

# READING GROUP Discussion Guide for

## *Dancing with History: A Life for Peace and Justice*

BY GEORGE LAKEY

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“[A] civil rights legend.”—*The Guardian*

“Almost no one I can think of has made better use of their time on earth”  
—Bill McKibben

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From his first arrest in the Civil Rights era to his most recent during a climate justice march at the age of 83, George Lakey has committed his life to a mission of building a better world through movements for justice. In his memoir *Dancing With History*, Lakey draws readers into the center of history-making events, telling often serious stories with playfulness and intimacy.

### Preface

Do you recognize the “widespread anxiety” the author refers to? How does it affect you?

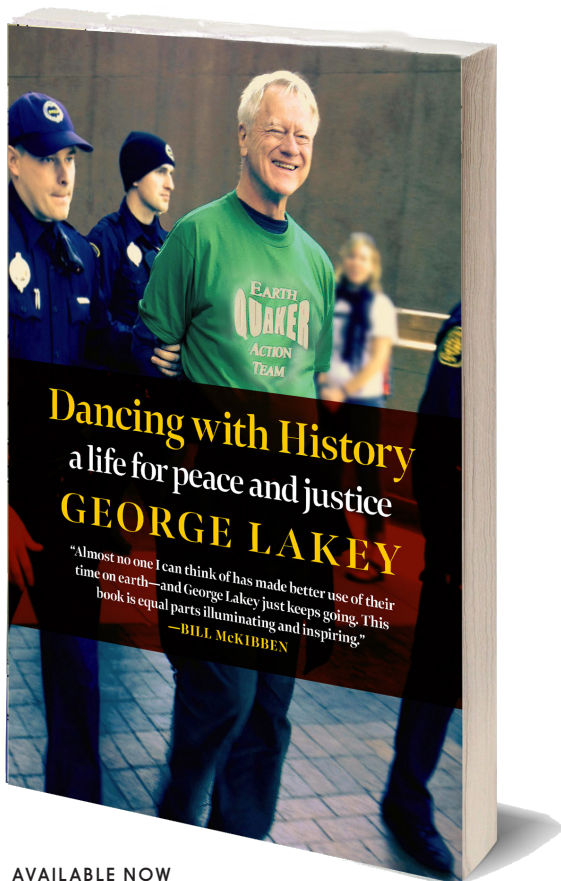
The author finds continuities that assist him to keep going, example faith, community, his learning curve. What are pillars you lean on? Is there one you don’t now rely on that tempts you, one you might try out?

### Chapter One: A working class lad finds a place to stand

Are there any ways your own youthful background was similar to, and different from, the author’s? Did your experience assist you to find “a place to stand?” What didn’t you expect in the strengths the author discovered in his working class background?

What do you think the author was struggling with in the play rehearsal, and how did his teachers prove to be effective allies of his growth?

The author sees a similarity between cultural messages sent to women and people of color about their supposed limitations and limiting messages sent to white working class men. How have you seen such messaging operate, either toward the groups mentioned or toward other groups that encounter mistreatment because of their identity?



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for

During the Cuban missile crisis the author re-visited his breakthrough on the soapbox, using an earlier growth-point in order to meet a current challenge. Do you recall an example from your own growth that later proved to be a strength that you relied on?

When facing the Cuban missile crisis the author considered it more useful to start urgent discussion than to attend protests mounted at the same time in a number of American cities. How could that be?

After he took his toilet break during that event he started at Penn, the author didn't resume his previous role of leading the discussion. How did his choice relate to his larger consideration of "roles" that can be played when dancing with history?

### **Chapter Two: Lessons in leadership**

The author asserts that leadership style can be a contentious issue; what are some of your own concerns about leadership?

In the spontaneous crowd discussion at Penn the author showed a decided preference for "facilitative" leadership that gives considerable weight to the unfolding group process. In this chapter he's appreciating the decisive, in-charge move by the band director. Do you see this as a contradiction, or do you see a way of reconciling those two styles?

In the story of bringing Handel's *Messiah* to his home town, how does the author show even as a young teenager his appetite for organizing?

