

Address to Illinois Yearly Meeting, July 25, 2007

Walking to Heaven, Following the River: A Call to Faithfulness

By Lucy Duncan

Thank you so much for inviting me to be here tonight. I am looking forward to spending the next few days with you very much, to spending time with old friends and getting to know many I haven't met before. It's a blessing to be among Midwestern Friends again, feels a lot like home. The invitation to speak with you tonight has terrified me, made me wonder what I might have to say. My ego has also shown up several times in the last weeks, demanding attention. I've tried to regard both of these companions as distractions, and let them pass, though that's not always easy, they can be noisy. Most of all your invitation has been a challenging and inspiring call to faithfulness, and to soul work. Some days that work has been hard. I've encountered blocks and obstacles to finding my voice or hearing any messages. One day that I had intended to spend on this talk, I got lost at least 4 times driving to take my son some place or to pick him up. As I puttered along slowly crawling through North Philadelphia, I wondered if any words would come. Other days, riding my bike around the burial ground in which my family lives, I've been offered so many stories, I didn't know where to begin, wondered how to weave it all into a sensible presentation. My prayer is that what I've found to say will speak to you and that I've been faithful to the measure granted me.

As I've been praying and holding this session in my heart, I've asked myself what God has to say to me now, in these weeks, that I could share here at Illinois Yearly Meeting. I had a spiritual teacher once who said that life is the teacher. What he said has been helpful to me, but I have learned that God is the teacher and Life is the classroom. So, I've been asking what God has been teaching me in my life this year? What stories have arisen from the past that have offered me solace and guidance this year? How do those teachings inform my daily life, the way that I spend my time, the way that I interact with friends and neighbors? What direction am I being called? How do I hear God speaking through others, through my meeting, and through my work life? How am I faithful to what I hear? As I've been asking these questions I've felt the leading to finish grieving some events, to begin to heal and I've joyfully celebrated many of the messages and love and guidance I've received which have come without so much struggle or in the midst of the struggle.

I went to a New Jersey meeting recently to help the members to tell their stories of spiritual experience and I heard one story which spoke to me about God's constant presence and the need to pay attention and be watchful in order to perceive that presence in your life. The Friend was driving the lead car guiding another car to a destination. She was on a highway and somehow ended up behind the car she was leading instead of in front of them. She still continued to lead. She liked leading from behind. She could see the other car clearly, and work to anticipate its moves. She could signal the next turn and move to another lane in order to get them to move over. She didn't have to worry so much about looking in the rear view mirror to make sure she didn't lose them going through a

light or when she turned. She could see them clearly. The key to this working well was the driver of the following car needed to look in his rear view mirror and keep checking to see where she was leading him. The driver was able to do that fine and they ended up at their intended destination. She thought that this felt to her the way God offers guidance. God doesn't always show up in the car in front of you and make it easy to follow. God doesn't hand you a map. Instead God is a constant presence, there behind you if you work to perceive that presence and will lead you if you keep looking in the rear view mirror, if you watch where she's leading and don't speed off without her. So I hope to tell you tonight some stories of looking in the rear view mirror to find out where God is leading me, of working to find her guidance even when I may have sped ahead or gotten lost.

When I gave a title for this talk I couldn't see clearly the shape. Though, seeds and fruits of the Spirit is close to what I will speak about, has been a part of my prayer and meditation as I've considered what to say to you tonight, a story came to me that I'll open with that provided for me a different title. So, I call this talk "Walking to Heaven, Following the River: A Call to Faithfulness."

We are called to an Abrahamic journey,
Leaving the familiar to walk with God
As a stranger in a strange land,
Always inviting and invoking
A commonwealth that is now and not yet,
About to become and already here.

