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# What Canst Thou Say?

**Friends • Mystical Experience • Contemplative Practice**

*You will say, Christ saith this, and the apostles say this: but what canst thou say?  
Art thou a child of Light and hast thou walked in the Light, and what thou speakest,  
is it inwardly from God? —George Fox*

## Being with the Dying

### Living With Losses (Part I)

Mary Waddington

Being with the dying in a caregiving capacity is an experience to embrace as a gift in spite of its hardships. I found it physically depleting and emotionally wrenching, especially when dealing with intractable suffering. Nevertheless, the rewards have been incalculable. I did this five times, all were close family members. Each experience brought unvarnished dialogue and left memories in vivid detail. Each changed and enriched me. I learned big lessons on how to let go and how to love indiscriminately and with abandon. I learned anew that life is precious and to fear death while living is to be cheated out of the fullness and sweetness of life. I've often wanted to share my stories but this has never really happened. Too intimate, maybe, or too beyond my ability to string together the right words. Perhaps I have felt inadequate, sensing I could never do justice to the telling. But now is my chance to try.

Those five end-of-life involvements were with my mother-in-law, my father, my mother, my sister and then my husband, in that order. The caregiving period ranged from eighteen months down to mere minutes and they took place either across the continent, across the road or at home. After each death something nearly indescribable happened. I was given the knowledge and sensation of not having lost them. Their palpable presence was around and within me. Throughout our faithfulness to the task of living, including the process of dying, we had been weaving ourselves together. After they died we remained distinctly ourselves yet inseparable.

Mother was a registered nurse and an altruist. When she wasn't caring for the sick at her job, she was raising four children and taking care of the neighbors. She was beautiful in every way and unaware of it. She was quite good at believing nobody needed to take care of her. We lived across the road from each other until she was 88 when she moved in with me after a hospital stay. She had

surgery that left her with a palliative colostomy and the prognosis of approximately four months left for her on this side of the veil. From that point on, her losses accumulated rather rapidly and were in-our-face observable.

At the beginning, Mother was miffed that she couldn't be in her own home. Rather bluntly I told her I was too busy running my holistic health practice down the hall to be running back and forth across the road administering

*From the Editor:*

*How then shall we live? This is the question I carry as I sit with those in hospice. People come onto hospice service at a time when their mental capacities may or may not be diminished and always when their bodies are failing them in some way. Most often they are not in the last week of life, but have time and space for consideration of what their lives have meant. As a hospice chaplain and a person who has always wanted to understand a person's heart, I sit with the questions of where meaning lies today, given whatever limitations someone is facing physically and/or mentally. And no matter one's mental capacity, it is my belief that there is sharing that occurs between the hearts of loved ones, beyond words. So the questions... What would help make life feel complete? Is there an unfulfilled dream, a longing? Are there relationships seeking healing? During this profound and holy time, what needs to be shared, lived, experienced? By holding up this lens for hospice clients and their families, it is my hope and prayer that one more person may die feeling at peace and complete with this life.*

*Susan Greenler, Guest Editor*

**What Canst Thou Say? (WCTS)**

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postoperative care and, secondly, she could move back into her home when she felt strong enough to handle things. On some level she must have known this would never happen because without further discussion we settled in for the long haul. As we practiced coping, we subtly acknowledged the benefits. In the beginning her most painful losses seemed to be that she was no longer master of her house, that she wouldn't be driving into town anymore and that she couldn't address her bathroom duties the normal way. As time advanced, new losses introduced themselves. She moved rather seamlessly from walker to wheelchair to hospital bed, recalling such progression from her nursing days and having lived a lifetime of change met with resilience.

For 60-some years Mother had been my wise and patient teacher, having taught me sewing, cooking, gardening, mothering, saving, trusting, truth-telling—a never-ending array humbly and repeatedly offered until I knew them. Now her lessons were of a different ilk and accessible to me around the clock. They would become my crash course taken in halting strides and accomplished with limited stoicism, journaling in the night, deep breathing and resolve. I came to think of this course as Living With Losses 101, aware that we both would be balancing the dual roles of teacher and student. She lost her freedom, her comfort, her expectations. I gave her autonomy, back rubs, the wonderment of the moment. I lost my space, my timing, my sleep. She gave me unabridged companionship, a sense of timelessness, and the privilege of sharing our deepest thoughts and dreams.

