

Bearing Witness

by Linda Simoni-Wastila

In the meeting house this morning, silence. No machines thrumming, no rumble of moving earth. Six others sit in equal quiet. A blue jay caws from someplace distant. I look down to my clasped hands. The query runs through me: *Where there are hatred, division, and strife, how are we instruments of reconciliation and love?*

Pews creak. Blue pulses below my wrist, skin thin as hope. The jay cackles again, the same or another I cannot tell, but Franklin rises and slides the door bolt. No one speaks; it is understood our other Friends fled South through the excavated tunnels. Decades ago, the *Sin Papeles* built the tunnels and immigrated North. When they crossed the border, broken and naked, we sheltered and fed them in our safe houses until they ran down our schools, shot the police, and bankrupted our hospital. Their children hold the town captive.

Still, we hold *Sin Papeles* to the light.

To the light we hold our Friends traveling South. I hold my daughter, her husband and infant to the light. My cousin Lorraine, the kindergarteners I taught. I hold them all to the light.

A shadow in the window. A flutter of blue feathers. Footsteps rustle brittle leaves. Far off, the staccato of gunfire. I smell the smoke before I see it curl past the window. Muriel reaches for me and we grip hands.

We are instruments of peace, we whisper. We are instruments of love.

I hold us to the light.

