



CELEBRATING THE LIFE & LEGACY OF

LINDA MARIE THURSTON

7 AUGUST 1958 - 23 MAY 2021

A CELEBRATION OF LIFE & LEGACY FOR LINDA MARIE THURSTON

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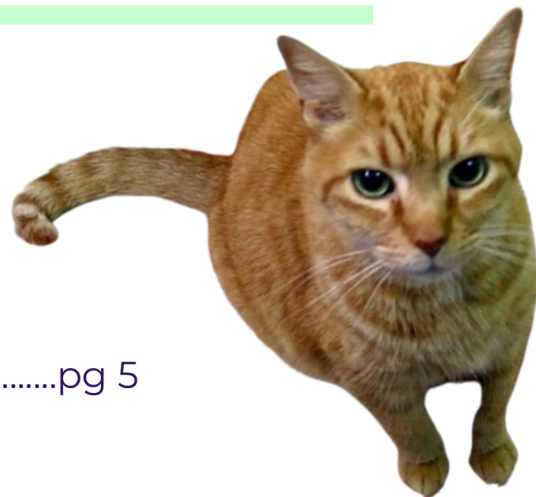
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Throughout this pamphlet, we've also included photos of Linda and some things she liked, along with poetry and writing we know she held dear.



“

Somewhere a circle of hands will open to receive us, eyes will light up as we enter, voices will celebrate with us whenever we come into our own power.

—Starhawk

”



A CELEBRATION OF LIFE & LEGACY

20 August 2022 • 2 PM • Judson Memorial Church, New York

OPENING & ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Kristine Keeling, Liz Roberts & Jeanne Strole

WELCOME

Kristine Keeling for Linda's Family,
Liz Roberts for War Resisters League
& Pilar Maschi for Critical Resistance

LINDA'S LEGACY: VIDEOS & READINGS

Friends, comrades and family share some of Linda's countless impacts on struggles for peace and freedom.

Speakers & Readers include: Fran Roznowski, Steven Oliver, Noni Gordon, Amber Roberts, Kazembe Balagun, and Carla Dawson.

MUSIC

Roger Oliver, JenDog Lonewolf, & Jeremiah Hosea of Earthdriver

CLOSING

Kristine Keeling & Liz Roberts



“ Revolution is not
a one time event. ”
— Audre Lorde



A Statement from the Family about Linda Thurston

We each had a unique relationship with Linda. She was someone who would write you detailed letters in a perfect scrawl that looked like artwork.

Regardless of whether those letters came from New York, New England, or Central Africa, Linda would describe her experiences in a way that would make you admire her and wish you were there with her.

She would always relate to you as if you on the same level, even if you were a kindergartener and she was a teenager.

Around Linda, we could be us. In fact, she loved us for it.

Although we all didn't speak every day, when we did reconnect, it was easy to pick up where we left off.

We miss her guidance. We miss her thirst for social justice that was contagious. We miss her smile. We miss her style. We miss her.

