

# *Each of Us Inevitable*

SOME KEYNOTE ADDRESSES,  
GIVEN AT  
FRIENDS FOR LESBIAN AND GAY CONCERNS AND  
FRIENDS GENERAL CONFERENCE GATHERINGS,  
1977–1993,  
REVISED, EXPANDED EDITION

Becky Birtha, Thomas Bodine, Elise Boulding,  
John Calvi, Stephen Finn, Ellen Hodge,  
Janet Hoffman,  
Arlene Kelly, William Kreidler, George Lakey,  
Ahavia Lavana, Muriel Bishop Summers,  
Elizabeth Watson,  
David Wertheimer, and Dwight Wilson

EDITED BY ROBERT LEUZE

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“EACH OF US INEVITABLE,  
EACH OF US LIMITLESS—EACH OF US WITH HIS  
OR HER RIGHT UPON THE EARTH,  
EACH OF US ALLOW’D THE ETERNAL PURPORTS  
OF THE EARTH,  
EACH OF US HERE AS DIVINELY AS ANY IS HERE.”  
—Walt Whitman: “Salut au Monde,” II, *Leaves of Grass*

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Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns (FLGBTQC), until recently known as Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (FLGC), is a North American Quaker faith community within the Religious Society of Friends that affirms that of God in all persons—lesbian, gay, bisexual, heterosexual, transgender, and transsexual. It gathers twice yearly: Midwinter Gathering is held over the long weekend surrounding U.S. President's Day in February and Summer Gathering is held with the larger Friends General Conference Gathering the first week in July. Once known as Friends Committee for Gay Concerns, the group has met since the early 1970s for worship and play, its members drawing sustenance from each other and from the Spirit for their work and life in the world—in the faith that radical inclusion and radical love bring further light to Quaker testimony and life.

## Preface to the Internet Edition

The new, revised and expanded edition of *Each of Us Inevitable*—the printed compilation of keynote addresses given by beloved Friends at prior Gatherings of Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (FLGC) and Friends General Conference (FGC)—includes all the talks in the original edition and eight additional keynotes, bringing the total to 19. The added talks were given between 1979 and 1993.

In February 2003, the community united on changing its name to Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns (FLGBTQC). The talks are available as separate Adobe Acrobat PDF files for each author on the FLGBTQC website, <<http://flgbtqc.quaker.org>>.

It is hoped that keynotes given after 1993 also will be published someday; however, the richness of content in these additional already-edited talks suggested moving ahead in the present when the possibility of publication exists.



It may be helpful for some readers browsing on the internet if I offer here at least brief hints, however inadequate, of that “richness” that lies in specific talks.

Elizabeth Watson (1977: “Each of Us Inevitable”) came to help us accept ourselves. Her message is not “love the sinner, not the sin,” but, “I love you, and I love you *for* your givenness, not in spite of it.” She offers an account of the life story and the healing words of Walt Whitman.

Arlene Kelly (1979: “Estrangement and Reconciliation”) brought answers in the form of difficult questions: How can we remain engaged with people who are different? From what do we feel estranged? What has caused hurt and anger within us? Do we see that we come to Gathering both as oppressor and oppressed? Can we find ways to step into the shoes of the other person? What is involved in being “reconciled”?

Janet Hoffman (1982: “Eros and the Life of the Spirit”) spoke on themes of exploring and wrestling with new insights; fiery passion; relinquishing our need; and transformation. Eros, she believes, drives us toward God and gives our life its basic meaning. Love demands a complete inner transformation. Love (not guilt) leads to social change.

Dwight Wilson (1984: “Nurturing Our Relationships within an Often Hostile Community”) spoke from his personal experience as a black man. His message was concerned with trusting one’s own perceptions and understanding—not society’s mainstream view, not scripture, not the internalized hatred that society may try to induce in us. He spoke of the sometimes negative role of the institutional church for blacks, women, pacifism, gays, and lesbians.

