

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

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Complete Contents

Elizabeth Watson (1977):	<i>Each of Us Inevitable</i>
Arlene Kelly (1979):	<i>Estrangement and Reconciliation</i>
Janet Hoffman (1982):	<i>Eros and the Life of the Spirit</i>
Dwight Wilson (1984):	<i>Nurturing Our Relationships within an Often Hostile Community</i>
Arlene Kelly (1984):	<i>Nurturing Friendship and Lover Relationships</i>
Elizabeth Watson (1985):	<i>On Wholeness</i>
Elise Boulding (1986):	<i>The Challenge of Nonconformity</i>
Thomas R. Bodine (1987):	<i>Caring Matters Most</i>
Janet Hoffman (Friends General Conference, 1987):	<i>To Listen, To Minister, To Witness</i>
David Wertheimer (1988):	<i>Bias-Related Violence, Gay Marriage, and a Journey Out of the Society of Friends</i>
Ahavia Lavana (1988):	<i>Helping and Healing</i>
William Kreidler (1989):	<i>Tending the Fire</i>
Ellen Hodge (1989):	<i>Tending the Fire</i>
Stephen Finn (1990):	<i>Celebrating All Our Being</i>
Muriel Bishop Summers (1990):	<i>On Living in Integrity</i>
John Calvi (Friends General Conference, 1990):	<i>Laying Down the Weapons 'Round Our Hearts</i>
Becky Birtha (1991):	<i>“Accept It Gracefully”— Keeping Our Creative Gifts Alive</i>
George Lakey (1991):	<i>Our Bodies, Our Elves</i>
Elizabeth Watson (1993):	<i>Night and Day</i>

“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*

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.

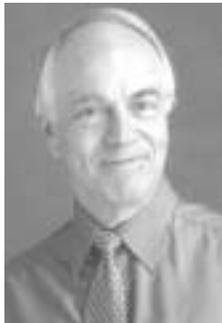
George Lakey (1991: “Our Bodies, Our Elves”) sought a vision of the new creation. He emphasizes, in six general areas, gifts that lesbians, gays, and bi’s can give to the Society of Friends and the larger world; the areas are embodiment (in a human body); the erotic (as a bridge to spiritual experience);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

The Challenge of Nonconformity

Reweaving the Web of Family Life for Gays and Lesbians

ELISE BOULDING

*Keynote Address, Midwinter Gathering
Friends for Lesbian and Gay Concerns
February 1986
Baltimore, Maryland*

Reweaving webs of relationship is our main business in life. The process begins with the great separation which is birth. The ensuing bonding/reweaving between parents and newborn child is no simple process, because the individuality and conflicting needs of each assert themselves almost at once. All through life we go on bonding across differences, because we need others to make us whole. The tension involved in that bonding is part of the human condition, and we ignore or underestimate it at our peril. Loving isn't easy.

Those who are called to nonconforming witnesses have a particularly complex task in reweaving relationships because there are more differences to bond across. We know that many family webs were ruptured in wartime because families could not support sons who chose conscientious objection or nonregistration. A special witness of nonconformity is the gay-lesbian act of "coming out." This involves publicly affirming the spiritual, social, and biological rightness of forming a primary bond with a person of one's own sex—women loving women (lesbians) and men loving men (gays). It also means witnessing to the wholeness of each human being, man and woman. "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you all are one in Christ Jesus." [Galatians 3:28]

That witness to oneness is something all of us can share with lesbians and gays, at the same time acknowledging that primary bonding with a person of one's own sex is a special case of the sexual bonding of the species. Some heterosexuals

unite so strongly with the gay witness for wholeness and against the gender distinctions that warp personhood that they declare themselves “spiritual gays.” For the sake of simplicity I will use the term *gay* to refer to both lesbians and gays in this talk.) That fellowship of concern is important to gays because their nonconformity results in the breaking of many family and community bonds as family and friends reject the nonconforming position. The rejection causes pain and anguish only heightened by a public unwillingness to acknowledge even the legitimacy of the pain, let alone the position taken.

