

THE Round Table

Fall
2002

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



Peace to All
who
enter
here!

the
journey
to
Karen
house...

Why This Issue?

In what has become a contemporary epistle for many in the U.S. religious peace movement, Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk and prolific author, counseled the young activist Jim Forest who was deeply committed to promoting peace and justice. But even with his youthful idealism, Forest had been "hitting the wall." Merton offered the following reflection:

Do not depend on the hope of results. When you are doing the sort of work you have taken on, essentially an apostolic work, you may have to face the fact that your work will be apparently worthless, and even achieve no result at all, if not perhaps results opposite to what you expect. As you get used to this idea, you start more and more to concentrate not on the results but on the value, the truth of the work itself. And there, too, a great deal has to be gone through, as gradually you struggle less and less for an idea and more for specific people. The range tends to narrow down, but it gets much more real. In the end, it is the reality of personal relationships that saves everything.

The truth of Merton's last line is exemplified throughout this issue of the Round Table, on how folks came to the Catholic Worker in Saint Louis. Virginia Druhe and Mary Ann McGivern joined up with friends at the very beginning to start the houses of hospitality. Jerry King was moved and challenged to help by these and other women who sustained Karen and Little Houses in these first years. A former guest and now co-housing member, Tracie Tantroy testifies to Teka Childress's saving role in her life, while I, a Friday night housetaker, reflect on Becky Hassler's practice of accompaniment. Community members Courtney Barrett and Melissa Brickey also bear witness to the amazing solidarity and at-home-ness that Karen House provides for many people throughout Saint Louis. Finally, Elizabeth Madden and Carolyn Griffeth share their moving narratives of conversion that recently brought them to share life with the Karen House children and co-housing community.

In our regular columns, Mary Ann McGivern writes of the power of *Hamlet* as performed in a penitentiary, Becky Hassler calls for our support of the people of Afghanistan, Teka Childress ponders the reality of violence in our world from the neighborhood on the North Side to Israel and Palestine, while Melissa Brickey meditates on all those who have gone before her, marked by the sign of love.

As you read this issue, may you recall the people who have touched your own life, walked with you through trying times, and reminded you of what really matters. Let us continue to open our hearts and not count the cost.



--Mark Chmiel

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A Great Experiment in Truth

by Virginia Druhe

I came to the Catholic Worker through a meeting at the Holiday Inn on South Lindbergh in St. Louis County in the summer of 1976. Already involved with the Catholic Worker in Nebraska, Sue Lauritsen had decided to move to St. Louis later in the year and didn't want to lose the Worker as an important part of her life. She came down from Omaha with several of her nephews to hold a preliminary organizing meeting.

I went to that meeting because my roommate at the time, Beverly Arnold, invited me to accompany her and a friend, John Lightle. I found them both very amusing and felt an evening with them was never wasted, so I went. I also liked other people who attended the meeting, though by now the only ones I can remember are Mary Beth Gallagher, Judy Gallagher, and Michael Bartz.

I came to the Worker because that evening was fun and worthwhile.

I came to the Worker because I did not want to live alone. By the end of 1976, Beverly had decided to move to New York to do community organizing on bank redlining.

I came to the Worker because I was eager for a prayer community. I had only recently returned to the church and felt the need for like-minded souls to live with.

I came to the Worker because I felt my efforts were more valuable if I were working with those whose needs otherwise would not be met. I was enjoying my work as an aide at a nursing home and the satisfaction of meeting people's immediate needs. At the same time, I felt these people had resources and would be taken care of whether

I was there or not. So, at a meeting in January of 1977, Luanne Schinzel, Kathy Derby, and I committed ourselves to be the live-in community with Sue at the still-unnamed house.

What kept me at the Worker? The first years of living at the house were very difficult. We knew almost nothing about existing social service networks in the city. We knew almost nothing about cooking for 70, living with 2 year-olds or maintaining an 80-year old building. We knew almost nothing about the tough love needed to accompany the mentally ill, the depressed, and the addicted. By the time we opened the house in September of 1977, there were 3 nuns in our community of eight women; the rest of us knew almost nothing about living in community. We had a year behind us of consensus decision-making.

I stayed at the Worker because we had a tremendous support network. Hundreds of people worked with us, gave us supplies, money, advice, and assured us that what we were trying to do was worthwhile, even important.

I stayed at the Worker because I believed it was an important place to be.