-Lloyd Lee Wilson, 1998

When I was five my grandmother, my father's mother, whom we called Gimel, died. At the time we lived in West Branch, Iowa and we got up the next morning and drove to Keokuk, Iowa to the open casket service in a small white chapel. I was close to this grandmother, loved her a lot. Both of my grandfathers had died before I was born and I didn't care much for my mother's mother, who drank a lot and had no fun in her. But Gimel I loved, with her lilting laugh and warm presence. I was sad about her death, though I didn't fully understand. After the short service, my father lifted me up to the casket so I could see Gimel and say, "good-bye." When I saw her I said, "Gimel broke and they put her in a box!" My father and I took a walk in the garden next to the chapel. It was an early Spring day, forsythia and daffodils were in bloom and the leaves dappled on the dirt path on which we walked. I held my father's hand and asked him what had happened to Gimel. He said, "She's in heaven." I asked him what heaven was and he said, "A very beautiful place." I looked around me, saw how beautiful this place was and figured we were in heaven, too. When I returned to kindergarten, my teacher asked me where I'd been. I said, without hesitation, "We went to heaven." My teacher said you couldn't drive to heaven. But I was firm and said that, yes, you could and that I had.

I still believe that you can drive to heaven, well, maybe not drive, maybe walk or bike. But I do believe heaven is all around us and being faithful is about working to perceive heaven in this world, here today, in this place.

In my life I've had a struggle with staying in places, with being enticed by the city over the hill, the next place. I've come by this tendency to dream, to desire to 'strike out ahead of the rest' honestly. There's a mythic story in my family about my great grandmother, my father's grandmother. She lived in upstate New York and worked as a teacher. She read an ad in the newspaper one day about staking claim in the west, about homesteading there, and her imagination was ignited. She answered the ad and set off on the train as soon as she could set her affairs in order, with her most valued possessions to the Dakota Territory, to make a place for herself on the prairie. Among the items she carried with her was one that most would have considered impractical—a large glass mirror with detailed wooden flowers carved into the frame. She found her plot of land, made a makeshift shelter, hung her mirror on the wall and set her heart and hands into making that land work for her and her for it. She struggled, though she was not unaccustomed to hard work. Not long after she settled on her plot of land, a young man set his sights on the land next to hers. They helped each other as they could, kept one another warm through several hard winters. They toiled side by side and fell in love. They worked hard and supported one another and were married on their little united piece of land. After three bitter winters in a row, losing their crops, they left the land that hadn't completely claimed them. I can see my great grandmother looking one last time at herself in that mirror in their little ramshackle house on the prairie, radiant, her hair wispy in an unkempt bun, lit by the orange-white light of her future, with a secret smile on her face. They moved their combined possessions to Huron, her husband to work in the hardware store there. My great grandmother hung her mirror on the wall, along with a painting of Venice, which had been a present from her husband. My cousin tells me that my great-grandmother always had a bit of the dreamer in her, wasn't ever completely content where she was.

Since I graduated from college, I've usually lived in a place for seven years and am then struck with an irresistible urge to leave. Despite knowing well the pain of departing, of leaving beloved friends and family, of leaving behind all my most recent stories and familiar geography, I've left. Part of that has been being called elsewhere, as I truly believe my call to FGC and Philadelphia was, but I believe that some of it has had to do with getting to a place of discontent and not understanding that the answers to my restlessness lay within, that the longing I felt each time was an important feeling to heed, but may have been an invitation to growth and transformation, not necessarily always a call elsewhere. I've been blessed—God has been present and offered me lessons in my life despite my roaming and still every seven years, this temptation returns and I feel a pull elsewhere, to a better place, to a place beyond.

I've been in Philadelphia now for eight years, coming up on nine and, predictable as ever, the longing came about a year ago. I was struck with wanderlust, started looking for other

jobs and considering other places. This time I only looked in places I'd lived before- California, Nebraska, New Mexico, but the pull was there. This is the first time I've had the benefit of the grounding of my family, as well as being more ready to resist the urge and try to discover what lay beneath it. It's been hard to resist, I feel a bit like an alcoholic resisting a drink and I still find myself in front of the computer on occasion looking to see what's out there, but this time I am able to stop myself, to enter into a different kind of adventure- one of staying in one place, being held in community, one which invites me to face myself and take on the work that God offers me. This time my restlessness and longing were answered in a surprising way. FGC has grown and Bruce, the general secretary, needed more help with administration. A consultant was brought in and proposed a new structure with Bruce and three associate secretaries helping him with supervision and working as a team on cross-organization tasks and initiatives. I was completely surprised when Bruce invited me to consider being one of the associate secretaries. After some discernment, maybe not as much as would have been right order, I said yes.

