

SOUTHEASTERN YEARLY MEETING OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

Annual Michener Lecture 2007



Religious Society of Friends

2007 S. Magnolia Dr.
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Letting Go of Illusion, Engaging Truth: Healing!

Everywhere you look there's beauty...
everywhere you go there are points of interest



Niyonu D. Spann

One-off Original

~~Second Printing~~

Julio Domínguez
of the

Tallahassee & Gainesville Friends

1/14/2007



Zine Library -- Please don't take

The Thirty-seventh Michener Quaker Lecture in Florida
Funding provided in part by the Dwight & Ardis Michener Memorial Fund

GRACE



At last, the moment you have waited for...
of a grand achievement... to be remembered
this treasured gift



PUEBLO



Tallahassee
Religious Society of Friends

2001 S. Magnolia Dr.
Tallahassee, FL 32301

Wait! What?

Quakers don't
Make ZINES!

the celebration
red always by



Mrs. D. Spann



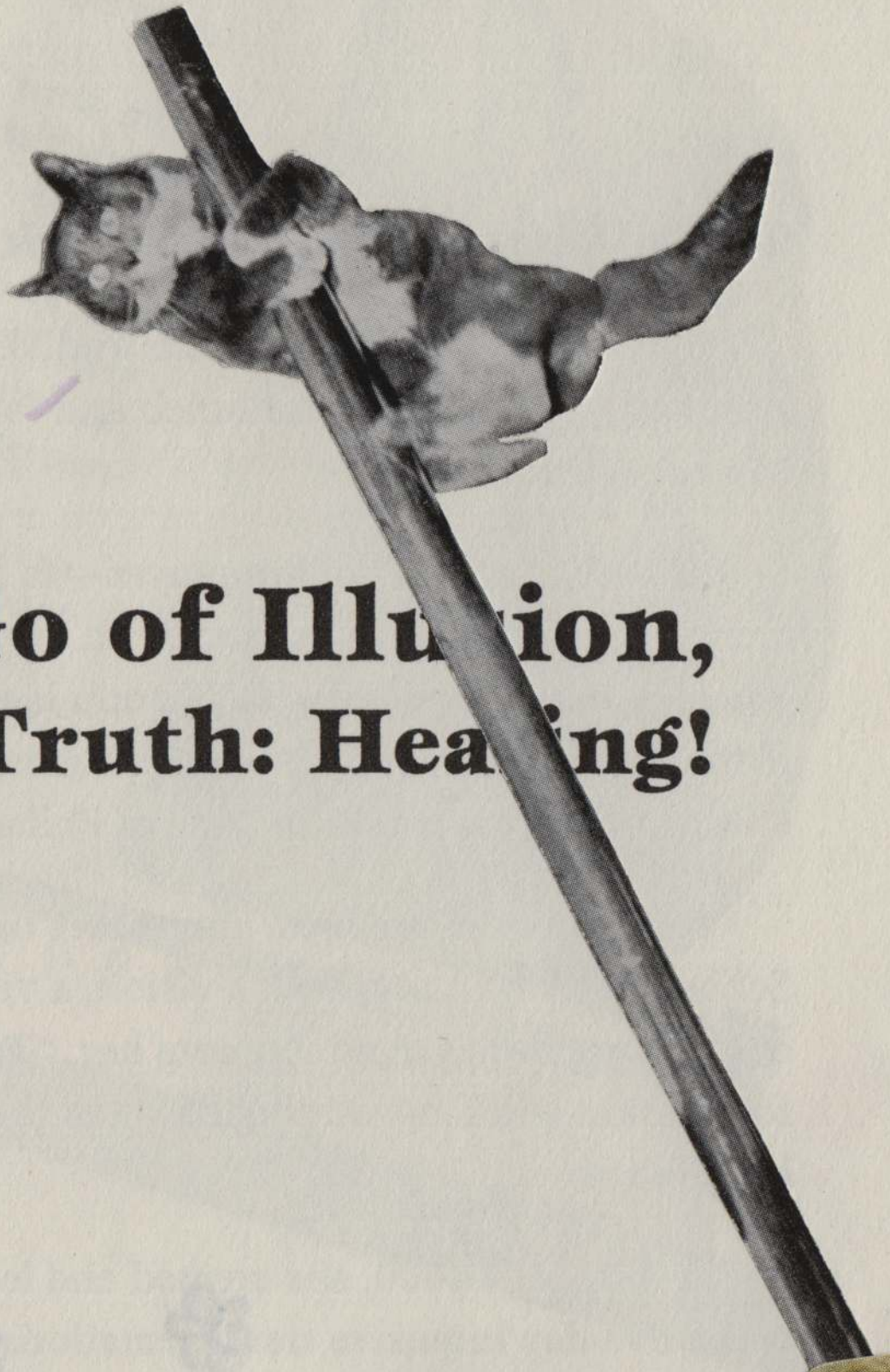
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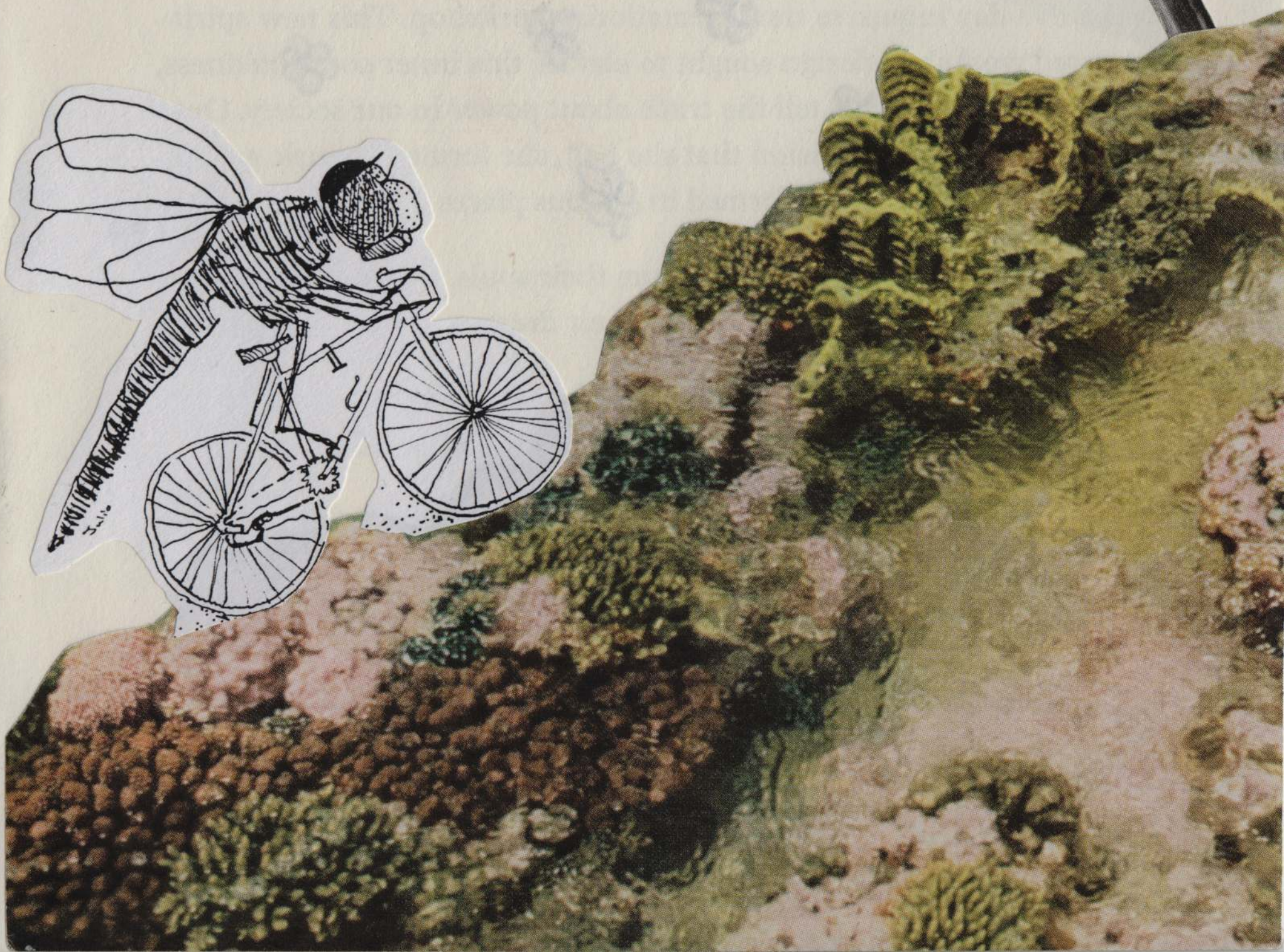
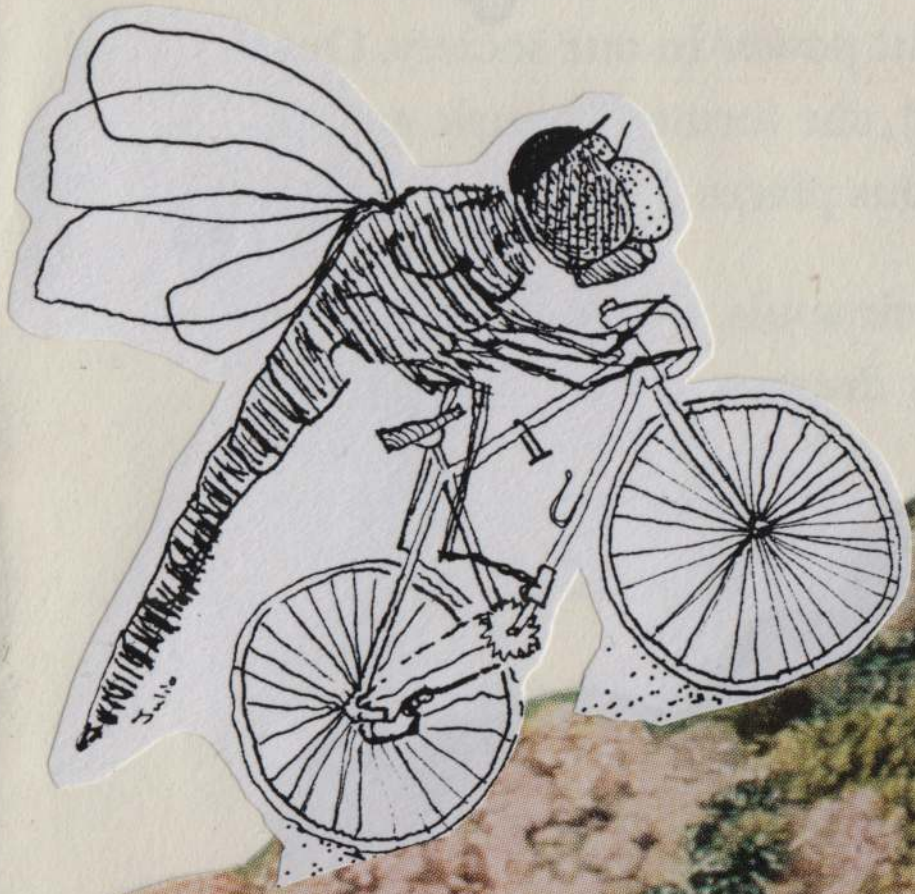
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The Thirty-seventh Michener Quaker Lecture in Florida
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I aint
Lettin go
for Nobody!!