When have you experienced doing something that seemed straightforward and even routine, as singing did to the professional choir members, then found a breaking-in of spirit that made it transformative? How might vulnerability have helped to catalyze that experience? The author regards that in-breaking of spirit as likely with responsive leadership that empowers others. Can you think of ways in your own life that you can support that responsive, empowering kind of leadership?

### **Chapter Three: College offers breathing room and fresh challenges**

The author reported the challenge in a small town that can come with establishing a close friendship with an effeminate boy. What's been your experience of reaching across a cultural divide of some kind? Have you made a start toward making the connection but didn't quite "go there?"

As you read about the author's falling in love with Burt, what were your own, perhaps mixed, feelings? And what was your response to the author's introduction to gay sexual expression through a spontaneous, low-key orgy?

He reflects that he's "lucky" to have gotten such a "free-spirited introduction to sex with men," contrasting it with the hurtful or off-putting first sexual experiences with men that many young women have had. Do you personally see his experience as "free-spirited," or on the other hand "licentious" or in some other way problematic?

### **Chapter Four: Finding Quakers and a loving partner**

What was your response to the author's first encounter with Quakerism? How similar or different was it from your own impression of Quaker practice?

The author wrestles strenuously for a year with the challenge of pacifism. Have you taken on that question in your own thinking? The author found in the writings of that time that non-pacifists laid a false claim to pragmatism by failing to do the pragmatist's work of assessing each situation through research and then assigning probabilities of success to spelled-out, alternative strategies. In what ways does your own experience of those who say "pacifism doesn't work" coincide with the author's?

Since no one can assert with complete confidence the outcome of a course of action, the author claims that even those with philosophical differences, to be responsible, need to consider their course of action based on the nature of the act of killing compared with the act of nonviolent struggle. How might his assertion make a difference to you in your own choices?

Many people make a positive impact in the world without having had a conscious sense of "mission." In this chapter we learn that the author at age nineteen uncovered a clear life mission, guiding his life in the way that some people discover at an early age a sense of vocation as a writer or nurse or farmer or engineer. Have you known anyone with a compelling sense of mission, or have you experienced that yourself? How does it make a difference in the way they, or you, live?

In the 1950s political atmosphere of "McCarthyism," demonstrations were few and far between. The author is fearful in his first protest, worried about the possibility of a violent reaction. Can you relate to that fear?

What do you think of his way of normalizing his fear by connecting with his experience, letting it remind him of previous episodes of major stage-fright (plays and piano performance)? In your life have you successfully normalized fear in anticipating, for example, childbirth or other risks you've taken?

The author discovered a foundational strategic principle that for him distinguished between a "protest" – basically the public expression of opinion—and an action taken in a campaign, as in the campaign that successfully stopped nuclear testing in the atmosphere. He expresses disappointment that half a century later there are still leaders organizing "protests" instead of leading campaigns as did Larry Scott and the civil rights movement. Is this distinction new to you, and how do you relate to it?

### **Chapter Five: I'm more activist than my college can handle**

The author says his individualism leaned toward anarchist politics rather than conservative politics. How might his working class background be responsible for that?

Even though his college administration found him difficult, the author was respected by his peers. Have you found situations in your life of that kind, or perhaps the reverse: being appreciated by authorities and not so much by peers? How do dynamics such as this make it hard to navigate in your environment? Do you suspect the authority/peer dynamics have made an impact on your longer-term contribution?

Despite the clear antagonism toward the author felt by the college administration, he was allowed to study at the college for three years. Might that story have been different had the author been Black?

The author was influenced by findings by cultural anthropologists of functional, cohesive societies that had very different sexual mores from the 1950s U.S. The researchers reinforced his questioning of the U.S. patriarchal ideal of the monogamous nuclear family. How do you personally see this issue in the quest for a liberatory and egalitarian society?

## **Chapter Six: The only white student in the dorms of a Black college**

The author identifies himself as an introvert, and yet at Cheyney finds himself, again, in a situation where it would be convenient to be naturally outgoing and sociable. How do you experience yourself on the introvert/extrovert scale? Do you think your spot on the scale influences your readiness to embark on new adventures?

The author found his Black college to be more culturally spacious than his white one. Do you find that surprising, as he did? How might the surprise itself be related to an assumption usually made by “people on top” (white, or upper class, or male) that their position gives them the ability to see in a more spacious way, because of their supposedly superior vantage point for viewing social reality?