I'd like to say my pathway in the last year was clear and free of obstacles. But, if I did, I would have missed the point. The challenge offered me was to face blocks in myself that I'd avoided facing before- old habits of thinking and being that had stopped working - that I would eventually have to face wherever I went, because I carried them with me. It usually took awhile to get to a place where they reared their discouraging heads, where I felt safe enough for them to creep out of the shadows and seek the light. That spiritual teacher I mentioned earlier, the one that said that life is the teacher, he also talked about the crack in the cosmic egg. He used this as a metaphor for breaking out of an old world view and being able to see more, perceive more, of the truth that God offers. I've been blessed to have felt myself emerge from an old egg at least twice. I believe that the crack often comes from facing the wounds of the past, the hurts often cause the cracks in the egg and new light is offered as a result of grappling with those hurts. In my life, in moments of despair and suffering, in times where I am invited to struggle with the challenges of my childhood and early adulthood, I feel an urge to run, to light out to new territory. And it's true- I am receiving an invitation to new territory, to a new understanding, but this time staying put offers the threshold to the new understanding awaiting me.

This new job on familiar territory has been a wonderful opening in my life, with much struggle, uncertainty and transformation, but it has been an invitation to face myself in a way that is exactly what I needed. I've been working on learning how to say difficult things with love and, often, I am offered an opportunity to practice this skill in this context. I struggle a lot, with finding my voice in this work and with finding my place in the organization. Within FGC, we are more together than apart. Each voice is critical to the process of finding our way forward. FGC is experiencing growing pains and in my new role I don't just feel the effects of those, but feel more responsible for mitigating that pain, for finding solutions to the gaps and new ways of operating. Bruce and the other associate secretaries and I struggle with becoming a team, too. We work hard to support Bruce and find our way to really assist him, as well as offering new perspectives and

sometimes challenges. It's hard, teaching in an inner city school was the only job I've had that was harder, but I feel blessed to get to do the work, to support the work of those I supervise, to find books for Friends, to work with the staff and volunteers at FGC, and to serve the Religious Society of Friends. The rewards are enormous. FGC has been called to important work, to support and nurture American unprogrammed Quakers and I feel humbled and grateful to help that work. FGC is filled with wonderful spiritual teachers and I get to engage with them intimately each day, as I seek patience, faithfulness and courage to do the work that I am called to.

About eight months into doing this job, I wasn't sleeping that well, would toss and turn worry about work. One night, finally, I slept deeply and awoke when my husband, Graham, came into the room in the morning. I told him my dream. I had dreamt that I had been walking through a huge museum, not unlike the Tate Modern in London, each of the rooms had vaulting ceilings and white walls. I wandered from room to room then entered an enormous space with a painting that covered the walls from ceiling to floor and even turned the corner. My first thought was, "Wow, where did the artist get a canvas so big." Then I looked at the painting and was filled with peace and joy. It was a painting all in blue, suggestive of the ocean, with many layers and hidden presences in the deep. Every time I looked at it, I found something new and delightful in the blue canvas, another expression of creation or a bit of playful light in the stunning blue. I looked at the painting for a long time, as Lorenz Graham so eloquently said, "my heart lay down," was at peace looking at that painting. I was overcome with joy when I realized what the artist was attempting. I looked at the painting and saw that he had faithfully represented his perception of God. After I told Graham the dream I said to him, very excitedly, "That's what we're all here to do, to express our understanding, our grasp, of God." I said, that's my answer to my struggles, to faithfully express my perception of God. Graham said, that Simon, our five year old son, had told him the day before that he had had a wonderful dream. Graham asked him to tell him, but he wouldn't. He said he wanted it to keep coming back to him and thought it might not if he told.

