



# PLUMB LINE

Elizabethtown College Peace Fellowship Newsletter

SUMMER 2022 VOLUME 17, NUMBER 2

## About this Issue of *Plumb Line*: What's the Good Trouble We Need to be Involved in Now?

*By Andrew Wenger '08, on behalf of the Plumb Line editorial board*

It feels as if it was a different world back in February when we members of the editorial board began the process of choosing a theme and planning for this summer's issue of *Plumb Line*. Particularly in the last few weeks change has seemed rampant, as the Supreme Court of the United States has rewritten, redefined, and/or removed a number of things that we have long considered rights and norms. It isn't the first time in our history that such things have happened, but what seems unique is the Court's purposeful step away from what was already accepted as defined freedoms.

It is angering to see our nation take steps that embrace fear and control. It goes against my sense of what is right and just, both as a human being and as a believer. Part of me feels like a disciple on the day Jesus was arrested, on the day he was crucified and entombed. It feels as if all of the progress that we have made as a people working for the Beloved Community is being mocked and spat upon, that it is being put in the earth and sealed away. I just want to hide from the world. But of course that is not what we are called to do. We are called to stand tall and to keep walking forward, to ever pull upon justice so that it will arc into our world.

I know that I am writing in very religious language. I am, after all, a pastor, and my faith heavily influences my peacemaking and politics. I've read my history; I know of the danger that comes when our faith becomes the cloak of authority. I've read my Bible; I know that we are called to be beacons of light, messengers that call people to the love and joy of our God, not cattle prods that would punish those we see as sinful.

Those who want to shape the world at the tip of the spear will never achieve true peace. At best they can only create a *Pax Romana*, a fake peace. Jesus was ready to take on the entirety of the Roman Empire and the Temple authorities of Jerusalem with only the power of love, compassion, nonviolence and servanthood, and you and I are called to do the same. The call is to struggle against injustice, corruption, and hate with justice, upright living, and love. How? Through actions that lay bare the inhumanity of those enacting injustice. We lift up those in need, strengthening their voices and steadying their feet. And we stand between oppressors and oppressed, using our power to protect the vulnerable and the hurting.

These actions likely won't gain us friends in the halls of political authority. But speaking the truth seldom does; prophets of peace have rarely been beloved in their own times. Instead, they are labeled radicals, rabble-rousers, and troublemakers.

In this issue we talk to and about and with a few peacemakers—aka troublemakers. We approach this in the spirit of the late John Lewis, the great civil rights icon, who enjoined us to "get in good trouble, necessary trouble." May you be inspired to rouse a few rabblies as well.

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# The Magic of Good Trouble

By Peggy Lorah '71

As I write this, I am reeling at the senseless loss of life from the hate-fueled mass shootings in Buffalo; Laguna Woods, California; and Uvalde, Texas over the past two weeks. It is not lost on me that the victims of each of these shootings was a member of a marginalized population and that each of the shooters, regardless of their cultural identity, expressed contempt and hate as they carried out the slaughter of their fellow human beings. My heart is heavy and my faith in the possibility of meaningful action is faltering. Despite my grief and doubt, it occurs to me that it is for just such times that getting into good trouble is crucial. Finding the capacity to trust in love that can overcome hate and to believe in the possibility of peace and justice in a world that seems to be rushing in the opposite direction is a daunting task, but it is this that John Lewis challenges us to do.

I have been in this place before. I was fortunate to be a student at Elizabethtown from 1967 until 1971, and it was there that I first learned about—and saw firsthand—what getting into good trouble is all about. My college years swirled around the trifecta of civil rights, the Vietnam war, and the second wave of feminism, and it was a time when college students played an important role in changing the world. The assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. in April, 1968, and Robert F. Kennedy in June of the same year, brought many of us to the brink of despair and hopelessness. Mentored by faculty and staff who lived their beliefs in social justice, nonviolence, peace and reconciliation, and the value of every human being, we attended teach-ins, participated in vigorous discussions and debates, and began marching, as did students across the country. John Lewis was one of our many guides for doing the hard work of addressing social ills and moving toward healing a nation torn apart by apathy, fear, and hatred. In the forward to *Carry On: Reflections for a New Generation* (2021), Lewis's posthumously published guidebook, Andrew Young shares a foundation of the civil rights movement which said that any time someone was killed, you had to continue their work; otherwise, you were sending the message that killing would stop the movement (p. xiii).

