

THE Round Table

Summer 2010

"...a path from where we are to where we should be." --Peter Maurin

Story Telling



Why This Issue?

Let me tell you a couple of stories. I was sitting in the community room at Karen House with about eight or nine of my fellow Catholic Workers. We were brainstorming what the topic might be for the next Round Table issue. We tossed about several ideas as we always do, seeing what might develop with a particular idea. I realized that it all sounded too familiar to me. Everything sounded the same, like something said or tried a hundred times before. Whenever I spoke, I kept offering ideas like, "Let's review the Nobel Prize winners for literature, or our favorite novel." At the end of the discussion I realized, "I just need to read a novel!" I felt dried out like an old reed.

Recently I was sitting somewhere else. I was in the back of St. Cronan's church at the 5pm Saturday Mass, a Mass I like because it is small and quiet. The reading for the day was one of my favorites, the return of the prodigal son. I was moved as I usually am by this story because it offers hope and reminds us of the great mercy of God. In his reflection on the reading, Gerry Kleba told us yet another story. During the Reconciliation process after the end of Apartheid in South Africa, there was a particular trial. An older woman, whose son had been killed during the Apartheid, faced the man who had been responsible for his death. Facing him, and in a sense handing down his sentence to him, she said something along these lines, "Since you have taken from me my only son and left me alone, you must now take his place and become my son. You must come to visit me in my old age." The South African man was given new life when he heard this response, and in hearing it, so was I. The woman's unexpected greatness of heart made me feel that everything was not old, but young and alive, and that life was full of great possibilities.

The Round Table committee kindly responded to my need for inspiration and decided to invite you to submit stories for publication here. Included in this issue of The Round Table, therefore, are several of them. Carolyn Griffeth and Tery McNamee have offered several about dumpstering that may make you want to go and check out your local dumpster. Claire Lakey contributed a story of early Catholic Worker days in St. Louis. Ellen Rehg tells of being inspired by two women in need, Mike Bremer offers an anarchist tale from the south side of Chicago, Angie O'Gorman tells a heartbreaking story about losing God and Allah. Virginia retells her experience being kidnapped by the Contra. Mary Ann McGivern, long-time RT story-teller tells a story about male resident- yes there once was a man at Karen House- Donald Cress. I pass on my own memory of an early Karen House guest who taught me something about love. J.P. Murray writes a story about the patient presence and love of a father through the eyes of his son. Rick Mihm literally encourages us with his own tale of courage.

As if stories weren't enough, we offer several pieces of poetry offered by St. Louis' finest, Mark Chmiel, Tina Busch-Nema, Megan Ramsey, Bill Ramsey and Rebecca Gorley.

In place of the regularly featured articles we have two book reviews, one by Colleen Kelly of Angie O'Gorman's first novel, A Book of Sins, and one by Ben Schartman on a new book, Contesting Patriotism, by long-time Karen House community member, Patrick G. Coy, Lynne M. Woehrle and Gregory M. Maney. Lastly, we offer from Little House by Mike Baldwin and from Karen House by James Meinert.

Stories can give us a new perspective on life and on human possibilities, they can move us, inspire us, and bring back meaning to our own lives when it seems to have slipped away from us. Thanks to all who sent in stories and we hope that they are enjoyed by all.



- Teka Childress

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Beginnings

by Claire Lakey

I first heard about Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker movement when I was a junior in high school at Loretto Academy in St. Louis, MO. It was in 1949. We were fortunate to have a wonderful principal, Sr. Martha Marie, a contemporary of and very much like Sr. Mary Luke Tobin, who was the only woman religious to be invited to Vatican II. These were amazing women.

In our Religion/Sociology class Sr. Martha Marie introduced us to 'social justice issues' in the Church and often invited speakers to our Friday assemblies who were involved in various movements in the Church. Some of these were the Catholic Worker, Friendship House, Worker Priests in France and Young Christian Workers. We all subscribed to a wonderfully enriching and informative publication called TODAY magazine which came out of Chicago and presented us with a whole new area of issues.

At that time there was a bookstore and discussion place called The Center. It was first located on Boyle and Olive, and then later was moved to a small storefront near Grand and Lindell. It was there that I began to meet people from some of these movements that I've mentioned, especially the Catholic Worker. Some of these folks were Ann and Bolyn Carter, Margaret and Cy Eichele, Dave Dunne and Mignon Mc Menamy, Ruth Heaney, Gertie and Marty Paul, Jack and Fran Woltjen and Frank Lakey. There were some others but these are the ones I came to know well.

After several years I became engaged to and married Frank Lakey. Frank had lived at the Catholic Worker in New York one summer while Dorothy Day was there. He was so impressed with who she was: her spirituality, love for the poor, love for the Church, her stand on non-violence and how she lived out the Beatitudes and the Works of Mercy. She demanded much of herself and of others. Frank remembered how he and another young man who was had also been in the service were trying to rig up a shower arrangement because of the heat and the condition they were often in after a day of hard work. Dorothy became a bit annoyed and said something that made them feel that they were trying to have too comfortable a bathing situation. However, they continued to work on this and did, indeed, have their shower!

In the next years Dorothy would come to St. Louis, now and then. She sometimes visited Holy Cross Church, in Baden, to connect with Monsignor Martin Hellreigel, a leader in the Liturgical Movement at that time. She also came to visit with those people whom I mentioned earlier, especially Ruth Heaney and the Pauls and Woltjens who were trying to establish a Catholic Worker Farming Community in Starkenberg, Mo.

When Frank and I were first married and lived on Pestalozzi Street, Amon Hennessy came for a short visit. He spoke

at The Center about his lifestyle and ideas on non-violence and stirred up quite a lot of discussion as only he could do. We have been fortunate, in the places we've lived, to have enough room to have a 'Christroom'. There were others from New York who came down to spend a few days with us. We were blessed.

After Frank and I moved to Dogtown, Dorothy came to stay with us for a short time on her way to Starkenberg to visit, mentor and comfort Ruth Heaney, who was at that time widowed and had six small children. Ruth and the Pauls had been sharing a big farmhouse, but after Larry's death the Starkenberg community rallied and built her a wonderful home just for her family. Ruth held to a simple and rather difficult lifestyle, no electricity, hard work and nothing really easy. When Dorothy saw this, at her first visit there, she strongly encouraged Ruth to make things more beautiful- to have flowers outside and plants inside and to have it be a warm and welcoming place. Indeed she did this through the years, and coming to Starkenberg was always a special and wonderful experience. Ruth truly had the ability to bring out the best in people.

The St. Louis Catholic Workers always loved to quote Peter Maurin's Easy Essays. They loved the whole philosophy but the truth was that Marty Paul, Larry Heaney and Jack Woltjen were not good or knowledgeable farmers. The local farmers were amazed at how little they knew about making a living from the land. Ruth and Fran had both grown up on farms and did know something. Jack and Fran had hoped to use their place as a haven for recovering alcoholics. The lofty ideas of these three men did not really come to fruition. Yet Starkenberg was a wonderful place for people to come to support one another and to share ideas about the Catholic Worker way of life.

After Ruth entered the Benedictines and became a prison chaplain she was allowed, by her order, to spend some weeks each summer with her children and grandchildren even taking them sometimes to the home farm in Nebraska. Her garden continued to be beautiful and her home a welcoming place.

In the years before Ruth died there were wonderful reunions at Starkenberg bringing together people from Wisconsin, Chicago and Kansas City. The older folks and children of these families came just to be together- to pray, to sing, to laugh, to remember Dorothy and Peter and to retell stories from over the years and to express gratitude for a very special time in all of our lives.



Claire Lakey is a Latin teacher and a mother of ten children, the eldest of whom is married to Teka's brother.

To Live in the Gospel

by Ellen Rehg

One day, probably somewhere around 1985, I rode my bike from Karen House to St. Louis University to go to the library and do some work. I was a community member at Karen House, and was also studying philosophy at SLU. It was hot – a typical blazing July day in St. Louis. After I locked my bike on the bike rack at the library, I realized that I was really hungry and thirsty. However, upon checking my cash reserves, I discovered that I had very little – maybe about \$1.50. I figured that I could get the most for my money by going to McDonald's, a place I rarely frequented. But I thought, well, I can get a soda and still have just enough money left to get a cheeseburger. Even that didn't seem like nearly enough to slake my hunger, but it would help.

I started walking the three blocks to McDonald's. On the way two elderly women stopped me. They were dressed very oddly. They almost looked like they had stepped out of the twenties – cloche hats, long, straight dresses, pearls around their necks. They smiled winningly at me and asked me whether I had any spare change.