My clients developed the habit of pausing at Mother's room on their way down the hall to my treatment room. By doing so they started their therapy early, giving and receiving the kind of energy that heals the soul. At first the conversations were brief and generalized, but as she weakened and they became endeared to one another, there would be hand-holding with generous solicitudes and engaging smiles. My clients became her good will ambassadors from the world outside her domain.

Mother and I had a passion for dance that we shared throughout our lives. As we developed a workable technique of moving her from bed to wheelchair and back to bed again, we practiced putting my arms around her waist and hers around my neck to find the easiest method of transfer. During this clumsy maneuver, one or the other of us would offer the invitation, "Shall we dance?" Close to the end, it appeared that her soul began moving between the physical and the spirit worlds. When her eyes were open, she was here with me and lucid. When they were shut, I couldn't tell where she was. However, she always reported her roving back to me. She would visit with Dad, who had died a year earlier, and one time he told her, "If you're a woodcutter, cut your wood well."

The day before she died, I was leaning over her with my arms at her shoulders about to adjust her pillow. She opened her eyes and assessed the situation. Then with the slightest upturn of her lips she whispered, "Shall we dance?" We have been dancing together ever since.

**Mary Waddington** is a life-long member of Salem, New Jersey meeting, where she serves on Worship and Ministry. Mary is retired from her holistic health practice and can now devote ample time to her photography. She shared another story of her husband Richard's death which is in the web version <whatcanstthousay.org>.

# Grief, in Three Flavors

Opeyemi Parham

**M**y Dad died, suddenly and unexpectedly at age 86.

He was in his own bed, in his own luxurious Ellicott City, Maryland, home, where he lived with my step-mother and my step-sister, a chronically ill individual in her fifties.

And so the family was informed, and each of the three of us adult children proceeded to integrate that death in our own way. Three siblings coping with our grief, as we found ourselves orphaned in our fifties.

I was shocked, because my dad “wasn’t ill”. I wondered if I had the right to be surprised. He was already more than ten years over his predicted life expectancy, as a Black American man. And shouldn’t I be relieved that he had the kind of death we all dream of, but that only about seven percent of us actually experience?

If I was shocked, my youngest brother was devastated. Our mother’s death after four years with renal failure and thrice weekly dialysis had blown our family apart in ways from which it never had recovered. My youngest brother had been the one who made the most effort to stay in touch with our father over the many years. He had recently moved from Philadelphia to Los Angeles. Shortly before that move, we three adult children (we never really bonded with our two step-siblings from that second marriage) met to discuss ongoing support, “boots on the ground” for our Dad. In retrospect, I wonder what the Los Angeles brother might have intuitively “felt” about our father’s future; certainly he worried about the quality of our Dad’s life in ways that we two older siblings did not.

We older ones were the “Black Sheep”. My middle brother had been banished from our father’s home many years earlier, in a certified letter requesting that he never return to that Maryland home. I had received a similar dismissal, after flunking appropriate decorum about two years before my Dad’s death in a visit where I got too brutally honest about our family dysfunction.

Youngest brother had witnessed deep suffering in our Dad. Sadly, that suffering focused on our father’s increasing emotional discomfort, living with his second wife and her daughter. Despite being in a home that was over 5,000 square feet with four bedrooms, that house simply was not big enough for the three of them. A power struggle was ongoing, with step-mama and step-sister on one side, and Daddy Dearest on the other.

What was my youngest brother’s response to our elderly father’s sudden demise? He requested an autopsy, needing a scientific understanding of what had happened. The official story was that our step-mother and step-sister had heard a thump from our Dad’s room, and found him on the floor. They helped him back into bed. The next morning, he was found dead in that bed. “Why hadn’t they called 911?” asked my brother. Why hadn’t they “done something” when he fell? Maybe he had a brain bleed? Maybe they had poisoned him?