I stayed at the Worker because it was exciting and it stretched me, caused me to know and love people I would otherwise never know or love. Mary Ann McGivern and I used to commiserate that we knew too many good people -- we just couldn't keep up with them all! I fell in love with 2-year olds. With awe, I entered the world of a gentle woman who had suffered a lobotomy and years of prescription drug abuse. I learned about building maintenance from a variety of older, white men. I laughed often and

Virginia Druhe takes house faithfully every Tuesday at Karen House.

hard with women guests who were full of confidence and faced down all their problems with humor.

The Worker made the world so big, and so immediate. I learned about non-violent direct action and military budgets with Clergy and Laity Concerned. I learned philosophy with Jesuit volunteers. We lived in liturgical time and celebrated church history. We sang.

I think the deepest attraction of the Worker for me, and the reason I stayed as long as I did, was that living with and trying to minister to the poor allowed me to stay close to and minister to my own wounds, hidden and powerful. Insisting on the importance, beauty, and sanctity of the poor in our society was to also insist on the importance, beauty, and sanctity of the injured and outcast parts of myself. While this is a great impetus to service, it can also be an impetus to blind and controlling "service."

In 1980 I stopped trying to live and work in the same house. I needed to be able to at least start and stop my day predictably. At that time we had three houses within 2 blocks of each other. I began living in one house and working in another. In 1990 Cass House had been closed and the Little House had no space, so I moved into a flat 2 doors from Karen House. That required income.

I was offered part-time work with a peace and justice committee of the Daughters of Charity and the Vincentians. When that ended, I found part-time work with the American Friends Service Committee. By the mid-90's that position had become full-time. Gradually, it became true that the Worker was no longer the focus of my work. My availability to the needs of the house was limited and defined.

After 15 years in a constantly evolving community, I recognized that I was no longer really emotionally available to the needs of the community. My emotional life now had a history and shape that in some fundamental ways was not flexible and open to new members in the way I felt they deserved. I also knew that one unresponsive presence in a community can weight the whole group.

Another significant factor in my leaving was simple age. I was tired. I no longer had the energy to have more than one focus for work, one emotional center in my life. I no longer wanted to spend so much of that limited energy on the blessed rage for order that the Worker requires -- the constant struggle to keep toilet paper in the bathrooms, to find the can opener, to keep the rooms decent for guests and the dining room clean. I was no longer happy to find mustard to go on the sandwich for the man at the door or to do many of the other little things that are the heart of the Worker's work. It was time to go. So I formalized the reality that I was now a friend, neighbor, and volunteer, but not part of the core Worker community.

Life and the Worker brought me many chances to grow and heal. I came to the Worker because of that. I stayed as long as that was true. I left when it became truer elsewhere. I'm not sure that generosity ever had anything to do with it. I hope I never claimed it did.

The Worker, for me and many others, is a great experiment in truth. In time, it came to be an experiment on a scale too large for me. My life seems to keep reducing itself. It may be truth, it may be grace, it may be age, it may be laziness. At any rate, I continue to taste a sweet mercy in the universe, and to trust in it. ✦

The Beatitudes **Padre Jacob** **Santiago, Chile**

Blessed are the poor
— Not the penniless but those
whose heart is free.
Blessed are those who mourn
— Not those who whimper but those
who raise their voices.
Blessed are the meek
— Not the soft, but those who are
patient and tolerant.
Blessed are those who hunger and
thirst for justice
— Not those who whine but those
who struggle.
Blessed are the merciful
— Not those who forget but those
who forgive.
Blessed are the pure of heart
— Not those who act like angels but
those whose life is transparent.
Blessed are the peacemakers
— Not those who shun conflict but
those who face it squarely.
Blessed are those who are perse-
cuted for justice
— Not because they suffer but be-
cause they love.

As Simple as That

by Mary Ann McGivern

In 1976 Ann Manganaro, Paulette Peterson, and I lived in a little apartment on Pershing near Skinker. Ann and Paulette were teachers at the Neighborhood School for four to eight-year-olds. Then in November, I took a six-month leave from the Institute for Peace and Justice to work in Florida with the United Farm Workers. That month Sue Lauritson came to St. Louis to start a Catholic Worker House. I heard from Ann and Paulette that Sue was holding meetings, but I was never a part of them.

In the spring, Ann decided to embark on a year of pre-med studies; Paulette decided to go to graduate school in New York; and I prepared to return to St. Louis. Ann and I agreed to continue living together.

I came home the first of June, started to be living on a tree-lined street, working nine-to-five, uninterrupted by injured workers, abused women, and accounts of prisoners in labor camps. It was such a civilized life here in St. Louis.