Arlene Kelly (1984: “Nurturing Friendship and Lover Relationships”) sees “coming out” as a step toward taking responsibility for ourselves as individuals. In our friendship and lover relationships, are we feeling defective, she questions; have we relinquished some of our power? She discusses ten factors essential to building relationships that are whole.

Elizabeth Watson (1985: “On Wholeness”) recognizes our patriarchal, hierarchal, and homophobic civilization and religious heritage. She discusses the Christian church and Jesus; the power of the human community; “dwelling in possibility,” and her personal odyssey into wholeness. Can we take charge of life and healing by imaging a desired outcome?

Elise Boulding (1986: “The Challenge of Nonconformity”) acknowledges the need to bond across differences—because we need others to make us whole—and the fact that it’s more difficult for those called to “nonconforming witnesses.” For “publicly gay” persons, special strengths are needed; they are the social change activists. The “gay witness,” she says, includes equality, nonviolence, community, and simplicity; gays should be viewed not as embattled victims but as co-workers in reweaving the social web for us all.

Thomas R. Bodine (1987: “Caring Matters Most”), drawing on his own experience, began with a description of the wide diversity of Friends throughout the world. How to change people? How to bridge the differences? he wondered. What happens if we seriously try to practice Christian “gifts of the spirit” in those parts of the Quaker world that hate homosexuality?

Janet Hoffman (Friends General Conference, 1987: “To Listen, To Minister, To Witness”). Her wide-ranging talk includes: living “without seatbelts”; following a corporate leading, not censoring it; “dis-illusionment”—a good thing (“Offend me!” she declares); to minister—sometimes just by being oneself; to love someone—to become in some sense the person we love; to witness—to be faithful to the spirit. She touches on personal growth, the true evangelist, continuing revelation, seeking, stages of development in pacifism, and committed unions.

David Wertheimer (1988: “Bias-Related Violence, Gay Marriage, and a Journey Out of the Society of Friends”) shares some personal, Quaker-related experiences: seeking marriage with his (male) partner under the care of his meeting; studying and later teaching at Quaker schools; enrolling as a Quaker in divinity school. He asks whether Quakerism works well only when it can function one step removed from the harsh realities that it contemplates. He sees FLGC as a committee on sufferings, a critical group to helping Quakerism discover how to survive. Death threats led him to question his Quaker belief in nonviolence. His talk includes input from those present at Gathering.

Ahavia Lavana (1988: “Helping and Healing”). When Ahavia’s son Hunter had AIDS and later died of it, what helped and what did not help? What was healing and what was not? She speaks on accepting what is beyond our control.

Bill Kreidler’s address (1989: “Tending the Fire”) is his intensely personal but often humorous account of learning to tend his spiritual flame following an addictive, abusive relationship—by being honest, by being open, by practicing, and by being easy with himself. He talks of the ministry of our community and of how it helped him reach the goal he had envisioned (“old Quaker ladies” tap dancing).

Ellen Hodge (1989: “Tending the Fire”) offers differing images of fire: Kristallnacht, persecution of “witches,” a 1963 bomb in a Birmingham church, Vietnam and Cambodian napalm; candlelight vigils for the slain Harvey Milk; the Japanese *Bon* festival. She retells, in modern vernacular, the Biblical story of Moses for its relevance to our situation.

Stephen Finn (1990: “Celebrating *All Our Being*”) describes a personal journey, illustrating reasons some people have trouble celebrating their being. He asks, does one feel shameful rather than worthy of experiencing “heaven on earth”? Does one adopt compensatory mechanisms to get through a life without heaven? Does FLGC sometimes serve to shield us from the need to be open about our shame?

Muriel Bishop Summers (1990: “On Living in Integrity”) spoke of living with integrity—the quality of one’s relationship with all of creation—and with oneself: a process. She discusses the balance between integrity and safety; the need of being whole, not fragmented; some essentials for wholeness; and the Divine Presence as ultimate reality, whose nature is love and whose character is truth.