That is how bad things were, regarding clear communication, love, and connection in our family, at the time of this sudden death of our Dad.

My response was mystical. I set about to “see” what had happened

in those last eight hours of my Dad’s life. I am often a channeling medium when deaths occur—I have been, since the death of my own mother. I live my life best in the flow of God’s desires for me by following the opportunities presented. So when my youngest brother—very suspicious of our step-mother, deep in grief, and challenged by the “not knowing”—complained to me, “Can you believe that she (our step-mother) asked me if I wanted to SLEEP in the bed where he died!” I quickly responded, “Well, if you don’t want to, can I sleep there, please?”

Not only did I sleep in his bed, during my stay in Maryland as we held our final rites, but I still sleep on his pillow, these two years later.

When I arrived at the Maryland house, I noticed many things. In my Dad’s bedroom (he and his wife had had separate bedrooms for most of their 20-year marriage) were numerous tubes of therapeutic muscle rubs and arthritis relief medications, prescription and over the counter. I knew—from my own experiences as a physician—that this kind of physical pain at end of life is often minimized and missed by managed care, although this is exactly what diminishes quality of life.

The second thing that I noticed was that my Dad had retreated—in that huge house—to a “man-cave” in his basement. There he had all the accoutrements of a fabulously techno-friendly lifestyle, from a mega complex massaging lazy boy recliner, to a big screen TV connected to many movie stations and ESPN that made football games ongoing and available. He had an assortment of favorite snack foods in Costco cartons bought

in bulk. On his walls in that space were the evidence of his life accomplishments: family photos of his biological family and of his step-family, all the generations represented down to three great-grandchildren, a map with pushpins indicating all the countries he had visited (over 30), a beautiful family tree that traced back to my Dad's own great-grandparents.

So many symbols of the family and life he desired, but without the actual ongoing connections to the humans involved with all those accomplishments.

Middle brother rode down with me from New England. He slept in that basement "man-cave" for the three days of our visit. My corporate social service job at the time gave three days bereavement for an immediate family member. Baby brother slept in an unoccupied bedroom.

And I slept in our Dad's bedroom, open to dreaming into the meaning of his way of dying. On the second night there—the day of the funeral—this is what I "dreamed".

I saw my dad was falling to sleep in his bed, when he heard a voice.

"Bill..." said the voice.

It frightened him. He tried to get out of the bed, but was confused and fell. His wife and daughter tucked him back into bed and left to their respective rooms.

As he was drifting off to sleep again, he heard the voice.

"Bill..." it said. "Billy"...

At the foot of my Dad's bed stood his father (deceased at age 99) and his mother (dead only five years earlier, at age 102). They had been divorced since my Dad was two years old. I watched my dad leave his body, and go away with his mother and his father, walking out through the wall

into a beautiful green meadow. My father was about six years old, as he left his body. He took his parents' hands and went off contentedly to play in the meadow under their loving coupled gaze. I "knew" that this next stage was simply a way station, and not his Final Destination. I knew that I had just been given the blessing of an explanation of why my dad was so emotionally challenging. He lived his entire life with the emotional toolbox of a six-year-old! And I got a deeper understanding of why he continually "dismissed" loved ones from his life. It was the way he had felt "dismissed" by his own mother, conditions of the divorce being that he would live with his father and be raised by his paternal grandmother, instead of his mother.

Baby brother eventually got an autopsy report that declared our Dad had died from a heart attack. In fact, his autopsy indicated various smaller areas of infarction, before what must have been The Final One.

I had my mystical meaning, explained to my satisfaction.