Then the second week back, at breakfast, Ann said she had had a dream about teaching school and that what it meant, she was sure, was that she wanted to live at the Worker that was forming. She had agreed that we would form a community together, but she wondered how I would feel about living at the Worker.

I had never visited the New York Worker (where Ann had spent a summer and where a dear friend of hers lived) nor had I read much by Dorothy Day. But I missed the farm workers I'd come to know in Florida, so I said I was certainly open to the Worker. Someone had just spotted the St. Liborius convent as a possible house and that afternoon Ann and I drove past the newly imploded Pruitt

Igoe, down treeless streets, in the glare of the midday sun, and walked around the outside of the empty building. I said, sure, let's do it.

And that's how I joined Ann, Sue, Virginia Druhe, Luanne Schinzel, Kathy Derby, and Joann Silva. We moved into the house in August and accepted our first guests -- Dean, Connie, and Connie's three-year-old daughter Connie Sue on Labor Day. We opened officially on September 24, accepting the Sutton family whose two youngest children, Paul and Elijah, were to become my foster sons three years later when Ella Dickson gave me her four-flat for the Worker.

Ann became a doctor, opened a clinic in El Salvador, and died of breast cancer eight years ago. Virginia lives next door to the Worker and still takes house. The others have all moved on. Paul's and Elijah's children call me Grandma. †



Jeff Finnegan

Mary Ann McGivern recently joined the Dorothy Day Co-housing Community.

Cloud of Witnesses

by Jerry King

Unlike some others writing for this issue, I have neither lived at Karen House nor been strictly a part of the Catholic Worker Community. Except for brief periods now and then, I haven't even been a frequent visitor. Yet for twenty odd years, the Karen House Community has been at the center of my faith journey.

So much that is good in my life has come through Marty, my spouse of 39 years and friend for almost 50. And so it is little surprise that my Karen House story begins with Marty and Virginia Druhe. They met in the fall of 1980, silently sharing directed retreats at the Jesuit house in Sedalia, Colorado. Virginia was making a 30-day retreat in preparation for beginning the hermetic phase of her spiritual journey at the Worker; Marty was taking a well-deserved eight-day break from husband and five (later to be six) children, encouraged by her spiritual director, John Kavanaugh.

Upon returning home, Marty spoke glowingly of this young woman, her love for the poor, and her commitment to a life of voluntary poverty in community. Over the next several months, through conversations with John and our growing friendship with Virginia, we began to learn something about the Catholic Worker, and this amazing place on Hogan Street.

At this point, I take for granted the powerful spiritual presence of women in my life. But back then, I was astonished by the women of Karen House -- Virginia, Ellen Rehg, Tekka Childress, Ann Manganaro, Mary Ann McGivern, and others. Also, I was fascinated by these

people who were so accepting of me, even as their way of life challenged institutions and beliefs that I had held sacred since childhood.

In my family, I learned many good and valuable lessons: my mother was a paragon of selflessness and fidelity. My father was a powerful political figure who taught by example that successful men gave back to society by helping the less fortunate. But there was also a blind faith in unfettered capitalism; contempt for labor unions; lack of respect for women; and a total adherence to "charity" over justice. Dad resented the Establishment in many ways, but he also deferred to it and prepared us to be part of it. I learned many of these lessons too well.

In the early years of my marriage and business career, I worked hard to climb the corporate ladder, paying way too little attention and respect to Marty and the children. I voted for Barry Goldwater in 1964 partly because he vowed to "bomb North Vietnam back to the Stone Age." And, even though my opinion on the Vietnam War had changed by the late '60's, my political beliefs were still naively conservative and protective of the status quo.

But some seeds were planted and began to germinate during these years that made me more ready for Karen House when it appeared in my life. In 1968 Marty and I joined the Lower College Church and almost at the same time began a twenty-five year involvement in faith-sharing with a group of old friends in Mark's Community. During the 1970's, inspired by our two dear Jesuit friends John Kavanaugh and John Schwantes, our network of faith

Jerry King is a member of the Core Community of the Center for Theology and Social Analysis.

support grew to include the Christian Life Communities (CLC) gang at Westminster House. And, through Methodist missionary friends in Brazil, we had met Brother Franco and Father Rubens during our three-year stint there in the early '70's. We were there to further my business career, and largely avoided Brazilian politics. Yet, Franco's commitment to the poorest of the poor children of Sao Paulo and Rubens' willingness to endure prison and torture for opposing the oppressive military dictatorship penetrated even my distracted consciousness.