It is important for Friends to understand the consequences for those in their midst who make the nonconforming choice of being publicly gay. Because recent decades have been a relatively easy time for Friends—a time of respectability—many have forgotten or never knew the pain of nonconformity. Yet many of us who were rearing children at the close of World War II spent much time thinking about how to rear them to be war-rejecting nonconformists. The post-Hiroshima world looked very bleak indeed. It was not something we wanted our children to be part of. We wanted them to help shape and be citizens of a very different world. In those years I read about the lives of many peace-committed, social change activists, hoping to find some clues to what gave them strength for nonconformity. I found certain common elements in the childhood of each: (1) an experience of solitude, separation from society in childhood, whether through illness, isolated living, family differentness, or for other reasons; (2) an experience of close attachment to some adult while young, inside or outside the family; and (3) a capacity to daydream, to envision a different and better world, which became the basis for reconnecting with society-as-it-could-be. The combination of having experienced both separation and bonding seemed to make the vision of the other possible, and drew the nonconforming activist to the work of reweaving the social web on behalf of the vision. Many Quaker gays and lesbians fit that model of social change activists.

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Today the Quaker gay community has a special calling to reweave the social web on behalf of gays’ vision. Their nonconforming witness comes out of the pain of their isolation, from the strength of the love they have known, and from the image of a different future social order. Many Friends are not only unaware of the social nature of the gay witness, they are unaware it is a witness at all. The gays’ nonconforming position is all too often seen only in terms of human rights. In fact the gay position represents a deepening and enriching of Quaker

testimonies on equality, nonviolence, community, and simplicity, and as such deserves our respect, love, and support.

Let us look at the gay contribution to the Quaker testimonies:

Equality:

The gay position goes beyond generally affirming equality in human relations. It deals with the specifics of the subordination of women to men, and to the specifics of all subordination—women to women and men to men. It sees inequality with X-ray eyes, in relation to age, class, ethnic, or cultural differences. Most of us affirm the testimony to equality without doing anything very complicated to maintain it. Gayness, however, sets aside all the conventional signs and symbols associated with traditional gender-based roles—which are also signs and symbols of inequality—and calls for crafting relationships that fully acknowledge the other as equal. Nothing can be taken for granted. It is only when one looks at society through gay eyes that one realizes how much unthinking social subordination goes on in daily life. Yes, much of it is “harmless,” but it is all part of the web of inequality. Early Friends took objection to hat honor and the honorific “you” with the same seriousness that gays take objection to gender and status honoring.

Community:

The gay witness to community permits no gender barriers to assumption of responsibility. On the other hand it gives a new positive definition to age-old customs in every society of women gathering with women and men gathering with men in various settings and for various occasions. The community of women helping women has been a positive nurturant force in society, and so has the community of men helping men (when the latter has not involved warmaking). At present we move bumpily between same-sex and heterosexual groupings in our social enterprises. Gays can help enrich our understanding of the potentialities and strengths of each type of grouping.

Simplicity:

What many gays bring to the witness of simplicity is not only a rejection of accumulation for its own sake, but a highly developed aesthetic sense for the patterning of our environment. Whether the general public knows it or not, gays have made tremendous contributions to our society in the arts and humanities, and the tradition of doing so goes back a long way. Quaker “plain” turns beautiful.

Celebration:

Another contribution of gayness which infuriates many is the gay gift for celebration, for joyfulness, for the dance of life. A gay dance is a very different

affair from most public dances, open and welcoming to all ages in the best tradition of Quaker family dancing—a needed counterweight to the Quaker tendency to gloom. Behind the gay joyfulness, won at great cost, is the deep spiritual experience of accepting one's own gay identity, of being able to say aloud and in public, with pride and grace, "I am gay."

Discipline:

Finally, there is the witness of the disciplined life. Discipline is a hard word to understand. By "disciplined life" I mean a careful intentionality, a choosing, a discerning, in all one's actions. Gays who choose the responsibility of being publicly gay set aside conventional social role assignments and thus subject themselves to a constant process of discernment. Life has to be organized and directed toward the living of the new wholeness, to the crafting of the new person.

Reweaving the web at the family level is where broken bonds are most painful. Quaker gays have parents, grandparents, brothers, sisters, cousins, aunts, and uncles like everyone else, but they are often (not always) treated as black sheep. When they form couples and marry, they would often like to be married under the care of their local meeting, but find it difficult to communicate that wish. They sometimes have children from former marriages, sometimes adopt children—and very often serve in the time-honored role of extra parenting adult. Many of them work with children as teachers and caregivers. Like the celibate Shakers of an earlier era, many gays love children and take care that there are children in their lives.