And my middle brother had the experience I most associate with a death held well. "Grief shared being grief diminished." His best friend from elementary school days had driven up to Maryland from Florida to be with him. They both played guitars as teens; the Florida friend brought two tuned guitars with him. His "girlfriend who got away" (the one that I had personally rooted for as my future sister-in-law), now an opera singer, drove in from Delaware. The three of them provided a spontaneous hour of music and song at the funeral home, during the visitation period. The ex-girlfriend sang "There is a Balm in Gilead" as tributes were paid to my Dad from his college students, friends, and family.

My dad was neither a religious man nor a terribly spiritual man, in my experience. His favorite son skillfully directed the funeral as the master of ceremonies. Even the funeral home commented on the artistic flow of the ceremony. We are a family of theater people, so that was an ultimate compliment.

In the end, I was happy that my Dad had found relief from much emotional and physical pain at the end of his life in his dying.

**Opeyemi Parham** was a family physician, before "going feral." She is now a healing artist and an artist healing. Her writing is online <madinamerica.com/author/oparham> and in anthologies "Hope Beneath Our Feet", *Dancing on the Earth: Women's Stories of Healing Through Dance*, and "What Remains".

## Blue Silence

John Butterfield

*Silence leads to light  
lighter than white, but blue  
as the name, much repeated,  
calls me deeper into the otherness  
which is the sameness  
but also the selflessness  
which defines and values  
and raises perception  
to make love visible like fireflies.*

*Love flows freely  
from deep inner wells  
for love cannot remain within  
and still be love.*

*Peace flows in gently.  
Calmness to later radiate benevolence.*

*Here I am free,  
united and loved,  
loving and present  
waiting but not waiting  
yearning but also satisfied  
neither thinking nor dreaming  
in the light  
that is brighter than white:  
the dawn blue of silence.*

**John Butterfield** is a Church of Scotland minister in the Orkney Islands to the north of Scotland. He is also a member of the Iona Community.

## Dying in Kenya

David Zarembka

In Kenya, a person does not die alone. This is the story of my mother-in-law, Imali Selina's death in 2006. At that time my Kenyan wife, Gladys Kamonya, and I were still living in St. Louis. We received phone calls from some of Gladys' six sisters. Some said her Mom was sick but would recover, while others said she was seriously sick and we needed to come quickly. We decided to go as quickly as we could to Eldoret, Kenya, where her Mom was in the hospital.

When we arrived we learned that she had cancer of the esophagus, probably from the smoke of cooking with firewood during her 81 years. The doctor said that he could put a tube into her stomach which might get her six more months of life. Mom responded adamantly to this suggestion: "God made me the way I am and no one is going to cut open my stomach. If God wants me to go now, then it is time for me to go."

There was nothing more that could be done in the hospital so we took her home to the house we had just built in Lumakanda. Since she couldn't swallow, she was living on drips. Each morning the doctor from Lumakanda Hospital who lived nearby would come to insert the morning drip and when he was on his way home in the evening, he would insert the evening drip. It was surprising to me that Mom had a constant stream of visitors. This included not only the expected older people, but older teenagers and young adults. Usually the visitors would come and greet Mom, shaking her hand. They would then sit mostly silently with her for fifteen minutes to half an hour. There was no small talk or insincere comments that she would

become well. The important point was their presence with her.

After a week, I had to return to the United States, but Gladys stayed with her mother. Shortly after I left, Mom asked to go to her home in Viyalo about 65 miles away. Gladys hired a taxi and drove her home where she continued to stay with her Mom. Although I was not there, I am certain that a constant stream of family members and neighbors visited her daily, greeting her but sitting silently accompanying her on her way out of this world.

A person cannot live on drips and soon Mom passed away. I was not able to attend the funeral about a week later, but probably close to 1000 people attended the funeral in the front yard of her home. The grave was dug in the front yard. One of the poignant customs of these funerals is to carry the casket out of the homestead so that Mom could return to the homestead for one last time.

After a lot of singing and prayers, the casket was lowered in the grave and the grave filled with dirt. Gladys had a cement grave stone erected over the grave, but the grave itself is not considered sacred ground. People walk, children play, and the cows eat the grass on the grave.