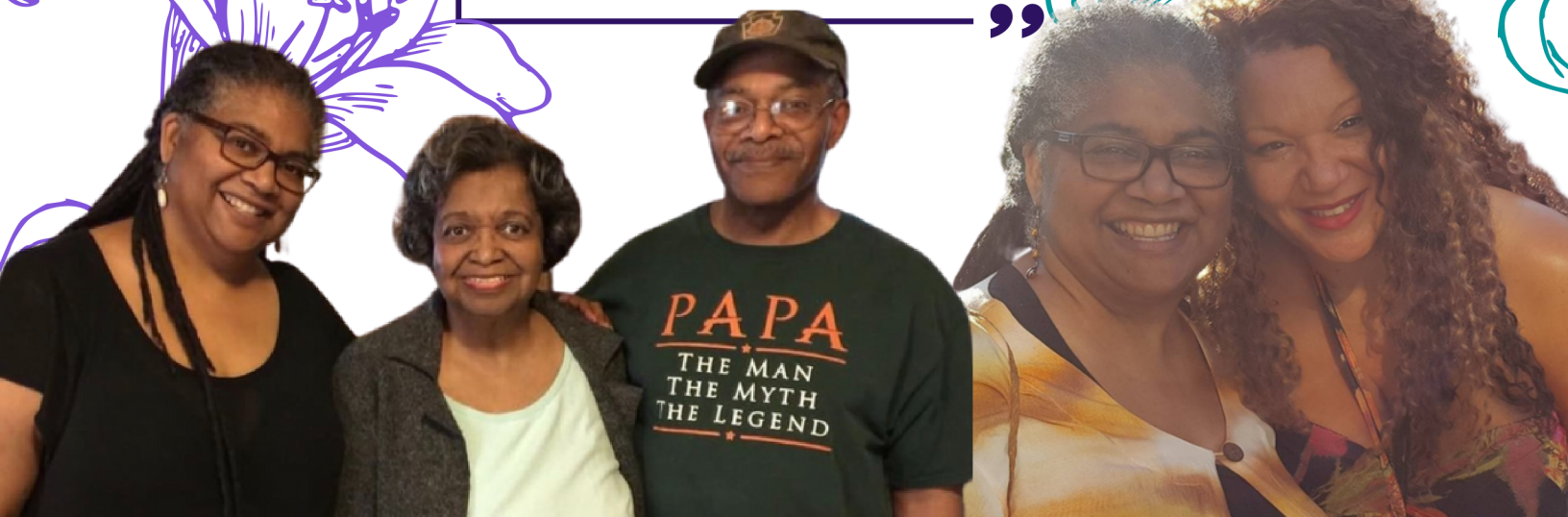
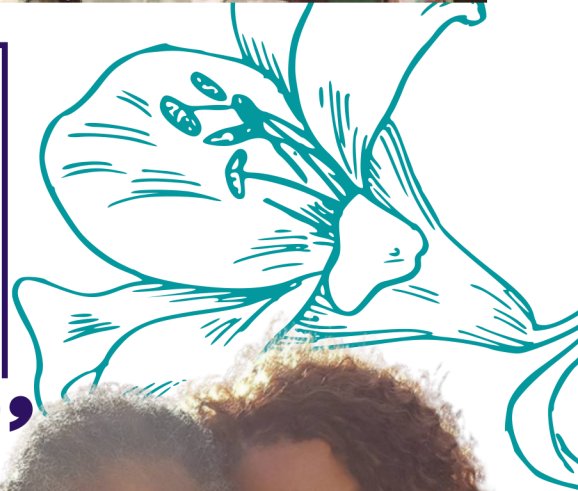
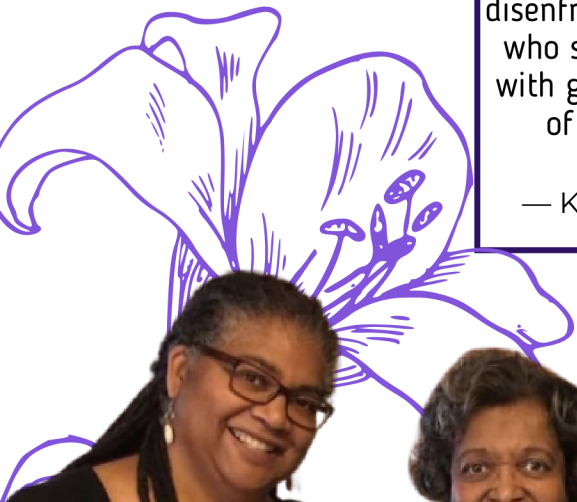


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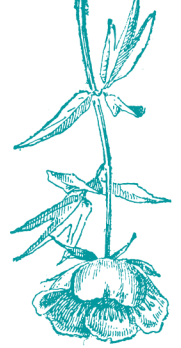
Linda was committed, she was committed to her community, to the disenfranchised, the displaced, and those who struggled to be heard. She moved with grace, integrity and joy, regardless of the heavy mantle she carried.

— Kristine Keeling, Linda's cousin

”



Linda & the (Audre) Lorde



I was going to die, sooner or later, whether or not I had even spoken myself. My silences had not protected me. Your silences will not protect you.... What are the words you do not yet have? What are the tyrannies you swallow day by day and attempt to make your own, until you will sicken and die of them, still in silence? We have been socialized to respect fear more than our own need for language.