Being a Catholic Worker, I was not accustomed to refusing a request for money from beggars. But I felt very disappointed – I was so looking forward to that soda and cheeseburger. I tried to find another way.

"If you go to the Rectory right over there," I pointed, "they'll give you food." I knew the people at the College Church gave out grocery bags of food to people.

"Well, that's ok", the women responded. "They give us cans of food to cook with, but we don't have a stove, so we can't use that."

"No," the other woman said. "We can't really use what any of the food banks give us. We always have to scrounge around for other things."

"We don't even own a can-opener," the first continued, laughing a little at their amusing predicament. They were like Click and Clack.

"Oh," I replied. I didn't know what else to say. My throat was getting drier by the minute. I shifted from

one foot to the other. "Well," I responded slowly, feeling the hair on the top of my head getting hot from the sun. "I only have about a dollar and I was just going to get myself something to drink because I'm so thirsty," I told them.



Rita Corbin

"We understand!" one of them told me, to my astonishment. "You go ahead and get yourself something."

"Yes, go ahead, get yourself something to drink. We know you'd give us the money if you had it!" the other responded. She waved her hand at me in a gesture of friendly dismissal.

It was the last thing I expected to hear. What could I do? Their graciousness completely disarmed me, and I dug in my pocket for half of the money, deciding to get myself a soda but not the cheeseburger. It didn't amount to much for them, but at least it was a start. I felt like telling them, "Go in peace, your faith has saved you!"

Later that evening, at home in the community room, I told Ann what had happened. "I felt like I was in the gospels, like it was a gospel story," I told her, after I had related how the women had disarmed me.

"It was," she replied. When she said that, I went from thinking that it was like a story from the gospels to realizing that it was the gospel. God's transforming love still lives and touches us, especially in encounters with the poor. To live in the gospel means to be transformed by God's love. God's love changes our hearts so that we can open them up and do things we wouldn't ordinarily do. What were the miracles in the gospels? They were in essence that Jesus got people to open their hearts – to live as though love were the only thing that mattered. To let go of their egoism or self-centeredness, their hatred or fear. To encourage a thirsty Catholic Worker to share her small change with others in need.



Ellen Rehg is exercising her way into a buff body.

In Guarjila

by Megan Ramsey

In Guarjila

a rusted seesaw waits
one end high in the air
at the other, a white girl sits
a gringa
a gringa, but with their eyes

the far off places have become familiar
she is surrounded by her bedtime stories

the country road where the church women were killed
the university where the priests were murdered
the chapel where the bishop was assassinated

the white girl sits at the weighted end
thinking of the tortured, the refugees, the guerillas
the suffering, the deaths, the oppression

the far off places have become familiar
she is surrounded by her bedtime stories

the church where the community formed
the clinic where they work toward healing
the mountains- they look to the future

the white girl looks to the end high in the air
thinking of the tortured, the refugees, the guerrillas
living in the homes behind her
the struggle, the growth, the community

Jaclyn creeps down from her hideout in the tree
on tip toes she clings to the opposite end
they lock eyes
the white girl and the salvadoran
the dark eyes of the salvadoran beckon those of the white
as the gringa concedes, the seesaw begins to tilt

and now they sit eye to eye
the white girl and the Salvadoran +

August 2008

Megan Ramsey is a native of the Forest Park SouthEast neighborhood, recently graduated from Drexel. She can be found in Philadelphia, making films.

Dumpster Story Volume 1

I lived in community at St Francis House in Chicago with a man named Steve who almost daily wore a black pair of levis, which he was proud to have dumpstered. Unfortunately, one day his beloved pair of jeans disappeared from his laundry basket as they waited in the basement to be washed. Steve was really upset at the loss of his favorite pants and that someone had the nerve to steal his dirty laundry. To add insult to injury there was an important phone number in the pocket of the jeans that he also lost. Over the next week Steve rode his bike down Chicago's allies checking dumpsters, as was his habit. Imagine his surprise to find another pair of black levis just his size in a dumpster. Eagerly he rushed home to try them on. Delighted by the exact fit, he put his hand in the jeans pocket and pulled out the phone number that had been in his black levis pocket the day they were stolen. From then on, he proudly wore the black levis he had twice dumpstered. +

by Carolyn Griffeth

Traffic Problems

by Mike Bremer

More than seven years ago, we had a problem on our street on the south side of Chicago. Located near two main streets that became a gridlock of automobile traffic during the afternoon rush hour, some drivers began to go the wrong way down our narrow one way street as a shortcut. A clearly posted ONE WAY sign and two DO NOT ENTER signs didn't deter more than a few motorists from speeding down our street in order to get home earlier. Such is the lawlessness on Chicago side streets where the police seldom venture and there is almost no risk of being caught violating the traffic laws.

Our block is home to more than 20 children who enjoy playing outside after school - about the same time that cars would come speeding down our block. At our monthly block club meeting, many parents were "desperados" about the situation. The block club leader Jorge and I volunteered to ask the alderman's office about having a barricade placed at the entrance to our street.

After three visits with the alderman's staff, we finally got a meeting with the man himself. "Sorry guys, but the city doesn't issue out those barricades anymore," was his response.

I left the office with a hopeless feeling, but Jorge had a gleam in his eye. "You're a carpenter, Mike. couldn't you slap together one of those things in a few hours? I'll take care of finding a DO NOT ENTER sign to put on it."

I agreed to build the barricade but not just to slap it together.

"It has to look like an exact replica of one of the city's barricades, Jorge, or else they'll probably just haul it away."

I located a barricade a few days later and carefully measured all the components. I used a color wheel to match the red and white paint. Onlookers watched me with curiosity as I fanned through the shades of red. "Beautiful stripes aren't they- just what I want for my house trim."

After a couple of nights work in the garage with the

doors closed, the 8 ft wide x 5 ft high barricade was complete. I called Jorge to see if he had found a DO NOT ENTER sign yet. He came over carrying the metal sign wrapped in a large black plastic bag. We bolted the worn sign to the new looking barricade and then made a plan for bringing it out to the street.

The next morning at 4:30 am, we opened the garage door and began our 800 ft journey with a heavy, awkward - to- carry structure. It didn't help that Jorge wore flip-flops that kept falling off- leaving only me to retrieve them so that he would not cut his feet on the glass strewn throughout the alley. The last 100 ft, our carrying gave way to dragging the barricade and I worried that the racket might attract the attention and blow our clandestine effort. We arrived at our destination out of breath and planted the barricade in the crosswalk, leaving enough room for one lane of traffic.

As we parted ways I reminded Jorge of our solemn oath, "Not a word of this to anyone."

A couple of days later, I stopped by Jorge's house and commented that the city's new barricade seemed to be stopping the cars from going down our street in the wrong direction. He said that he

noticed how much quieter the block is now. Then he added, "By the way, I called the Alderman's office to thank them for getting us the barricade."

I glared back at him in disbelief, "You did what?"

"Take it easy. the Alderman's office somehow thinks that they got us the barricade through their efforts. They're taking credit for it, which guaranteed it won't be taken away by the city." (Over the years the city has repainted the barricade and replaced our beat up DO NOT ENTER sign).

I nodded with a look of relief and amusement.

"You see Mike, the government can work for you - you just have to do the work for it."

A lesson surely meant to soothe the anarchist soul. ✚



Mike Bremer is an activist, Catholic Worker in Chicago.

Resettlement

by Angie O'Gorman

Jaffa stands looking down from atop the New Jersey Palisades, five hundred and fifty feet of sheer cliff. Southward, the George Washington Bridge connects to Manhattan and between its cables and steel beams he sees distantly the space where the World Trade Center no longer stands. The mild fall wind is circuitous, spiraling around and down to ruffle the Hudson River's small soft white-caps. Jaffa feels embraced, as if he is disappearing into the wind. Behind him, Idris lays a picnic cloth on the sun-warmed ground. He places the round, flat bread, jars of zatar, oil, hummus, and a thermos of hot tea on the cloth's four corners, just in case the wind has a change of heart.

"Let's go," Jaffa demands.

Idris looks over his shoulder. "We just got here my friend. I have khubz, hummus; come and eat."

"Let's go."

"Okay Jaffa, okay."

Jaffa calms. Idris sees it in the sag of Jaffa's shoulders. Something has settled.

Jaffa turns and studies his friend for a moment with an apologetic sadness in his eyes, a soft smile on his face. The two hold each other's glance, an exchange of assurances. Idris turns back to gather up the picnic

Jaffa leans from the cliff into the wind, flies for a second like a young eagle baffled by the currents, and pitches towards the rising earth.