I've thought for a long time that a gift that I have is working to make dreams come true. This dream was an affirmation of that gift and a new way of understanding it. We all have a responsibility to express what of God we understand, and together if we're able to do really do that, to be faithful, we could find ourselves in God's heaven, heaven on earth. My dream, my understanding of Friends great promise is to do that together, to bring our dreams together and collectively to express our perception of God. But not to dream of an elsewhere, a city on a hill, but to, as Thomas Kelly said, "Plant our visions deep in the furrows of the world's pair" and make manifest the kingdom of God in this world and not to wait for our children to do it. Not only that, we have a responsibility to restore the earth, to understand that much of heaven is here, already, in God's creation and that much of our work is perceiving and conserving the bounty that God has set before us. We've wreaked a lot of havoc by not honoring creation, by thinking instead that heaven is elsewhere, just over the horizon, somewhere in space. What healing might come if we understood that we are greatly blessed to be alive together, in this time, in this meeting house, if we could truly perceive God in the glint in each person's eye and understood that heaven is beneath

our feet, here today? I want to be clear that I fully perceive the healing work that needs to be done, but for me starting from a place of believing that the wholeness and seeds of heaven are all around us is a more helpful place to begin. Focusing on working towards a vision is more energizing than working always against injustice. Let us dream together, let us express to one another our perceptions of God and walk together to the heaven we envision. We may not get to that vision, but what a walk it will be, a holy, joyful peace walk, together. In my life I'm trying to work towards that vision, to express my perception of God and listen attentively to other people's understanding of God. I've been blessed with some glimmers of practices and steps on that walk to heaven. Today I'd like to share some of the stories that have given me guidance, that have shown me a pattern that might help.

At the most recent Gathering in River Falls, we sold some buttons in the Gathering store. My son Simon selected three to wear. One said, "There's no alternative to being yourself." Another said, "Quaker Chick" and a third had on it that Gandhi quote, "If we want real peace in the world, we must begin with the children." My friend Barbara Mays looked at that button and laughed. Her daughter, when she was a teenager scoffed at that quote, asked "Why wait for us to do it? Why leave that work for us?" There is much truth in this and, yet, our children can call us to become more peaceful, now. Simon has. Sometimes being unfaithful, behaving against one's values, can be a call to being faithful, can call forth a leading towards transformation. This next story about Simon is an example.

I am very fond of Simon's art work. I have a portfolio that we keep his myriad drawings and paintings in and since he was a baby, I've tried to keep that portfolio in order, adding things sporadically as he has made them, making decisions about which things are worth keeping from among the huge volume he creates. I think some of my guardianship of his art work has to do with emptying my mom's house after she died and finding a file of art work for each of my brother's but finding only an empty file with my name on it. So, this portfolio is important to me, a record for Simon. On one occasion Graham, my husband, was sorting through and organizing Simon's art table and knew I probably wanted to make a call about which things to include in the portfolio, so he just put the most recent stack of art in the portfolio, not paying attention to whether it was mixed in with everything. When he told me about what he'd done and I looked inside the portfolio, I lost it. I felt affronted and disrespected and I yelled at Graham and wept in such a way that was scary. It triggered in me a deep pain of some kind and I shouted at him, blamed him, wept over the portfolio and behaved very, very badly. Simon, I think he was two at the time, was in the room during this tantrum of mine and started to cry, I could see the fear on his face- where had his mama gone? That, finally, made me stop, calm myself down. Later, when I was putting him to bed, I talked about this with him. He told me he had been scared. I told him that what I had done was wrong, that it was never okay for me to treat his dad or any one like that. I made him a promise (and I'm one to take promises made to children very seriously) that I would try never to behave that way again. That I might sometimes

start to behave that way, but would try to stop myself, and if I did get angry like that again, I would apologize quickly and let him know that I was behaving inappropriately.

So far, some days less perfectly than others, I've kept that promise and it has been an important invitation to transformation. In order to really keep my promise to Simon, I can't just repress the feelings that give rise to that behavior, I've also got to look at the roots of violence in myself, explore the sources of my pain and anger and give myself space to grieve and release the painful moments from my childhood that cause me to respond with such hurt and anger to certain situations. The work of changing is hard and also requires of me something that is a real challenge: for me to be compassionate and very patient with myself.