I began to ask each time: "What's the worst that could happen to me if I tell this truth?" Unlike women in other countries, our breaking silence is unlikely to have us jailed, "disappeared" or run off the road at night. Our speaking out will irritate some people, get us called bitchy or hypersensitive and disrupt some dinner parties. And then our speaking out will permit other women to speak, until laws are changed and lives are saved and the world is altered forever.

Next time, ask: What's the worst that will happen? Then push yourself a little further than you dare. Once you start to speak, people will yell at you. They will interrupt you, put you down and suggest it's personal. And the world won't end.



And the speaking will get easier and easier. And you will find you have fallen in love with your own vision, which you may never have realized you had. And you will lose some friends and lovers, and realize you don't miss them. And new ones will find you and cherish you. And you will still flirt and paint your nails, dress up and party, because, as I think Emma Goldman said, "If I can't dance, I don't want to be part of your revolution." And at last you'll know with surpassing certainty that only one thing is more frightening than speaking your truth. And that is not speaking. //



— Audre Lorde



“When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid.”
— Audre Lorde





Linda, War Resisters League Operations Coordinator, comrade, friend, lifelong radical who wove us together.

Linda M. Thurston first started working with the **War Resisters League (WRL)** in 1997 as an organizer for the **Day Without the Pentagon**, a two-year long project. Focusing on the transfer of military spending to local communities, it culminated with a mass rally at the Pentagon on October 19, 1998, WRL's 75th Anniversary. Linda coordinated the entire campaign culminating in the event, and later joined the national WRL staff collective in 2007. She was responsible for implementing and maintaining daily operations, the national office space at the Peace Pentagon, coordinating meetings, overseeing the website and merchandise store, and was known to geek out about tech things. Linda was a lifelong dedicated movement archivist. She gathered, held, and saved, much of WRL's history and institutional knowledge. The office chair she chose had been used by A.J. Muste and Ralph DiGia, two early WRL leaders. Linda played a key role in WRL marking our 90th and 95th anniversaries, and had been preparing for WRL's 100th Anniversary in 2023.



Linda was deeply committed to WRL's interns, and was a mentor for many. She kept in touch with them, over many years, continuing those supportive relationships, which gave her joy, as well as a sense of connection to burgeoning revolutionaries in the movement. **The Linda Thurston Archival Internship** has been established to honor Linda's work and mentorship; it creates an opportunity to train people in the peace and justice movements to preserve their history for future generations.

Linda's time in Philly brought her close to **the MOVE family** and the efforts to free Mumia Abu Jamal. In many ways, it was Linda's connection to Mumia and her years of work in abolitionist and political prisoner solidarity campaigns, that inspired WRL to select Mumia for WRL's Peace Award in 2015.



Linda was a visionary, an intellectual, a radical thinker always looking ahead with an eye to the past historical context. Linda was love and loved many creatures and things; She loved **Rustie the cat** and WRL kids whose pictures hung in her office. She loved magic and science fiction and was a Star Trek nerd. She was a social weaver who committed her life towards ending the violence of policing, imprisonment, and militarism, and worked towards building systems that promote community power, healing, restoration and reconciliation, accessibility, and an investment in life-affirming resources. She wove us together. Linda's passing leaves a big void in our hearts and our organization.



“ You have to be persistent. There was a time when people thought there would never be an end to slavery. If someone had said that it would be abolished 45 years later, people would have thought they were crazy. But there were enough people who kept believing...”

- Linda Marie Thurston

Read Linda's Obituary here:

warresisters.org/she-wove-us-together-linda-marie-thurston-1958-2021



Linda, Critical Resistance & Building a Movement to Abolish the Prison Industrial Complex (PIC)

Linda will be remembered for her warmth, generosity and grounding ability to welcome organizers into movements against war, US imperialism, and the prison industrial complex (PIC). Within the varying organizations she'd been part of, she did the hard consistent work of setting up the back-end systems and infrastructure that integrate and support the everyday participation of many within our movement. She also worked to connect people cross locally, from local to national and internationally – often through her steadfast communications work and organizing.