For those of us who were dedicated to ensuring these rights, this seemed like a magic formula that puzzled those who thought hatred was all it took to shut us down. What we saw instead was that, over time, the

numbers of those leading and continuing the work multiplied, no matter what form the continued assaults on that work took. Even when they were clear that efforts would likely not be successful, activists continued to bring attention to the scourges of hatred, racism, war, poverty, sexism, heterosexism, cissexism, misogyny, antisemitism, Islamophobia, environmental destruction, and disparities in health care.

While many struggles remain and our progress has been far from perfect, over the past 50 years we have seen both incremental and major changes in the texture of this country in most of these areas. Many individuals born during this era never knew a time when women and people of color were not visible contributors to the work force or when elementary through post-secondary education was not a viable option for anyone seeking it. We became used to seeing that people who loved each other could live together, create families, and marry, knowing that the law of the land upheld this regardless of race, sexual orientation, or faith tradition. Most of us took our ability to vote for granted and could not imagine a scenario in which that hard-fought right would be endangered.

Sadly and frighteningly, the success of the progress we made has awakened hatred in those who are concerned about losing their privilege and power. Inkings of this hatred have been apparent since the early 2000s, but during the past several years, it has exploded into a deadly rage that divides us into enemy camps and threatens to destroy the nation. It is no wonder that it is hard to hold on to hope and to imagine where we go from here.

The lessons I learned about getting into good trouble at Elizabethtown have served me well and have followed me throughout a long career in which my job was to advocate for those who were in desperate need of the magic of good trouble. As a counselor and counselor educator, I have specialized in trauma-informed care which asks, "What happened to you?" instead of, "What's wrong with you?" I have followed John Lewis's advice and have listened much more than I've talked. I have consciously been a witness to the lived experiences of each person I've worked with, affirming and meeting people with curiosity rather than skepticism. I have challenged myself to live my commitment to social justice every day, understanding that on the last day of my life, I will still be making mistakes. I work at

approaching everything I do with humility and gratitude, and I take these words from John Lewis to heart: “Don’t give up. Don’t lose hope. Be patient and persevere. Change will come” (2021, p. xiii). These words from John Lewis echo the words of the Jewish tradition of the Mishnah: “It’s not incumbent upon you to finish the work, but neither are you free to evade it.”



*Peggy Lorah graduated from Elizabethtown College with a BA in Religion and Philosophy in 1971. She earned a masters’ degree in Community Counseling from Shippensburg University in 1989 and a doctorate in Counselor Education from Penn State in 2001. Peggy practiced with specialties in trauma-*

*informed therapy and in addictions, working in community social service agencies and community mental health and substance abuse settings for many years. She began working at Penn State in 1999 as assistant director in the Center for Women’s Students (now called the Gender Equity Center) and became the director in 2001. Practicing as a licensed professional counselor, the focus of her work was counseling and advocacy for students who were survivors of sexual and relationship violence and harassment. In addition, she was affiliate faculty in Counselor Education; Higher Education; and Women’s, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. She taught classes in Social Justice, Helping Skills, and Diagnosis for Counselors. From 2017 until her retirement in December, 2020, Peggy was assistant vice president for Student Affairs for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.*

## Looking for Trouble

By David Radcliff

What leads a person to get into “good trouble”? For folks like John Lewis, it can be one’s lived experience. Due to the challenges and injustices that come with one’s identity, people around the country and world find themselves compelled to take a stand. They are then often seen as troublemakers and treated as such by the dominant forces at work in the world.

For others of us who come to our world from a position of privilege, we have to go looking for trouble. In my life and that of our organization, New Community Project (NCP), this means putting ourselves in the position to be exposed to troubling realities around us and then allowing ourselves to be drawn into these troubles by our moral compass, faith grounding, or other standards that bid us to attend and act.

For me, this means listening to certain key partners in this ever-unfolding earth drama. This in turn means making sure there is space for “the other” to speak and have the confidence to be heard, which presupposes a relationship that allows for this honest exchange.