I've also discovered some disciplines that help me to keep my promise to Simon. I try to ride my bike or walk every day because that helps me to release the tension that can cause such an outburst. And each night Simon and I talk about the blessings of the day. This gives me a chance to tell him about small joys, many having to do with being with him, and for him to remember his day and think about the moments he might want to remember. The other day he said that taking some small hand-made boats to the creek near us and sailing them with Graham had been a blessing. Many days he says, "My whole day was a blessing, really, mama, it was." This time also gives me a chance to tell him about times I've been unfaithful, particularly with him, and to say I'm sorry if I need to. The other day, on my birthday, we went to a restaurant and I kept gracking at him about sitting still and using his utensils. I was speaking from a place of worrying that I'd be embarrassed by his behavior, rather than from a place of helping him to learn a new skill. He was tired, there was nothing on the menu he really wanted, but he really was behaving fine. I was keeping us from having a lovely dinner on my birthday with my complaining. When we went to the car, he didn't want to sit next to me. I asked him if that was because I was being a grumpy mama. He said, "yes." I convinced him to let me sit by him and we played and joked on the way home. That night I told him I was sorry for getting at him so much at dinner. He said, "I know mama, it's okay."

Another person in my life who calls me to faithfulness, to keep my promise to Simon and other promises I've made, is Graham. Other people have loved me unconditionally before Graham, but he was the first from whom I could really receive that love. He is the most persistently cheerful person I've ever met and he's cheerful despite being fully aware of the evidence to the contrary. He has this uncanny ability to watch me when I get into a spin of frustration, despair or self-deprecation, to stand witness, but not engage. Being with him in those moments is a little like being in worship, where the distractions and troubles of the mind can be released so you can really listen for God. He quite patiently stands by while I spin my wheels. The other night I was despairing about this talk, feeling like I had nothing to say, feeling overwhelmed at work and not valued or worthy. He listened ever so patiently while I released all this, then very quietly said, "But Lucy, it will come. God will come, just wait, be patient." If he'd said this when we started the conversation, I wouldn't have been able to hear him, but he waited until I could listen again and his words gave me enormous comfort. The other day a friend had spent some time

with Simon, playing, and was amazed that he didn't need to win at the games they played. I said that Simon is able to do that with his friends, let them be in charge if they need to, but he seems to have a very strong well of self-assurance, doesn't need to win to feel he's okay. This ability of Simon's, I'm certain, comes from his father. Graham has such a deep sense of well-being that he can let me be in charge, be the planner, be in control. I have long needed that kind of sense of importance to feel okay and Graham has such a deep reserve that he's happy to let me be the one who wins. The interesting thing about this ability of his, his ability to surrender to me is that I'm beginning not to need it so much, not to need to be always in control, I'm better able to consult and surrender myself. A couple months ago I was complaining to Simon about Graham leaving coffee cups lying around the house. Simon said, "Yes, mama, but he listens to me." Simon knows well his father's gifts. I read a quote by Patricia Loring which spoke to me about the kind of love I feel I've received from Graham.

"When we are able to accept being accepted, able to receive the loving, listening presence of God both embodied in others and hidden in their hearts, we experience God as love. The experience of such love results spontaneously in gratitude, praise, and joy. This is not the "duty of being grateful" I'm speaking of. I mean an upwelling of heart-breaking, heart-opening thankfulness, and joy that such love could be, that we could be in it, that it could be in us, that we are all in it together."

All beings
Are words of God,
His music, his art.

Sacred books we are, for the infinite camps in our souls.

Every act reveals God and expands His being,
I know that may be hard to comprehend.

All creatures are doing their best
To help God in His birth
Of Himself.

Enough talk for the night.
He is laboring in me;

I need to be silent for a while,

Worlds are forming in my heart.

-Meister Eckhart, from *Love Poems from God* by Daniel Ladinsky.

