked by their parents to entertain themselves. I offered to help turn the ropes so they could jump Double Dutch. I do not remember what else we did, but eventually the parents came out of their RV and thanked me profusely for interacting with their children saying I was a “life-saver.”

Dick was a Quaker, son of Clifford and Margaret Haworth. The family moved around quite often, depending on what CPA job Clifford had. When Dick was high school age, they lived in a city that did not have a good public school system, so he attended Olney Friends School, meeting up with the Stratton family from West Orange. Once Dick Haworth’s family moved to the Midwest they stayed there: Peoria, Chicago area, Duluth, Minnesota, St. Louis area, and wherever they lived, they would attend Illinois Yearly Meeting sessions here in McNabb. Dick was acquainted with a local Quaker, Turner Mills, who owned four farms, which would eventually go to his four grandchildren.

Dick very much wanted to pursue farming. So, in August of 1963, ILYM sessions were held in August back then, Dick drove from Ames to McNabb, to meet with Turner to ask if we could farm one of his farms. Turner was glad to get another young Quaker family to move to the community, so he accepted the

request. This was in August. As many of you know, March is the month to change tenants. Where would we live from August until March? Turner Mills had a mobile home moved to the backyard of the house next door, directly east of here. Not only that, but he moved in an outhouse. That was fine—I had used outhouses when we stayed at my grandparents' house in rural Iowa.

Sharon was born at the end of September. I would get up during the night to nurse her, use the outhouse and go back to bed. That was all right in the fall before the weather got cold, but not very comfortable for the winter feedings. Dick installed a heat lamp in the outhouse, which I could turn on from the trailer when I first got up. By the time Sharon was finished nursing, the outhouse was warmer. It worked okay! The couple in the house were good neighbors. They moved out in January instead of waiting until March. Two years later our son Dave was born.

Dick and I and our two children got involved in the Clear Creek Quaker Meeting as well as taking advantage of the wider Quaker activities—going to Blue River Quarterly, Illinois Yearly Meeting and getting involved with Northern Half Yearly when Milwaukee and Madison were considering leaving ILYM to start a Northern Yearly Meeting. Dick got involved in AFSC and FGC. When an older member of Clear Creek could no longer drive herself, I drove her to the Associated Committee of Friends on Indian Affairs meetings and I continued going to those meetings for many years.

Sharon joined Clear Creek Meeting in 1977. She went to Scattergood School, joined the Quaker Youth Pilgrimage to George Fox country in England, attended many FGC Gatherings, working at them for more than a decade, was the caretaker at Clear Creek for a year, then went off to Earlham College in the fall of 1982.

Our son Dave never joined, but occasionally comes to meeting and helps Clear Creek on various projects. He joined the Marines right after high school and then was part of the Army Reserves. Clear Creek Meeting now thinks of him as our “Telephone Guy” since he works at the McNabb Telephone Company. He is our go-to person when Clear Creek or ILYM have telephone or internet issues.

Margie, born after I had joined Clear Creek Meeting, was a “birthright” Quaker. She attended FGC a few times. She applied

for the Quaker Youth Pilgrimage, as an ILYM representative in 1992, but when someone else was chosen she instead took part in an AFSC sponsored work camp in West Virginia. In 1993, she and I went to George Fox Country and also spent time in Switzerland and Scotland. That fall she entered Earlham College. I am sure the children grew up thinking that vacation trips were always combined with Quaker meetings. Most of our family trips, including to both the east and west coasts were scheduled around Quaker events.

Besides teaching First Day School, I participated in any Clear Creek program where young people were involved. One was taking part in a Putnam County program, when over Thanksgiving weekend, local families hosted foreign students who attended colleges in the Chicago area. We hosted Bomi Damkevala, a student from Bombay, India. The Thanksgiving weekend program was discontinued a year or two later, but we continued to have Bomi join us for Thanksgiving for many more years. To this day he calls us every Thanksgiving Day. Also, I have stayed at Bomi and Bachi's house a few times, when attending Continuing Committee at Downers Grove.

When Sharon and David were young—Margie was not to make an appearance until ten years later—we owned a German shepherd/collie mix who had delivered puppies. A McNabb family who came to adopt one of them had two foster children and two younger sons by birth. We would visit back and forth and I realized that she was not a nurturing parent, nor was her husband. They were not respectful. They treated the foster children badly. They treated their own children not much better.