John Calvi (Friends General Conference, 1990: “Laying Down the Weapons ‘Round Our Hearts”) offers steps to healing: surrendering; inviting one’s angels; receiving, with honesty and tenderness, the messages that are sent; entering upon the dance between hope and fear.

Becky Birtha (1991: “Accept It Gracefully’— Keeping Our Creative Gifts Alive”) shares her personal experiences with healing, growing, dealing with pain, and loving herself—often as expressed in her poems.

George Lakey (1991: “Our Bodies, Our Elves”) sought a vision of the new creation. He emphasizes, in six general areas, gifts that lesbians, gays, and bi’s can give to the Society of Friends and the larger world; the areas are embodiment (in a human body); the erotic (as a bridge to spiritual experience); vulnerability (seen as a doorway); facing pain; reaffirming difference; and love (moving beyond judgmentalism).

Elizabeth Watson (1993: “Night and Day”) relates how the titles of some Cole Porter songs evoke reflections from her own life. “Night and Day”—falsely dividing the world (a continuum) into opposites. (Are we the “good guys?”) “Down in the Depths”—unlearning the shame and guilt inspired by our Judeo-Christian tradition. (If there is sin, it is in not caring.) “In the Still of the Night”—embracing the darkness; finding it full of possibility, a time for gestation, for creation, for rest.

—ROBERT LEUZE



EDITOR ROBERT LEUZE has been involved with gay Quaker groups since 1973, first in New York City where he attended Morningside Meeting and subsequently with the group that evolved to become the present-day Friends for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer Concerns. He grew up in rural Northern New York near the eastern end of Lake Ontario, amid the extreme homophobia of the McCarthy period. During his college years at Yale University no one he knew (or knew of) was openly gay. He came out (to himself and two or three others) his senior year and, a year after graduation, moved to New York City. He and his present wife Sarah fell in love in the late 1960s and were married in 1969, believing that psychoanalysis had changed his orientation. He came out for the second time in the mid-1970s, but he and Sarah remain very happily married after 34 years. He pursued a career as an opera singer in the 1970s and 1980s and continues to perform in solo concerts—concerts that usually include songs relevant to the gay experience. He is a longtime member of the Yale Gay and Lesbian Alumni/ae Association (Yale GALA), and of Outmusic, a GLBT organization for singers and songwriters.



Kim Hanson

Robert Leuze



# Celebrating *All Our Being*

STEPHEN FINN

*Keynote Address, Midwinter Gathering  
Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns  
February 1990  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

Good morning, Friends. I want to share with you a vision I had as I was preparing to speak with you this morning. I had been reading *Each of Us Inevitable*, that wonderful collection of past FLGC addresses. And when I paused to meditate, I suddenly had an image of these addresses as sequential messages in one continuous meeting for worship—stretched out from FLGC gathering to FLGC gathering—with the time periods in between being the silence between messages. I also had a strong sense of how my message today rests on those previous messages. In particular, I feel a continuity with Jan Hoffman’s address at the 1987 FGC Gathering, “To Listen, To Minister, To Witness.” And I was very inspired by Bill Kreidler’s message to us at Midwinter Gathering last year in Minneapolis, in which he spoke so movingly of his personal journey. So I will speak of my own personal journey, a different but related story, and the subtitle of my talk this year could well be: “Aspiring Quaker Saint Struggles to Embrace His Rascal Side.” I hope to use this story to talk about how to celebrate all aspects of our being.

You see, as I reflected on our theme—“If Heaven Is So Nice, Why Wait?”—I decided to treat this question as more than rhetorical. I do believe that the

kingdom of God is here now, as Jesus said. There's no time to waste in living this kingdom; this is all there is. And yet I don't always act as if this were true. Nor do a lot of us. Why do I wait? Why do the people around me wait? These are the questions I'll try to answer this morning. And you might realize right off, as I did, that there are a lot of different reasons to reject heaven on earth. Part of my job every day as a psychologist is to help others answer this question: "Why am I waiting?" We are all very creative in coming up with reasons to wait! Today I'm going to select just a few of the possible reasons why people postpone heaven, and examine them. The reasons I've chosen are particularly common among gay and lesbian Friends, I believe. And they are also clearly reflected in my own life. So let me start by telling you a bit about me.