Still, Karen House was a revelation. Here were folks not "helping" the poor, but joyfully living with them; not just living simply, but doing so in ways that made sense to even my capitalistic mind; not just opposing political and institutional oppression, but reaching out in love to its victims in the neighborhood and the city. From the first time we visited and met the members of that early '80's community, I felt completely at home. And it has remained my spiritual home.

Over the years, Marty and I have written a few checks to Karen House, and donated a couple of old Dodge vans

(which Teka probably considers a mixed blessing). But the most rewarding contributions from my perspective have been the business and financial advice for Karen House and the co-housing community; the driveway reconstruction (actually performed free by subcontractors who do work for my company); and the work on Lorraine's house on Helen St. donated by several other subs. Using my experience, skills and contacts as a "capitalist" to benefit the Worker has been a special blessing for me. And, of course, Marty and I have been repaid one hundred-fold in so many other ways in our association with the House — the friendships, the clarification of thought, the prophetic presence in our lives. Truly the Karen House Community has been our "cloud of witnesses."

Our six children, their spouses, and our grandkids are at the center of our lives. Our time with them during the Christmas season is our most precious. And within the Christmas season, the very center of our time together is our annual ritual of Christmas Eve Mass at Karen House and then returning the next morning to make and serve Christmas breakfast. We feed and are fed.



"Thank You, Jesus, for Teka"

by Tracie Tantroy

My name is Tracie Tantroy and I would like to tell you how I came to know and become a part of Karen House. I first came in contact with Karen House in 1989 when I had my fourth and last child, a son, Jarkeis. He was three-weeks old when I needed emergency safety and shelter. I called the Housing Resource Center and they referred me to Karen House. I called and asked if they had any openings for four children and myself, but the house only had an opening for one adult and one child. I then asked if I could take that space, and bring my other three children in if a larger space became available. I was told yes, so I agreed to take the opening. That's when my life began with Karen House. I was given a tour of the building, told the rules and regulations, given a room and a chore, and told the dinnertimes and curfew. I was happy

because I felt safe, but I worried because my other three children weren't with me, even though they were safe with my family. Since there was no space for them, I went on to do what I had to do to maintain a room at Karen House.

About six weeks passed and space became available; so I brought in my three girls, Rasheeda, who was seven years at that time, Charity, who was four years, and my one-year-old, Amaura. That was a joyous day for us because we were all together again. The kids loved Karen House. They got along with everybody that lived there, and we were content. We stayed about six or more months.

Teka was my contact person that I went to with my problems. She had told me about a new shelter that was opening up called Hope House. Teka explained that it was a program for women and children and that it was transi-

Tracie Tantroy is a member of Dorothy Day Co-housing Community and is helping renovate Lorraine's house.

tional housing, where I would have my own apartment within the building. She helped me fill out the paperwork and keep appointments. I was approved for Hope House, and Teka helped us move from Karen House to Hope House. I don't know where I would have been if I hadn't met Teka. So I think and say, "Thank you, Jesus, for Teka," all the time. Even though we weren't at Karen House anymore, Teka and I kept in touch. Whatever I needed, Teka tried her best to help me get it. I had grown so fond of Karen House that when it came time to leave I didn't want to go, but I did leave. Karen House had become my adopted family.

I settled in at Hope House in October of 1989. In January of 1990, I had a crisis — my mother passed away. The first person I called was Teka. She comforted me the best way she knew how, and I got through it. She was there for me once again. Feeling down and blue, lonely and sad, I received a phone call, and it was my last two kids' dad. I had been with him for eight years already, and he was also there for me when my mother died. He asked me to marry him over the phone. Being vulnerable, I said yes. I didn't really want to marry him because we had many problems through the eight years I was with him. But I was feeling sad because my best friend, my mother, had just died.

My mother passed the 14th of January 1990, and I got married February 14, 1990. He moved into Hope House with us. We stayed until June, and then he found us an apartment, so we moved out of Hope House on to a street called Labacrie. All this time, I was still having problems with my husband. He had gotten on drugs and kept it a secret from me for as long as he could. One particular Friday, he had gotten paid and shared his money with me. I was home getting ready to attend a revival, and he kept asking me for some of the money back, making different excuses as to why he needed the money. I didn't have time to argue, I was going to church, so I gave him some of the money back. The kids and I went to church and had a good time praising the Lord. When it was over, we returned home and my husband started up again with asking for the money he had just given me. When I refused to give it back, he jumped on me and we fought. I finally called the police, and they came and took him one way, while I gathered my kids and went the opposite way.