The author discovered that Black people seem to understand white people better than the other way around, and have more knowledge on how the unstated dynamics of oppression actually work. What might Marybelle Moore have meant by the author being, at Cheyney, a privileged kind of token?

## **Chapter Seven: Starting a new family in a social democratic society**

The author tells how going to a theoretical discussion by socialist intellectuals gave him scant help for experiencing a socialist society. What has been your experience of learning about socialism?

The author shares some of what was surprising and interesting to him about Norway’s social and economic order. What was surprising and interesting to you?

Before his experience of Norway, the author expected that “visionary” and “practical” were opposites. How have you thought of the role of vision, in your life and in your politics? Is reading this book opening you to possibilities that might contribute to envisioning?

A door-opening event for the author was meeting Gene Sharp, whose life work led to his being nominated several times for the Nobel Peace Prize. In your life, how might a research-friendly orientation sharpen your ability to be both practical and visionary?

The author’s discoveries in Norway led eventually to his using his college professorship to create a global database of over a thousand cases of nonviolent struggle in two hundred countries, -- while finding that the research merely scratched the surface of the nonviolent campaigns in history. How do you account for the scant attention given, even in universities, to cases of nonviolent victories against armed adversaries?

## **Chapter Eight: North Philadelphia and the Ivy League**

The author acknowledges the lasting influences of his working class upbringing, even in small things like preferring, when playing piano for Broadway sing-alongs, to be led by requests from the group. What are some class characteristics that you continue to embody that were “baked into” you through your upbringing, whatever class you come from?

We might remember imbibing some of our class characteristics through pleasant experiences, for example enjoying doing what a parent or relative liked to do. By contrast, the author’s dad was averse to leading because of fear of the consequences of stepping forward, dating from the scare when factory management placed a machine gun aimed at the workers. Might there be some of your own class characteristics that were likewise absorbed through fear, perhaps on a more subtle level?

The author noticed that social democratic countries like Norway work so well because the people have embraced a “systemic” view rather than trying to fix social ills in a piecemeal fashion. What is your own inclination: are you a “splitter” or a “lumper?” Would you welcome support to be able to see things in a holistic way?

The author believes there’s only one truth, not a division between what is “morally true” and “practically true.” What has been your inclination up until now on this question, and what do you think of his invitation to see apparent contradictions between “moral” and “practical” truths simply as invitations to do fresh research, innovation, and design?

### **Chapter Nine: The civil rights movement escalates**

This is the author’s first time joining a social movement with awareness of what a movement is. How does he reveal his wish to be consistent with the message it wants to convey?

What are the contradictions between what he expects and what he encounters in Chester, PA? The differences rattle him but he persists; if you were in a similar situation, what do you think would sustain you and enable you to participate usefully?

When he encounters violence he finds his previous preparation to be helpful. Where in your circumstances can you pick up training or other preparation for the possibility of violence erupting?

How was he proactive when he arrived alone at a demonstration in North Philly? Do you have the practice he prefers, which is to go to demonstrations with a buddy or group of people you know?

The author wrote a successor book, *How We Win*, to the old Manual he wrote with Martin Oppenheimer. Do you know of other materials that are useful in preparing yourself for maximum impact in a movement you’d like to join?

Even with the sharpened polarization and frequent use of racist violence in 1964’s Mississippi, Bob Moses perceived a range of groupings or sectors that gave leverage—and even a measure of protection—to the highly vulnerable civil rights workers of SNCC. His perception was highly unusual, since anxiety leads most people to over-simplification of social reality. In your own situation today, you can probably identify the most fierce opponents of a cause that you identify with. For a moment taking the role of Bob Moses, help each other to discern the more subtle distinctions among groups that oppose your cause.

You know some of your own personal pluses and minuses when it comes to being useful to a social movement today. What are some of the pluses you might bring?

### **Chapter Ten: Facing threats while cranking up the movement against the Vietnam War**

Even though a self-described “individualist,” the author revealed his strong sense of social obligation in wanting to meet the expectation his classmates met when drafted into military service. Can you identify a community expectation that you respond to, even though it may not be expressed in a way you agree with, or prefer? (Besides taxes!)