**Letting Go of Illusion,
Engaging Truth: Healing!**





School

... THE WONDERFUL WORLD

It's time to show you this

her

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101

the

id." And it transformed

CONTRAST

2000, she created and led *Beyond Diversity 101*. That five-day intensive transformational workshop. This new spirit-centered workshop design sought to elevate this inner connectedness, within and without, to tell the truth about power in our society. Out of this same powerful vision that she had, she formed a music group, Tribe One, which has performed in various places.

She loves helping folks sing from their souls, in ways that they might only have thought possible in their dreams.

It is with great pleasure that I look forward to hearing her as she shares from her soul her experiences. May it bless us all.

She will speak out of the silence and when finished sit down. There will be time for a couple questions before we break and return for the seminars.

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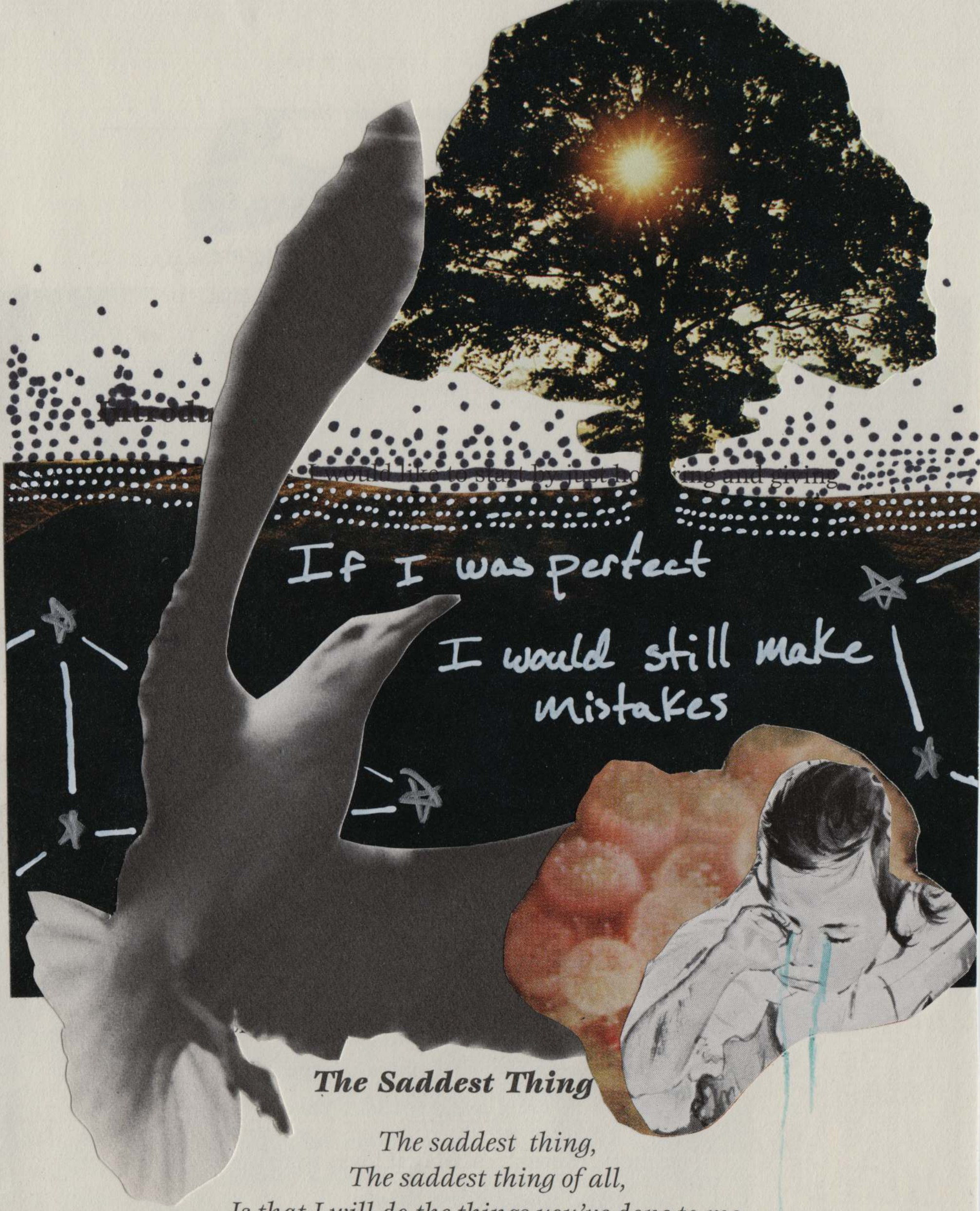
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Mp2007