It was around 11:50 p.m. We were standing at the bus stop waiting for a bus that wasn't going to show. Out of nowhere, the father of my two older kids' showed up and asked what we were doing standing there. I told him we were waiting for the bus to take us over to my friend Pam's house. He told us there weren't any more buses running, and offered to take us to her house. We got in, and he dropped us off. We spent that night with my friend Pam who had four kids of her own. I was welcome, but I didn't feel comfortable.

The next day, I located my friend Lorraine who said we could stay with her and her eight children. Lorraine had a three-story house at the time, so she gave us her third floor and she and her family occupied the first and

second floor. We shared all of our meals. Lorraine and I had met at Karen House, and we got along like sisters. I stayed with Lorraine, and called Karen House everyday to see if a space had come available. Nothing opened up for a while. Then one day, I called and they had space, so we moved back to Karen House for the second time. We were already familiar with the staff from the previous time of living at Karen House, so we were assigned a room and a chore, and we settled in, feeling nothing but love and safety. We were home.

Time went on and my public housing came through after a seven-year grace period. Teka, again, was there for us. She took me to my appointments, helped me fill out paperwork, and when they assigned me my apartment, she helped me move in. Even though I left Karen House, I still kept in touch because during my stays at Karen House, I had felt more love and concern for my family's health and well being than from my actual family. I don't know where I would be if the Lord hadn't placed Teka and Karen House in our lives. That's why I try to give back to the community any way I can. If Karen House needs Tracie Tantroy or kids, we are here.

I lived in public housing for six years, but I started losing my grip on life because of my mother's passing. I didn't know how to cope with her loss, so I chose to get involved with drugs, trying to numb my feelings to the pain I was experiencing. I know now that was the wrong thing to do because I began to neglect my responsibilities. But I never neglected my kids — they were my life. They kept me with one foot planted, because I knew that I had to do for them. Anyway, I lost my apartment in public housing. I called Teka, because I felt comfortable with her, and knew she wouldn't look down on me. I laid my cards on the table, and told Teka what was going on with me. She didn't criticize me; she just offered her help once again.

I stayed involved with Karen House; I would volunteer to cook, help clean, run the clothing room, or whatever the case would be. I was committed like they were committed to me. Then one day the idea came about to build a community that was to be called "Dorothy Day Co-housing." I was offered the chance to become a community member, so I joined and now I live in one of their three-bedroom apartments at 1633 Helen, on the second floor. I've lived at this address for one year now, and I've been affiliated with Karen House now for twelve years. Today I am free and clean, and have been for three years. I thank God every day and night for Karen House.



Accompaniment 101

by Mark Chmiel

The week my wife Mev died my brother-in-law Ken arranged to get me tickets to hear Bruce Springsteen then on tour following the release of *The Ghost of Tom Joad* CD. I asked Jennifer, one of Mev's students, to accompany me. They were good seats and I cried much of the concert.

Later on, in my apartment I had a musical diet to complement my Wailing Wall of photographs of the beloved dead. There were certain songs I'd listen to and they would inevitably make me agonize, but... I didn't care. It's almost as if I wanted to hurt. And the effects of the music often exceeded that of the photographs that I had so often meditated upon. I must have listened to Gustav Mahler's 6th symphony fifty times that year.

Only gradually did I let go of mourning as a full-time job and resume work on my dissertation on Elie Wiesel. I realized how weirdly lucky I was: I had the time and resources to be able to grieve, ache, commiserate; I didn't have to return to a job two days after my spouse's funeral. So I made good use of those early months, but at some point, I realized: I need to get out of my own stuffy, memory-saturated apartment.

And I thought of Becky. A former Sister of Mercy, a Karen House community member, a nurse on the way to becoming a nurse-practitioner, she had so often offered a steady hand to me, a gentle smile, a silent encouragement to hang in there, as she moved into our Mev's and my life of affliction. She walked with us, had seen me so raw, angry, broken, and she had cared for Mev with true heroism and mindfulness, from administering enemas to



photo of Becky Hassler by Teka Childress

Mark Chmiel is happy to be in the course "The Engaged Buddhism of Thich Nhat Hanh" at Webster University.

massaging her body so she wouldn't get bed sores.

"I want to help Becky at Karen House!" That was my aspiration. It wasn't so much to be of assistance to the women and children who took temporary relief and shelter there. It wasn't to be so deliberate as Mev had once been, following in the footsteps of her teacher John Kavanaugh who advocated "tithing time" with people on the margins. It was simply that I wanted to tithe time with Becky, not the homeless. Becky accompanied me/us, so I wanted, in a small way, to accompany Becky back.