They arrive at New York's JFK. Idris, a refugee at forty, resettlement granted in exchange for his leg, wife and child blown to sand at an American checkpoint in Baghdad. Jaffa, a twenty year old pilgrim, a seeker for a different God, for the Allah before the Saudi Wahhabis, before his sister's honor killing. Idris' family blew away with the dust. Jaffa's father is still within him. He sees the old man's oiled beard, rage in his eyes, foam at the corners of his mouth as he disowns Salah. Jaffa's mother is still screaming. There are meetings, there are silences.

Two years later, Idris still attends Mosque. He reads his Koran, prays five times a day. There is no praise left in Jaffa. He's lost some internal connection to Allah, like a tendon severed. Jaffa's Allah is as distant as everything

else; the sound of his own language, the smell of real bread and earth, the taste of real water, the blue of real sky that he no longer sees from the streets of New York. The emptiness in him is a gnawing vacancy, the worst kind of hunger. It focuses his mind only on itself.

"They ask for you at the Mosque," Idris says.

Jaffa nods. "You want something to eat?"

The two work at the Chiclets factory just outside New York City. One night Jaffa comes to Idris, angry over a problem at work for which Islam is somehow blamed. He pounds the apartment wall, yelling into the fracturing plaster until his anguish takes him to the floor sobbing. Idris stands in the kitchen doorway paralyzed. When Jaffa does not get up, Idris sits on the floor next to him, braces his back against the couch and cradles the boy into himself.

The shuddering force of Jaffa's sobs loosens Idris' own tears which he's never cried for his wife, his children, his leg. Both men settle into a long guttural moan, a tone poem of human suffering. Jaffa repeatedly slams his foot against the floor as if shaking his rage free to ooze through the bottom of his sole. The woman downstairs bangs on her ceiling.

At the Chiclets factory, a prayer group meets each Wednesday to study the Bible. It takes nearly a year, but the two Muslims are invited to attend. Jaffa accepts. Idris doesn't.

As a member of the Chiclets' prayer group, Jaffa sometimes joins the others at the Hendricks' for "scripture-n-stew." He is uncomfortable with the mundane so connected with the sacred, but he likes the teachings they discuss. It's not so different, he thinks, from the Madrasa, when he and his friends sat together in the quiet, desperately trying to understand Allah's truth.

"Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for justice," Tom Hendricks reads. It is Jaffa's favorite teaching. "For they shall be satisfied."

"Something to hope in," says Jennifer Hendricks.

"Praise God," Tom adds.

"And praise Allah," someone says, wanting Jaffa to feel comfortable because they are comfortable enough now to do that.

Tom suggests Jaffa join them for church next Sunday.

The building is low and sprawling, beautiful though not holy like a Mosque. Inside, women are sitting with men and

Angie O'Gorman published her first novel, "The Book of Sins," this year.

Jaffa is not comfortable. He feels utterly wrong visiting the church although he somehow believes it is alright with Allah and this is important because even though Jaffa no longer believes in Allah, he still fears him.

Reverend Billy preaches "God's Righteousness." Twenty minutes later, the entire congregation is on its feet promising to smite gays and lesbians, illegal immigrants, turncoat liberals and Obama's socialist ways.

Tom Hendricks elbows Jaffa. "Here's your justice brother, America's God fearing. You can't do better than this." Tom waves his arms and hands and sways his thunderous body. All Jaffa can hear in the words, and see in the motions, is his father. And for Jaffa, the Christian God dies too.

Idris slowly finishes and glances up to tell Jaffa he is ready to go, but Jaffa is no more. ✦

Humanity

by Tina Busch-Nema

His balding head was bent as if in prayer
An empty pint of whiskey at his feet
The air around him reeked of his despair
A spirit shattered by years on the street

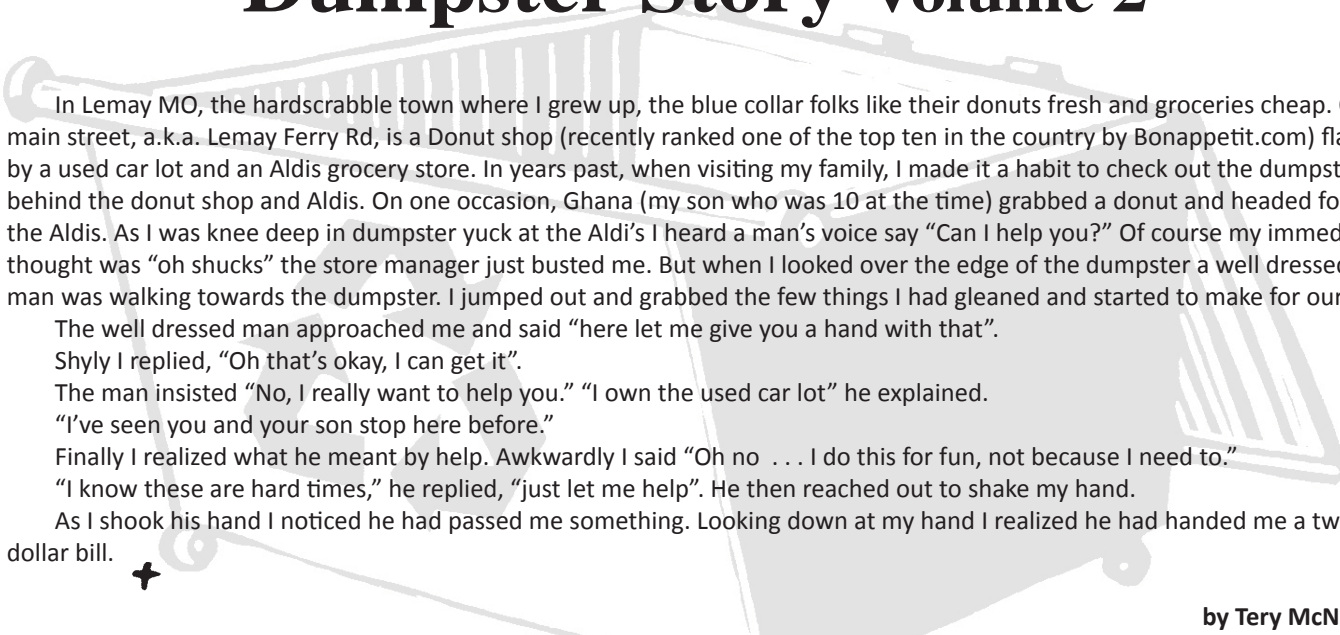
What could I offer to this broken man?
My ordered life so foreign to his grief
Perhaps compassion this abyss could span
Our shared humanity bring some relief

His callous fingers opened to receive
Three cookies, a communion to be shared
A sacramental blanket we might weave
To give a shred of hope that someone cared

The prism of our hearts will let us see
The sacred source of our humanity ✦

Tina Busch-Nema mother of three, SOA convict, enjoys spending her free time working with Winter Outreach.

Dumpster Story Volume 2



In Lemay MO, the hardscrabble town where I grew up, the blue collar folks like their donuts fresh and groceries cheap. On main street, a.k.a. Lemay Ferry Rd, is a Donut shop (recently ranked one of the top ten in the country by Bonappetit.com) flanked by a used car lot and an Aldis grocery store. In years past, when visiting my family, I made it a habit to check out the dumpsters behind the donut shop and Aldis. On one occasion, Ghana (my son who was 10 at the time) grabbed a donut and headed for the Aldis. As I was knee deep in dumpster yuck at the Aldi's I heard a man's voice say "Can I help you?" Of course my immediate thought was "oh shucks" the store manager just busted me. But when I looked over the edge of the dumpster a well dressed man was walking towards the dumpster. I jumped out and grabbed the few things I had gleaned and started to make for our car.

The well dressed man approached me and said "here let me give you a hand with that".

Shyly I replied, "Oh that's okay, I can get it".

The man insisted "No, I really want to help you." "I own the used car lot" he explained.

"I've seen you and your son stop here before."

Finally I realized what he meant by help. Awkwardly I said "Oh no . . . I do this for fun, not because I need to."

"I know these are hard times," he replied, "just let me help". He then reached out to shake my hand.

As I shook his hand I noticed he had passed me something. Looking down at my hand I realized he had handed me a twenty dollar bill. ✦

by Terry McNamee

Our Matron's Voyage and The Other Shoe Falls

by Bill Ramsey

Our Matron's Voyage
for Hedy Epstein

See how her main sail sets
conviction against the current.
Under an itinerant flag,
all hands are on this deck.

A rudder, held stern,
steers toward others.
Her right of return
relentlessly undeterred.

Her child-bound cargo
offloads decades of deprivation,
balloons to inflate their hopes,
pencils to write their stories.

Previously high jacked
by a physician's fantasy,
an assailant's push,
and a compliant sphinx.