My reaction? I told myself that Dick and I could do better than that—so we proceeded to apply for a foster home license. I never talked to those parents to point out that they could be nicer. I was more of a silent activist than a verbal one. I had trouble confronting people. I continued picking up the children for a day in the park or bringing them to our house to play. In 1967, when Turner's grandson, Donnie Nelson, wanted to start farming, we moved to one of Turner's Magnolia farms and we had less contact with this family.

Since I was not one to speak up, I was really surprised when Dick and I, our two children and our first two foster children were walking through Chicago's Lincoln Park and I actually spoke out

about something I saw. We were at the pond area and several children older than ours were obviously stealing some baby ducks —sticking them in their shirts. I told them they could not do that and to put the ducks back in the water, which they immediately did. Perhaps they went back and tried again later, but at least our children witnessed what I had done.

These were our first two foster children assigned to us. We had signed up for short-term care, not on a line to adopt. Andy and Jeff came to us at the ages of seven and eight. They and sometimes a sister stayed with us for two years until they went back to their parents. Next came three boys for a year whose parents had asked DCFS to place their children while they worked out some problems. I heard a member of the Clear Creek Meeting say, “She’s a glutton for punishment.” I did not let this comment affect what I did, and we proceeded to have more foster children. I have always felt that I should let my life speak. I was not good at speaking with people, but I was a good listener. It was hard for me to relate to adults, but I could deal with children, and did, as Dick and I gave eleven foster children a good home when they needed it.

Meanwhile, Clifford Haworth had become very successful as a self-employed Certified Public Accountant, and he designed check-writing systems for many of his St. Louis area customers. Both the St. Louis and the International Dairy Queen Associations asked for bids for a check writing system that they could sell to their franchises. Haworth & Co. was selected in both cases to supply that system. Needless to say, Clifford needed more help besides his wife, Margaret, and son, Jim.

After 6 years of farming on two of Turner’s farms, Dick and I had decided we did not want to keep rent farming, so we made the decision to buy a house in the country and go into business with his father. When Dick drove to Lacon to pay our State Farm insurance bill, he asked the agent if he knew of any place in the country that was for sale. It just so happened that the agent’s mother owned a house south of Lacon that she was renting, but had not yet put on the market. We bought it and have owned it ever since. We kept in touch with that family and years later, when a member of the family died, they asked if they could spread her ashes on the farm ground. Of course!

Once we bought the house we started moving all the needed equipment for running the printing side of the business into our

large red barn. Dick made many trips between St. Louis and Lacon that year. Dick took over the production side of the business while his dad continued with all of the office work. In August of 1971, during one of the times Dick was down there, Clifford Haworth had a heart attack and died. It was a shock to all of us, and the feeling spread through the Illinois Yearly Meeting community as well, since Clifford was the presiding clerk at the time.

Naturally our lives got even busier as we then proceeded to move the rest of Haworth & Co. activities to the Lacon property—the office work moving into the house. I started doing all the office work as well as helping with production and shipping. Dick's mother, Margaret, did not want to stay in St. Louis, but wanted to be near family. She opted to live near Dick and me, so she bought a mobile home, which was moved onto our property in January of 1973. Margaret lived there until her death. Our daughter, Margaret, named after her grandmother, was born in 1975 and Grandmother Haworth was overjoyed to be able to watch one of her grandchildren grow up through the years and be involved in her life, instead of just having short visits.

In 1979, Dick got sick and we were told he had two years to live. He was diagnosed with alpha-1 anti-trypsin protein deficiency. He had developed cirrhosis of the liver and his only hope to survive was a liver transplant. I started following him around as he performed the many tasks of running Haworth and Co. taking copious notes.

As of January 1981, Dr. Thomas Starzl, the only liver transplant surgeon at the time, was in Pittsburgh. My sister Ann lived there so I had a place to stay. In May of 1981, Dick became the sixth transplant recipient at that hospital and despite having a fever at the time, the procedure was carried out knowing that Dick could not survive long enough to wait till the fever was gone. This surgery was still considered experimental, and I hoped the doctors would learn more from Dick's part in it.

Within a week after Dr. Starzl had operated on Dick and replaced his liver, Pope John Paul was shot. I remember thinking that prayers for Dick did not have a chance to be heard when millions of people all over the world were praying for the pope.

Three weeks after his surgery, at the age of 46, Dick died, May 31, 1981, the same day that Sharon was graduating from Scattergood School. I was not able to be there with her, but my

family and Dick's family all rallied around her for that special day. She proceeded to go on the Quaker Youth Pilgrimage that summer. We knew that was what Dick would have wanted her to do.