The author witnessed a surprising resonance between Malcolm X and Albert Bigelow who, on the level of belief, had some sharp disagreements. What are the implications for you, given today’s trend toward polarization of beliefs?

Do you know high school students in the past, or today, who might experience empowerment if they participated in a training of the sort led by Mike Yarrow and the author? Might you find it valuable? How, specifically, might it support you to a new level of effectiveness?

### **Chapter Eleven: My baby helps to save the trees**

The author was alarmed, to say the least, at Berit's threat to take their baby out to join another mom and baby in standing under a tree to prevent its being cut down. Later he encounters an upper-middle class neighbor who regards his picketing at City Hall to be adventurous and brave, but who sees herself being prepared to get between a saw and a tree to be simply "the thing to do."

Later his mother will experience a similar dissonance, being upbraided by a local pastor for her son's "irresponsibly" going to a war zone in Vietnam to do a nonviolent action, while the same pastor considers it "responsible" for young fathers in his church to go to war as soldiers, even though some are unlikely to return.

What do you make of these diverse and subjective perceptions of risk and daring when it comes to taking action? How much are they culturally conditioned? How do they affect your own choices about participating in social movements?

### **Chapter Twelve: Quakers launch daring protest as the Vietnam war escalates**

Ross Flanagan's intention was to lessen support for the U.S. war in Vietnam by humanizing Americans' perception of the Vietnamese themselves. How can asking people to give medical aid catalyze such a shift in perception?

How might Americans' support of the government's war weaken if the government showed hostility to—or reacted punitively toward—those who give aid to suffering Vietnamese civilians?

Bayard Rustin watched carefully instances where, after a few people took extraordinary positive action and got negative pushback from authorities, more joined in. He called such occasions "people in motion." It was a kind of dance, between the people and authority. What makes that dance important to observe when deciding where to put our energy?

The author was surprised that a large Quaker body could reach consensus to defy the government, and described it as the Holy Spirit taking Friends "by the scruff of our collective neck" and shaking "until we lined up with God's will!" Have you experienced or heard of other institutions transcending "business as usual" in order to respond to the impact of social movements? (More recently, Black Lives Matter might provide examples.)

What is so important about social, religious and business institutions making new decisions after social movement agitation has been underway?

Have you observed a growing social movement develop its own ecology, with differentiated parts within it? Differences might be generational, racial, religious/secular, moderate/radical, etc. Even if you prefer movements to be highly unified, how does an ecological perspective increase your acceptance of differences?

If you happen to be an experienced activist, have you tended to be active in the same “differentiated part” of each movement you’ve joined, for example consistently working on the legislative front, or building community-level ways of handling the issue, or organizing nonviolent direct action? If you have a consistent preference for a way of working, what accounts for that? How do you deal with the temptation to be critical of the other parts in the movement’s ecology?

The author believes that he and Ross Flanagan were “protected” from intentional martyrdom partly by the closeness of the community that Berit and the author brought together. However, terrorists considering the role of suicide bomber may also be prepared in close community settings to induce their martyrdom. What do you suppose are some differences between communities that support suicide bombers and those that support high-risk nonviolent actions such as the Phoenix voyages?

### **Chapter Thirteen: Both threats and cheer on the home front**

In view of the author’s responses to violent threats he has encountered, he’s clearly used a special set of stories for self-training. By what means does U.S. mass culture distribute stories of violent escalation as the go-to for meeting threatening situations?

What goes into your personal choices of the kinds of stories you expose yourself to? Are there ways you can make stories of nonviolent tactics for meeting threat more readily available in your community or social circle?

In this chapter the author reveals more of his joy in living even though highly committed to building the movement. What’s your own response to his observation that, “My personal calling to be willing even to sacrifice my life for the cause, if it came to that, is no contradiction to how much I say “yes” to our ability to connect with others and laugh and sing and make love and be at peace with Creation”?

### **Chapter Fourteen: Getting through the US naval blockade with medical aid for the Vietnamese**

In this chapter the author re-introduces us to strategist Lawrence C. Scott, who believed in making the most of a broad social movement’s ecology. Which ecological niche do he and George Willoughby want to fill more robustly by starting A Quaker Action Group, and how does the name make use of that concept?

How do the AQAG founders see drama making up for lack of numbers in the new organization? What is dramatic in the scenario they develop with the Phoenix sailing ship?

