

Memorial Statement
William H. Moyer
September 17, 1933 — October 21, 2002

Bill Moyer was brought up in a working-class neighborhood of northeast Philadelphia in a close-knit family of parents James and Edna, brothers Ronald and Jim, and sister Marion. His father repaired radios and TVs, a skill he learned from a mail order course. The family attended a local Presbyterian church, and Bill hoped to some day become a missionary in Africa.

A self-described mediocre-at-best student, Bill was an outstanding athlete. His scrapbook holds a newspaper photo of him as a feisty-looking teenager who had just pitched his third consecutive no-hitter. There are few individual pictures, however. The scrapbook mostly reveals a strikingly handsome young Bill as a team player in group photos of his various baseball and football squads.

Bill remained a sports enthusiast throughout his life, but not as a couch potato. Until his illness began taking its toll six months ago, Bill could be seen on neighborhood basketball courts in hard-fought pickup games with players 40 or even 50 years his junior. He always looked forward to the annual Moyer clan reunions and their family softball, touch football games and golf matches with his brothers, cousins, nephews, nieces and in-laws. A fierce competitor, his lifelong friend George Lakey recently recalled: "I'm thinking about Bill's warrior self. He was an amazing fighter. When we used to play tag football together in the early days of the Life Center, and I'd see him running toward me, I'd get scared."

But his "warrior self" was only part of the picture. For if there is one phrase that could sum up Bill Moyer it is "peaceful warrior." This phrase also epitomizes an insight George Lakey also shared: "Bill Moyer was a walking reminder of Walt Whitman's line that goes something like 'In myself I contain multitudes.' One of the biggest things I learned from Bill was how it's possible to contain in oneself -- and strongly express -- aspects that often appear to be in contradiction."

To understand how Bill became a peaceful warrior and how that was manifested in a variety of ways throughout his life, we have to learn more about his life story. After graduating from Penn State in 1957, Bill worked as an engineer for three years for Link Belt Corporation in Philadelphia. It was during this time that he met Emily and Walter Longstreth, a Quaker couple then in their 90s. Bill credited them for having introduced him to "the spiritual, ethical, and action methods of peace and nonviolence that set me on my life-long journey." It was also during this period that Bill first met David Hartsough who gave a presentation about his recent trip to Cuba to a group of Bill and four others at a Quaker meetinghouse in Philadelphia. The two would later share not only a common political and spiritual journey together but for many years also lived in the same houses in Philadelphia and San Francisco.

After getting a masters degree in social work at Bryn Mawr in 1962, Bill landed a job with the American Friends Service Committee's Chicago office in an open housing

program to help African Americans move out of the city's slums into what were then all-white neighborhoods. Buttressed by a racist ideology, the major economic and political forces of the city, including Mayor Richard Daley, were strongly opposed to housing integration. Social work was not enough, success required social change. And though Bill's AFSC program could point to some minor victories, significant progress required a powerful movement. Bill, who had spent the summer of 1964 in Mississippi helping blacks in a voter registration project, wrote an essay that convinced Martin Luther King Jr. to launch an open housing campaign in Chicago during the summer of 1966. Bill worked closely with Dr. King and the other leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference that summer. Widely published news photos showed mobs of whites in the Cicero neighborhood throwing bottles at SCLC-organized marches of peaceful blacks and their white allies, demonstrating that virulent racism in America was not confined to the Deep South. But change did occur as a direct result of that campaign. Today, because of the changes unleashed by this movement, many of the same neighborhoods are thoroughly integrated and can be pointed to as models of peaceful relations between blacks and whites.

Bill's resume for the next decade reflects his involvement in a variety of social change movements: SCLC's Poor People's Campaign in Washington (1968), nonviolent blockades of arms shipments to Bangladesh (1971) and to Vietnam (1972), support for the AIM Indians occupying a trading post in Wounded Knee (1973), a nuclear power plant blockade at Seabrook, New Hampshire (1977). During most of this time he lived in Philadelphia with other social change activists, mostly Quakers, in what was known as the Life Center.

But perhaps more importantly, it was during this time that Bill began to establish himself in the roles to which he would devote the rest of his life — writing and conducting workshops about social change. It was in these roles that he had a direct impact on the lives of literally hundreds of social change activists throughout the world, most notably in Australia, Canada, as well as across Europe — from England, Scotland and East and West Germany to Russia, Ukraine, Byelorussia, Poland, Czechoslovakia, and Latvia. Those are merely some of the countries where he worked. We would need to spend much longer simply to name all of the movements and causes that he supported and influenced over the last 30 years, let alone describe what he actually did. We should rather reflect on some of the meaning of Bill's work.

For one thing, Bill was always thinking ahead. He was one of the first people to clearly articulate the need to address the serious environmental issues raised by our Western lifestyle. For instance, he wrote about the dangers of nuclear power in the early 1970s, writings that led many to get involved in the anti-nuclear power movement. Similarly, he wrote many years ago about the dangers of globalization with such articles as "De-developing the U.S. Through Nonviolence," also published during the 1970s.

At the same time, Bill always insisted on paying attention to the big picture. He developed a model for understanding social change movements called Movement Action Plan. The MAP model describes eight predictable stages of a successful social change movement. Bill also explained how people can be effective in four roles in these movements — citizen, rebel, change agent and reformer. His ideas are neatly summarized

in his last book, *Doing Democracy*, published late last year. He was on a book tour on the East Coast earlier this year when the symptoms of his final illness first appeared.