We had been taking Learning Tour groups down into the delta of Myanmar for six years before the women with whom we worked felt comfortable and confident enough to say what was on their minds. This first happened after dinner as we sat together on the floor of the school that would serve as our bedroom that night. Mar Mar Win, leader of the group of women that has received NCP-funded microloans, said, “Can I ask you

a question?” “Of course.” “Can you tell me: why are some people in the world so rich, and the rest of us so poor?”

If we ponder that question long enough it will quickly lead to the good trouble of questioning economic systems, colonial rule, sweatshop wages (women there earn less than \$3 a day making our clothes), and our own sense of complacency and complicity with structures that reward the few of us at great cost to the many. As for my immediate response, I was glad to have recently read Diamond’s *Guns, Germs and Steel* and could assure the women that their relative poverty was due to no fault of their own.

The next trip brought the next question: “How do we keep the waters from rising?” The delta of Myanmar is that country’s main rice-producing region, and much of this very flat land is within a meter of sea level. A four-foot climate-change-induced rise is well within possibility by the end of the century.

Another constituency to which NCP and I try to listen is the non-human natural world—which is in steep decline due to human exploitation and lack of concern. Whether the meta-data of 70 percent fewer living creatures on earth than 50 years ago, or the local-data of the new road kill I regularly see on my daily bike ride, humans are sticking it to the planet. Of course, this will come back on us—e.g., globally, the average human life is 2.2 years shorter due to fossil fuel combustion. But even when it’s clearly in our own interest, not to mention the rights of nature to “be”, we seem incapable of restraint. “We must

stop shopping, but we can't stop shopping" (J.B. McKinnon, *The Day the World Stops Shopping*).

Here's the catch: the underlying risk of really listening to others is that we have to take them seriously and do our best to follow their questions and concerns wherever this may lead. For me and for NCP, this seems to allow no option but to pursue justice for planet and people. For us, this means making personal choices consonant with the realities of our neighbors—lowering our lifestyle standards, treating the earth and earthlings with near-reverence when it comes to how we "use" them (better: "relate to them"), being progressive and aggressive in calling our communities and nation to live differently for the sake of everyone and everything, becoming involved in local politics and community action with the goal of spurring change from the bottom-up.

And we work to empower our earth and our neighbors to take their rightful place as actors in their own destiny, rather than having troubles foisted on them continuously from beyond. Girls with an education and women with microloans are less likely to be lost in the sex trade or garment trade. Taking Learning Tour groups to the Arctic or the Amazon can instill appreciation, respect and a sense of soul-connection to these natural wonders. Or to Malawi, where inconsistent rains nowadays regularly reduce families to a meal a day, and where we work with our partner to plant trees and do climate-resilient and even climate-friendly food production, all the while beating the climate drum here at home.

A final key constituency are people in our own society who know there has to be more to life than what our consumer society offers but have no idea where to find it. When I or we are seen as trouble-makers—questioning assumptions, fomenting communities of resistance—we

light a light to help show others that life-giving options exist and are within our reach (see *The Dawn of Everything: A New History of Humanity*, by David Graeber and David Wengrow, for a way around seeing humans as doomed by sin and brutishness).

I often get the sense that NCP and I are seen as purveyors of "reality therapy"—saying what we see in the world, trying to live responsibly in light of this, and challenging others to do the same. I'll never forget the opening class session of an environmental course I was teaching at E-town College for adult learners a couple of years ago. This is the "bad news" session where I'm laying out all the challenges facing our planet—and us. About half-way through a woman on the left side leaned back in her chair and said, "I'm not sure I want to know this." This wasn't a religious class, but I responded to her and the others: "You remember what Jesus said: 'You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" The good-trouble folks in our midst help the rest of us see what we may be missing—to our own and others' detriment—freeing us then to be and to do what the times require.



*David Radcliff lives in Blue Ridge, Virginia where he directs New Community Project from his kitchen*

*table, gets around by bicycle, speaks around the country, leads Learning Tours around the world, and is an adjunct faculty member at Elizabethtown College.*

## Interview with Lee Griffith '70

*Interviewed by Joel Kline, Plumb Line editor*

### **What influenced you to embrace peacemaking as a central component of your life?**

While growing up in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, I became aware of an underlying tension, a conflict at work between two distinct allegiances. One was allegiance to the gospel, and the other an allegiance to America. I had the sense that the people around me tried to merge the two allegiances into one, but I felt a tension, even in my own family. My father served in the military in

World War II, fighting in Europe, while my mother grew up as a Mennonite, with its tradition of peacemaking and its challenge of serving and caring for others. Even as a child, I sensed that tension blowing right through my family, with both allegiances demanding ultimate loyalty. I recall, when my mother went to work in a sewing factory, my brother and I would spend time on summer days with my maternal grandparents, and we soon became aware that my grandma fed traveling hobos.