A little over a year later the family and community gathered again for the memorial service. I was able to attend this ceremony. Well over 500 people attended, remembering the late Imali Selina and what she had contributed to family, church, and community.

So Mom didn't die alone. She was surrounded in both dying and death by family, neighbors, and friends. This is how it should be. I hope that I am so fortunate when my time on earth comes to an end.

**David Zarembka** lives in Lumakanda, Kenya, with his wife Gladys Kamonya. He supports Quaker peacemaking in Kenya, Uganda, Rwanda, and Burundi.

### *Wings of Love* Susan Greenler

*Wings of love have carried you  
Far,*

*From home and those you love.*

*Wings of love have carried you  
Home,*

*To those you love who await you.*

*You are free.*

*What joy you know in freedom.  
In life,*

*You gave of yourself*

*To those you loved,  
To those who needed you.*

*Selflessly, with kindness and  
grace.*

*And now to be free.*

*Held in God's embrace.*

*Join with dear ones departed*

*Wings of love have carried  
you Home.*

*God bless.*

**Susan Greenler** is Guest Editor of this issue. She is a Hospice Chaplain in Madison, Wisconsin. She is passionate about the rights of humans to die in a manner which honors their soul and spirit. This poem is often requested at funeral services she officiates.

## Raw, Unprocessed Pain and Trauma

Mariellen Gilpin

I have to admit that my experiences with death and dying began and also ended when I was thirteen, and my grandmother was dying of cancer. She suffered greatly, which, since she had been the anchor of my young years, tore my heart. I wanted so much to help, and there was nothing I could do. A neighbor showed us how to put a heavy towel under her, in order to make it possible for us to turn her on her hospital-style bed. I tried to pull on that towel, and simply could not budge her. No way, no how. All I did was increase her suffering—her cries and moans when I tried were even more heartbreaking. I was a strong kid, a farm kid. I was astonished that I simply couldn't turn her. Since turning her was a necessary step in order to even attempt to get her onto the bedpan, which in those days was about three, maybe four inches high and hugely painful. Indeed, it was anatomically impossible to use once she was on it. I felt defeated. I gave up all efforts to help with her care. My older brother was working three part-time jobs and commuting to college. He was on night duty helping with her care. I still remember her cries and moans at all hours of the night. I heard her in my sleep long after she died.

We had no encouragement to talk about our feelings in those days. I was so relieved when she died, grateful that she was no longer suffering. And I didn't feel safe to talk about my feelings. Who would listen? Who would be able to hear me? I remember the minister's total reliance on reciting by heart long Bible passages during the funeral. Not a word about who my grandmother was, no opportunity in the service for us to share who she was and what she meant to us. The only comfort available was to turn off—shut down—my pain and grief. Once dissociated I stayed dissociated, not only about her suffering and death and our innate inability to really ease anyone's suffering ever, but about the dying of other loved ones in all the years since. I've avoided helping them, thoroughly and reliably. I'm not proud of it, and I have to name it for what it is—complete and total cowardice.

*Mariellen Gilpin is one of the WCTS editors. She worships with Urbana-Champaign IL Friends Meeting.*

## Marriage Journey

Ken Jacobsen

Our marriage journey continues in a new way since Katharine died January 20, 2017. There is nothing easy about it, but Love abounds. Many prayers come to comfort me along the way—I share one from the night before her passing, and two others from that year.

### Heaven from Katharine

*“she is going to heaven” they tell me,  
as my wife is dying,  
no, I say,  
she is not going any where,  
heaven is already here,  
was always here,  
was the air we breathed,  
no, I say,  
she is opening herself to heaven,  
to the heaven that is already here,  
this infinite ocean of kindness  
by which we live,  
“come” she says, “take off your fear,  
open up your frozen minds, wake up!  
wake up to the amazing, endless beauty  
of this heaven that is already here!” (January 19, 2017)*

### Following the Fence-Line

*as a boy on the South Dakota plains,  
my father was taught, when a blizzard comes  
on your way home from school, wiping out the road,  
find the fence line, follow the fence-line home;*