I was born the second of four children in a poor Catholic family. I grew up in a small village in upstate New York that was 90 percent Italian Catholic, with very traditional values. I was born six weeks premature, which was a big deal in those days, and I was a rather delicate child. This fragility was apparently made worse by a severe bout of flu at around 18 months of age. When I look at photos of myself from that time, I see a thin, sensitive child with big, fearful eyes. I think that part of my timidity was the result of my physical weakness and part was related to problems in my parents' marriage. Whatever the reason, it became quite apparent early on that I was a fish out of water in our town. The people where I lived prized football, wrestling, and above all, boxing. The town had produced two world welter-weight boxing champions, and all the boys that I grew up with hoped to be the third. They practiced on me. *[Laughter]* I, on the other hand, was not very athletic. I was sensitive and bookish, and to my parents' great embarrassment, I was quickly pegged a "sissy" and taunted repeatedly by the neighborhood boys. I was thinking recently about what tipped the other boys off and remembered an incident from when I was about four years old. My sister had a Halloween costume that I greatly coveted. *[Laughter]* I was very confused by my mother's refusal to let me try it on. One day, when she was busy in the kitchen, I snuck into my sister's bedroom and took out the Cinderella costume. *[Laughter]* I didn't have time to put the whole thing on, but shortly after, I emerged onto the playground proudly wearing the most beautiful gold tiara. *[Laughter]* Luckily, I wasn't treated too badly because my sister snatched the tiara away immediately. But I think it was incidents like this that made my reputation.

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I DO BELIEVE THAT THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS HERE NOW, AS JESUS SAID. THERE'S NO TIME TO WASTE IN LIVING THIS KINGDOM; THIS IS ALL THERE IS. AND YET I DON'T ALWAYS ACT AS IF THIS WERE TRUE. NOR DO A LOT OF US. WHY DO I WAIT? WHY DO THE PEOPLE AROUND ME WAIT?

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My father was terribly sensitive about my lack of traditional masculinity. I can see now that he was very insecure about his own maleness. But he tried to remedy the situation by joining the crowd and jeering at me and ridiculing me and trying to get me to be the macho boy that I wasn't. Needless to say, it didn't work. By the age of seven, I was certain that something was terribly, terribly wrong with me. I was still somewhat confused about what this was. I knew that others called me "queer," but I had no clear idea of what that meant, and only the vaguest notions of how to stop the taunting or protect myself. What I did know for sure was that I was different and defective, and I quickly came to believe that I could never please my father or be accepted by other men. Things only got more complicated during puberty, when to my horror I discovered that what others had been saying about me was in fact true. I was a queer. I was a faggot. I was a cocksucker. And although I was certain I would never act on such feelings (because, after all, I was the only person in the world who had them, right?), *[laughter]* I sure wanted to. That was enough to confirm to me my inner unworthiness.

In my Italian Catholic town I was the lowest of the low: a faggot. My one hope was that I could somehow hide this fact from others and fake my way through. By the eighth grade I was completely ashamed of anything to do with my sexuality or my body. I refused to dance or play sports or even allow my picture to be taken. I despised the way I looked. Now, I see this as a reflection of my low self-esteem; at the time, I thought it had to do with my body. On top of all this, I worked hard to cover up how I felt about myself, because I didn't dare reveal the source of my feelings to other people. As a result, I spent hours alone in my room in a kind of desperate loneliness.

This story is still painful for me to tell and perhaps for you to hear. But I believe it's not terribly unusual for gay men and lesbians. I'm sure that many of you in this room could tell similar stories of personal shame, and the relevance to our theme seems obvious to me. When I think of the reasons gay and lesbian people have trouble celebrating their being, I come back again and again to the humiliation we're exposed to and the feelings of shame that this generates. "If heaven is so nice, why wait?" I'm convinced that many of us still believe deep down that we don't deserve to be in heaven. And such feelings of unworthiness don't simply go away when you come out to your parents, wear a pink triangle, and join FLGC. These are all positive steps toward healing inner shame. But often, shame takes very subtle disguises, as I will talk about in a little while.