Once more unto the beach -
our dear friend, undeterred,
boards a flotilla of fortitude,
a fearless fleet of compassion.

Solidarity assails sanctions
as her port of call
awaits with open arms
to harbor her tiny vessel.

Alas, their common land is sighted.
A siege breaks over her bow.
Could war's turbulence fall
calm in her willful wake? ✚

The Other Shoe Falls

After the pressroom fray,
Insolent soles tossed in air,
A reporter is whisked away.
Both feet dragged off bare.

Hands that would not heel.
For orphans and widows he hurled,
For innocent souls he did appeal,
His audience the whole wide world.

He could no longer hold his tongue
Against the mayhem we unleashed.
So his irreverent indignity he flung.
As "Curb your dog." he beseeched.

His fierce and unfond farewell,
A toss aimed noticeably ruder,
Swiftly landed him in a cell,
As if he was the intruder.

For years he had waited and wished.
To find the moment to banner his rage,
To whisper his own mission accomplished!
To those gathered at the foot of some stage.

Shaken, but determined and unsubdued,
He pitches another across their brawls.
Unlaced in the midst of a multitude,
Finally and contagiously the other shoe falls. ✚

December 14, 2007

Bill Ramsey founder of the Human Rights Action Service, plays a mean harmonica, and can be found walking through Forest Park in the early hours of the morning.

I was Dreaming about Your Future

for Megan Heeney

by Mark Chmiel

I was dreaming about your future:
Later twenties, Manhattan, Union Theological Seminary,
“What’s a nice Catholic senorita like you doing in a place like this?”
It’s back to the books,
But with an occasional downtown jaunt to the Catholic Worker,
You cultivate an affinity group with your cheerful animation,
Speaking Spanish to the chicas on the subways,
Standing on Malcolm X Boulevard and 110th Street and listening to Dylan’s koan-like wind,
Picking up trash on the sidewalks as a spiritual exercise,
Watering geraniums at your studio apartment,
Teaching your teachers about the limits of language,
A NYU undergrad wants to come uptown and make a two-minute “movie” about you
And you say with a giggle to Katie, “I don’t want to be dismissed so cinematically!”

So far from the Midwest
With our cornfields and stolidness and segregations,
You feel liberated, like you could leap over the Empire State Building
Some days,
Other days, lost in the carrels,
Like Dorothy at the end of her life
(even though you’re still so young—une jeune femme en fleur)
You have elbows on the table, hands holding head of Botticelli Venus hair,
Weeping, sobbing, gasping for air
Half hour
Two hours
No studying today, simply
Soaked, spent, screwed

But then
(It’s a dream after all)
Like a bullet
You’re straight out of the frenzied focus of the library
Into the magnificent polluted spring air
Your eyes radiant, resurrected because
It came to you
It landed on you
It burrowed inside you
That precious, precarious image
That needs your noon-time and nocturnal nurturing
The image that suggests

How
To
End
The
War.



Mark Chmiel can be found this summer percolating over radical thoughts while drinking coffee at local cafes.

Photo Story: Jorj and Ghana



Photo by: Carolyn Griffeth

This is Purgatory

by Teka Childress

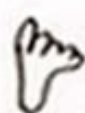
One day, years ago, we had a delightful guest at Karen House. Her name was Sue. She was in her late 60's and had long flowing grayish-blond hair. Not only did Sue's hair flow, but she kind-of-flowed. Her thoughts streamed like the water in a river, seamless, endless, and boundless in their energy. We might have thought that she should be able to follow the rules of the house but Sue was oblivious to them. This eventually resulted in a decision that she had to leave.

I was young and full of idealism and did not really think Sue should leave. Another member of our community felt keenly that some boundaries were important

for the well being of the house. We decided in the end that we would have her leave, but we would help her find a place to go. We helped her call around and she found shelter with the Missionaries of Charity.

The two of us drove her to the shelter. It was a chilly evening and my community cohort, dressed only in her t-shirt, was shivering. Sweet, not-so-oblivious Sue, noticing her discomfort, took off her coat and wrapped it around the shoulders of my friend. At that, my friend turned to me and said, "this is purgatory." She was right. It was the moment when we saw our actions in the light of love. ✚

Teka Childress brings her cheerful smile and loving heart to both her people at BJC behavioral health, and to all of her friends at Karen House.



Feet



by Anna Miller

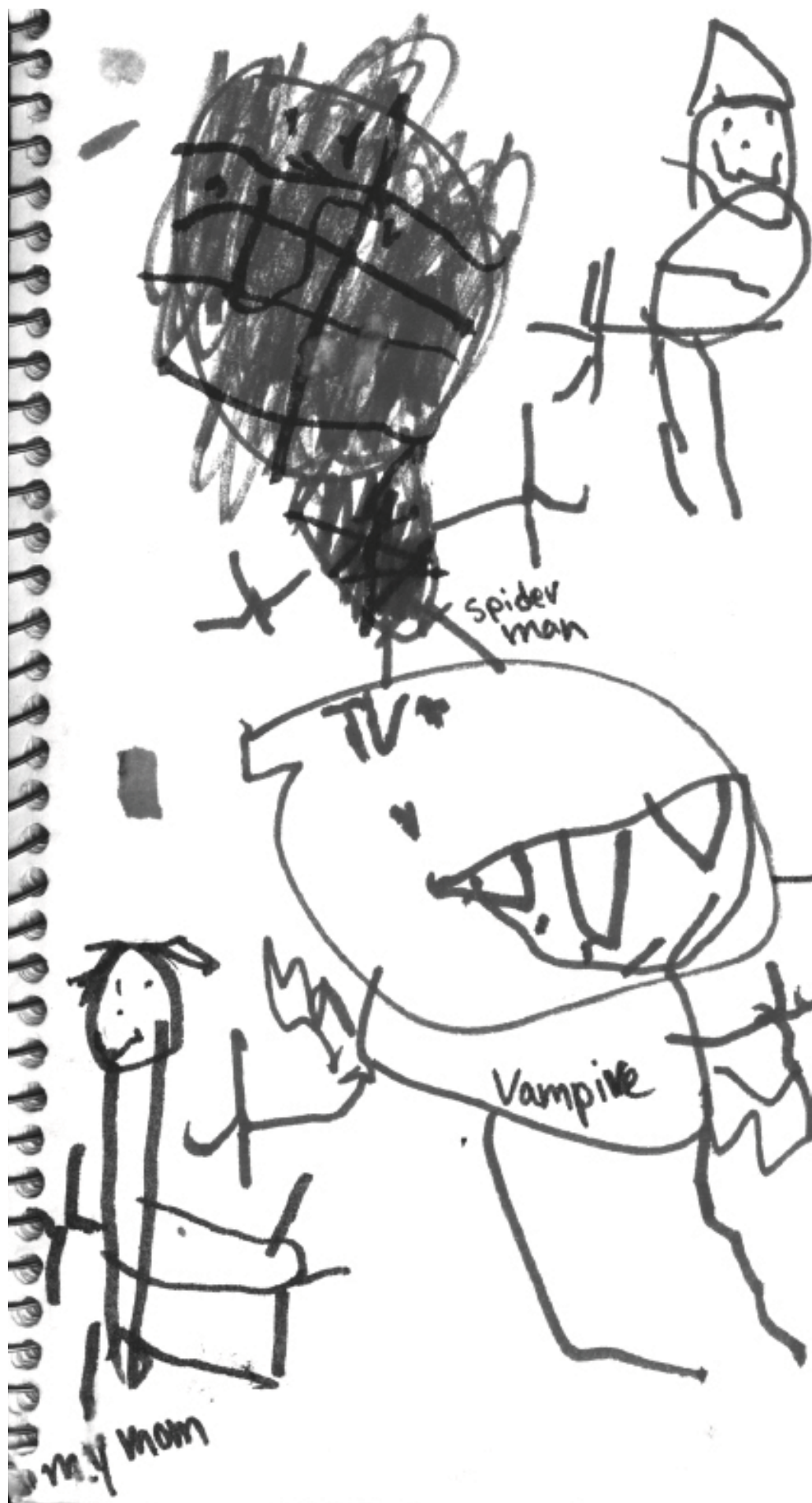
Everybody has feet.

Some have big feet, Small feet and any kind of feet. Some round Some Pointy and bony too.

Some are Smelly Some are clean. Some are pretty Some are dirty. Some are running Some are hopping Some are skipping. make in the rain.

Some hop, skip, run and make ever fly. But no matter how your feet are all feet are beautiful.





The World is too crowded with monsters and they live in dark secret caves.