Introdu

would like to start by just ho

ing and giving

If I was perfect

I would still make mistakes

The Saddest Thing

*The saddest thing,
The saddest thing of all,
Is that I will do the things you've done to me.*

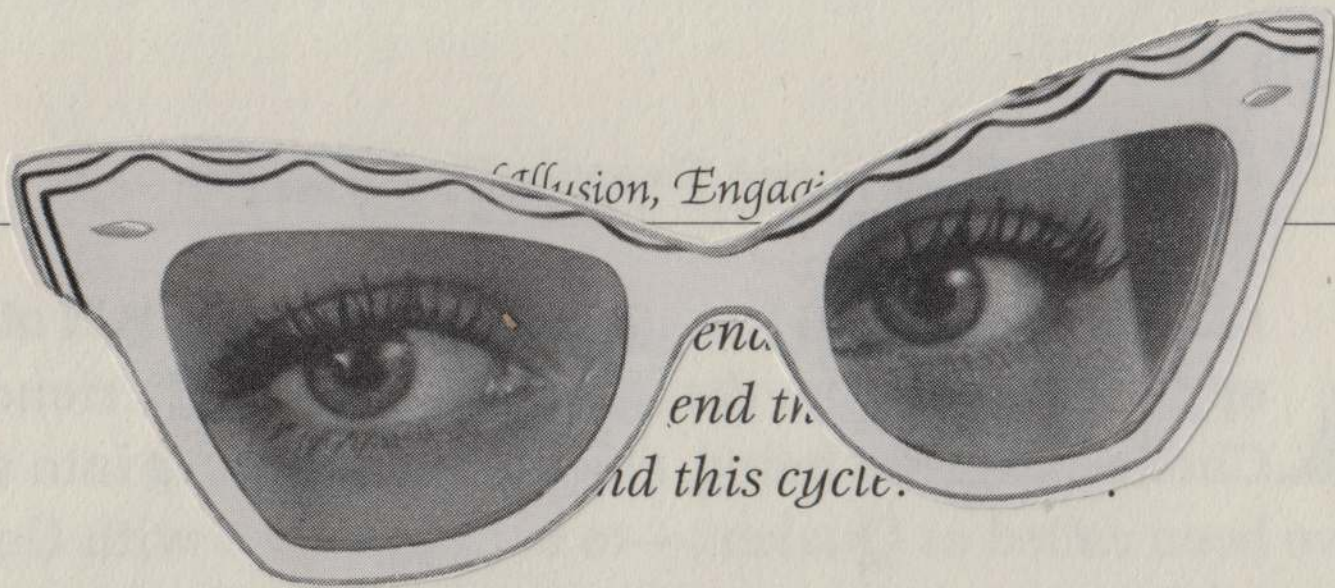
*The saddest thing,
The saddest thing of all,
Is that you can do the things I do to you.*

*The saddest thing,
The saddest thing of all,*

Is that you feel so sad

*Because I really do love you,
Because I really do try.*



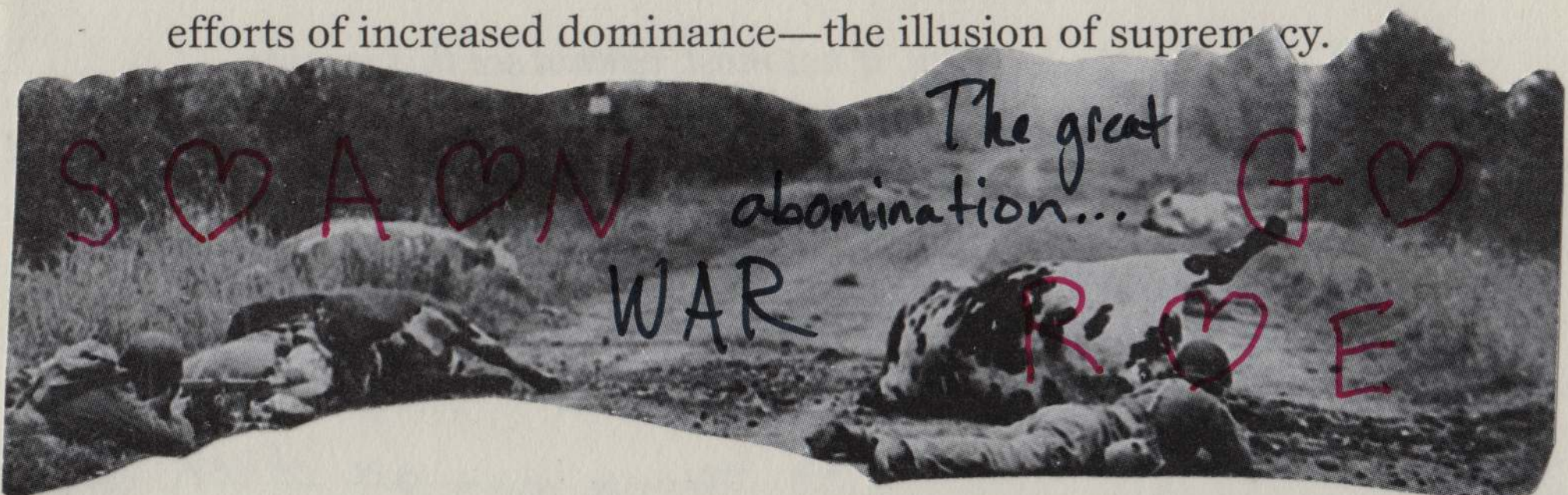


I wrote that song in mid-September 2001, as I realized that an unprecedented opportunity for healing was being met by the same old familiar, nasty taste in your mouth, sick feeling in your stomach, fear-based, violent response, efforts to bolster our position of US dominance and perpetuate the illusion of separation.