For those of you who had particularly good childhoods or who've worked hard to heal yourselves of shame, I remind you that each of us is exposed every day to numerous shaming messages and experiences. I was struck by this again the other day, while I was in a florist's shop buying a Valentine's Day bouquet for a male friend. Somehow, I managed to choose the only florist's shop in Austin with no gay employees. *[Laughter]* And the woman who waited on me

kept buzzing around and saying things like “Oh, she’ll really like this” and “Women really like roses.” When it came time to give the clerk the name of my friend so that the flowers could be delivered, she was so flustered and shocked that she asked very loudly, “Could you spell that!” Everyone in the room turned and looked at me. I confess that for a moment I felt quite ashamed. Every time we turn on the TV, every time we walk in public with a lover and are afraid to hold his or her hand, and every time we read an anti-gay remark by someone famous, we potentially add to whatever residue of shame lies inside of us. Friends, I believe we have to be very vigilant about this constant barrage of shame—because such feelings make it very hard to celebrate our being.

What I want to talk about most is one of the subtle disguises shame can put on. Again, I think the process I’ll describe is very common among gay men, lesbians and—interestingly—Quakers. Let me go back to my own story for a minute. Some of you may be surprised to hear me describe the unhappy boy that I was, thinking that you’ve never really seen signs of that in me. Indeed, what I described to you was an inner state. The boy that I was had to find some solution for this inner pain, and resourceful as he was, he found one.

I was very smart and talented and did very well in school, and I quickly turned this into a powerful asset. I got excellent grades. I always cleaned the sink when it was my turn in first grade, and I did it beautifully. I very quickly became the teacher’s pet in every class I attended. I soon discovered that if I could find a way to be *special*, I could deal with my inner shame in many ways. First, I got praise and recognition from everybody around me. Even my father, with all his shame about me, puffed up with pride at the yearly academic awards ceremony when I walked away with half the prizes. Second, my success in school protected me some from the hostility and taunting of my peers. They came to have a kind of grudging respect for me. Even if I threw a ball like a girl, I would help them with their homework. Third, if others liked me, then I could begin to answer my own inner condemnation of myself. And last—something I’ve really only recently owned up to—being special gave me a way to subtly get back at others. If I could convince everybody that I was better than they were and that they were defective and dumb and not-as-good, then they could feel a little shadow of what they had made me feel.

One of my clearest memories in this category is of defeating the worst bully in school in the fourth-grade spelling bee. His sister had been the state spelling bee champion, and the poor boy studied for weeks and weeks, trying to duplicate her achievement. I eliminated him in the fifth round by correctly spelling “anemone,” [laughter] and he didn’t make fun of me for weeks afterwards. Very soon my strategy to be the best, to be special, had crept into almost all areas of my life. I was the first-chair clarinet in band; the best, most conscientious altar boy. I had more cub scout merit badges than anyone in my den; I was the politest, most respectful student. If I couldn’t be the best (or at least do extremely well) in a

certain area, I avoided it. I sometimes simply made up stories about my specialness, and I became a compulsive liar. I had to be special at all costs. I now think that the amount of energy I poured into being special was in direct proportion to how badly I felt about myself. This pattern continued when I went to college. There I found a new area to conquer: Quakerism.