Hobos were the homeless folk of that day, and occasionally, one would come in from the road and knock on the farmhouse door. Grandma would ask the visitor to sit on the porch while she went back inside and prepared something for the visitor to eat. Neighbors would warn Grandma not to do this, certain that it would only lead to more and more hobos stopping by because recipients of Grandma's care would somehow mark the house as a safe one to visit. But my grandmother felt strongly that feeding the hungry was an important way to show God's love, and she would not be deterred. I observed her allegiance to the gospel, but I also felt the pull of American patriotism.

When I first went to college, I was a leader in a group of Young Republicans, but as I began to question the validity of the Vietnam War, that no longer worked for me. I was not comfortable with the kind of blind allegiance to America that would not allow one to raise questions about our country's involvement in the war. For a short while, after abandoning Republicanism, I thought perhaps I could reject both allegiances, but gradually, as time progressed, I found myself embracing the gospel in fresh ways. It was the late 1960s, and so much was happening in our culture and nation: the Civil Rights struggle and the witness—and assassination—of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.; the anti-Vietnam War protests and the growing peace movement; days of deep social unrest. As the Vietnam War continued, I found myself increasingly drawn to radical resistance, influenced by peacemakers like the Berrigan brothers and their intense opposition to our nation's war-making culture.

**Tell me more about your involvement with radical resistance.**

I was deeply influenced by the radical resistance movement, especially several years after graduating from E-town. I studied at Bethany Seminary, and after that went into Brethren Volunteer Service, choosing as my project site the Community for Creative Nonviolence in Washington, D.C. I was drawn to intentional community, and eventually became a part of Jonah House in Baltimore, where both Philip Berrigan and Elizabeth McAllister lived. The two communities—Jonah House and Community for Creative Nonviolence—were involved in service work, providing free kitchens and hospitality houses for homeless people.

I spent about 10 years living in intentional community. In addition to their focus on service, many in those communities were also involved in radical peace witness

that often took the form of civil disobedience. One of those times, a group of us entered the White House on a tour. At that time the government was encouraging the building of fallout shelters to be used in the event of nuclear war, and so as we entered the White House grounds, we were carrying shovels under our coats. Not something that could happen today, with all sorts of metal detectors. But in those days, it was possible, and once we were on the grounds, we started to dig a shelter on the White House lawn, proclaiming that fallout shelters only become graves. For our witness, we were arrested. There were several other times as well when we were arrested while trying to call attention to our country's unending reliance upon violence and military weapons. One time it was attempting to pour blood on Department of Navy files, protesting the Trident submarine, a really horrendous weapon. Symbolically locking the doors of the Pentagon. And, inside the Supreme Court building, offering prayers against the death penalty.

I was arrested perhaps a dozen times in the 1970s and early 1980s, and those experiences led me to write my first book, *The Fall of the Prison: Biblical Perspectives in Prison Abolition*. It didn't take me long to discover that the people inside of prisons are pretty much like the people on the outside. You meet wonderful people, and you also meet a few who aren't so wonderful—again, not unlike life on the outside.

It began to dawn on me that, even though I didn't believe in violence, even though I didn't own a gun and was unwilling to wield a gun, still, should I run into trouble, what was my inclination? To call the police and ask them to wield the gun on my behalf. As I pondered all of that, I began to think about alternative ways of addressing trouble, which in our society is labeled crime—ways that might not involve calling the police and asking them to wield weapons for me.

**You currently live in the Elmira, New York area. How did that come about?**

In the early 1980s some of the members of our community in Baltimore were sort of sent to Elmira. Some of our community members had contacts in Elmira, but even more, Elmira was a small city that at the time had the highest unemployment rate in the state, yet there was no free kitchen and few other services to provide support. So it seemed like a good place to start another community and to open a free kitchen. That kitchen is still going strong today. Elmira also is a prison town, with

two major prisons in the area, as well as the county lockup. And so we were also interested in doing volunteer work inside the prisons, offering literacy programs as well as providing hospitality space for people getting out of prison.