In the moments before our government declared its intended response, people throughout the world fell into a shared mourning and expressions of compassion. It was the kind of feeling that precedes new choice-points. I felt the collective holding of breath—as our eyes and ears turned to watch and listen. Was it possible? Yes! Could it be? Would we rise from the ashes, confused, yet changed—determined to find another way of being with each other? As the smoke cleared, and we met the tear-stained eyes of our earth-mates, had this shared suffering moved us any closer to each other?

When I turned my nose upward to see if I could detect a different scent in the air, I sat at my piano and when those words fell from my lips, *The Saddest Thing*—I knew that I knew.

The fear-route was more familiar. In fact, fear-currency had just risen off the charts. It would be used over the next five years to finance wars abroad and on the streets of our cities, and to line the pockets of those who have now begun their ride into the sunset. This fear-currency would be used to further bolster efforts of increased dominance—the illusion of supremacy.



And Friends, I believe that we are at such a point of opportunity within the Religious Society of Friends. Choice-points in being, allowing fully, living into who we have been called as Quakers—to be co-creators with God of the Blessed Community—or continue to feed an illusion which is choking off life.

Queries:

- 1) *If you are a Quaker, what makes you so? What would have to happen for you to no longer be a Quaker?*

I invite you with this query and the others I ask, to just allow what comes and track it just a bit. So, If you are a Quaker, what makes you so? And if you go to an overly analytical place, just kind of calm that part of your mind down, and just let the simple little answers come. *Whole Community, Love*

- 2) *Do you believe that there are those who really own Quakerism?* *no*

Not your analytical mind, the rational one that goes, “Well, I would say, given that ...” Not that one.

- 3) *Why is it that Quakers who come from a working class or poor background so often feel out of place or less-than amongst Friends?* *Class divide.*

So, I cautioned you a little bit about that rational analytical mind, and I also want to caution you just a bit about the little guilt-prick that can come in and stop you. Why is it that people coming from a working class or poor background so often feel out of place or less-than amongst Friends **except for the times we are in silence together.**

- 4) *Why is it that many, if not most, cannot see this woman standing before you speaking as a **real** Quaker?* *I'm not so sure.*

My mother is a Quaker from Cuba. That Quakerism is very different from silent Quakers in the Southern U.S. I was born into Quakerism in Gainesville, FL and I feel out of place sometimes because they are often blinded

of myself to them and we grow.

It is time, Friends. I want to say, "Can't you feel it?" I also want to say, "I know that you know that you feel it." Every cell of our being is screaming out to tell us that it is time, **"The gig is up!"** We have an intense yearning for the wholeness, yet we are holding onto the illusion that blocks this wholeness with every fiber of our being—and it is time to let go.

I met Friend John today here, and he happened to pull out a book of quotes—Martin Luther King. The one that seems to slip right in here is that: "Courage faces fear and thereby masters it... We must constantly build dikes of courage to hold back the flood of fear." That speaks to me of a practice, I think of constantly building dikes of courage to hold back the flood of fear.

Letting go of the illusion and moving into wholeness was at the heart of my calling to serve as Dean at Pendle Hill. I did not know it as completely as I do now. What I did know then was that I had stepped up to the plate in a very well established game—that was bigger, more complex, more significant to the Religious Society of Friends—that this assignment could form a more powerful ripple, and would bring greater clarity of purpose and work, deeper levels of my own spiritual life than any work commitment I had previously taken on.

Why this is so, and why it felt, and is so huge, I cannot articulate. But what I can say is that all of our Quaker institutions; 50-years old, 75-, 100- are grounded in—like all US institutions—are grounded in systems of entitlement-over, privilege-over, and oppression-over. They just are. Bell Hooks calls it "dominator culture."

And, institutions will not be able to continue to have the purpose or mission statements of peace and social justice or even personal, spiritual transformation while dealing, or not

Sincere kind & loving community. I love them, I hold nothing against them, I give

by their virtue. That feeling fades quickly in their

What are we getting from this level? Dr. Joy Leary, author of the book, *Post-Traumatic Slave Syndrome*, which I recommend, says that America's pathology is her denial. And she talks about America's pathology and the need for healing. "The need for lancing a boil," is the metaphor that she uses. I believe that this need for healing is absolutely true, and that most people in this room will agree. So how does that pathology play out within the Religious Society of Friends?

HIGHLIGHT THE LIGHT

Poem by Julio

I'd like to read to you from my personal journal, March 18, 2005, 4:30 a.m., and what you need to know is that I am not a 4:30 a.m. kind of gal:

I find myself now awake. So many thoughts flashing through. I am getting to live life inside an institution that is oblivious of the third circle. It is a dangerous thing when a place—an organization, a church, a community—operates as if they are not of the third circle. I see that more clearly than ever now. And yes, I am excited and I am hurt; I want to feel both.

When a person, an African-American woman like myself, acts as if I am not of and in the third circle—when a person does this, they might tell themselves any story: "I am a soul, I am standing in my wholeness, I have transcended the human experience—the human experiment, I live only from that place of divinity within." They might tell themselves any story.