At first I was a little confused by Quakers: I didn't know how to be special. *[Laughter]* It was clear to me that specialness in Quaker circles didn't have much to do with academic achievement or so much with being talented or smart. But I applied my talents, and after some close observation, I learned how to be a special Quaker. This involved such things as giving inspiring messages in meeting

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WHEN I THINK OF THE REASONS GAY AND LESBIAN PEOPLE HAVE TROUBLE CELEBRATING THEIR BEING, I COME BACK AGAIN AND AGAIN TO THE HUMILIATION WE'RE EXPOSED TO AND THE FEELINGS OF SHAME THAT THIS GENERATES. "IF HEAVEN IS SO NICE, WHY WAIT?" I'M CONVINCED THAT MANY OF US STILL BELIEVE DEEP DOWN THAT WE DON'T DESERVE TO BE IN HEAVEN.

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for worship, always attending meeting for business, and making contributions at crucial moments that would turn the meeting around. I showed my keen awareness of social concerns. And I even tried to bring the best dish to potluck dinners. *[Laughter]* I developed a saintly beatific glow that everyone admired, and soon I was seen as a weighty Friend, as young as I was. I was on my way to becoming a Quaker saint. I was playing a game you may recognize from your meeting. I call it, "My inner light is brighter than yours." *[Much laughter]* Now, I don't want to be too harsh about this time in my life because, of course, trying to be special wasn't just a way of covering up shame or courting praise or getting back at people. I truly believe

there also was a part of me that yearned for wholeness and perfection and that I was trying, as best I could, to live up to my own conception of wholeness. It's just that I had a very incomplete vision of what true wholeness is. It's as if—by my specialness or by my Quaker saintly halo—I was trying to get back that little tiara I had been so proud of and which caused me so many problems with the boys in the neighborhood. I so much wanted to be loved; but the solution had itself become a part of the problem. My need to be special clearly got in the way of my being whole or getting loved. I had put on this wonderful-looking cloak of many colors over an inner core that I still felt was basically defective, and that cloak prevented me from moving forward. My inner shame could never come out in the open where it might possibly heal; it had to stay locked away in the dark, hidden under my cloak. I was also terribly constricted by this saintly role, for it allowed very little room for such things as sexuality or anger, and without

those vital sources of passion I began to feel quite dead. My desire to be special quickly led to a life out of balance, with me frantically trying to do more and more things to confirm that I was really worthwhile. My hectic life was a clear statement, I think, that I didn't feel I deserved the kingdom of heaven; I had to earn my way into it. Last, I was holding everybody around me at a safe distance with this Quaker saintly garb. They didn't dare get close to me. After all, I didn't seem to have any defects, so they sure didn't want me to see theirs. I couldn't take anything from anybody, because I didn't want them to know that I needed anything; thus, I couldn't have the kind of reciprocal relationships that are required for closeness. Here, I think, is where one of the greatest disadvantages of self-appointed sainthood shows up.

Some of you have heard me talk before about relationships and community as those places where we're polished from rough gems into brilliant jewels by knocking up against other rough gems. The knocking is painful and jarring at times, but it reveals our inner facets for everyone else to see. My armor of specialness interfered with my getting polished since I had convinced everybody that no further polishing was needed and I wouldn't let anyone close enough to see otherwise. I even chose a profession—that of a therapist—where my saintly garb was an asset and where I could give continuously every day without ever having to receive. Once again—unwittingly—I was back in a lonely room by myself, but this time it was a room of my own building. As I gradually became aware of this, I decided my saintly garb—my cloak of many colors—had to go, or at least had to be greatly altered.

I want to pause again in my own story to draw a few parallels, without projecting my own process onto everybody else. I've noticed that the "I am special" solution to personal shame is one that I see frequently among gay men, lesbians, and Quakers of all sexual orientations. I don't think it's any coincidence that the title of a popular gay novel is *The Best Little Boy in the World*. And perhaps some of you will remember David Wertheimer's comments a couple of years ago in New York City about the smugness of Quakers. I didn't understand that comment two years ago; I was too busy trying to be special. But now, I know exactly what he meant. Quaker smugness, with its underlying shame, is often quite subtle. After all, we believe in the Inner Light; everybody is as worthy as everybody else, right? Wrong. If you look closely in your meetings, I think you may see a terrible paradox: subtle messages abound that some of us are better than others because of our spiritual depth, or our good committee work, or our social action; at the same time, everyone is running around, frantically trying to buy his or her way back into the kingdom of heaven. For a people who believe in the Inner Light, we often still act as if we need redemption. "Deserve heaven as we are now, with our imperfections? No way! We won't deserve it until we've attended at least one more committee meeting." And I submit that our inner shame makes it almost impossible to practice continuing revelation. As Friend Peter Burkholder once

said and I overheard: “We all hear God’s voice all the time. We just don’t love ourselves enough to believe it.”