When I had been in the Intensive Care waiting room after Dick had his liver transplant, I felt I was calm—I knew the event was going to happen and we hoped and prayed for the best. But there were people there who had a family member brought in because of a car accident, a shooting—things that happened unexpectedly. Needless to say they were distraught, at a loss to know what to do. Their lives had changed in a second, and they were not prepared for it.

Many years later when watching a grandchild play soccer, I saw how quickly that ball could change directions. I was reminded how like life that can be. We can be going along in life smoothly, or not so smoothly, heading for a goal and in an instant that life can change. In one second, any accident can slow you down, a tornado can ruin your home, a family member can need more care of some kind. In soccer, the team members try to second guess where the ball will be going and position themselves accordingly. In life, one tries to prepare for the possibility of setbacks. Life can be hard, but it is what you learn from it that matters and whether you grow from it.

I surprised myself when, after Dick died, I proceeded to step-by-step do all the necessary work—take orders, set up type, photograph, develop negatives, make plates, cut paper when needed, print the job on the A.B. Dick 360, and number the checks on the Kluge letterpress, as well as doing all the office work. That was the time in my life when I started taking a day at a time, sometimes just a half a day at a time, in my planning.

I suspected that the first time something went wrong, or some job came up that I had not done before, I would just give up, sit down and have a good cry. Well, you know what? I didn't! I figured it out on my own. If I had an occasional machine glitch, I either called A.B. Dick in Peoria, or a neighbor. It is deeply satisfying to succeed, especially when you have self-doubt. I felt that if I could succeed at carrying on Haworth & Co., knowing that I was a slow thinker and learner, anyone would be able to do the same. From a young age I felt that God or a Guardian Angel was helping me along the way.

For example:

When I was eight years old, some friends and I were playing hide and seek, on the second story of my house. The seeker was blindfolded! I bumped into a newel at the side of very steep steps; a few inches to the right and I would have fallen down the full length of that stairway. I remember thanking God at the time.

One year when Dick and I and two friends were traveling to New Jersey from Earlham College, I fell asleep at the wheel in the middle of the night. We had crossed the interstate median, into west-bound traffic when I woke up and I immediately steered Dick's old Nash back into the east bound lane. We were lucky not to hit any westbound traffic, culverts, or over-pass abutments. My Guardian Angel was with me, as she was later when I became a single parent in 1981.

Years later Sharon and Peter became parents of Nathan, who weighed in at two pounds, two ounces. He spent time at both the Provena Hospital in Urbana and St. Francis Hospital in Peoria in their neo-natal intensive care units. With care from both of those hospitals and a Guardian Angel, plus the loving care his parents gave him when he returned home, he thrived and became who he is today.

Besides a Guardian Angel, Clear Creek Meeting and Illinois Yearly Meeting were also there for me. Both groups had shown me that life does go on after adversities. The people we encountered were some of the best—friendly, active, and very good role models. The older Clear Creek Friends showed us younger couples that you could still be active and useful at an older age. At that time there were quite a few young, married couples with children. Deaths of five young people (ages 10 – 46) and four couples divorcing took a toll on our meeting. The majority of the deaths and divorces affected the Quaker half of the marriage and ended up with the women and children going to different churches. This was a big blow to our rural monthly meeting, but the elders, who in most cases were relatives of these young people, continued to carry on and supported the younger generation with love and understanding.

Around this time, I laid out my life's schedule. I was married at 22, widowed at 44, so I figured I would get married again at age

66 and die at age 88. Well, I was remarried when I was 64, and that's okay because I do not plan to die at age 88, which is not very far away and I still have a lot to accomplish.

I started visiting people in prison when Becky, an attender at Clear Creek, ended up in the Lincoln Correctional Center. Clance Wilson, our clerk, became Becky's father-figure and he encouraged others in the meeting to visit her, which we did. In September 2009, I bought my Chevy S-10 truck so she would have a vehicle to drive. Becky was released on October 9, 2009, moving into my mobile home where she lived a little more than a year.