What this meant was that I joined her in one of Karen House's basic practices: "taking house." The running of this House of Hospitality is divided into three shifts: 8 am to 1 pm, 1 till 6, and 6 till closing at 10:30. Becky took the Saturday afternoon shift, so I started going to work with her every other Saturday. She kindly helped me lose some of my vast ignorance and inexperience: She instructed me in answering the phone ("Are there this many people without homes in Saint Louis?"), getting guests their medicines ("What's this drug for?"), giving out sandwiches to the men and women in the neighborhood who came by between 1:30 and 3:30 ("You don't like bologna? You're a Black Muslim? OK, peanut butter and jelly coming right up"), playing with the kids ("Sure, I'll pick you up"), breaking up scuffles ("You bitches have got someone to look after you, what about me?" snarled one inebriated man, who resented what he deemed the lavish treatment of some of the guests), accepting donations ("Gee, thanks for all these sweaters" to a huge drop-off in mid-May), making sure the guests do their chores ("Um, you think you'll get to sweeping the floor today?") and simply listening to tales of triumph and woe.

Oddly and accurately, Karen House grew on me. At one point much later, Virginia Druhe had to let go of her Friday evening shift, and I was asked by Celestia, resident wise woman of the community, if I would consider doing it. I said sure. Jean Abbott had once said, at a little reunion I had of some of my friends from the Arco community, that the experience of being with Mev in her last months reminded Jean of when she was living in Central America. She referred to the intensity of working "in the mountains" where life was so under siege and, consequently, everything and everyone was so precious. When volunteers came back to the US, they missed that experience of intensity, of not taking anything for granted. Spending time at Karen House was like being in the mountains, or being on Arco during Mev's last months: It's not that it was always heavy with grief, but it was both delight and disorder: life on the edge.

Decreasingly as time went on, people asked me if I missed Mev. And I would think of Springsteen's song/echo of John Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*:

*Now Tom said, "Mom wherever there's a cop beatin' a guy
Wherever a hungry newborn baby cries
Where there's a fight 'gainst the blood and hatred in the air
Look for me Mom I'll be there
Wherever there's somebody fightin' for a place to stand
Or a decent job or a helpin' hand
Wherever somebody's strugglin' to be free
Look in their eyes Mom you'll see me."*

At Karen House, I got to know women and children who had known the violence of poverty, the winter desolation of sleeping outside, and the frightful agony of breast cancer. As we ate dinner or washed dishes or sat in the office together, they got to hear my stories of living with a wife who was slowly dying. So many middle-class, educated people presume there's such a huge gulf between themselves and people who live on the street or in shelters. After being at Karen House, I was not able to countenance such a presumption. For it is indeed true: "We have all know the long loneliness and we know that the only solution is love and that love comes with community." It had all happened while Mev was lying there dying on Arco and it was still going on at Karen House and I imagine it is going on in hundreds of thousands of places at this very minute.



Deep Listening

by Courtney Barrett

When I told Anthony I was going to write about him again, his chest puffed up in much the same way as it did the night I decided to move in to Karen House. I have told this story a thousand times, to a variety of audiences. It is a little different each time because countless people, intense conversations, and incredible happenings led me to a life at the Worker.

So here it is...my journey to Karen House with as much "verve and crackle" as I can muster sitting in front of the computer on the third floor at the house (the afternoon temperature hovers around 98 degrees).

Many moons ago, I was studying at Saint Louis University in the Occupational Therapy department and, as part of my scholarship, I needed to complete 40 hours of community service per semester. I had done volunteer work in high school and was looking forward to broadening my experiences. One of the first places I applied my Jesuit education was at Karen House. It was a Saturday morning in the fall of 1994. Mitch McGee answered the door (with an overwhelming amount of enthusiasm for that time of morning) waving us in with one hand and clutching a cup of coffee in the other. We chatted a little about Dorothy Day, drank some coffee, and spent the rest of the morning cleaning out a room in the basement. I was convinced this room had not been touched since the nuns moved out 40 years before. I now realize it had and has been cleaned out many times prior and since that Saturday morning (especially when Mitch lived here).