The story will most likely be grounded in absolute truth.

And, if it ignores relative truth—it is incomplete truth for the plane on which we are living. The plane on which we build organizations and hierarchical structures like families,

churches, communities. It will be discounting lifetimes of experience and the current suffering all around, and within. It will be ignoring the manifested world created through choices—use of power—that divine ability to actualize the potential.

When we act—either as an individual or as a people—as if we are not of or in the third circle, we are delusional and active guardians of the status quo. The status quo which is power over, entitlement over, privilege over. In other words we are on active duty in guarding the fortress built brick by brick with denial as the cement!

That was my 4:30 a.m. awakening. I had been teaching this stuff, but I had not been living it with this intensity.

There were recently, within the past few weeks, at Pendle Hill a number of statements made that all agreed were racist, even the person who made them. It caused quite a disruption within our community—particularly the student community which is where most of it took place. When word got to me of what had transpired, my greatest concern was not that the statements had been made, or that the statements and the person who made them were being openly discussed. My greatest concern was that discussions and judgments would occur, not openly, but behind closed doors and that the individual who made the statements, or the individuals who felt most targeted or hurt by the statements would begin to be isolated, shunned, made invisible.

To me, it is not a shock that homophobic actions and sexist remarks or evidence of white supremacy show up among Friends. I see it all of the time. Now that might seem like a bit

END

of an exaggeration, but it happens—I would say that it happens every two hours or so when I am among Friends. I want to acknowledge the hurt and I don't want to go into shock.

I don't know a whole lot about medicine, but when I was researching what happens when we go into shock, I could see that the purposes for our bodies going into shock are not conducive to taking in information or integrating. It's counter that. You know what I mean? It's to shut down for a minute. I have said this probably in most of the talks that I have given over the last couple of years, "Going into shock is one of our most important blocks to be dealt with if we are serious about moving forward." There are times for going into shock, **but when you need to face AND integrate truth is not one of them.** Every time one of these actions happens in a public way, I want to acknowledge the hurt and have a practice of not going into shock.

As Friends, we seem to have a heightened aversion to, or fear, of the shadow side—those parts that we'd rather not see. We like to focus on the light as if there is no shadow, and I understand. This is not an unnatural desire. There is a belief operating here that says that if those things in the shadow were allowed to be seen, talked about, and acknowledged that we would surely die. I like to say that we want to be the underground railroad Quakers, but not acknowledge that we were also the Quakers who required African Americans to sit on separate benches during meetings for worship.

So we have this fear that we would die if the whole truth were brought to light. There is some truth here. If we truly acknowledge those parts that we deny—that may be our shame, our sorrow, our greatest fears—there will be death. And primarily I focus on the death of the illusion!





Parker Palmer, former Dean of Pendle Hill, says that “Truth is always preferable to illusion, no matter how closely the illusion conforms to our notion of the good—or how far the truth diverges from it.”

Now, when I’ve been telling and accepting lies for so long, it can seem really overwhelming to engage the truth. How can we do this?

I would again like to offer the three circles. Quite simply, what happened, or what is happening on an individual level? What happened? And what is happening? Allow the stories. Allow truth to come forward—agreed upon or not. **Allow truth to come forward—agreed upon or not.** That gets real, real hard for folk—particularly hard if your way of being in the world is about correctness or about proven theories.

And then, what is happening on the second level? How do the men feel about what is happening in this yearly meeting? What if there was an allowing of folks to speak from that group level? Not how **should** they feel; how **do** they feel? What are their stories?

When you had your last big crisis—I don’t know this yearly meeting in terms of your crises—but you have got to have had something—you know what it is. Sometimes when I do workshops with groups, I say, “List the ten big things.” Then I will say, “Let’s have people do a Las Vegas vote on which one of those things feels like it still holds the most energy for the yearly meeting.”

And then 360-degree truth about what happened. How was it created? What was everybody’s part? What were the ‘weighty Friends’ up to when that happened? How does the rest of the body react when the ‘weighty Friends’ do their thing? And,

how do the societal norms play out? How does classism play out here? Brainstorm it. Or in a less structured way, when someone raises it in a group session, make space to really listen.

And then moving on to the Third Circle. If we just take U.S. societal level, how do those ways of designating the more-thans and the less-thans in our society live out in the Religious Society of Friends, or live out in this yearly meeting, or live out in your family?

And if we don't let shock, and don't let guilt, and don't let fear block the sharing of the remembering, we can re-member. We will have an opportunity to re-member.

I travel amongst Quakers throughout the United States and one thing seems constant: **A culture of exclusivity. This is the case in regard to age, in expectation of formal education, in ways of being regarding socioeconomic class, and surely in terms of race.** I ask, "How can this be within a religion that has at its core, the belief in equal access to the Holy Spirit and particularly, equal access to vocal ministry?" It does not match. **It does not match.** So we would have to be in dis-ease.

As a musician if you ask me to play a cord or if I'm playing a song, I can hear when a note feels like it's off. Now it could be because of my culture, and what I've been exposed to in terms of music. And there are other cultures that have notes that probably feel not so right to me. So it is within the content of who-we-say-we-be—within the context of **who we signed on to be.**

How then people, do we find ourselves, our meetings, our institution in such homogeneity? There are many pat answers that we offer up that I've heard, and probably some of you have heard, in trying to bring some understanding to "how we

became this way.” One answer that I hear frequently is; “it’s because we don’t have singing.” Or you know, “What young people want to sit around with a bunch of old people?” —what interesting responses.