Bill's ideas have had a liberating impact on many of his fellow social change activists, most of whom were so totally absorbed by the details of political organizing work that they rarely had time to think about larger strategic implications. Lynne Shivers, another lifelong friend and fellow Life Center activist, explained: "Bill's work gave me a clear way to analyze my own peace movement work in terms of the big picture. For example, I could understand why it did not matter that there were so few people with awareness at the beginning since the movement would grow! It also allowed me to understand at later stages not to be anxious when people drifted off to other work, since they were taking the ideas of the campaign to different groups of people. Bill's work also helps me analyze campaigns in other countries regarding very different issues and contexts, since his theories are not bound to one culture."

It would, however, be too simplistic to try to understand Bill Moyer's impact purely in terms of ideas, as seriously as Bill and others took those ideas. Bill's personality itself exemplified what he preached. Everyone who knew Bill can remember the glint in his eye and the distinctive laugh that often accompanied comments he made on even the most serious of subjects. And he could be funny. One friend, Wende Heath, recalls standing in line for dinner with Bill at a retreat at Esalen where he took one look at the food and remarked, "Oh good, what a relief, free-range potatoes." Bill's constant gentle humor made many serious, monomaniacal activists willing to listen to someone who was clearly a formidable intellectual.

Others did not see Bill just as a guru, however. He was as much a gadfly as a guru. Always feisty, Bill liked to push people. He wanted them to open their minds to new ideas and new thoughts. He didn't want simply to convince them of the rightness of his own views, even though he strongly held them.

Bill believed in social change. But he realized that social change had to rest on personal transformation. And he was willing to push others, albeit gently, because he was always pushing himself. Besides constantly reading and talking with others about issues of personal transformation, he was involved with the Integral Transformative Practice community, and a Ken Wilbur study group that discussed these issues in depth. In recent years he led workshops called "Creating Peaceful Relationships in a Dominator Culture" that specifically reflected the inner work that he was constantly engaged in. To Bill Moyer nonviolence was not just a political tactic. It was a way of life. Bill Moyer was a gentleman in the sense of always being polite and respectful of others, but on a deeper level, he was a truly gentle man because he was genuinely at peace with himself.

It is of course impossible to know for sure, but it seems likely that Bill's search for inner peace is what drew him to Quakers. For at its best, the Religious Society of Friends represents a community that is dedicated to integrity of beliefs and action, of peace within ourselves and peace within the world. Bill moved in Quaker circles for more than 25 years before formally joining Hampstead Monthly Meeting in March 1984, while living in England for three years in the mid-1980s. One of his last wishes, expressed only three

months before his death, was to have his membership transferred to San Francisco Monthly Meeting. Friends on both sides of the Atlantic moved with unprecedented speed to accommodate his wish, and on October 13th, at its regular meeting for business, San Francisco Meeting accepted the transfer. A group of three members of our Ministry and Oversight Committee went directly from the business meeting to the hospice to welcome him into membership and held a powerful meeting for worship at his bedside.

Bill was a faithful attender of San Francisco Friends Meeting for many years. He served on our Peace and Social Concerns Committee. And he once conducted his workshop on “Creating Peaceful Relationships” specifically for Meeting members. But he rarely spoke in meeting for worship. Shortly after he was diagnosed with his terminal case of a rare form of liver cancer, however, he delivered a particularly powerful message about the spiritual challenge of living under what he called a “death sentence.”

Bill did not treat the diagnosis as the end of the story. Far from it. He took it as an opportunity to launch yet another campaign — a campaign to regain his health. Within a matter of weeks, he was embarked on a variety of treatment methods, both conventional and alternative. More important Bill gathered around himself a remarkable support community from among his far-flung network of Quaker and social change activists, including several members of our Meeting. To keep in touch they even launched a website called “healthybill,” with a mailing list of nearly one hundred participants. His sister Marion Lizzio and family friend Jack Logue came out from Philadelphia and spent the last three months with him.

About six weeks before his death, Bill’s support community organized “An Evening with Bill Moyer” at Meridian Gallery at which many of his longtime friends spoke eloquently about the impact he had had on their lives. And though he had been seriously ill for several months and had suffered considerable pain in recent days, Bill spoke for about 45 minutes, using charts and diagrams, explaining his ideas about social change and nonviolence. Thankfully this moving event was captured on videotape.

Despite all the efforts to save his life and the strong community supporting him, Bill died peacefully at the hospice on October 21st. On one level we can say that Bill’s last campaign was a failure. By the same token, we can say that his lifelong campaigns against war, racism, and ecological disasters have been failures since we see fresh evidences of the power of militarism and the forces of darkness every day.

But Bill’s life was no more a failure than the life of the carpenter’s son from Galilee who was betrayed by one of his disciples and abandoned by the others. Bill’s community of support became transformed into a community of love. We are part of that community today as we celebrate Bill’s life. Bill’s loving spirit is as alive and well as ever. We’re ready for the next battle, refreshed and reinvigorated by reflecting on the life of our friend, a peaceful warrior, a guru-gadfly, a gentle man.

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Bill Moyer’s life has been a blessing to us all. Praise God.