Linda's contributions to the PIC abolitionist movement are innumerable. Before **Critical Resistance (CR)**, Linda demonstrated fierce commitment to the anti-prison movement including her work to free political prisoners, whereby she was a co-founding member of the **International Concerned Family and Friends of Mumia Abu-Jamal**. As the Director of the **American Friends Services Committee's National Criminal Justice Program**, she coordinated the **200 Years of Penitentiary Project**, organizing with faith communities around the issue of prison abolition, and edited the 1993 book **A Call to Action** by the National Commission on Crime and Justice.



Her commitment to internationalism spanned her support for the anti-apartheid struggle in the 80s and her work with **Amnesty International** to abolish the death penalty during the 90s, through her time with CR and the **War Resisters League (WRL)**. Throughout her time organizing with CR and other formations, she uplifted and helped to advance an abolitionist political framework that championed people most impacted by the PIC – particularly prisoners – along with multi-generational movement building and history.



CR recognizes Linda's role as irreplaceable in helping to build Critical Resistance as an organization. She was one of the coordinators of **CR's Northeast Regional Conference** in 1999-2001, which took place in New York City in 2001. The second of CR's conferences, CR East **seeded PIC abolition as a concrete organizing strategy**. Geared toward sharing skills to make local organizing against the PIC more effective, and prioritizing the participation and leadership of people most impacted by the PIC, this conference helped launch CR as an organization just two months later. Linda contributed to a wide range of essential tasks to move CR's work forward, such as her editorial support in **CR's 2005 republication of Instead of Prisons** by the **Prison Research Education Action Project**, and her work in 2006 to support outreach and communications for the **Campaign for Amnesty for Prisoners of Katrina**. Over the years, Linda attended CR national retreats building with and guiding younger members, and supported organizers through CR's New York chapter, regularly sharing her wealth of movement history knowledge. More recently, Linda served on the **Community Advisory Board for CR**.



During her long, impactful career, Linda was also the **Center for Constitutional Rights' Coordinator of Education, Outreach and the Ella Baker Internship program** and worked with numerous organizations, including **the Brecht Forum, Prison Radio Project, Funding Exchange, and Human Rights Watch**. Her contributions were rooted in care for everyday people, with a broad vision of liberation for all.

She is survived by her mother **Barbara Thurston**, her brother **James Thurston Jr.** (both of Bangor, Maine) and his children **Rachel** and **TJ**, her sister **Nicole Thurston Thibedeau** of Rhode Island, Nicole's husband **Christian** and their children, **Caleb, Robert Journey** and **Armani**, her cousin **Kristine Keeling** among many other beloved kin, mentees, and the dozens of organizations and hundreds of activists to whom she gave so much.

In Linda's own words, when honoring Malcolm X only a few days before her passing, **"What is remembered, lives."**

Long live Linda M. Thurston!

With Love and Solidarity,
— Critical Resistance



A Poem To Linda

The words won't come.
 Stuck in my throat,
 Garbled letters
 Jutting into ligaments.
 I'm trying to birth you right out into us again and again,
 so you can tell us how it was and how you are and how it's supposed to be.



In this deep grief,
 A smoldering syrup that keeps me close
 I know only you would understand,
 I'm looking for you now!
 Your hand a web, an index into our time,
 That reached in and grabbed us by the chin to bring us up
 to this life, the pain, the posturing, the pandemic,
 The portal.



I dreamt of burning pires on flat land;
 Thought someone told me, showed me
 How the light left you
 to breed an altar.
 The moon finding you sleeping, celestial wave-making.



You long prepared for
 This, the grief spun of wires and leftover, charred
 For the murdered and the ill,
 And you gave yourself over to it,
 Arms folded like skirts ready to hide and hold the newest
 child.



Where do we turn to now?
 Too late for mirrors and tricks and tirades.
 Only you can grasp this loss,
 Of you.
 Will you hold us tight.
 Cause we're floating out,
 And drowning.



— By Susan Kingsland
 June 21, 2021

Prison Abolition, Political Prisoners, and the Building of Critical Resistance: An Interview with Linda by Matt Meyer, War Resisters League

From *Let Freedom Ring: A Collection of Documents from the Movements to Free U.S. Political Prisoners*

Matt Meyer (MM): You have a long history of working not just for political prisoners, but for the rights and freedom of prisoners in general, as well as for prison abolition. You've worked with a number of the key regional and national organizations in this field. Would you share some of those experiences?