Young people are starving for loving community → to make themselves useful.

These responses are sickening—I mean they make us ill.

Why do people of color and folk from other groups targeted by oppression rarely make it into positions of leadership in Quaker institutions, and when they do, they report suffering greatly?

I believe that **the answer can be found in really facing ourselves and trusting that we can withstand the truth.**

And the reason I believe we can withstand the truth has to do with **who** is walking with us.

Truth telling on all three of these levels, as scary as it may be, will lift away that that blocks the air and light from the wounds that need healing. We will shine forth more. Those who are looking for us and whom we recognize as missing from our religious community will be able to find us and -settle down at home.

Where there is truth, there is love, and I join as the Quakers in declaring that “the practice of love is the most powerful antidote to the politics of domination.”

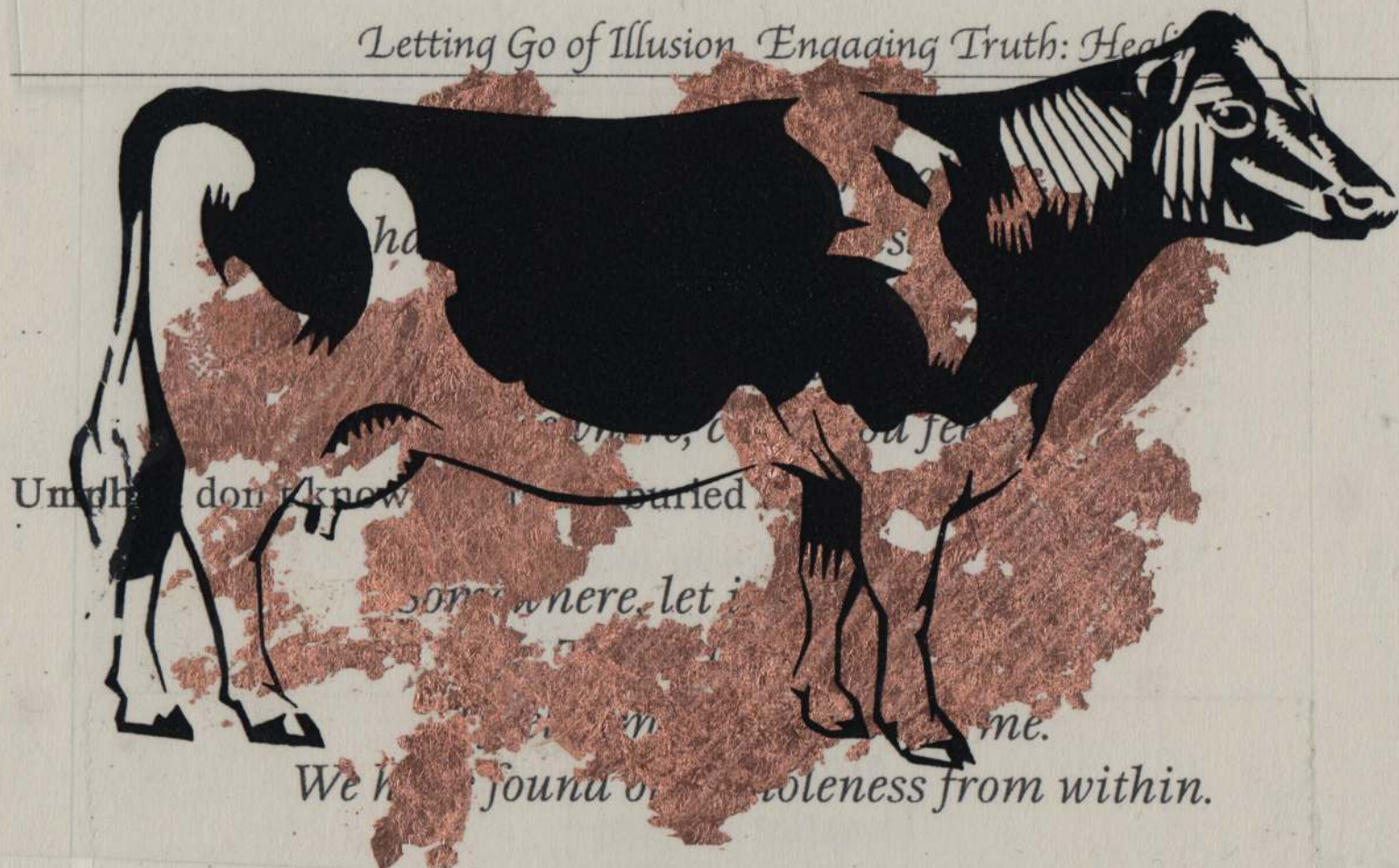
Sung a cappella:

Somewhere©1994

*Somewhere, there’s a place for us
Somewhere, I can see it.
Somewhere, we shall know we are one.
There I see it now.*



Models in kitchen n



Quakers, we are seeking wholeness and the Spirit will assist us. The Spirit is assisting—offering strength, offering grace. We have a great gift to offer the world. I am not ashamed to say it. I am not hesitant about saying it. That great gift that we have to offer the world—in our practices and testimonies—I mean the testimonies—the ones that are on the back of somebody's T-shirt—those, as well as our stories—our stories. People are fascinated, wanting to know how we come to be, how we come to speak some of the truths that we are speaking in the world, and the work we are doing in the world. Let's share those stories, and let's share also how we have gotten stuck in our illusion of who we are, and how we are moving. We are all seeking this wholeness—this healing—and first we must face and let go of the patterns of denial. The opportunity is before us. Will we turn to one another and do it differently—this time?