Vampire wants to steal spider mans babies, who know magic but only if they have a wand

The Witch wants to capture the Vampire's babies who have a tooth-ball weapon. The Witch is trying to capture my mom.

my mom can carry 90-10 men + not get hurt in fire: she's the WULK
 • spider man wants mom on his team

Kidnapped by the Contra

by Virginia Druhe

In August, 1985, Witness For Peace sponsored a boat trip down the Rio San Juan, between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, to call attention to an opportunity for a negotiated end to the U.S. sponsored contra war which was using Costa Rican territory to fight against Nicaragua.

The contra who operated out of Costa Rica, ARDE, had declared the Rio San Juan closed to civilian traffic. Closing the river was a very significant hardship to the small communities in that area since there were no roads. The river was the only means of transportation. Even access to San Carlos, the provincial capital, was only by boat across Lake Nicaragua.

We travelled in a boat that was basically a large, floating porch with built in benches around the sides. The adventure was shared by Mary Dutcher, also a member of the St. Louis Catholic Worker Community at that time, eight other Witness for Peace Long-Term Team members, 20 Witness for Peace delegates from upstate New York, ten members of the press -- including one alleged member of the CIA, six Nicaraguan crew and about a dozen contra. As you can see, at least the visible contra were at all times seriously out-numbered, though admittedly Witness for Peace and the press were at all times seriously out-gunned.

A few days before the trip, ARDE's leader, Eden Pastora, announced from Costa Rica that we were wolves in sheep's clothing and would be shot if encountered. While we had not expected so extreme a reaction, we decided to go ahead. The first day we travelled down river, met with Nicaraguan soldiers and Costa Rican Civil Guard, tied up overnight and slept in hammocks and on the floor. We just barely fit.

Contra attacks almost always occurred near dawn, so as we moved back up river at 7:30am the second morning, I was beginning to feel some encouragement that the trip would be completed as planned. Within ten minutes we heard a loud gunshot. The captain of the boat later laughed, saying he had never seen so many people drop to the floor so fast in all his life. He was smarter and more used to traveling the river. He recognized the shot was a warning to pull over to the Costa Rican side, issued by a contra soldier.

When we got to shore two very young contra appeared out of the bushes with their guns and told us to get off the boat and go with them. Before leaving, one of our members managed to get that news out on a 2-way radio we had with us.

Being well trained in non-violence, the long-termers ar-

ranged our single-file line with care. A few of us in the front, the visiting delegation in the middle, Nicaraguans mixed among us for protection. Mary Dutcher and I were assigned to bring up the rear, followed by one of the contra. As we began walking Mary said to me, "We should start a conversation with this guy." I answered, "Yes, we should," but I could not think of one thing to say. I was mute. Mary plunged in. "What kind of tree is that?" Turned out it was a cacao tree. She managed a good bit of conversation on our roughly one hour walk through muddy jungle. There are photos of Mary and that young man, Israel, playing cards together the next morning. I will always admire Mary for creating that friendship in that context.

The contra led us to a large muddy opening on top of a hill with a small plank house in the middle. A few more contra appeared here. It turns out the young men who stopped us had been given orders to stop all civilian traffic on the river. They now proudly told us that since we were a group of internationals, Eden Pastora himself would be making the decision about our fate. I had a quiet moment of dread then. Israel also told us that they had seen us the morning before when they were on the Nicaraguan side but didn't stop us because we were singing and Mary and I were dancing a waltz. That is a sweet story, but it is also true that for their sake they needed to be in Costa Rica when they pulled us over.

During the time we waited in the mud at the small house we heard our companions at a press conference in Managua on a radio announcing our detention. The strain in their voice was painful. A Nicaraguan military helicopter also flew over, so we knew they would have located the boat. After several hours we were told that a higher commander was going to come speak with us, but he could not get here until the next morning. We began negotiating to return to the boat to sleep since there was no place for us to sit down where we were, much less lie down.

In the late afternoon, permission was finally given. We resumed our careful single file. Two contra led us out and two followed at the end. This time I was given the task of walking with a woman in her thirties who was quite overweight and having a hard time. Like several others, she had been wearing flip flops and had lost them in the deep, sticky mud. There was also a sturdy 80 year-old man with us who was beginning to need support. A doctor in our group was walking with him.

Virginia Druhe just returned from Honduras where she accompanied a Jesuit Priest, who is receiving Death threats.

I don't have much sense of direction, but I did start to notice that we were on a very wide path now and had not been before. Eventually word filtered back that we were lost and the contra melted away into the trees! Blessedly, some among us were able to find the way to a path they recognized and get us back to the boat. At one point, the woman in my care slipped down a long hill in the mud. When she got to the bottom she didn't get up and I remember thinking we would never get her out of there and I would end my life there with her. The moment passed, she stood up and we all moved on.

When we got to the boat, the area commander was there waiting for us -- and angry! Apparently he had not gotten lost and knew a few short cuts. He declared that we had disobeyed his order and were to go directly back to the house. We knew we would have to walk in the dark to get there, so we arranged everyone on the ground as pitifully as possible under some trees and appealed to the leader's Christian mercy. I believe he was wearing a cross. He relented and we piled ourselves into our hammocks again. I ended up on the floor next to the journalist who was later suspected to be the CIA agent among us.

In the morning Israel told Mary that we would be released that day, after the appropriate leader had spoken with us. Late morning we were called into the cacao grove and Daniel appeared. He gave us a good propaganda speech, tried to intimidate the Nicaraguans and sent us on our way.

We had travelled a few hours and were calculating that we would just make it to the town of El Castillo before dark when we were pulled over, again, by a Costa Rican Civil Guard. He said that we were to wait for a member of the US Embassy who was coming by helicopter to be sure we were okay. The last thing we needed! My memory is that the person never showed, we went on and pulled into El Castillo by flashlight.

In El Castillo we were treated to a dinner of sardines and saltines that was as tasty as any meal I've ever had. People in town had us gather in the church sanctuary to welcome us and our collective odor in that small space was so thick I could barely breathe. I have never forgotten one older man who pulled a perfectly clean and ironed set of yellow pajamas out of his pack at that point. We had returned to the mundane.



Sister Mary

by Mary Ann McGivern

My story is about Don Cress. Don was a street alcoholic, exactly my age, 44 at the time of this story. He'd been drinking since he was 14, spent time in jail, had seizures, was in debt for more than his monthly disability check to a local shop owner. He spent his days at Karen House. Once in a while he lost his temper and got put out.

Sharon and BJ had brought the Little House laundry over to Karen House and they called me to come pick them and the laundry up. I put our dog Fleetwood into the Volkswagen bug for the pleasure of his company and drove the three blocks. Don was sitting out in the back yard. I remember it was cold and the church blocked the sun.

Don always spoke very slowly. He said, "Miss Mary, I'm cold. Could I come over and sit on your front steps in the sun and have a sandwich?"

I said, "Don, did they put you out? You can't keep getting mad." But I let him get in the car. So there we were BJ, Sharon, me, the dog, laundry for us, and Paul, Elijah, and Don sitting behind me on the driver's side. We all were snug in the Volkswagen.

We pulled up in front of Little House and there was a police car, lights flashing, behind us. I had slid through that

corner stop sign. My license was in the house and there was no plate on the back of the car. I told everyone to stay put.

The officer asked for my license. He asked me if I knew there was no rear plate. I didn't want to lie in front of my passengers, so I said, "Let me look."

He asked me if I knew I'd run a stop sign.

Then Don got tired of sitting and he got out of the car, standing between me and the policeman whom he ignored. He looked straight at me and very slowly said,

"Sister Mary," (He never called me sister.) "Could I have a sandwich?"

I thought, Don, I will make you two big bologna sandwiches. I said, "Don, just sit on the front steps till I'm finished." He crossed the street and Sharon and BJ, carrying laundry and holding the dog all got out and trooped across the street.

The officer said, "Do you really live here? Do you have a driver's license? Do you promise you will write Jefferson City and get a replacement plate?" I said yes and he left.

I made two big sandwiches for Don and he sat in the sun and shared them with Fleetwood.



Mary Ann McGivern recently had the Little House Garden named after her.