In FLGC, I found a great deal of healing for my specialness and the inner shame that it covers. This healing was possible because of the courage of so many of you who—like Bill Kreidler—risked sharing your imperfections with me and showed me how commonplace my own imperfections were. Nevertheless, I do sense at times that FLGC as a whole also wraps itself in some kind of special, saintly, Quaker energy. I believe we often try to be better than the average Friend as a way of guaranteeing our

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I DO SENSE AT TIMES THAT FLGC AS A WHOLE ALSO WRAPS ITSELF IN SOME KIND OF SPECIAL SAINTLY, QUAKER ENERGY. I BELIEVE WE OFTEN TRY TO BE BETTER THAN THE AVERAGE FRIEND AS A WAY OF GUARANTEEING OUR ACCEPTANCE INTO THE LARGER SOCIETY, AND I’D LIKE TO SEE US GENTLY EXAMINE THIS COLLECTIVE IMAGE OF OUR ORGANIZATION, SINCE I FEEL IT DEFINITELY HINDERS OUR MINISTRY IN THE SOCIETY OF FRIENDS.

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acceptance into the larger Society, and I’d like to see us gently examine this collective image of our organization, since I feel it definitely hinders our ministry in the Society of Friends.

I’m going to give you a few examples. I’ve been struck by the way we sometimes boast about our meetings for worship and meetings for business. I know I’ve said something like, “FLGC worship is the best worship at the FGC Gathering.” And I’ve puffed up when I said it. Or maybe you’ve heard us claim, “There wouldn’t be a children’s program at the Gathering if it weren’t for FLGC.” My question is not whether these things are true—for in a sense they are—but whether we are secure enough in ourselves to have a regular meeting for worship or even a mediocre meeting for business, and still deserve our place at the FGC Gathering. I fear that our specialness as an organization serves the same

functions that my saintly armor did. It helps us deal with our collective sense of unworthiness. It protects us from the hostility of some in the Society of Friends. It gets us praise and recognition. And, let us ask ourselves, does it also serve to subtly get back at those Friends who’ve condemned us in the past?

If you follow my analogy, you’ll see that the FLGC special role has undesirable side effects similar to those of my Quaker saintly role. Such a role unintentionally divides us from other Friends and perpetuates the isolation we so wish to overcome. Also, to maintain such an image we necessarily constrict ourselves, clamping down on those parts of our organization that are not so accepted or so savory, in order to remain special. In short, to the extent that we do all this we

impede our wholeness and keep ourselves from celebrating all of our being. And in the meantime we probably give short shrift to God's plan for us.

How do you take off a cloak of specialness and start to make real connections? I've found it's really quite simple. I just have to look inside, acknowledge what's there, and bring it out into the open—no matter *what* I find. Simple, but often pretty scary and painful to do. I often find that where I think I ought to be or what I believe is right is often very far ahead of where I actually am, and there's a lot inside that I still don't relish people seeing.

One incident comes to mind. Earlier this year, Lone Star FLGC had a worship-sharing session on the topic of AIDS. As I sat in the room listening to others speak, I began to feel overwhelmed with shame and despair. Everyone was giving strong, confident messages about how they were involved in AIDS work and about the pain that they felt. And what I felt seemed very different. I had been struggling for weeks to get myself to visit two friends who were in the hospital dying. As much as I loved each of them, I was so scared I could not get myself to the hospital. This was totally incongruent with my image of myself as a therapist, as a Quaker, and as a good friend to each of these two men.