The focus on civil disobedience faded somewhat during that time, but the activism continues. In fact, tomorrow night I'm participating in an anti-nuclear gathering in Corning, New York. There's still opportunity for public witness, but, oh my, the last time I was arrested was in the 1980s. I better get busy!

**This issue of *Plumb Line* is focusing on John Lewis's challenging words about making good trouble. What kind of good trouble ought we be involved in now? With so many needs and challenges before us, where should we start? How do you choose where you put your energy into working for justice and peace?**

When you take the gospel and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount seriously, when you talk about non-violence and turning the other cheek and being good to those who persecute you—when you take all of this seriously, it begins to shape your life, to push you in different ways. I remember, back in my seminary days, being really impressed with the folks who asserted that just praying for peace is not enough; what about our tax dollars paying for war? Some just refused to pay those taxes, even though knowing the government likely would eventually come along and seize your house and your car. I didn't know if I could do that, so I just decided I would live below taxable income level, something I continue to do today. Such decisions in turn lead to other changes, like grappling with how to simplify one's lifestyle and how to respect and care for the planet more intentionally. One move leads to the next move, and on and on.

It's important to just do something. The possibilities for witness are endless, you know. You can support humanitarian causes; you can give to people in need, supporting the folks who are less powerful—actions that sometimes causes trouble for your own wallet! Even more, we need people to speak up, to confront racism, violence, homophobia, blatant bigotry.

My latest writing project is a book on non-violent Christian anarchism, that minority of Christians throughout history who endeavored to take the words of Jesus seriously and follow his model of non-violent, self-giving love. People who, like Jesus, often found themselves in trouble. It's almost like, no matter what Jesus did, it was trouble. He would heal someone, then

get confronted for having done it on the Sabbath. But it was good trouble, like overturning the tables of the money changers in the temple, challenging his followers to love their enemies, pray for their persecutors, go the extra mile in relationships. Jesus was a real troublemaker!

**So what sustains you in your peacemaking work? What keeps you going?**

That's probably friends, both "capital F" Friends and "small f" friends. So many people whose friendship and witness have touched me. And Friends, a nearby Quaker meeting I am connected with.

I've come to accept that I am a real weirdo. I am a distinct minority, and that's the way the rest of my life is going to be. I've given up any illusions of saving the world and converting the world, which never was my job. It's the small things that count, but it can be so difficult when we live in a culture shot through with militarism.

Eight years ago, I was diagnosed with cancer, and the first reaction from some of my friends was one of, "Well, we will **fight** this with you. We have to battle this." The language of militarism is right there. And every politician, it seems, uses militaristic language: "I will fight for jobs;" "I will fight for you, the people;" "I will fight . . ." Why all this talk about fighting? Instead, why not talk of doing something positive, of working for justice, of seeking peace? Can we get past the language of militarism that is so ingrained in our culture—language which only becomes even stronger during times of war? I think of the current war between Russia and Ukraine. What if Ukraine had initially said, "we surrender," but then immediately launched a Gandhian-style campaign of non-cooperation. It would have been risky—non-cooperation is always risky—but how many lives might have been saved? We need to begin imagining life without violence and warfare and destruction as the only responses to conflict.

*Lee Griffith, a graduate of Elizabethtown College and Bethany Theological Seminary, is retired, living with his husband in a cabin on 26 acres of land near Elmira, New York. He is the author of three books: The Fall of the Prison: Biblical Perspectives in Prison Abolition; God is Subversive: Talking Peace in a Time of Empire; and The War on Terrorism and the Terror of God. Lee is currently working on an additional book focusing on non-violent Christian anarchism.*

*Lee indicates that he generally shies away from cameras, so his photo is not included with this interview!*

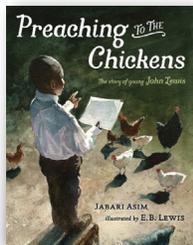
# Children's Books about Peace and Justice

Recommended by Andrew Wenger '08, Plumb Line editorial board member

## Preaching to the Chickens: The Story of Young John Lewis

by Jabari Asim, E. B. Lewis

John wants to be a preacher when he grows up—a leader whose words stir hearts to change, minds to think, and bodies to take action. But why wait? When John is put in charge of the family farm's flock of chickens, he discovers that they make a wonderful congregation! So he preaches to his flock, and they listen, content under his watchful care, riveted by the rhythm of his voice.