Zanmi N and #4

by Becca Gorley

Zanmi N

you sleep until the moment
before the sunrises
the moment before
you are called for
until you can no longer
be for you but
be for someone else
to answer, act, do
wash, sweep, carry, buy
one thousand times
sweating, like breathing
involuntary motion
this travay
grinds children's bones to ashes
remnants of charcoal
conceived for purpose
to rise each morning
and burn with duty +

zanmi- friend, Haitian Creole
travay- work, Haitian Creole



Photo by Katie Cushwa

#4

her world, a wet tile
mopped with her hair
ragged up dirt, bug shells, grime, life hells
gave her brunette, natural highlights of low life
her honest sweat watered gardens growing fire
daily doused with a piece of her entity
reversing entropy
channeling breath into energy for shine,
shining sans the desired due dime
Oh! industrious globalized, vertical world
building castles out of oil, coal and bone
production passed destruction as
fingerprints spotted over walls, her halls

After her, i walked in
After her, i saw floors, walls white as chalk
reflective shine
in this mirror, no face but mine corner of my eye-mind
a maid mopping madam punched out her time

society dispelled this bottom rung mime, voided her of
her due dime
and after the mirror reflection, mine
i walked out, opening
window washed doors

and saw you
smiling with your children
in the burning garden watered by the last sweat and
tears, the twins have not grown up yet +

Rebecca Gorley Zanmi- friend, Poet, SLU grad in Social Work and American Studies.

Gentle (for my father)

by JP Murray

My dad tells me to be gentle. “Be gentle Michael; what are you doing with that magnifying glass?” When I’m stooped over our overgrown concrete, strafing after black dots with a scorching glass eye.

“Be gentle Michael; if you try to jump the fence you will hurt yourself.” His trembly hand, coarse with moles and salt and pepper hairs, peeling a band-aid out of its wrapper and applying it to my knee. Brushing the gravel out of the small cuts that ooze blood on my palms.

“Be gentle Michael”; the dog perks its ears, stiffens, and growls—my hand retracts quickly.

“Be gentle Mike”; my face flushed, sweaty in the sun that beams off and up the white concrete at the Bemis Park tennis courts. Another green ball crushed out of the chain link fence, bouncing to rest five feet from its can-companion. My feet set—as if in concrete—in the same serve stance he’s demanded of me for the past forty-five minutes, knees wobbly, “shit, shit, shit” running through my head.

“Be gentle Mike; toss it a little higher then come down on it.” One more time. One more homerun.

“Michael—be easy, calm down”; my cleats kicking the floor of our dandelion-yellow bug. Sitting in the backseat, ignoring the burning black cloth, thinking about my teammates’ faces after I missed the penalty kick.

“Be easy Mike; be easy. No one gets it every time.” Colin

sitting next to me, studiously looking out the window—probably smirking, though it’s worse if he isn’t.

“Michael...gently.” I push off from that sacred, jagged rock and glide down the block for the first time on my own—only realizing it when I finally look back and he isn’t behind me but standing next to the driveway, hands on his hips, covered in twilight so I can’t see his smile, too late to turn my head and steer, knowing that it’s ok to fall down now. I gently land in the space where my training wheels should have been, skinning both knees, never feeling a moment of it, still wondering at that self-propelled glide—the first time I surfed the sidewalk.

Gentle Jonas; later that night in the tub I wince as he washes the twin scrapes, in between talking about how I had done it by myself, and how I couldn’t feel the difference now when he was there and when he wasn’t. And how I had gotten up anyway, and done it twice more, just to reassure myself that it wasn’t an accident, that it was inside my muscles now. That night I dreamed of flying; I remember it perfectly: floating in the hallway, the resistance and upsurge from moving my arms. My dad Jonas with his hands underneath me, secretly letting go so I could move on my own. The sheer physics of it: my body light and the air water. The startling range of motion. The gentle buoyancy. ✦

JP Murray is a recovering grad student and inveterate dabbler.

Dumpster Story Volume 3

Once a Catholic Worker dumpstered a five gallon bucket of solid chocolate from a fancy chocolate company in Chicago. For two weeks community members gathered around the chocolate bucket breaking off delicious chunks of gourmet chocolate. All the fun was spoiled though when someone reached a new layer of cigarette butts and wires. ✦

by Tery McNamee and Carolyn Griffeth

While dumpstering at Northwestern University in Evanston, IL I came across a bunch of photographic slides taken by some random undergrad. The devilish side of me decided to peek at the slides. Lo’ and behold I recognized one of the people in the slides as Mike Miles a long-time Catholic Worker activist who lives at Anatoth, a peace community in northern Wisconsin. ✦

by Tery McNamee

When God Calls

by Rick Mihm

When God Calls:

Holy Week of 1995 will forever be etched in my mind. As a young priest, I was assigned to Loras College – a small Catholic liberal arts college in Dubuque, Iowa. As College chaplain, one of my responsibilities was to drive 20 college students to Washington, D.C. to participate in the Holy Week Faith and Resistance retreat offered by the Atlantic Life and Jonah House Communities (Liz McAlister and Philip Berrigan). The week included prayer, serving the poor in the D.C. area and planning an act of civil disobedience. In 1995, Holy Week coincided with the World Weapons Bazaar at the Sheraton Hotel in downtown D.C.

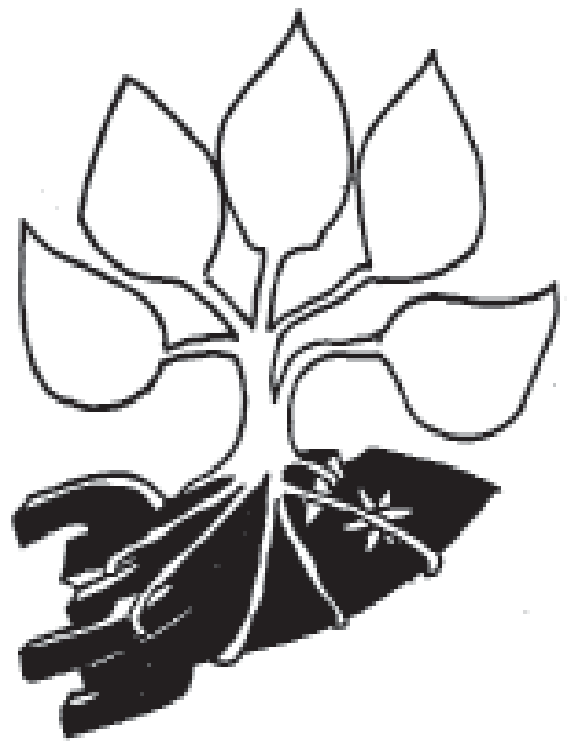
It was decided to have a witness in the hotel atrium which overlooked the entrance to the bazaar. When the group approached the hotel, Professor Paul Allen and I noticed a room where registrants for the event were receiving their guest badges. Since we were dressed in khakis and button down shirts we decided to try to enter the bazaar as registered participants. It worked. When asked by the staff our affiliation, we responded, Loras College in Dubuque, Iowa. They entered our names in the computer, affiliation and country of origin. A badge with the information was given to us to clip on our shirts. We were then given a packet of information and as we were escorted to the ballroom a huge commotion ensued as our group unfurled banners and began to chant in peaceful protest. Security guards and police were pushing our companions out as we walked by them entering the ballroom with other military personnel.

The look of amazement on their faces as they watched us enter the event was precious. Upon entering the "bizarre" world of the military, I was overwhelmed by what I experienced; weaponry beyond one's wildest imagination. Most of it was simulated so that participants could experience real time war scenarios and test their abilities against the enemy. Here before me, were some of America's brightest college grads, affixed to monitors and joy sticks - vaporizing enemy forces. I was sickened by the scene and stepped out into the hallway to catch my spirit.

While walking to the restroom to find some water, I passed a large banquet hall prepared for dinner. Many military dignitaries and world leaders were milling around before seating themselves for the meal. They sat at the head table where

they were joined by a Roman Catholic Bishop from the Military Archdiocese. Behind the head table was a raised stage and podium.

Suddenly, I was struck by the presence of God's Spirit and was certain I heard my name called. When I looked around there were a few stragglers heading for the restrooms. I realized God was calling me to speak to this group. Shaking my head, as from a dream, I asked myself if I was



crazy. When I looked in the banquet hall, I saw hundreds of participants filling the place and being seated at their assigned tables. I headed back down the hall towards the ballroom - heart pounding and my brain racing. Once again, I was overcome by a force that filled me with courage and

Rick Mihm is a community member at New Hope Catholic Worker Farm in Dubuque, Iowa.

I reversed my direction and proceeded back to the banquet hall.

By this time, the participants had been seated and dinner was being served. I looked in and wondered what I was being moved to do. Then a conviction came upon me and I proceeded into the banquet hall and towards the stage smiling and nodding to guests on my way. When I reached the three steps climbing to the stage, I took a deep breathe and what seemed like slow motion took the stage and podium and said into the microphone: "Excuse me ladies and gentleman. May I have your attention?" At that moment, the participants turned their heads and others adjusted their chairs in order to see me and the lights dimmed. Then three spot lights turned on me and I realized that I was the abrogated keynote speaker! I introduced myself and told them that I was on the faculty of a small, Roman Catholic, liberal arts college in Dubuque, Iowa. I explained that I taught in the religious studies department and after experiencing the ballroom with all the simulated weaponry, I was confounded as to how I could reconcile the fascination I witnessed in the young people this morning, with their peers back home as we taught ways of non-violently addressing conflict.