But finally, as I sat there in the worship-sharing feeling totally ashamed, I knew I had to take off the cloak. So I spoke about what I was feeling, and a little miracle happened. Others around the room began to talk about their fears and their struggles with AIDS or with death, and I no longer felt alone or ashamed. Then several people offered to accompany me to the hospital should I want to go. I no longer was alone, for I could receive as well as give.

Friends, this is the kind of thing we desperately need to do with each other—not in an orgy of self-confession, but as a way of sorting through, learning about, and reclaiming parts of ourselves that we've come to hide. Now that I know this, I understand a saying that a former teacher of mine always used: "An earthworm can only move forward by eating the dirt right in front of it and processing it." *[Laughter]*

This saying also brings to mind Jan Hoffman's words at the FGC Gathering several years ago [1987]. Remember her request to us? "Offend me! please offend me!" Each of us needs to dare to offend, for only by doing so can we truly, wholeheartedly enter into this polishing process that has been divinely arranged for us, and only then can we become the brilliant gems that God so much wants us to be. By making ourselves vulnerable, we take a big step toward heaven on earth.

For FLGC, my vision is that we'll enter into the next stage of our acceptance into the Society of Friends. We won't need to be special to have a place at the Friends General Conference Gathering. Or better yet—we will be seen as special just as everyone else is special: because of our divine inner light and the beautiful unique way it manifests itself in our lives. We will share our imperfections more freely with each other and with other Friends. And we'll celebrate all



of our being in our paradoxical humanness. We'll learn about the perfection of our imperfection. And we'll be heavily, brilliantly polished. To quote my good friend Millie: "Friends, we all have assholes and let's give thanks to God that we have them." And thank you to the people here in FLGC who've had the courage to show us theirs. [*Laughter*]

Is there life after Quaker sainthood? As you can see there is. Let me tell you a little about what's it been like for me. In some ways, I'm more confused. So

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often now what I've thought was dark in me has turned out to be the Light, and I've come face to face with how I can use the appearance of Light to do violence to others. Moreover, even those parts of myself which still seem dark—my racism, my sexism, my continued struggles to integrate my sexuality—no longer seem so unique or so shameful. They are simply parts of me that still need polishing. I'm less ashamed, but at the same time more humble.

Heaven has assumed a much broader perspective for me. As I've given up my armor of specialness, I've actually started to feel more special and to take in more of the love that is sent my way. Before, I could never believe in my heart that others loved *me*. I always thought they just loved the cloak I had on. Now, I really see and believe that I truly am loved—for all of me.

Of course, I still struggle with perfectionism and have to remind myself to take, as well as give. I'm not doing this new life stage perfectly either. You'll probably still catch sight of me with my special cloak on. If so and it feels right, tell me. Take the risk of offending me. We'll both learn a lot.

In general, I'm more alive these days. I'm angrier, randier, more difficult to be around than I've ever let myself be before. I'm also more loving, warm, and passionate, and I've been getting polished very hard. In fact, several weeks ago as I was thinking about this all and brushing my teeth in the bathroom (I do some of my best thinking brushing my teeth), I turned away from the mirror and I thought I caught a reflection in the corner of my eye. I turned back and it was gone. But

I'm pretty sure I saw it: a brilliant gold Cinderella tiara, shining on my head. And this time, Friends, I know that I, just like each of you, deserve to wear it.

Thank you so much for being all that you are.



Steve Finn is a member of Friends Meeting of Austin, Texas, and a psychologist in private practice in Austin, Texas. In 1991, he and Jim Durkel were married under the care of Austin Meeting. They now live outside of Austin with two horses, two dogs, two cats, and two cockatiels. Steve is co-author, with Friend John H. Driggs, of the 1990 book, *Intimacy Between Men: How to Find and Keep Gay Love Relationships*, published by Dutton. He received his Ph.D. from the University of Minnesota and previously served as a clinical associate at Lesbian and Gay Services in Minneapolis.



Stephen Finn and Harley