Linda Thurston (LT): When I became the director of the New England Criminal Justice Program of the Quaker-based American Friends Service, one of the big issues was a tendency to lock any prisoners who spoke out on any issues in solitary confinement—sometimes for years. These were clear cases of political repression, locking people up not because they posed any threats but because they were willing to fight for their rights, even as prisoners. Many folks whom I worked with then may not have landed in prison because of political activities, but they certainly got politicized once in prison.

Partly because I was in Boston, where there was a very strong anti-apartheid movement and a very strong Central American solidarity movement, I learned about many people doing time because of refusal to cooperate with federal grand jury investigations. At the Red Book Store in Cambridge, I remember meeting some people—like Tommy Manning and Jaan Laaman of the Ohio 7 case—who are still political prisoners to this day. Kazi Toure, now out of prison and the national co-chair of the Jericho Amnesty Movement, was around in those days, along with his brother, Arnie King, who is also still doing time despite an incredible record of community support and work. I think there are some regional cultural differences that have shaped people's political development differently. In New York City, for example, most of the political prisoners came directly out of the local Black Panther Party. But in Boston and later, in Philadelphia, with the case of MOVE and the MOVE 9, I had a different framework. While I was working for AFSC, I began to learn more about political prisoners through my own writing and radio projects.



As an AFSC staff person, I was involved in the 200 Years of Penitentiary project, recognizing Philadelphia's Walnut Street Jail as the first prison in the USA. The campaign was a way of doing prison abolition work in the 1980s, and I got to dress up in my Sunday best and speak to all the Quaker groups and Methodists and Presbyterians and United Church folks. From there, I got to work with the National Inter-Religious Task Force on Criminal Justice. Those networks, with people like Episcopal Minister S. Michael Yasutake (founding chair of the Prisoner of Conscience Project) building bridges between social and political prisoners, helped create lasting relationships and commitments. Fast forward some years, to the early 1990s, and I ended up working with Amnesty International USA on death penalty issues.

I actually had, from the beginning, some very real issues with Amnesty International. In part, this was because Amnesty refused to name Nelson Mandela, or any number of other people, as political prisoners. I didn't understand at that moment the human rights movement's nuanced differences in definition regarding political prisoners, prisoners of war, and prisoners of conscience. Nor did I understand how amazingly egg-headedly legalistic and academistic the whole human rights framework could be. But at that particular moment, between 1994 and 1995, executions in the USA had almost doubled in one year. It seemed important to do that work with those resources, but it was one of the most frustrating experiences of my life. Amnesty is an organization that grows out of the Cold War mentality. They began as a group that issued bulletins on behalf of prisoners of conscience, one prisoner from the West and one from the Soviet Union, trying to embarrass those governments by bombarding them with letters. While I was there, we did begin trying to get Amnesty to pay attention to the case of Black Panther death row inmate Mumia Abu-Jamal. But I could not stay at Amnesty for long.

The job I had at the Center for Constitutional Rights was coordinator of the Ella Baker Student Program, which I used to refer to as my job of training little "baby radical lawyers." These were young people that we would recruit from various law schools who thought that they wanted to be "movement" lawyers. Whatever issues they were eventually going to work on, it was crucial that they get an education in the history and the current way of looking at the role of prisons in society and the reality of political prisoners. I remember bringing in Attica prison rebellion survivor and representative Big Black in, to come and talk to these law students after we'd shown them the film Attica. It was a strong way of educating and radicalizing people who could have a direct effect on the lives of prisoners.

MM: What were and are some of the issues involved in building bridges between the people who do work around political prisoners and those who work around the prison-industrial complex or prison abolition?