We had become accustomed to the jail routine, so when another friend of ours, Tom, ended up in the Dixon Correctional Center we had no qualms about visiting him. Some people said we were doing Prison Ministry, but I said we were simply visiting friends. Neil and I went almost every month. We filled the food card with money and we would eat, visit and laugh for several hours. When he was released he, too, moved into my mobile home, living there for about two years. To this day Tom refers to me as his "Guardian Angel." He came back to the community where most people accepted him. However, one neighbor said to another neighbor, "Why is she bringing a murderer into our neighborhood?" Well, she said it to the right person, a friend of mine, as well as a friend of Tom's. Immediately she said to the complainer that she would welcome that person into her own family, as a son!

I have mentioned the mobile home, the one I inherited when Grandmother Haworth died. For thirty years, nine people lived there for various lengths of time. The trailer served the purpose of housing people who were having difficult times in their lives: no warm place to live, getting out on parole, or not able to pay needed rent at other places. Though I did not charge rent, they were asked to pay a modest amount for the utilities. After almost 50 years of use, when the last two renters did not take care of it and were not regularly paying, my children and I decided it had seen the end of its usefulness. After my children succeeded in getting the last person to move, we all worked at clearing it out and Dave worked diligently at destructing and getting rid of it, recycling everything he could.

I have mentioned Neil a couple of times, but I have not told you how we met. It is said that no matter where you go among

Quakers, you meet someone you know, or someone who knows someone you know. When Dick and I went to the World Conference of Friends in 1967 in North Carolina we spent most of the day in two separate places. Dick, as an ILYM representative, would take a bus to Guilford College, and I would stay on the Greensboro campus for the non-representative meetings. At the bus loading area there was a man near me, whose wife had just gotten on the bus to Guilford. The name Mesner was on his name tag. I approached him and asked if he knew a fellow Earlhamite, Phil Mesner. The response? "I should, he is my brother." And so I met my second husband-to-be. In looking through old pictures, in both Dick's and Neil's belongings, a couple of them were the Young Friends Conference pictures from the 1950's. In the 1955 photo, Dick Haworth and Neil Mesner were standing next to each other. Our families kept in touch with each other, as I have done with many people in my life. But it was a complete surprise when a former foster child contacted me.

Twenty years after Andy & Jeff, the first foster children, went back to their parents in 1971, Andy called, having had no communication at all since they left. He was now at a good place in his life, was married, had a job, and had a son. He asked if his son John could visit for a week or two in the summer. Andy wanted him to experience with us what he had so much enjoyed. He related that he really had been amazed that Dick and I treated them the same as we treated our own children! Andy's children, John and later a younger sister, Samantha, visited for a week in the summer for many years. When John got married years later he and Courtney named their first child Oaklyn Grayce, Grayce spelled with a "y."

At one time a church in Lacon displayed the saying, "Expect Your Miracle" on the sign board. I would read it every time I drove into Lacon and I always smiled when I saw it. I like that phrase, "Expect Your Miracle." First of all it is positive. This phrase is telling us to think positive. Perhaps expecting a miracle will even cause us to change what we do or say to be more positive. Secondly, to say expect your miracle implies that miracles are possible, whether it be a miracle, a dream, a goal, something expected, or unexpected, being positive in your life certainly will help your chances of happiness.

One evening about 30 years ago I turned off the answering machine when I left the house for the evening. When I got home

the answering machine was on and there was a message. I called the caller back. Near the end of our conversation I told him that I thought I had not left the answering machine on. He proceeded to tell me that he and his wife had tried to call several times and the phone just rang and rang. When he decided to try one more time, he got the answering machine. The caller was Dennis McQueen and the message? “I wondered if you had heard of Bud Selleg’s illness. He is not doing too well.” Bud Selleg was headmaster of the MOWA Choctaw Friends School in Alabama, where ILYM had sponsored two summer work camps. Dennis and his wife Sebrina and I had taken part as adult advisors.

Dennis and I agreed that we do not always question happenings that could be considered miracles. I was meant to get that message. Whether it was a miracle or if by chance my sometimes-active-cat could have walked across the machine and stepped on the on-off button, does not matter. Either way it was an unusual happening.

Years ago one of the Blue River Quarterly Meeting programs was based on Journaling Exercises. We were to choose one out of four Bible selections, all of which depicted a principle that Jesus was telling others to follow. What would we say to Jesus about the difficulties of putting that principle into practice? The Bible verses I picked out were Luke 6: 28-31: “Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who treat you spitefully...Treat others as you would like them to treat you.” I wrote:

Jesus—I really do believe that I should treat others as I would like to be treated. But when I come up to someone who I feel is sending bad vibes, I find it hard to interact with that person. Is it all right to just ignore them and walk away? I would be glad to pray for that person. I have no problem with that. But if they are showing hate, I am not about to stand around and bless them. Sorry—I am just not an activist; I will come back later—after this person has cooled down, okay? Oh, and Jesus—love, bless, pray for, treat others with kindness, I promise I will do my best to practice them all.