*now the blizzard comes for me,  
this winter of my grief,  
my dear one gone, the roads wiped out  
in the ever-deepening snow;  
I feel for the fence-line before it's lost,  
this love we walked by, post by post;  
I can barely see, can barely feel in the cold,  
but I think I've found the fence-line,  
God help me follow the fence-line home. (October 17, 2017)*

**Ken Jacobsen** is a regular contributor to WCTS. He and Katharine were the cover story in the February, 2017 issue (#93) and in the May, 2017 issue (#95, p.7), WCTS published “Holy Accompaniment: The Gift of a Peer Group” by Ken Jacobsen, Emma Churchman, Allison Randall, and Marge Abbott about Ken's peer group coming to Wisconsin to accompany him in his grief.

## The Golden Hills

Ken Jacobsen

*this first season since you died, my love,  
these autumn walks up into the  
golden hills we loved,  
with our golden dog,  
I walk a little slower now  
since I'm walking for two,  
since you can't walk now,  
and I'm carrying you;*

*but its more than that, my love,  
I walk a little slower too  
so I can be sure to see what you  
would see,  
not to pass it by, this golden  
Opportunity,  
to see the sun shimmering on the  
lake below,  
to see the flicker birds flashing  
through the trees  
gathering for the long journey south,  
to see the way the whole world is  
softly falling back  
to its beginnings in the earth;*

*I walk a little slower now, my love,  
working and working my aching knees  
to learn to bear the load,  
we walk a little slower, you and I,  
to see what we can see,  
these walks into the golden hills we love,  
with our golden dog.*

(September 30, 2017)

### WCTS Has Two Blogs

1) *Quaker Mystics* <[quakermystics.wordpress.com](http://quakermystics.wordpress.com)> is now being used for Mike Resman to publish his poetry.

2) *What Canst Thou Say* <[worshipsharinginprint.wordpress.com](http://worshipsharinginprint.wordpress.com)>, supports WCTS. If you would like to contribute, contact Judy Lumb <[judylumb@yahoo.com](mailto:judylumb@yahoo.com)>.

## Election Morning

David Lewis

This too was a corporate casualty of tightened budgets. Frankly, nurse staffing levels prohibited such direct and prolonged individual attention and the volunteer service offered a temporary reprieve to these amazing nurses who had non-terminal patients with immediate needs of their skills.

I sat there in silence in the most presence I could muster to the moment—election results whizzing in my periphery, work day lined out in a packed calendar of meetings, strategy proposals overdue, and deadlines approaching at dizzying speeds. I spent the two hours with her in what I would consider a sub-quality worship vigil. Most Quakers should be familiar with this kind of worship, where you are continually swatting thoughts of your day out of the mind's eye like pesky gnats, unable to center fully on the connection to the divine undercurrents.

The spirit moved.

The seismic shift of recognizing the spirit did not strike during this two-hour vigil, it occurred around 3 p.m. in a conference room when I received the message that the “vigil ended”. She passed shortly before the busy nursing shift change on an hour that we could not have a scheduled NODA volunteer. I was unable to find out if a nurse or assistant was able to be with her when she passed.

While the world pondered election results, I wondered if she passed with someone's hand on hers. My world resized in an instant.

**David Lewis worships with the Urbana-Champaign IL Friends Meeting.**

During the fourth hour on the ninth day of the eleventh month of the year 2016 I sat in the room of a dying woman. I held her hand and watched her labored breathing in the still dark room of the hospital. She would die that afternoon while I was in a meeting for something I cannot recall the gravity nor importance of.

I had been a volunteer with the local hospital's take on the “No One Dies Alone” (NODA) program. I also worked at this hospital and had originally pursued this volunteer service to feel closer to patient care. Through years of ambitious career pursuit, my position within information technology tended to wax towards middle management, long hours, and piles of stress.