I want to tell you a little bit about my meeting. After being a sojourning member at Central Philadelphia for several years and retaining my membership in Omaha Friends Meeting of IAYM(C), Graham and I decided to seek out a Friends Meeting that we would both want to join, that we could call home. CPMM was too big for us, we'd both come from more intimate meetings. Living in the Philadelphia area gave us the luxury of being able to search for and visit quite a few meetings before finding the one that fit. We visited four meetings, going back at least 4 times, other than Central Philadelphia, before finding the one that was right. During the process as a meditation and exercise, I made a wish list for the meeting I hoped we would find. First on my list was deeply centered worship and a smaller size. Also included were some racial diversity, being welcoming to gays and lesbians, a strong First Day school program, and the membership of some other families with younger children. I remember vividly the first time we went to Goshen. I sat in the deep worship, looked around and joyfully checked off each of the items on my list. I felt strongly that a prayer had been answered on that day. It's not perfect, we bump against one another as one does in spiritual community, but there is a sense in worship that the river of living water is present, the room is filled with pregnant waiting, that is the center, that's what keeps many of us there. That palpable Spirit in the meeting house offers great comfort and a clear pool of living water calling us to transformation.

Recently we held a meeting for worship with attention to the spiritual state of the meeting. We focused our time together with three queries:

How is God's presence experienced in our meeting?
Are there places where our meeting feels stuck?
Where do you see new life emerging in the meeting?

The meeting for worship was centered and focused and the messages that arose were full of gratefulness, vulnerability and challenges to growth. The strongest longing expressed was to know one another more deeply, for us to know and be known, to touch one another more significantly. I see in this longing, this challenge a great opening. Sitting in worship together, listening to vocal ministry, we hear the glimmers of the sacred books written on the souls in that room. But for us to move together, to cultivate the ground of spiritual community, we are called to ask and listen for how God is speaking with each of us, to listen deeply to the longings of the heart and the gleanings of the Spirit. Sometimes this is expressed in sorrow, sometimes in joy, sometimes in anger. In order for us to find a direction as a meeting, we are invited to feel and understand both the openings that come to our members and the places where there are blocks. The ground for this deep sense of community arises out of being together, working together, learning together, yes and hurting one another, but most of all telling one another our important stories and making space for all voices to be heard. When I visited a meeting recently to help them tell some of their stories of spiritual experience, I was surprised by how shy they were with one another. I sat with a married couple and one of them told an amazing story of his hand literally being guided by God, a story that had clearly changed his life and his wife had never heard it before. I don't think this meeting is that unusual, we can be a shy people.

But what if we took the risks of telling one another what lies on our hearts and made a safe space for those stories to be told? We are together in spiritual community to find how our stories weave together, to create the tapestry that comes from sewing those stories into a larger pattern and finding how we can be parts of one another's stories and create a story that is not just my story, but our story. The first time Simon really went trick or treating on Halloween, he came back and had to write messages to his three closest friends. The message he had to write, the first in his own hand, was "Make your own story." I asked him about this later and he said, "You know, mom, make your own story and tell it." Each of us is called to this activity in our life, and if we listened carefully to each person's story in our meetings, what story could we make and tell together? What kind of mural could we paint together of our perception of God?

"The "lone Quaker" is an oxymoron. We are a Religious Society, a gathered people, who in community help each other listen, learn, and follow divine guidance. Our meetings provide encouragement and support. They supply warnings and admonitions when we need them. And, because we are all human, our meetings also provide the laboratory in which we inevitably hurt each other and can also, heal, forgive, and learn to live together in God's enfolding love."- Marty Grundy, 2001

Graham, Simon and I live in the caretaker's house of Friends South Western Burial Ground. The burial ground was opened in 1860 by the Orthodox Friends of Philadelphia Monthly Meeting of the Western District, partly because other Quaker burial sites were full or were being re-used for other purposes. Now it is owned and managed by Central Philadelphia Meeting. We moved there in 2001 when I was 2 months pregnant with Simon. He's never known another home. His first sentence was the joyfully pronounced, "Daddy dig hole!" When we moved there the gardens around the house hadn't been tended for awhile, one caretaker had mowed and dug up many of the perennials that had been there for years. Since we've been there the garden has changed, we've added plants and weeded (well, Graham's done most of that), added two apple trees and a redbud planted on the occasion of my mother's death. Each Spring I await the emergence of the gardens, delight when the daffodils and azaleas, baptisia and peonies bloom and I love to watch the garden fill with color. Right before I left the garden right outside our back steps was overgrown with sunflowers, moonflowers, Echinacea, black-eyed Susans and hydrangea. I've made lots of pies from the sour cherries on the tree outside our kitchen and Simon often asks to eat a 'home grown' lunch from the one acre community garden that occupies one corner of the burial ground. The burial ground is big, 23 acres and really lovely and peaceful, a very beautiful place. There's a grove of oak trees in the center, where we have meeting for worship for the meeting at least once per year, in one corner there's a huge sugar maple tree, there are many tulip trees, three magnolias and a number of dogwoods. The burial ground is encircled with an old stone wall, with iron fencing above that. We keep the gates open almost all the time-one pedestrian gate on the back and the gate that serves also as our driveway in the front.