## Yes We Will: Asian Americans Who Shaped This Country

by Kelly Yang

From creating beautiful music like Yo-Yo Ma to flying to outer space like Franklin Chang-Díaz; from standing up to injustice like Fred Korematsu to becoming the first Asian American, Black and female vice president of the United States like Kamala Harris, this book illuminates the power of Asian Americans all over the country, in all sorts of fields.

*Yes We Will* answers the question, can we accomplish whatever we dream? With love, courage, determination, and lots of imagination, we can—and we will!

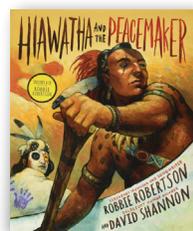


## Hiawatha and the Peacemaker

by Robbie Robertson, David Shannon

Born of Mohawk and Cayuga descent, musical icon Robbie Robertson learned the story of Hiawatha and his spiritual guide, the Peacemaker, as part of the Iroquois oral tradition. Now he shares the same gift of storytelling with a new generation.

Hiawatha was a strong and articulate Mohawk who was chosen to translate the Peacemaker's message of unity for the five warring Iroquois nations during the 14th century. This message not only succeeded in uniting the tribes but also forever changed how the Iroquois governed themselves—a blueprint for democracy that would later inspire the authors of the U.S. Constitution.

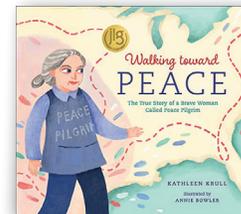


## Walking toward Peace: The True Story of a Brave Woman Called Peace Pilgrim

by Kathleen Krull, Annie Bowler

She gave up everything: her home, her possessions, even her real name. She called herself Peace Pilgrim, put on her sneakers, and started off on her quest to walk thousands of miles all around America. Step by step, mile after mile, Peace Pilgrim traveled tirelessly, inviting everyone she met to consider a world where each person and each nation chooses peace.

This true story about a little-known woman who sacrificed everything for her convictions inspires us to step out for what we believe in, gathering others to join us along the way.

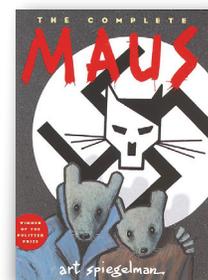


## Maus: A Survivor's Tale

A graphic novel series for older kids (13+) by Art Spiegelman

A brutally moving work of art—widely hailed as the greatest graphic novel ever written—*Maus* recounts the chilling experiences of the author's father during the Holocaust, with Jews drawn as wide-eyed mice and Nazis as menacing cats.

*A note from Andrew: This is an incredibly powerful series about the Holocaust. At times, it is very graphic about the atrocities of the Nazis and it deals with other adult issues, including suicide, rape, and mental illness. I cannot recommend this book highly enough, but you may want to have ongoing conversations with any young person reading this book.*



### Plumb Line

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Plumb Line is available in both paper and electronic formats.

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## Selected Words of Wisdom from John Lewis

*You are a light. You are the light. Never let anyone — any person or any force — dampen, dim or diminish your light ... Release the need to hate, to harbor division, and the enticement of revenge. Release all bitterness. Hold only love, only peace in your heart, knowing that the battle of good to overcome evil is already won.*

*Do not become bitter or hostile. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Never, ever be afraid to make some noise and get in good trouble, necessary trouble. We will find a way to make a way out of no way.*

*Nothing can stop the power of a committed and determined people to make a difference in our society. Why? Because human beings are the most dynamic link to the divine on this planet.*

*Take a long, hard look down the road you will have to travel once you have made a commitment to work for change. Know that this transformation will not happen right away. Change often takes time. It rarely happens all at once. In the movement, we didn't know how history would play itself out. When we were getting arrested and waiting in jail or standing in unmovable lines on the courthouse steps, we didn't know what would happen, but we knew it had to happen.*



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