Although the author doesn’t mention it, AQAG’s informing the U.S. government of its intention to sail through the U.S. Seventh Fleet on a forbidden mission had precedent in the practice of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas K. Gandhi, both of whom made a practice of informing their opponent of their main intention. Do you see advantages in such a practice?

AQAG’s intention was to send medical supplies to the civilians suffering from the war in both North and South Vietnam, aiming to connect with each of the major entities in a complicated conflict. (The most dramatic mission, in clearest conflict with the U.S. empire’s war effort, was directed toward North Vietnam.) What might be advantages in AQAG’s plan to, if possible, deliver medicines to all sides?

How do you personally relate to the author’s reasoning when he considers the life-risking character of the Phoenix voyage? To the author’s sitting with his Quaker clearness committee for further processing, and that community’s support?

In writing about dropping pursuit of his Ph.D., the author uses the phrase “based on behavior....” What might he mean by that, as a part of his decision-making process? Have you found you sometimes gain information about your deepest intentions by reflecting on your own behavior?

In Vietnam the author gained a rare opportunity for an American: to have conversation with Vietnamese students strenuously opposed to U.S. intervention. What did you gain from hearing their point of view?

What was it like for you to “eavesdrop” on the supper conversation between two Vietnamese friends, both strongly opposed to the U.S. intervention, but having different strategies for ousting the U.S. military? Does it raise for you, as it did for Cao Phuong’s friend, the question of relative efficacy of these two means of struggle, nonviolent and violent, in the attempt to achieve change?

### **Chapter Fifteen: A dunk in the South China Sea during confrontation with gunboats**

The author’s assignment as project director for the Danang journey was to complete the mission and support the safety of everyone on the crew. A process goal from the point of view of Quaker culture was decision-making that relied on Spirit as discerned by the group, even under pressure. In what ways did you notice the author supporting the process goal?

What stands out in your mind in the way the Phoenix team related to the crews of the gunboats in the cove near Danang?

What guesses do you have about what created the strongly different dynamics between the Danang confrontation and the confrontation off the coast of Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City)?

The crew was unable to deliver medicines directly to the South, but the leader of the Unified Buddhist Church considered the mission successful nevertheless. How could that be?

### **Chapter Sixteen: Draft Resistance in the US and intensive work in Britain**

When the author was confronted by the Navy pilot on a midwestern college campus, how did he de-escalate the tension?

How did the Navy pilot’s story illuminate the degree of risk for the Phoenix voyages?

The tactic of solemnly reading the names of the war dead was reportedly helpful in a U.S. sharply polarized about the Vietnam war, reducing the “knee-jerk reaction against anti-war protests.” What about that tactic might have broken through polarized perceptions?

In today’s polarized America can you imagine dramatically calling attention to those on both political sides who’ve been hurt by a trend or policy, like wildfires or gun violence or closing rural hospitals? Do other tactics come to mind, in addition to reading solemnly the names of those who suffer the results of the policy?

The author observes that even in the midst of innovative, creative anti-war tactics, some activists continued to rely on traditional marches or rallies. What are the dynamics that encourage “same-old, same-old” tactics in social movements, and how can habits be replaced by creativity and innovation?

“Revolution” and “nonviolence” are often thought of as contradictory, but the author worked to combine the two to create synergy: a combination greater than the sum of their parts. What elements in each of those concepts—revolution and nonviolent direct action—can you imagine putting together in a way that generates more power for transformation?

Even in his thirties, after a good deal of achievement including publications and public speaking, the author admits to feelings of insecurity because of his class background. These are heightened by entering the British cultural environment. Such feelings (sometimes named “the imposter syndrome”) he has in common with people with other characteristics that mainstream culture regards as “less than:” being of color, female or gendered differently from a cis male, of Indigenous or Latin or Asian background, physically challenged, LGBTQ, and so on – a subtle, lingering sense of not being everything one “should be” to get full respect. Have you experienced anyone acknowledging such feelings to you, and/or have you acknowledged such feelings to others?

Berit devised a “work-around” —costuming— to assist the author to meet the expectations of professional middle class public life in Britain at that time. What didn’t occur to either of us was briefly acknowledging, in front of the group, my inner conflict and my choice to appear as my authentic self, hoping it wouldn’t get in the way of the message about social change that I’m happy to share. Has such a strategy assisted you, or anyone you know, to relate more directly and authentically, in a stressful situation?