The neighborhood we live in is diverse, mostly working class. Many new immigrant families live there, Pakistani, Indian, Southeast Asian, buy their first home there. On the road behind the burial ground are many families that have been there for generations, both African-American and Caucasian. Across the road is a Greek Orthodox church which has a festival every year. They set up a midway with merry-go-rounds, teacup rides, a little train on our street and open a Greek restaurant serving souvlaki and moussaka for a weekend. There's Greek dancing and crafts and everybody from the neighborhood comes out to play.

There are a few famous Quakers buried there—Henry Cadbury is buried there and Addison Hutton, a prominent Philadelphia architect. All the graves are low to the ground, in accordance with Quaker practice of emphasizing the importance of the life, not the death of a person. We have a number of graves that were moved from Arch Street that are older, some even from the 18th century. The longer we live there, the more we've buried people we knew. A neighbor who was very involved in the local music scene is buried under the sugar maple. A young girl, 4, who had come to Philadelphia with her mother from Haiti to be treated for leukemia is buried there. She had been cared for by the meeting. Larry Thomasson, who had a wonderful bear hug and sang folk music and loved his son with all his heart is buried there. This Spring we had my good friend and close colleague Barbara Hirshkowitz's memorial service at the Burial Ground. We planted 10 trees (magnolia, white oaks, redbuds, hornbeams) on that occasion, enriching the soil with her ashes as we buried the roots into the ground.

Life in the burial ground is for me a lot like the Religious Society of Friends. We grow up out of the rich humus of those who have gone before, offering their lives as testimony to their faith. Those that have gone before inhabit our lives, our meetinghouses and we are challenged to resist the temptation to idolize the dead, to hold up their lives as the principal testament of our faith. We are called to remember them, to be inspired by the risks they took, their faithfulness, to be enriched and nourished by their lives, but to grow as the sun of faith inspires our lives, our meetings. We are called to tend the garden of Quakerism well, to weed and plant and sow seeds of heaven and to open the gates wide, to invite the world in and to take the fruits of the garden we tend into the world and offer them. Let us venture out of the stone walls around our meetinghouses and share the fruits of the Spirit that we have tended. Who knows where that might lead? Maybe we'll nourish someone who needs our story more than food to stay alive. Maybe we'll end up on a Merry-go-Round and be filled with the joy of the ride and take that back into the meetinghouse.

A year ago this week I took Simon to his annual physical exam and he had very high blood pressure. We were sent to a kind nephrologist from South Africa, who measured the blood pressure in his arms and legs, cited the big difference and sent us, quickly, for an echocardiogram. I didn't go to that appointment and Graham called to say that Simon had a coarctation of his aorta—a congenital heart defect which is a constriction of the aorta.

Simon would need surgery within a month. Needless to say, this scared me. The week before the surgery I took Simon to Winterthur, the DuPonts' former estate-now a museum with numerous gardens, and spent time in the 'Enchanted Woods.' Simon walked the kid's labyrinth with glee, spent time climbing on the story stones, stood in a ring of toadstools, and found the green man hidden in a grove of trees. He traversed the troll bridge, climbed into the bird's nest and peeked into the tulip tree house. We walked down the hill to the museum and wandered through a stone passage to discover the reflecting pool. We walked past a woman sitting in a chair, very still enjoying the quiet. I'd been imagining still pools quite a bit last summer; the weather had been hot and imagining them helped me stay calm at the prospect of Simon's surgery. The pools I'd been envisioning had been much less vibrant than the one at Winterthur, they'd been more like swimming pools, blue without much life in them. We stood at the water's edge; the pool was filled with water lilies and lily pads and pods, the water was blue green and we saw a water strider swimming across. This physical pool was a startling manifestation of those still pools I'd been considering: life stretching out of the stillness. I found much comfort in that moment, standing there with Simon. I told a friend in meeting about this. She went to Winterthur and looked at the pool the next week and couldn't help imagining Simon playing in that pool.