Over the next couple of months, I came to Karen House every Saturday morning to clean, play with chil-

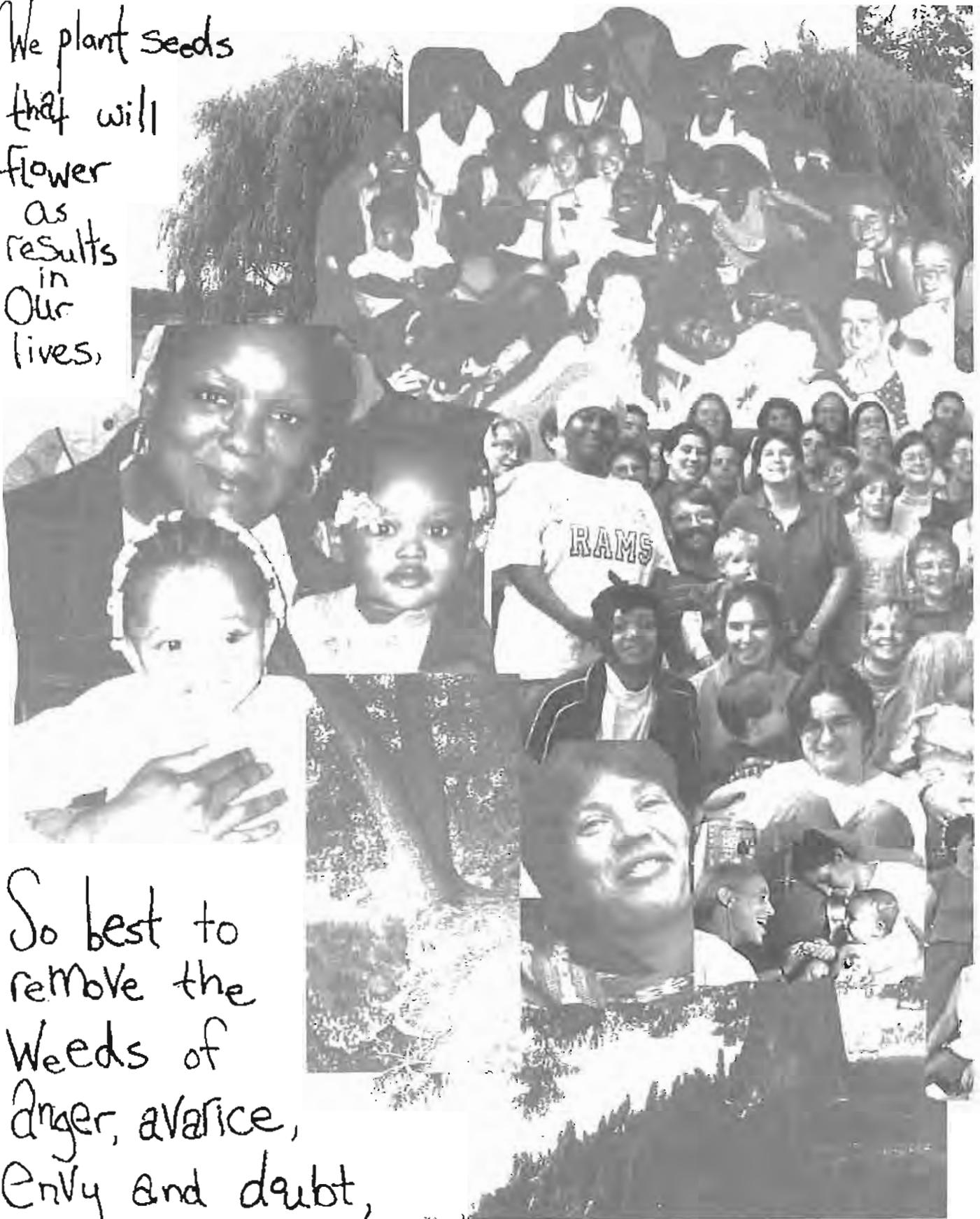
dren, organize, and watch in wonderment at the happenings around me...something about this place was different. Only after reading about the Catholic Worker movement and the philosophy behind it, did I begin to piece together my intuitions with what I experienced. I realized how Karen House differed from other shelters or soup kitchens. I realized that the culture created in this house was quite intentional and part of an amazing philosophy created way before my time.

Nevertheless, studying and college life drew me away from every Saturday at Karen House (as many college schedules tend to do) until the fateful summer of studying Gross Anatomy. During that summer, my life was reduced to standing over a cadaver at 2:30 in the morning and memorizing the vessels of the heart, the nerve innervations of the arm...blah blah blah. I would shower every day after dissection and scrub the smell of formaldehyde from my skin while reciting in my head the origins and insertions of the musculature of the leg. It was awful.