At this time, the crowd realized I was not the keynote and the entrances to the ballroom filled with secret service and military police. However, before they pounced on me, a general at the lead table stood up and walked to the podium. He looked at me and said, "I'll respond to your dilemma with your

students. Tell them the world is like a city and the military is the fire department. At any time, a fire can break out and we are called to put the fire out!"

Before I could respond, I was tackled and forcibly removed from the room. When I was out of the banquet hall, myriad secret service descended upon me with fury. They were yelling and screaming and asking me who I was. I calmly tried to explain that I was a registered participant and if they would stop hurting me, I would give them my badge. They would have nothing of this. They tossed me in a room and began to interrogate me. A wave of questions were hurled at me and despite my attempts to calmly answer, they continued to shout at me.

After a few hours, they realized I was who I said I was and not a terrorist. They stripped my badge and two agents grabbed me by the arms, escorted me down the hall to the end of the building and threw me out - head first. I landed with my arms outstretched, looking ahead at the other 30 protesters who were sitting on the lawn eating their lunch and wondering what happened to Fr. Rick and Dr. Allen. When I explained the unfolding of events, people were in disbelief that I was able to get so far. The best comment came from Phil Berrigan: "That took courage. Good job!" That's what happened. My only regret is that I didn't have time to respond to the General. In my mind, I believed we could have come to a better solution then the one he offered. ✚

Dumpster Story Volume 4

One day I was dumpstering at produce row, a wide expanse of produce warehouses in North St. Louis. I stood at the bottom of a dumpster trying to figure out how to lift out two large boxes of sweet potatoes. When along came a clean-cut man in a pink polo shirt saying, "What are you doing in there young lady?"

I replied, "Trying to lift out a heavy box of sweet potatoes."

"What do you want them for?" he replied.

"To eat!" I said.

The man came over and inspected me and the heavy boxes, exclaiming, "They sure do throw away a lot of produce here!"

"Yes, they do." I said, going on to describe all the good finds I had made there.

"Well, let me give you a hand." the man said reaching most of his body into the dumpster and pulling out the boxes. "Can I help you load up your truck?"

As he did, I did my best to school him in the wastefulness of the food industry and the ethic of trying to live more sustainably, to which he listened intently.

"But what brings you here?" I asked at last

"I am the distribution executive of United Fruit," he replied to my astonishment. ✚

by Carolyn Griffeth

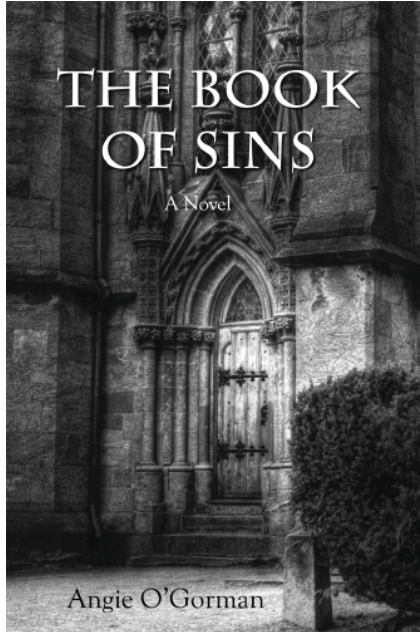
Book Reviews

by Colleen Kelly and Ben Schartman

When I first picked up the Book of Sins, I did so with trepidation, fearing that this was going to be another book about the church's abuse of power. However I was pleasantly surprised to discover the book was much more an examination of capitalism and how far a society can go worshipping at the feet of "The Market". The setting is futuristic, offering an example of

what our society looks like after the churches become an official part of the capitalist machine, handling the business' sector philanthropy. The story examines the relationships of a group of women who come together to challenge the current system. The women represent a variety of stages of awakening, that the reader can easily find resonance in relationships we have ourselves with people at all levels of awareness.

The story is good, with a phenomenal testimony of truth at the end that represents how we can catch courage from building community. And one can not help drawing comparisons with the capitalist age we live in now, with characters in the novel that do not recognize the system as oppressive because of the gigantic propaganda that surrounds them. We live in a country that praises the philanthropist but no longer asks why we need philanthropy. Our non-profits have CEO's that make six figures, our churches hold stock in corporations and our Catholic universities name buildings on behalf of Boeing, a company that makes millions off of products that kill. You wonder how far off are we from the futuristic picture that Angie O'Gorman paints? ✚



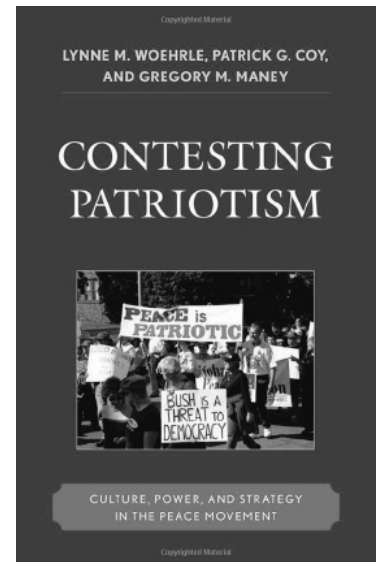
Contesting Patriotism by Lynne M. Woehrle, Patrick G. Coy and Gregory M. Maney is an objective description of the actions and responses taken by American peace groups during the last five conflict periods. According to the authors, this analysis was undertaken "at least in part, by our desire to help the peace movement think critically about its discourses." It was refreshing for me to read this quote and notice this as the aim of Woehrle, Coy, and Maney's work, for in my previous experience with academic writing in college, it had seemed somehow against the rules for authors to explicitly take sides. If this is indeed a rule in academia, then I am very glad that these authors have broken, or bent it too such a degree as to produce this book, which is in many ways a broad outline of intelligent strategies for the peace movement.

Woehrle, Coy, and Maney put forth that "shifting the normative center" of opinion in our country concerning war is the fundamental mission of peace groups. The authors describe five commonly held nationalist assumptions(myths) that form the foundation of our country's perspective on war, and they suggest that breaking up these myths is the core of the work of peace groups.

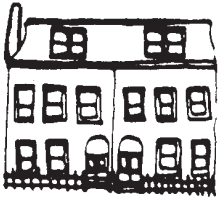
Towards this end they describe two modalities for weakening these dominant beliefs. The first method is by directly challenging these beliefs, which the authors recommend as a strategy in certain cases. The other strategy is to actually take these assumptions and use them to mean something slightly or totally different from what they mean in the dominant discourse: An example of this would be the slogan: "Support our Troops, Bring them Home." In this example,

peace groups have harnessed the popular desire to care for America's troops to the idea of peace instead of war.

This just scratches the surface of the discussion contained in Contesting Patriotism. And I would like to recommend the rest of this book to anyone interested in good thinking about broad peace strategy, who is not turned off by sometimes dense academic language. Bravo Woehrle, Coy, and Maney and thank you for your hard work. ✚



Colleen Kelly just arrived home from the US Campaign to End the Israeli Occupation Conference in Kansas City.
Ben Schartman rebuilt the garden wall of Karen House. It looks beautiful!



From Little House

by Mike Baldwin

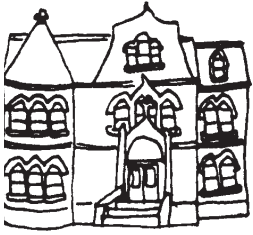
I once again have the pleasure of writing "from Little House." In the past, I have been told my posts need to be edited due to length. This time, I thought I would use few words and add pictures, since every picture is worth a thousand words.

To see the "reclaimed" Little House Garden and orchard in full, living color, please stop by and stroll through any time at your leisure. On July 10th we held a Garden Party honoring Mary Ann McGivern, who started gardening this spot around thirty years ago.

We will be raising funds for Little House and for the Downtown Teens. Send an email to mboute66@charter.net or tekachildress@gmail.com for more information.



Mike Baldwin, always on the cutting edge, now rides an electric bicycle and continues to work with the Downtown Teens.



From Karen House

by James Meinert

For a while the Large Family Room here at Karen House sat open. It is the biggest room in our house and we try to reserve it for a family with at least four children, but it accommodates up to seven children. It's quite a space! But days turned to weeks, and no families of that size called for shelter. After three days with no large families calling for a room, we are willing to take a family with only three children, but still none were calling. It is heartbreaking to tell a woman with two children that, "No, we don't have any space for you," knowing that there is a space plenty large for her. But there are no other shelters in the city with a room that can accommodate a woman and six children, so knowing that this particular space is unique, we try to hold it. And eventually a woman with five children called looking for hospitality, and we were able to offer it. Where else would she have gone? Where do all the other mothers of two go? Questions we aren't able to answer. Mysteries and tragedies of life that we put in the hands of the One who is Love. Yet we know that a small part of what we are called to do is keep that space open.