Even the two-hour volunteer shift starting at 4 a.m. was a casualty of this attempt to achieve corporate greatness so that I could get to my office in an adjacent building by 6 a.m. to catch up before the real work day began. After this work day ended near or after 5 p.m., I came home tired, though well paid, to a loving family. In my role it was easy to lose the pulse of what we really existed to achieve as an organization, taking care of patients. When moving so fast, it was also easy to lose sight of the light that bridges the sacred and secular.

The NODA program had the goal to provide comfort to those who are passing away from this world without a dedicated hospice nurse, nursing home, or family in attendance. The patients slip quietly out of this world in the presence of a small pool of volunteers who sit and hold their hands either softly speaking to them, sitting in silence, or reading books to them.

# *Being with my Mother*

*Judy Lumb*

I spent my mother's last year and a half with her. When I got the call and traveled to her side, she was 87 years old and had a reoccurrence of breast cancer in her bones. Her first experience with breast cancer was ten years before, and now she had pain in her back. She was sent to physical therapy for arthritis, which only made the pain much worse. By the time her ribs were x-rayed she had five rib fractures and she was diagnosed with cancer metastases. I expected she might die within about three months. She left the hospital to the nursing home of her choice. She had been visiting shut-ins for her church, so she knew all the options and had already made her choice.

After a couple of months, she seemed to be getting better. The fractures all healed. One day I said to her, "When I first got here, I gave you three months, but you are so much better, I give you a year or more."

"Oh, I hope not! That's a long time to be institutionalized!" She said.

"Maybe you can come home." I replied.

We spoke to her doctor about it and he set up a series of evaluations. Then the Hospice nurse came on her regular visit and suggested, "Just go home on a 24-hour pass and see how it goes."

She did and she never went back to the nursing home. The Hospice nurse came once a week and Hospice sent an aide to bathe her twice a week. I was afraid of injuring her further because her bones were so fragile.

She lived another year and a half. It was a wonderful time for me. We could not have done it without the Hospice nurse. She helped adjust medication to keep my mother comfortable, to deal with the difficult symptoms: pain, constipation, anxiety, and probably others I no longer remember.

On Tuesdays two neighbors came to play bridge. Whichever one of us (me or my siblings) was there had to be the fourth. Fortunately, they were very gentle with my inexperience. On Fridays another friend brought her favorite game, Upwords, a three-dimensional Scrabble game. Other friends came to visit now and then. It was enough social interaction, but not too much for Mother. That was ten years ago, and those are the things that stick in my memory, not the practical, bodily aspects of dying.

Mother was not really at the end of her lifespan. Absent the cancer, she would have lived to over 100. Her mother and great-grandmother did. Her skin was not thin. Her mind was totally clear. We all wondered what would get her, finally cause her death. One day she got a bowel obstruction. She refused to have surgery, so they put a drain in her stomach so fluids would not accumulate since they couldn't go on through. She could eat jello and clear soup, and it went out the tube. She lived another three weeks.

Every morning Mother did the crossword in the newspaper. One Tuesday she was annoyed with the crossword, saying the Tuesday puzzle was supposed to be easy and she was finding it hard. After her lunch of red Jello, we watched the red jello go out the tube. Then she decided to take a nap. Later I looked at her crossword and there were only scribbles, no

readable letters in the squares. She never got up again.

She went to sleep early that afternoon and then about 1 a.m. I heard a crash. She had fallen out of bed trying to get up. She said she was ready to start her day. I explained that it was the middle of the night, gave her another of her anxiety pills, and set chairs beside the bed so she wouldn't fall out again.

On Wednesday I was sitting next to her and she got a very contented, far-away look on her face. "That must be Laurie's grand-daughter. I wonder how old she is. We should go somewhere together," she said in a sweet, soft voice.

"Who is Laurie?" I asked.

"WHAT!!!" She startled. I never spoke to her again when she was talking in that sweet voice. Later she said,

"When are we going to go somewhere together?"

On Thursday she spoke a few times in that sweet, soft voice, but I couldn't understand what she was saying. It was mumbling, as if she was talking to someone in another dimension.

On Friday my sister Becky arrived. Mother slept the entire day and night. Her breathing was rather noisy.

