



The CommUUnicator

Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Waynesboro

George Thompson, Publisher Extraordinaire

By Anne Cooper-Chen

“I’ve always been fascinated by place,” says UUFW member George Thompson, who in 1990 established the Center for American Places, his own publishing imprint. Indeed, recent titles from his namesake GFT Publishing evoke strikingly diverse locales: *Roadside South*, *Mississippi River* and *Iceland Wintertide*.

“We publish big books with all kinds of illustrations—photographs, art,” he relates. Forthcoming titles from GFT, headquartered in downtown Staunton, include a 150-year history of Yellowstone and an innovative volume on the Uyghurs of China, which “involved a major translation effort and reads back to front” due to the configuration of the Uyghur language.

Author/editor of eight books himself, including *Landscape in America*, George has shepherded many works by others, such that GFT has garnered 135 major awards in 35 fields. Best book honors include an accolade from the American Historical Association and the International Latino Book Award. Those awards do not include any Pulitzer Prizes, however, since “we can’t afford the high fee” to submit an entry to the Pulitzer competition.

“Finding revenue is hard,” George continues. “None of these books support themselves. People in the arts know they need money. Publishers have their own strategies

for increasing readership. The U.S. market has continued to decrease, but our international sales are now up.

“The business of publishing has changed radically in my lifetime,” George relates. “In 1984, we had one computer for 100 people. Now we’re in the digital age [and even small] university presses use four-color book jackets.”



In 1984, when George joined Johns Hopkins University Press as acquisitions editor, he began commuting seven hours to Johns Hopkins, having moved to the Valley in 1983. His wife Cynthia, a distinguished professor of dance, retired in 2021 from JMU. Married in 1978, the couple has a daughter, son-in law and grandson.

As you read this profile, George is serving as the Publisher in Residence at the University of Alabama’s College of Arts and Sciences. “Few faculty know how to get published,” he says, so three times a semester—twice meeting

with faculty, once with grad students —he travels to Tuscaloosa to provide advice, help and contacts with publishers. “Grad students tend to choose topics that will sell mere hundreds of dollars worth of copies.”

George was born in Colorado and raised in Connecticut in the Congregationalist and Methodist churches. A UUFW member since about 2005, UUFW “is the only church I’ve ever belonged to. I found my home in UUFW.” *The website of George Thompson’s publishing company, gftbooks.com, includes information and cover images of currently available and forthcoming books. The site also profiles George himself.*

Feeding the Hungry

By Joe and Diane Good

For the last several years our Fellowship has been participating in The First Presbyterian Church of Waynesboro Food Bank Program. Our efforts to help local people experiencing food insecurity were fairly successful for some time. Alas, that is no longer the case. Recently, contributions of food and personal care items have been much reduced. The orange collection bins in the foyer of Fellowship Hall seldom have much in them. With the addition of our sidewalk pantry, which is generally stocked with items from those bins, we seldom have anything much to bring to First Presbyterian Church. Sadly, with increased costs of keeping bodies and souls together — food, shelter clothing, transportation, etc. — the need is greater than ever.

Most of us shop routinely and are favored with the means to buy pretty much whatever we want. May we suggest that on each shopping occasion we remember to get one

extra item to place in our orange bins. And remember to bring something each week, not just for our first Sunday children’s red wagon collection.

Community News

Stanton’s Building Bridges for the Greater Good is having an Open Meeting at 6:00 p.m. on Monday, September 19, in the Stanton City Hall Council Chambers. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss what are believed to be the most important issues candidates for the Stanton City Council and School Board should address. It is a lead-up to the BBGG Candidates Forum scheduled for Saturday, October 15, 1:00-4:00 p.m. in the Gypsy Hill Park gym.

Hazardous waste collection happens in Augusta County only once a year. It is coming up on Saturday, September 24th from 8:30 to noon at the Government Center. Residents may bring used oil, antifreeze, gas, solvents, oil-based paint, acids, pesticides and herbicides to the event for proper disposal or recycling.

End-of-Summer Song

Listen,
It’s the bluejays’ end-of-summer song,
A piercing reminiscence of days of heat,
Of raided nests, of scattered sparrows
At the feeder, and their own dispersed broods;
A song of longing for abbreviated days,
Dried grasses, drifting leaves,
Red berries in the snow.

Joe Good