The next week Simon packed his bags and said, "I'm all ready for a nice stay at the hospital!" We were admitted on a Monday and Simon was wheeled into the operating room, goofy on the phenobarbital given him to help him relax. In post op, Simon tried to jump out of the bed, which the nurses considered a good sign. He was in pain, very vulnerable, but the surgery had gone well. It had taken longer than the surgeon had anticipated because Simon's body had tried to make detours around the constriction, sending out little arteries. He recovered quickly, was home and playing with his trains by Friday. The surgery was fairly successful. Simon will need to have a balloon put in his aorta in a few years, to open the constriction further. And he developed seizures, either as a result of the condition itself or due to the anesthesia. Those are scary because when he's in the midst of a seizure, it's hard not to feel he has gone and might not come back, especially when he was palsied for quite awhile after the second one. Since January he's been on medication and is doing very well, has been seizure-free and is growing and has more energy than before all this happened. Before his surgery he said about a bean plant he'd planted, "Its invisible strongness is quite considerable." So has his been and Graham and I have been comforted by his deep sense of well being.

After the surgery, Simon was able to go back to pre-school on time. Most days he and I take the El train to 30th Street station and walk from there to his school. We pass the huge art deco train station and post office. We cross the street and Simon runs to the edge of the Market street bridge to see how dirty the Schuykill is today and whether any seagulls are about. He races me to the end of the bridge, usually hiding beneath a stone eagle at the edge there and leaping out when I catch up with him, saying 'boo!' We walk down the ramp and always greet a homeless couple that starts their day on a bench above the river. The husband always smiles, says Simon hasn't lost his spark. The wife wears a burka and seems shyer, but she smiles, too. Somedays we take them cherries or something else we think they might like. Simon races down the ramp toward the river. We

pass a big mural of a whale in the ocean, beneath it homeless men and women are often asleep on little ledges, lining up their shoes in neat rows on the nearby steps. We round the corner next to the river and he stops to look over at it, often flinging one rock in and watching it splash. He sometimes chooses a rock there to add to his rock collection. He climbs the big rocks on the grass, races me under the Chestnut street bridge, then weaves in out of the young trees on the grass right next to the river. He runs to the railroad tracks and we always check to see if the coin we left the day before has been flattened. He climbs a hill of rocks and comes rushing down and continues on toward the park near his school. We pass the community garden that has 8 sour cherry trees in it and is enclosed by a wrought iron fence with iron sunflowers on the gates, we cross the street where his friend Anna lives, then walk down a little side street of blue and brown row houses behind his school, lined with maples and ginkgo trees. He races me to the door and we take the elevator up to his pre-school, always full of paint, pattern blocks, water tables, childrens bright art and lots of love.

This walk is my favorite part of my day. It feels to me always a little slice of heaven. We are all like Simon, walking through our lives with constrictions or wounds in our hearts, living with uncertainty as he does with his seizures. We, too, walk along the dirty river, which we've clouded up some, but still the stream of living water flows. We can clean it up, we can let the dirt settle, but we can't push the river, we just need to let it flow. Simon and I walk there most days and are beginning to become familiar with the little changes, with the particulars of that place along the river. We consider the homeless couple our friends and miss them, wonder about them if they aren't there when we walk to his school. Who knows what movement of Spirit will arise from becoming more friendly with them, what shifts in Simon and me and in them? We walk along that river each day and, as we do, we come to love it, it becomes part of the fabric of our lives, even as it is a little microcosm of the problems and possibilities of our world. Simon greets this walk, despite his wounded heart, despite the dirty river, with great joy and delight. He brightens that little corner with his spark. It inspires me, this simple act. Who knows what other works will arise from it? Who knows where that light will lead, where will we be taken if we walk along the river?