As my eyes focus lightly and my ears perk up for the answer to that question; as I turn my nose up to the air to see if I detect a different scent, I await a positive response that says, "Yes. We will sit in the fire of truth together and find our healing—our wholeness."

Sung a cappella:

*Give over thine own willing,
give over thine own running,
give over thine own desiring
to know or to be anything.
Just sink deep down to that seed
sewn so sure in our hearts
and let it be in thee,
grow in thee,
breathe in thee,*

The

of love.

Isaac Pennington



The distance between PEOPLE

may be -the-world

filled with promise

for someone who loved you

today...



About the Lecturer



—Sharon Gunther

Niyonu D. Spann is the Dean of Pendle Hill, and a member of Durham Monthly Meeting and New England Yearly Meeting. In the mid to late 90s, after years of teaching in Friends schools and developing skills in facilitation and diversity training and general organization development, Niyonu began to allow a vision to come through—a vision of the interconnection of all

Thanks for the testimony, Sister!

living beings. She says that “this vision shook the foundation of all of my ways of being in the world.” It also transformed her life work.

In the Spring of 2000, Niyonu created and led the first *Beyond Diversity 101*—a five day intensive transformational workshop. This new Spirit-centered workshop design sought to elevate inter-connectedness within and without and to tell the truth about power in our society.

Out of this same powerful vision, Niyonu formed the music group, *Tribe One*. *Tribe One* has performed throughout the country at numerous gatherings: peace and justice rallies, churches, schools and in Nicaragua. Niyonu loves “helping folks sing from their souls in ways they might have only thought possible in their dreams.”

Niyonu received vocal training and her BM/BS at the Oberlin Conservatory, then went on to receive her Masters in Organization Development/Human Resources from the American University, and more recently, studied as a part of the doctoral program with University of Creation Spirituality. Niyonu has raised four sons now ranging in age from twenty to thirty-four.



Dwight and Ardis Michener Memorial Lectures

- 1971 Landrum Bolling, *What Does Quakerism Have To Say For Our Tomorrow*
- 1972 Paul A. Lacey, *Learning About the Future: Theology History*
- 1973 Douglas Steere, *The Mystery of Communication*
- 1974 E. Raymond Wilson, *Challenge of the Present Time*
- 1975 Franklin Wallin, *A Quaker View of 1995*
- 1976 Elizabeth Watson, *Only The Wounded Can Heal*
- 1977 T. Canby Jones, *A Quaker Message of Hope*
- 1978 Miriam Levering, *Who Owns the Sea?*
- 1979 Fay Honey Knopp, *Toward A Safer Society: A Quaker Response to Social Defense*
- 1980 Curt and Rosalie Regen, *By The Light of Faith*
- 1981 James E. Bristol, *Quaker Witness and Action Against Conscription: Saying "No" To Say "Yes"*
- 1982 Lawrence S. Apsey, *Transforming Power For Peace*
- 1983 Kenneth Boulding, *The Movement Towards Peace, The Peace Movement*
- 1984 Wilmer A. Cooper, *New Winds Blowing in the Religious Society of Friends*
- 1985 Kara Cole, *Why Do Quakers Care*
- 1986 Daniel A. Seeger, *Self-Discovery and Social Change*
- 1987 Lorton Heusel, *My Inscrutable Neighbor and I*
- 1988 Asia Bennett, *Who Will I Be When I Grow Up*
- 1989 Marty Walton, *Clearing the Way — Paradoxes in Living with God*
- 1990 Tom Mullen, *Contemporary Quakerism: Recapturing the Vision*
- 1991 Charles K. Brown III, *Pray and Pay Attention*
- 1992 Ruth Hyde Paine, *How Do I Know It's a Calling*
- 1993 John Punshon, *Making Sense of the Century*
- 1994 William & Frances Taber, *Building the Life of a Meeting*
- 1995 Judy and Denis Asselin, *Simple Riches*
- 1996 Robert Allenson, *Living as Dual Citizens*
- 1997 David Bills, *The Ripening of Quaker Worship*
- 1998 Patricia Loring, *The Hidden Center and Outward Scaffolding of Quaker Spiritual Community*

- 1999 Tom & Liz Gates, *Opening the Scriptures, Opening Our Hearts*
- 2000 Clara & Eduardo Diaz, *Witnessing the Varieties of Truth*
- 2001 Daniel A. Seeger, *Finding Our Sacred Ground,
Quakerism's Place in a Globalized Future*
- 2002 Michael Birkel, *Mysticism and Activism: Learning from John Woolman*
- 2003 Heather Moir, *Being Truthful*
- 2004 George Lakey, *New Theory, Old Practice: Nonviolence and Quakers*
- 2005 Deborah Shaw, *Being Fully Present to God*
- 2006 Frank Massey, *Seeking after Christ*
- 2007 Niyonu Spann, *Letting Go of Illusion, Engaging Truth: Healing!*



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Dear Friends, We can't continue to be Quiet. - Julio [Page 15]

If we truly acknowledge those parts that we deny—that may be our shame, our sorrow, our greatest fears—there will be death. And primarily I focus on the death of the illusion!

[Page 13]

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