Prayers for other people and prayers for thankfulness have been a part of my life since childhood. An automatic part—not necessarily a time set aside for that purpose. It was just a normal part of my always busy life. Perhaps it was praying—on-the-run. I do

not know if God pays attention to that type of prayer. A type usually starting with “Oh God” or “Dear Lord” but very seldom ending with “Amen.” Often a type in which I am thinking of someone in need. Knowing this is all I can do, that I cannot do much else but perhaps write a letter or give that person a call, I pray, hoping that it is one small step in the healing process. One who prays has faith—faith in a higher being than one’s self. God? Guardian Angel? Inner Light? It does not matter to me. I use these terms interchangeably. I have prayed for many people through the years. The faith that it could work was there and I continue to practice it.

In 1989, my father died in Keithsburg, Illinois, where he and Mom had moved to be close to mother’s younger sister. In 1996, Mom fell and broke a hip and came to live with me. I cut back on many of my activities that took me away from the house. I decided that I could not do the printing in the barn and care for Mom at the same time. I then had the company that supplied us with our check stock, and who were already printing some of our check orders, proceed to print all of the checks.

About that time Mariellen Gilpin asked if I would want to work for the newsletter, “What Canst Thou Say?” to mail out the issues four times a year. Since I liked secretarial type of work, and it was something I could do from home, I agreed to join the team and have been mailing them out ever since, as well as also doing proof-reading. About the same time, Neil Mesner and I were married in September 2001, under the care of the McNabb Clear Creek Monthly Meeting and Central City, Nebraska Monthly Meeting. His wife, Kay, had died two years earlier. Eventually, Mom went to live in a nursing home in Urbana, where Margie was working at the time. My mother lived to be 102 years old. My two sisters had regularly taken turns in helping out with Mom at least one week a month, the whole time she lived with me. Thus it allowed me to attend many Quaker related meetings, as well as travel with Neil back to his house in Nebraska, and to travel to see his three children, Miriam in Kentucky, Brian in Nebraska, and Cheryl in Kansas. When Neil developed health problems, we rented a house from Sharon and Peter in Urbana to be closer to their help and medical facilities. Neil died in March 2022, and I continue to split my time between Lacon and Urbana.

I call myself a Christian because I try to live a Christ-like life. I like positive attitudes and disagree with the philosophy that we

are all sinful. Perhaps I am more of a humanitarian Quaker than a Christian Quaker. I was brought up in a Christian denomination and know that the fellowship of the church meant a lot more to me than the dogma. Many people came to Quakers because they were not being pressured to believe a certain way. However else we may differ, it is not as important as the belief that there is that of God in every person.

I do not equate disease and inabilities with old age. They can happen in much younger folks as well. Yes, our bodies can slow down, but the trick, if physically able, is to keep going. I have the feeling that most of us do not worry about retirement. We are so busy with doing good our whole lives that retiring simply means having more time to spread that good will to others. Do not forget the good feeling you can have when you help others. When you are at the point where YOU need to be helped, do not take away that good feeling others can have by helping you. I sincerely hope that I will become that type of person in the next phase of my life. As I gradually can do less to help others, let me turn into a person that gracefully accepts what others do to help me.

During the time I was working on this talk I backed out of a driveway in Champaign and hit a truck parked on the other side of the street. It was a dark and rainy December night. My first thought was I could probably drive away and no one would know I did it. My second thought was “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” I preached that to my children, and I knew I would follow through on it in this situation. I left my name and phone number under his windshield wiper and heard from the driver a couple of days later. All I was asked to do was to pay for a new taillight assembly. I sent a letter and a check to them and sometime after that the driver called me back and left a message, to say the check had arrived. He sounded grateful. The second Sunday after this happened, a message given at the Urbana-Champaign Quaker Meeting was about doing unto others as you would have them do unto you. I knew then, that out of many possible titles for this Plummer Lecture, I would choose, “Do Unto Others.”

Previous Plummer Lectures

- 2023: Virginia Schelbert, *Let Your Life Speak*
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*

Title list 1961-1992 on ilym.org/plummer-lectures

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.