LT: I think there are people who come out of a political context, who make many assumptions about categories such as "social prisoners." Some people who work on political prisoner cases have, in a general theoretical sense, the idea that prisons themselves are bad, but also that prisons are where bad folks are. If you stole something, you're a thief. If you killed somebody, you're a murderer. And that is what you are, that is who you are, and that is all you are. I really have a problem with that idea, maybe coming from my spirituality or maybe just my common-sense political analysis. Nobody is only one thing, and no one is only as bad as the worst thing they ever did. If that were true, we'd all be in big trouble because we're all human. Some people who won't do work around social prisoners or politicized social prisoners have this perspective, and many people who do work with the general prison population do it purely from a social service perspective and aren't interested in working on political prisoner issues. The key is to see the connections between these struggles, and not to pit them against one another. We've got lots of work ahead of us.

It also has now gotten way more complicated because more and more political prisoners are spending vast, unbelievable amounts of time in prison, and not getting out. Political prisoners are dying in prison, so the issue becomes more urgent. At the same time, as I've said, vastly increased numbers of people are being sent to prison—also for long periods of time. In countries where the concept of "political prisoner" is recognized as a legal category, there may still be human rights problems and justice issues, but the complications and divisions between tend to be easier to deal with. It is agreed that there are political prisoners, and it is agreed that there are major problems in the prison-industrial complex (PIC). Here in the U.S., an urgent task of the current political moment is for folks doing political prisoner support work to recognize the broader context of the PIC.



One place where we've seen this take place is around the case of Mumia Abu-Jamal. Mumia's case has brought so many people from different political movements and perspectives together. In general, though, with all the cases, we need to make more opportunities for all kinds of interaction and discussion. Not to be naïve, but these dialogues between those of us doing basically similar work are an urgent necessity. We've got to find greater ways to work together.

MM: You've been active, since the beginning, in the development of Critical Resistance (CR), which in some ways tries to present a new framework about how to do some of this work. And you continue to help bridge the gap between work around prison abolition and around political prisoners. Could you describe the current national scene, around the time of the tenth anniversary of CR, and discuss how things have changed, and how they've stayed the same?

LT: It may be a new framework and a new concept in this current iteration, but the notion of prison abolition is much older than the 1998 founding conference of CR. I actually didn't get involved in CR until after that initial national conference in Oakland, but I did attend the conference. There were many folks at the first Critical Resistance gathering who were overjoyed that people were talking about prison abolition again. We didn't know that over a thousand people would show up, with energy to build local and regional chapters. We clearly hit upon a moment when people were ready to work on issues involving the role of prisons in U.S. life.

One issue that we've been dealing with, and need to continue to deal with, is the role of people who have been most impacted by the prison industrial complex. Our organizations can't just be made up of people who want to work on an issue. It has to include people who did time, people whose family members have done time. These folks must be in the leadership of the movement and the leadership of the struggle, because in many ways they can best understand and convey the complexities of the system on a local and national level. As we all need to step up and become active when that's needed, we also need to learn to step back and take leadership from the folk who haven't been in leadership. Some of us older folks need to learn that in regard to the youth, too.

Another thing that's fairly unique about CR, in my experience, is the way in which the regional organizations reflect the national program as well as the specific political context in a given region of the country. We've been weaving a sort of web between the local networks and the national group.

There's also a great deal of attention in CR given to political education. Far too often in our movements we don't find out where people are coming from. If somebody shows up for a meeting, we're so glad that they're there, we'll just give them some things to do and tell them when and where to go for the next meeting.

But CR really works to build community. I feel very connected to the local folks in the organization, even though I work more with the national. We are in a situation where someone can put a call out and say, "Yo, the sister who was at the meeting last night—her kid just got arrested. Can any of you get to court?" And people do it. It reminds me of working with the groups in Boston when I was younger: that sense of community, of family, of connectedness. That feeling also comes up when I get emails from different political prisoner support groups saying, "So and so on the inside is sick, we've got to jump in here and deal with this."

I guess I've come full circle after all these years, realizing that we need the political analysis, we need the political education, we need the strategizing, we need more bodies, and we need resources. But we also damn sure better remember that we're human beings and we need to support one another on all levels or we're not going to make it. Sometimes our failure is as simple as calling a meeting at dinnertime and not having so much as a pitcher of water at the table. If we're going to survive, if we're going to succeed, if we're going to win, if we're going to free folks, we've got to get better at doing the human piece of building movement by building community.



**Merry Meet. Merry Part.
And Merry Meet Again.**