On Saturday I was doing laundry and Becky was resting in the room with her. As I walked in, Becky raised her head, having just realized Mother had stopped breathing just as I walked in the room. She was gone.

We called Hospice and they took care of everything for us. All decisions had been made in advance. Soon the funeral home people came and took her away.



My mother had always been active in her church, especially baking and serving at funerals. I always assumed she had a traditional Christian view of the afterlife, of heaven. One day I asked her. "Oh no," she said, "I think when you die, that's all there is. It is the end, nothing more."

I was quite surprised at this, but I didn't try to talk her out of that view of afterlife. I suppose if she had indicated an expectation of life after death, I might have made some deal with her to contact me from the other side. However, about a week after her death, I was in bed but not asleep yet, and I heard her calling me from just outside the room. I went out there, but found nothing. I felt it was a visit from her, from her life after death.

**Judy Lumb** is on the WCTS editorial team. She is still a member of Atlanta Friends Meeting even though she has lived in Belize for over thirty years. She worships with the new Belize Friends Church.

## Book Review:

### *Facing Death and Finding Hope*

*Facing Death and Finding Hope: A Guide to the Emotional and Spiritual Care of the Dying* by Christine Longaker, 2018. Amazon Digital Services LLC (reviewed by Janice Stensrude).

In 1976 Christine Longaker lost her 25-year-old husband to an incurable disease. Together, they struggled to find some meaning in it, reaching out to Christine's childhood Catholic faith. It was a year or so after his death that she came upon the Buddhist view of death that became the path to healing her grief. In the ensuing years she became internationally known for her pioneering work in the hospice movement, and 20 years after her husband's death she wrote *Facing Death and Finding Hope*, which has been translated into nine languages and has been continuously in print since its Doubleday debut in 1997. Though she writes from a Buddhist perspective, the advice offered can be adapted to any spiritual tradition. *Facing Death and Finding Hope* is an excellent guide for hospice volunteers and professionals, yet is well suited for anyone who has questions about how to deal with a dying loved one—or even how to face one's own death.

**Janice Stensrude** interviewed author Christine Longaker shortly after the publication of her book, *Facing Death and Finding Hope*. The transcription of the last half of that interview was published in Alan Davidson's e-newsletter, *Through Your Body* No. 19, 31 December 2011. The entire interview is published on Janice's website <[stensrude.com/longaker.htm](http://stensrude.com/longaker.htm)>.

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May 2019

### Eldership

Guest Editor: **Alison Levie**

*And dear people of God, be tender over the least breathings of God's Spirit in one another and all wait to be clothed with a healing Spirit.*—William Dewsbury

What is your experience with spiritual eldership? Has someone acted as a “midwife to your soul”? Have you witnessed Friends speaking both kindly and clearly in response to Friends’ choices? Have you seen the skills needed for this important role nurtured? Does Spirit-led eldering deepen the faithful vitality of Friends’ meetings?

Deadline: February 15, 2019

August 2019

### Discernment

Guest Editor: **Marcia Nelson**

*Growth in the spiritual life comes precisely in faithful exercise of whatever capacity for discernment we are given. ... As far as we are able, we practice an ongoing intentional openness and prayerful attentiveness to intimations of divine presence and guidance, both inwardly and in outward life and relationships.* —Patricia Loring

How have you experienced discernment? What tests of discernment have you used? How have you distinguished discernment from ordinary thinking? In what way(s) has discernment made a difference for you?

Deadline: May 15, 2019

November 2019

### Young Adult Friends' Spirituality

Guest Editor: **Greg Woods**

What role has your faith/spirituality played as you traverse young adulthood? What has most surprised you about your journey? What are you seeking in a spiritual community? What have been the challenges in your search? Have you found what you seek? What gifts do you bring to a spiritual community? Who or what has inspired you spiritually as a young adult? How has that inspiration affected your spiritual journey?

Deadline: August 15, 2019

## **What Canst Thou Say?**

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*Being with  
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