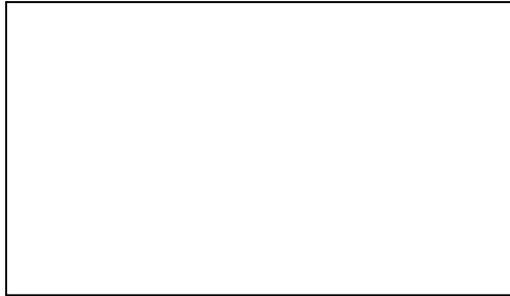


## Session 2: Isolation, Class, and Community



**Preparation:** Read chapters 3 and 4 of *No Silent Witness*

**Opening:** Susan Griffen, "Thoughts on Writing: A Diary," *The Writer on Her Work* Ed. Janet Sternburg (New York: W.W. Norton, 1980):

*Silences. Not the silences between notes of music, or the silences of a sleeping animal, or the calm of a glassy surfaced river witnessing the outstretched wings of a heron. Not the silence of an emptied mind. But this other silence. That silence which can feel like a scream, in which there is no peace. The grim silence between two lovers who are quarreling. The painful silence of the one with tears in her eyes who will not cry. The silence of a whole people who have been massacred. Of a whole sex made mute, or not educated to speech. The silence of a mind afraid to admit truth to itself. This is the silence the poet dreads.*

*And now I think of the wonderful laughter of a room full of women, the excited talking. The joy. Or the almost blistering crackle of energy in a room full of women when one is singing or reading her work to the others. Every word counts."*

**Discussion**

## **A. Isolation**

- 1. How common today are the factors that isolated the minister's wife, Etta Eliot, and loyal church member Kate Bingham?**
- 2. Both Etta and Kate were aware of the disconnect between the pulpit's description of Ed and the reality of his addiction and failings as a husband. What impact did this double vision appear to have, and what effect does it have on lay people today?**
- 3. Would you have approved of the Eliot ministers' giving their families' wealth away? What, if anything, would have been wrong with it? What, if anything, would have redeemed it?**
- 4. How much sacrifice should ministers' spouses be asked to make for the "cause"?**
- 6. When it comes to class differences, what are our cultural comfort zones as UUs? As UU women?**

## **B. Women's Community**

- 1. As a means of finding community, how helpful are writing and publishing?**
- 2. What is it that Etta derives from speaking before a live audience that she doesn't get from her unseen readers?**
- 3. What are the relative benefits of women's discussion groups, reading circles, and programs with outside speakers?**

**Closing : Ellen Tucker Emerson to her sister Edith, June 12, 1874, in *Letters of Ellen Tucker Emerson*, vol II, ed. Edith E.W. Gregg (Kent State University 1982):**

***Wednesday morning early start. Screams and embraces at the depot, accompanied by much laughing, dancing for joy, and crazy marching up and down the platform, because we were***

*such a multitude, and going to a Conference and it was a heavenly day. I don't believe any other thing throws people into such a state of wild delight, it surpasses starting for Class-Day when you're young, this going to a Conference when you're old. Mrs. Cheney and Mrs. Folsom just as happy as the rest, though Mrs. C. hadn't been able to close an eye all night. Away we frolicked to Arlington, desirous to extend the right hand of fellowship to every mortal that got into the cars, as doubtless they were going too. We instantly pervaded the whole vestry and found the Arlington ladies in as high spirits as ourselves, all cutting bread and buttering it, and parading about in swarms, with hams and table-cloths and baskets and cans, all in clean calicoes and broad smiles and making such a noise of talk and play. The organ drew us right into church, and we began to sing before we could find the place in the hymnbook, church already full and everyone too happy to live.*

**Suggestions for Further Reading:**

For the larger context of women's access to control over their reproductive lives and choices, *The Moral Property of Women: A History of Birth Control Politics in America* by Linda Gordon.

Still one of the best books on women and writing and class issues is Tillie Olsen's *Silences* (New York: Bantam, 1982).