

Keeping the Vigil: for the Seventh Anniversary of the Interfaith Prayer Vigil for Peace

by George Ella Lyon

We have been standing
on this corner
three hundred and sixty-four
Thursdays,
almost a year
of weeks.

We have been standing
where the towers fell
saying with Gandhi
**“I have an unchangeable faith
that it is beneath the dignity of [humankind]
to resort to mutual slaughter.
I have no doubt that there is a way out.”**

We have been standing
as more hearts were torn
and the cup of blood
passed from hand to hand.

We have stood here
witnessing for another way
while our tax dollars
bore our children blindly
to kill their children.

We have grieved for all
lives exploded:

the soldier by an IED

the woman in the market
reaching for a fig

the man at prayer

the child dozing
in his grandmother's lap

the family who fled
out the back door
when they saw the sergeant

looming on their porch.
 Anything, anywhere
 to avoid the news
 that cannot be refused.

We were here
 saying with Martin Luther King
**“Darkness cannot drive out darkness;
 only light can do that.
 Hate cannot drive out hate;
 only love can do that.”**

crying “Stop now!”
 when the mosques were bombed
 the fake intelligence outted
 the images of Abu Ghraib
 burned into our brains.
 No back door
 through which to flee
 our nation’s story.

Over and over we have said
 with our signs and songs
 sweating and shivering
 reading and praying:
 We can turn around.
 This is not the way.

And cars have sped by.
 Ambulances, tank trucks,
 buses, SUV’s
 through rain and snow
 and on open-window days
 giving us the thumbs up
 or the finger, honking support
 or ignoring us completely
 as they careen from Main to
 Broadway talking on the phone.

We have sung
“We shall overcome”
 with Joan Baez in our midst
 and **“Lift me up to the light
 of change”** with Holly Near.

All along we have stood
 on this corner insisting
 our nation stop
 “staying the course.”

We have claimed
 every event
 in this hideous pageant
 as a crossroads
 where we could turn
 another way.

And now beloveds
 seven years
 after we began
 seven—that magical, Biblical
 number—enough of those drivers
 who saw or didn’t see us
 (and our brothers and sisters
 on street corners around this country)

who read or ignored
 our op eds and letters to the editor
 our emails to Congress

who joined in or jeered at our marches
 who said we should “Go back to Russia!”
 who said, “What war?”

enough of our fellow Americans
 marched to the polls on Tuesday
 and turned that gray plastic wheel
 of history
 to steer us in a new direction

to choose a leader
 whose mouth
 seems connected to his head
 and heart, whose skin
 is the color of equality

whose blood
 is the confluence of us all
 whose pledge
 is to end this war.

**We have stood
 we are standing
 we will stand
 at this corner
 of democracy
 and history
 bearing the signs
 of a new direction**

**holding the hope
of the world
in our hands.**