A major part of the author’s work in Britain became training, sharing lively workshop methods arising from the civil rights movement and other innovations in adult education. What reasons might exist for training to become widely available in your community (if it’s not already)?

### **Chapter Seventeen: The tree of life, a book, and a new baby**

Taking on writing a new book on top of the author’s other commitments was the result of a challenge from an African freedom fighter. What do you imagine made Nathan Shamuyarira’s challenge so powerful?

AQAG’s long walk to Edgewood Arsenal became a wake-up call to the U.S. public about biological weapons, even though it was done by a small group. What about the walk’s strategy made it so effective?

### **Chapter Eighteen: Winning in Latin America and re-centering for the longer run**

When first joining the campaign to stop the U.S. Navy from bombing the Puerto Rican island of Culebra for target practice, the author was concerned that the radical politics of the Independence Party would postpone victory. Independence Party President Ruben Berrios had a sophisticated strategy that included a powerful dynamic the author missed. What did the author miss?

How does the effort to learn the language, or try new behaviors, make a difference in bridging the gap with people who have historically been oppressed?

A transformational change in A Quaker Action Group (AQAG) depended on members doing research, big-picture analysis, and consideration of alternative organizational models. What about that combination adds power to the wish for change?

The Willoughbys were the oldest couple in the mix, yet their offering of a training concept to the group was embraced by young people. What about training might be attractive across generations?

How does a formal agreement to come to each others' aid embolden a coalition or network?

Americans don't usually expect young "hippies" and politically conservative longshoremen to unite on a political project, and in the beginning of the Bangladesh campaign the longshoremen lacked interest in cooperation even though they opposed dictatorship. The difference was made when the "practice maneuvers" of the activists' kayaks and canoes in the harbor were carried by TV. How might mass media coverage make a difference in the attitude of the longshoremen, bridging the gap between social classes?

The author was willing to risk losing the chance to participate in an attractive new campaign -- against the B-1 bomber—by holding out for the incorporation of a positive vision. How might you act in a similar situation, and what would be the stakes for you?

### **Chapter Nineteen: A container for liberation**

The author criticizes his masculine socialization for getting in the way of being more fully present for his family, especially for his needy baby Peter. This was underlined by his initial resistance to his men's group. Can you think of examples of masculine conditioning inhibiting men's relating in a deeper and more personal way?

What's your feeling reaction to the author's falling in love with a man in the community even though married to Berit and committed to family? And to his reporting that he and Berit found, on the other side of their relationship crisis, agreement that each could have secondary loving relationships?

The author didn't consider turning down the invitation to speak to a thousand Quakers at a national conference; his and Berit's shared turmoil was whether to use the opportunity to come out boldly. Might you have made a different choice? What does it say about them that they wrestled with that choice, and made a decision that invited still more challenge afterward?

What are your feelings about the action E. Raymond Wilson took at breakfast the morning after the speech?

The author considers the "speak-out" as a structured conflict through which uncomfortable truths can be said directly to people who might be "tone-deaf," in a way that bridges the two sides. Can you think of any situations in your personal or group life in which such a structure might be useful?

Another conflict structure he describes is the walk-out by the queer caucus, which gave the caucus and the mainstream group opportunity to process separately the meaning of what happened, followed by the re-uniting of the two through a common activity. Can you think of conflict situations where caucusing might be useful?

The author agreed to reverse roles with Berit even though he doubted his capability to do well. As it turned out he said he was "over his head," even with the assistance of family therapy. He discovered that part of his challenge was his own unresolved relationship with his dad. Does any of his and Berit's struggle ring a bell for you or might fit the struggle of a friend of yours?

The author was relieved to spend at least part of his week in an Ivy League classroom where he could successfully innovate to his heart's content. One class gave him feedback that showed he was projecting "mother-energy," another discovery for him. Have you found that any of your behaviors express positive attributes of a parental figure?

## **Chapter Twenty: 1976 and the revolution continues, in politics and family**

The author's lover Alan coaches him as he prepares to urge a political coalition to adopt a pro-LGBTQ platform, encouraging the author to vent. Have you experienced coaching of that kind, or would you like to?