I'm realizing that many of us have spaces within us that we also choose to open or close. One of those spaces for many of the community here at Karen House is for children. Some of us out of love, and some of us out of our need for that unconditional affection they give us, keep a space open for children. When exhausted and desiring nothing more than alone time or a quiet space, a child crawls up on our lap with a book and smiles. How do I say no?

But there are many spaces within me that I close off. Sexism is deeply rooted in our culture, and both men and women suffer from it. I see for myself the way in which- reacting to my own sexism- I often pre-judge other men. I often assume they are more violent, more controlling, more oppressive, and more destructive. I often choose to avoid them and avoid sharing myself with them. There is a space within me that desires free and open human affection and intimacy with all people, including other men, but so often I realize that when a chance for relating and connecting was presented to me and I was closed to it. If a space within is not open, how can I ever welcome someone in?

For years I have had many closed spaces within, and I marveled at other people whose hearts broke and bled so easily as they loved people and accepted the pain and loss that comes

with that. Not me. I have been closed so often to friends, to community, and to my family. But somehow, from living in this community here in St. Louis, with all of the love that is freely poured upon me, some of those closed spaces are cracking open, and I'm realizing that love snuck in. In spite of my best effort to protect myself from it, and thus avoid any of the pain that may come, it came anyway. I am reminded of the gospel, when Jesus says, "It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit" (Jn. 15:16). I do not think I chose Love, but LOVE chose me. Now as I am about to embark on a three month hiatus from Karen House and leave behind my loved ones, my community, my family, I feel my heart breaking. I had to say goodbye to my mom, something I have done many times in my life, once for two years, and for the first time had tears come to my eyes. What a marvel! I am finally rooting down in a place, and by rooting down here, the spaces that were always closed are starting to open. I am sad to be leaving people, which must mean I am finally learning to love people.

Just because I am in a different place does not mean that I will not have any open spaces to love and be loved. Every day is presenting me with chances to choose openness and not closedness. The family that just moved in has twins in it. Two adorable babies that if I was here longer I would hold in my arms and carry around the house looking at things on the wall and marvelling at colors and shapes. But knowing that I wouldn't be here for them, I was closed to the family. I did not create a space in my heart for them. Choosing to love when I know there will be a goodbye is so very difficult for me. Though, maybe life will present me with another opportunity to love some beautiful twins, and I am very aware of the space that I have within for such an undertaking.

Author Joyce Rupp has a book called "Praying our Good-byes" which is very moving. In it she encourages us to sit with those spaces within created when a goodbye happens--when a loss takes place. I think over the past year and of the many people and their many faces that have come into my life and then left while at Karen House. I think of all of the spaces that have been forced open and that within them I have encountered LOVE. I am grateful for this place and for the spaces it creates. I pray for myself and for all people that we can choose to love, to break open new spaces and sit patiently with empty spaces, so as to let love bear fruit.



James Meinert is in Managua, Nicaragua facilitating the Mev Puleo Theology Scholarship Program. He is deeply missed at Karen House!



Catholic Worker Thought & Action

Non- Participation

by Jenny Truax

“Love of the other means...non-participation in those comforts and luxuries which have been manufactured by the exploitation of others...[W]e will have more time with modern conveniences, but we will not have more love.” - Dorothy Day

“I think a tremendously important aspect of nonviolence is withdrawal, withdrawing your support from those things that are immoral. Simply living off donations, or using discarded produce—these actions are fine, but you’re still living off the system as it exists.” - Chris Montesano from Sheep Ranch Catholic Worker, in *Voices from the Catholic Worker*

Lately, inspired by our last two RoundTables, I’ve been thinking more about Peter Maurin, distributism, and our capitalist system. While hauling my 3rd garbage bag of unused bread to the dumpster the other day, I wondered about the occasional conflict between two central elements of the Catholic Worker: this principle of nonparticipation that Dorothy Day describes, and the practice of hospitality, with its accompanying compromises.

Non-participation means that we try to minimize our support of structures that oppress and harm people while supporting structures that promote dignity. The idea here is that our sphere of love needs to include both our own house, as well as those people who create the things we need to live. The scarcity that characterized the early days of the Catholic Worker has been supplanted by a disposable U.S. culture that over-produces, over-consumes, and over-wastes. Many Catholic Workers survive by receiving, utilizing, and giving away donations of this excess. I sometimes wonder, though: are we supporting this wasteful capitalist system by accepting the waste?

As I throw out the excess bread (we have to throw away about 10 garbage bags of it per week despite our best efforts to use it creatively), I have a nagging sense of unease thinking about the amount of resources (hours of labor, gallons of gas, pounds of food and water) being wasted, and the number of people (both locally and globally) in need of the bread I just tossed. This waste is planned; it is more profitable for retailers to waste one garbage bag of bread than to run out and miss a sale. Peter Maurin talked about giving to others “at a personal sacrifice.” This, too, I contemplate while avoiding the pigeons that congregate around the dumpster, waiting for the bread.

It can be a grace-filled process, this giving to people in need what is, in justice, theirs: clothes, food, etc. It’s good for people who donate, distribute, and who receive. I’m so grateful that we have mountains of healthy, hearty bread to give to folks who

need food. But it also seems that this practice does little towards transforming our wasteful system. To expand the bread example, it’s similar to the “Dollar Store quandary”: it’s lovely that discount stores provide inexpensive goods so that the poor in the U.S. can afford them, but the consequences to the sweatshop workers in China or Indonesia and to the planet (all that transporting!) aren’t so lovely. How do we choose between, or balance, love for the poor here and love for the poor in another country being exploited so that we can have access to cheap goods?

At Karen House, we have often lived out the value of non-participation by living on the cast-offs of the system at the bottom of the waste ladder, rather than as consumers at the top. Years ago, we bought hamburgers, fish sticks and chicken every week from the grocery store; now we receive large donations of these items along with the bread. Accepting these large donations allows us to minimize both our carbon footprint and our participation. But I wonder: in the context of providing hospitality to thirty women and children, is there even more we can do to transform or replace the system and to manifest non-participation?

Over the years, we’ve tried different ideas, with varying success. We’ve experimented with vegetarian dinners (decreasing our purchases of meat), but didn’t do the meals well enough to meet our guests’ needs. It’s very important to us to avoid forcing a way of life or a belief system onto our guests, who are with us out of need rather than by choice. We try to support local, independent businesses with the purchases we do make, and we buy Fair Trade coffee for the house. We give as much food away as possible. But what else could we do in the donations we accept and purchases we make? Should we focus on more widely distributing the waste that is donated to us? Perhaps we should we start a Karen House food garden? Encourage donations of organic or local food, or discourage donations from exploitative chains like Walmart? Could we simplify more in the purchases we make? Should we limit the magnitude of the donations we receive, in order to spend more energy in these endeavors? What is the best line to draw?

I don’t have the answers. I’m not sure anyone does. For now, I’ll look forward to many more opportunities to ponder these questions, probably on my way to the dumpster.



Jenny Truax is making her own toothpaste!

The Round Table

Karen Catholic Worker House

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The Round Table is the quarterly journal of Catholic Worker life and thought in St. Louis. Subscriptions are free. Please write to *The Round Table*, 1840 Hogan, St. Louis, MO. 63106. Donations are gladly accepted to help us continue our work with the poor. People working on this issue include: Joe Angert, Jenny Truax, Teka Childress, Megan Heeney, Colleen Kelly, James Meinert, Katherine Wallig, Carolyn Griffeth, Caitlin Shukwit, Ellen Rehg, Timmy Cosentino, Ben Bowmann and Ben Schartman. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

New Karen House Garden!

We hope to break ground soon in front of our building. We're very excited about this project, and could help with these donations:

- Donations to pay for concrete removal and supplies.
- Sources for topsoil and plants
- Volunteers to help dig out the beds, haul materials, etc.
- Tools (wheelbarrows, shovels, etc.) for gardening

Karen House Needs:

- Our lawnmower broke, and we could use another one to mow our backyard.
- Vinegar, baking soda, and other "green" cleaning products

Some new pages on our website (www.karenhousecw.org) of interest:

- "What We're Reading" - Book suggestions from the Karen House community
- Responsible Consuming- resources for worker cooperatives, Fair Trade items and independent businesses

Check www.KarenHouseCW.org for updates on Karen House, information on the Catholic Worker, an archive of past Round Tables, and more!