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What is a family? In the broadest sense it is a complex of households of relatives spread widely over one or more continents, some of which carry out the functions of reproduction. In theory these households keep in touch and care about one another; from time to time they meet for family reunions. Sometimes gays are invited to family reunions, sometimes not. Most households develop an additional "extended family" of friends who are "like one of the family." Such extended families are especially important to gays. Sometimes

Friends meetings organize extended family groups as part of the ministry to the meeting community, and gays are often part of these.

The sad truth, however, is that gays usually find themselves outside the family networks they most value, cut off from people they love by the social

obsession that gays are “unnatural,” pathological people. The strengths which gays have to offer their families are so many, the rewards for their families of experiencing reconnection so great, one can only hope that increasingly families will reconsider mending ruptured relationships with gay offspring.

Many gays have special gifts and insights regarding family relationships that can strengthen both their families of origin and meeting families. These parallel the testimonies mentioned earlier. First and foremost is the testimony to equality in couple relationships. Because they accept no gender-based status differentials, gay couples are challenged with crafting an equality of relationships which few heterosexual partnerships achieve. Needless to say, it is based on a continuing openness to each other. At the same time, however, it must be remembered that gay couples live under stress. Gay couples long for stability and long-term relationships, but occasionally experience the same painful marital dissolutions that heterosexual couples go through.

They are denied the buffering effect that extended families provide young couples when troubles arise. The longing to reweave the family web and feel the support of parents and extended biological family is one of the most poignant aspects of being gay. The longing to reweave the web is not only personal; it is social. Gays long to help shape a society in which human beings and families are more gentle with one another.

How can the family web be rewoven? Caring about one's family does not in itself bring about reconnection, or there would be few gays separated from their families, so a kind of negotiation would seem in order. When differences are strong, mutual respect is the scarcest resource. In the case of gays, parents often do not respect their gayness, and gays themselves begin (sometimes unconsciously) to lose respect for their parents' continuing inability to accept their sons and daughters in new identities. For gays to work on ways to let their families know they respect them may be an important part of the process of winning respect in return.

Negotiation requires discovering common interests. One strong common interest between gays and their families is the hidden love on both sides which longs to find expression. It can be drawn out with patience. Negotiation also requires a willingness to “give” on matters of lesser concern. What can gays “give” on? What can their families “give” on?

The strength for gays to try reweaving the broken web comes from the support of friends. Can Friends meetings be friends to gays and support them in

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their efforts to reconnect with their families? That kind of support implies a recognition of the gay identity of the gay single or gay couple in the meeting. It means a willingness to share their other burdens as well, and an appreciation of what they bring to the meeting. It means gays taking committee and clerking responsibilities in the meeting. For some meetings, marriage of the gay couple under the care of the meeting has been an occasion of great spiritual deepening.

Quaker gays are *Quaker*. Gays active in any community of faith are likely to enrich that faith in similar ways. Quaker gays witness to the Quaker way of life, and bring special strengths to that witness in their manner of practicing equality, nonviolence, community, celebration, and discipline. The gay identity is itself part of that witness, striving for wholeness and oneness in the spirit of the teachings of Jesus. The witness should be honored.

Never in history has the Society of Friends needed more imagination and wisdom in demonstrating the possibility of living in that life and spirit which takes away the occasion of all wars. Learning new ways of approaching gender identity, and new ways for men and women to live and work separately and together in building the peaceable kingdom, is urgent for us all. The gays and lesbians among us can help us in our learning and in our doing. It is time for them to be freed from the stereotype of embattled victims fighting for the right to be what they are, and instead be accepted as co-workers in reweaving the social web for us all.

—As revised for publication in *Friends Journal*, October 1987.



Elise Boulding is professor emeritus of Dartmouth College; while there she greatly enjoyed serving as advisor to the then-new gay student group. She was born in Oslo, Norway, and now lives in a retirement community in Needham, Massachusetts. She is a member of the Wellesley Meeting. The author of many books about women's changing roles, she has worked internationally as a scholar-activist on issues such as peace, the environment, women's and gender studies, and the future. She has helped start peace studies programs. Her husband, the late Kenneth Boulding, died in 1992. Her family includes 5 children, 16 grandchildren, and 2 great-grandchildren—as well as a gay cousin.



Elise Boulding