Berit and the author use the strategy with their children of "normalizing" their polyamorous relationships, as we see in the breakfast conversation between Ingrid and Alan. In a community where such relationships are not frowned upon, how might a strategy of normalizing be useful?

In the next story in this chapter the generational roles are reversed: it is the "child"—Alan—who is seeking to normalize something the older generation finds challenging. What are your thoughts about how it was handled, including the next morning by Alan's dad and the author?

## **Chapter Twenty-one: Getting the goods on cancer and a community for healing**

The author's friend Ellen coaches him in relation to what felt like unbearable pain, then her dad shares a challenging perspective that offers more access to power. While both these interventions were in the context of cancer, can you see usefulness in either approach or both when applied to other challenges you face?

The author accepted that his wish to heal might require confronting his own illusions, just as citizens in a declining empire "can benefit from giving up their own ways of pretending." What might he mean by this, both personally and politically?

He continually turns to his political skills and experience as a resource for his personal healing, while the feminists of the day were urging the relevance of personal insights to politics. What do you see as benefits of relating learnings from our inner and outer lives to each other? Can you give an example from your own experience?

"This experience of cancer might be an opportunity to choose life by choosing me—that young working-class me, who trusted himself and his intuition." Does this statement by the author ring a bell for you? Might there have been in your life a deep trust in your intuition which has somehow gone missing, and if so, how might you bring that forward again?

## **Chapter Twenty-two: Christina's miracle**

What's your response to the author's reflection that he'd misunderstood how profoundly racism was embedded in social and economic structures, and now believes a racist culture cannot be transformed without changing society as a whole?

As a parent the author is forthright with Christina about the medical expectation that she will die, along with his belief that there is a larger reality that might have room for healing. How might you frame a grim outcome in a like situation?

## **Chapter Twenty-three: Nuclear arms race mounts, Philly joins Jobs with Peace network**

The author's story about Ingrid's nightmares, and reducing Ingrid's anxiety through inviting her to take action, suggests a possible application for today: might the growing anxiety about the climate crisis (with its wildfires, hurricanes, and so on) be eased somewhat for individuals who take action?

Organizing a local Jobs with Peace Campaign combined two of the author's favorite issues which are frequently kept separate. What do you see as pluses and minuses of putting these two together?

Do you think that people need to have a parent like the author's dad to learn to allow useful "banging against," as in the chair-throwing incident? Or could one develop the capacity to roll with the punches without the head start of an ancestral example?

It's obvious that a multi-class, multi-racial coalition is a plus in building movement power, but the constituent parts of the coalition aren't always ready to relate to each other with skill and confidence. What was your reaction to how MNS members prepared themselves to work across class lines, through workshops and caucusing? Can you imagine emulating the author's encouragement of debates within Jobs with Peace rather than trying to "smooth things down."

A national electoral campaign expert told the Jobs with Peace workshop that movement activists are the leaders of the process of change rather than the people in electoral politics. This contradicts the impression given by mass media. What do you think?

The author found that common sense policies, like creating a Plan B in case a military installation is closed or a contract lost, are strongly resisted by the U.S. economic elite. (In social democratic Scandinavia they are simply regarded as best practices.) What do you think explains the economic elite's unwillingness to have back-up plans in place?

#### **Chapter Twenty-four: Family change**

The author reaches a crisis point with his son that leads him to contradict his own nonviolent principles; he then falls into shame. Can you identify in some way with his situation? In your view is there something useful to be learned from his experience? What alternative is suggested by the clue that he'd been trying to be his son's "savior?"

The author, who has identified since boyhood with Black people's struggle, finds himself in elderhood fitting into a role fairly common among Black people: a grandparent rearing grandchildren. (In the author's case his are also Black children.) He then finds support when Michael, a much younger white man, joins him. What do you find surprising, and not, in this turn of events, and what larger implications might it have?

#### **Chapter Twenty-five: Confronting the Supreme Court**

In contrast to the author's first arrest—by himself—he has become more insistent on joining what is called an "affinity group." How did his group's usefulness to the young man who lost his grip on reality show the strength and resilience of intentional solidarity?

