IN INDIANAPOLIS we have been working on defunding the Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) for several months. On November 15, 2016, a crowd of about 200 of us alongside Native Americans in traditional dress marched through downtown Indianapolis with our signs about defunding the pipeline. We stopped in front of two of the banks involved with funding the pipeline, Chase and PNC Bank. The crowd stood in silence as people went in to close their accounts. That day the group withdrew $110,000 dollars.

Yet my own effort to close my account was much more difficult than I thought it would be.

Because of administrative changes, I first had a lot of trouble getting the forms to change my paycheck to direct deposit. It took time to set up paying bills. Also, I realized that I had initially chosen Chase bank because they had the most ATM locations. This was important because I don’t own a car. There can be major inconveniences from defunding. I did it anyway.

I went down to the Circle in the center of downtown Indianapolis where the Chase Tower dominates the Indianapolis skyline. I spent about an hour walking around the Circle with my sign, looking to see if anyone else had shown up from my local group. It is a little nerve wracking to be walking around by yourself like that, but, for better or worse, no one looks directly at you or engages you, for the most part.

I had finally worked up the courage to enter the Chase Bank Tower to close my account. I had no idea what the reaction to entering with my sign would be. I just held it at my side, and then placed it next to my chair as I waited. The bank officer greeted me with a smile and said someone would be with me shortly. He came back after about ten minutes to say he appreciated my patience—it was a busy time.

Mostly people coming into the bank ignored me, but there were a number of glances in my direction.
When I was shown into the banker’s office, she saw my sign, smiled, put her hands together and bowed to me, and said, “We are on the same page with this.” She put her finger to her lips with a smile indicating she shouldn’t be saying that, officially. She was very pleasant and helpful. When I left, she took my hand in both of hers.

As I was walking past the lobby officer when I left, I reached out my hand, which he took in both of his hands, giving me a big smile and a little bow as well. I told him I appreciated his patience with my freedom of speech, and he smiled and said, “Of course.”

My little bit was added to the total amount of personal money divested so far: $72,944,005.39 dollars according to defunddapl.org.

I felt a transfer of goodwill between me and those in the bank to such an extent that I returned later in the week to drop off three copies of the blog article I had written describing how well they had treated me and the whole defunding process. When the banker I had dealt with previously glanced up, she gave me a big smile and waved me in. She got up and again took my hand in hers and asked what she could do for me. She told me she and her husband had talked about our visit and the pipeline.

This is how our stories spread.

During meeting for business in February at North Meadow Circle of Friends, the meeting approved closing its Chase Bank account in solidarity with the #noDAPL movement.

Jeff was born into the Bear Creek meeting community in rural Iowa, which is part of Iowa Yearly Meeting (Conservative), where he currently serves as clerk of the Yearly Meeting’s Peace and Social Concerns Committee. He attended Scattergood Friends School and Farm and currently attends North Meadow Circle of Friends in Indianapolis.

Jeff's Witness at Chase Bank

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Jeff Kisling
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P.O. Box 6787
Albany, CA 94706
info@quakerearthcare.org
tel:510-542-9606

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