Johnny and the author managed the potential tension of their cross-class relationship, but it could have gone poorly. Do you personally know any successful, enduring friendships between two people who at birth were two social classes apart? What can be learned from how Johnny and the author handled it?

## **Chapter Twenty-six: Letting go of Movement for a New Society as coal miners escalate**

In saying goodbye to Movement for a New Society the author acknowledges that he is an “activist entrepreneur” but also states that he innovates best when part of a team, a “collective.” What are benefits you’ve noticed in this book that the author has received from working in a team, including the Phoenix crew? Do any of them overlap with your own experience, and have you found benefits that he may not have mentioned?

Leaders of the Mine Workers fiercely debated the merits of including the tactic of nonviolent occupation in their upcoming campaign. The author illuminated their discussion by sharing a historical miners’ struggle from elsewhere in the world. U.S. culture is known for being comparatively resistant to knowing and using history. How can you picture breaking through the cultural resistance, helping activists you know to plan today’s actions in light of a variety of experience from other times and places?

The author acknowledges a personal limitation when he discusses with Johnny the idea of retiring from Jobs with Peace: he does a good job only when he can be innovative. What are some of the values of solid management skills in leadership that the author fails to delight in?

It’s a revealing moment when Johnny offers the author a sabbatical. Have you found yourself reluctant or embarrassed when someone wants to give you something special? Inside the author, where might the tears be coming from?

## **Chapter Twenty-seven: Stretching to keep human rights defenders alive in Sri Lanka**

“Protective accompaniment” as a structured nonviolent tactic was in its infancy in 1989. It seems a large leap of faith for the author to risk his life to intervene against Sri Lankan hit squads. What were some beliefs and experiences in the author’s life that might give him the confidence to volunteer?

Now that protective accompaniment is more established, what might lead you to consider volunteering?

What were some of your feelings as you read the story of Peter’s death?

What supports you when you find yourself sad or grieving?

## **Chapter Twenty-eight: Putting training on the front burner**

What was important about the author’s getting Barbara Smith’s response to the idea of a new training initiative?

In the ACT-UP workshop, how did the author’s acknowledgement of the ambivalence of the activists support their willingness to learn? How did his supporting the expression of conflict rather than trying to smooth it over remind you of other moments described in this book?

In Thailand the author found his power as a trainer became greater through letting go of attachment to results. How could this be so? Have there been times in your life when letting go supported a positive outcome?

The author’s longtime delight in playing Broadway tunes with Johnny reinforced community in the gay bar. Have you found times in your own life that music or other artistic expression supported solidarity?

Training is one application of a larger human capacity: to value a learning curve. The author views one of the notable U.S. failures post-9/11 has been its refusal to re-evaluate being a world empire, trying to enforce its will through military domination -- in Afghanistan, Iraq, and elsewhere. What might it take for more Americans actually to learn from the abundant negative feedback to our imperial role, as the author's granddaughter Crystal was willing to do?

### Chapter Twenty-Nine: Swarthmore College and a new climate justice campaign

At Swarthmore College students were eager to explore nonviolent ways to defend a society against the threat of terror, and even a policy unit in the Pentagon became curious. What would you say to your friends and neighbors, and the peace movement, if you wanted to stimulate their interest in developing an alternative vision for national security? (National security, not security for a U.S. empire.)

Students were also eager to discover and write up centuries of unsung cases of nonviolent campaigns that have been waged on multiple continents. (The Global Nonviolent Action Database, searchable on the Internet.) How might these discoveries grow the learning curve for people whose options today are hindered by a strong pro-violence bias?

What were factors that might have influenced the living room-size Earth Quaker Action Team to believe it could push the seventh largest U.S. bank out of its practice of funding mountaintop removal coal mining? (Hint: alcohol was not one of them!)

How important do you think it is to develop preparations to resist a coup attempt even if the attempt might not happen? What are some reasons the Choose Democracy team might be confident that a trained popular nonviolent resistance could succeed against a serious coup attempt?

The author was no stranger to what he experienced as leadings from Spirit, but he was resistant to the prompting to read the story of Peter's death to the graduating Swarthmore students. In your view, in what ways was his following the leading in alignment with other choices in the author's long life as he sought to carry out his mission?

In what ways might that life inspire you to extend your own reach and power for justice and peace?

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