The highlight of the summer was a card I received from the children at Karen House. Jenny (my best friend from high school who now lives in the room next to me) was volunteering at the house for the summer and told them of my pitiful existence. The card was sort of a sympathy card and it was covered with knives, bleeding limbs, and little signatures with hearts and smiley faces. It simply read, "Dear Courtney, we are so sorry you have to cut up dead bodies and study all day long. Will you accept this card?" I was stunned. I complain about Gross Anatomy (and it was awful) but I was getting one of the

With loved ones, Courtney Barrett has just purchased a home in the Karen House neighborhood.

"We plant seeds
that will
flower
as
results
in
Our
lives,



So best to
remove the
Weeds of
Anger, avarice,
Envy and doubt,

That peace and
abundance
may
manifest
for
ALL.

Dorothy
Day



best Jesuit educations in the world and spending more money than any of these kids have ever seen...but they were sorry it was hard for me. This was one of the first of many humbling and astonishing lessons I would learn at Karen House.

Eventually, I was promoted from basement cleaner to dinner maker (although if anyone would have tasted my cooking, they would have chosen other duties for my college friends and me). We began coming once a week to cook (euphemistically speaking, of course) for the guests. Coming weekly allowed me to begin to form relationships with the women and their children...ones that changed my entire world view (relationships that continue to grace my life today). Attending mass on a weekly basis at the house was one of the ways I began to feel really connected to the community and former workers as well.

I looked forward every week to sharing the sign of peace or our ideas about the homily with professors, homeless children, college students, PhD's, and folks living on the streets surrounding the house (an experience not uncommon at our weekly liturgies). Of course, graduation from college came soon after and I was going to move on to my next adventure. I had interviews set up on either coast and was planning to take whichever job promised the most challenge and excitement. Two weeks before my first interview, I received a call that sent my entire life into upheaval. Julie (one of my best friends in college) was in the hospital in critical condition with an aneurysm that eventually took her life. The days surrounding her death and funeral were the most difficult of my life. I have never before experienced such incomprehensible suffering. When it was all over, I was not sure what I was able to do. Getting out of bed was the biggest chore of the day and going to the grocery store by myself was simply not an option.

Jenny was living at Karen House at the time of Julie's death. I began to spend a great deal of time there because, truthfully, I felt loved, as the women at the house provided more support, comfort, and understanding than anywhere else. I began to realize these women knew what suffering was, the everyday-I-can't-go-to-the-grocery-store-by-myself kind of suffering. They had lost friends, lovers, children, and parents in unbelievable tragedies. Their wisdom and experience was more comforting than all the theology of the Catholic Church. I felt safe and understood. When I sat in the dining room at Karen House, no one stared at me not knowing what to say, or asked me if I was going to go to grief counseling or get a job. They listened to me and I to them. We shared laughter and tears over cigarettes on the back porch. It was great therapy.

Understandably, I started coming to Karen House several times a week, and I slowly began going to the grocery store by myself. About a year later, several friends and I went to visit the Philadelphia Catholic Worker. We spent a week with more amazing Catholic Workers (I began noticing a trend). I wanted to be one of these Catholic Worker people (at least in theory), however, I was not

quite ready to give up the serenity of my air-conditioned apartment to live in the chaos that is Karen House. It was an evening in May of 1999 when my entire life changed forever. Now at the time, Anthony was not the tall, handsome, and confident young man he is today. He was short, round, shy, and sweet beyond belief (the last of which has not changed). We were sitting in the office after dinner and he was telling me about his school recital. He was so excited to be singing in it and offered to perform for me. I was not prepared for what happened next. Anthony's beautiful prepubescent voice filled the office. He sang a version of "Lean on Me" that spoke of the Christ child, of a young boy with no home and no food...but someone was kind and took him in. He sang so beautifully, with his eyes closed tightly and a fist over his heart. Tears welled up in my eyes as I tried to conceal the wonderment of this young boy singing a song of his own journey to Karen House. Sitting on the floor in the office with tears streaming down my face, I could not envision living anywhere else. I moved in two weeks later.

Since that night, I have met many amazing people, held the sweetest of children, cleaned countless puddles (of various substances), learned valued lessons, made countless frustrating and gratifying decisions, and grew in lasting friendships. Last night, Anthony (who now lives with his family a block from Karen House in our co-housing community) was in the food storage room asking me how my article was going (I am sure for selfish purposes only). I told him I needed some inspiration. Melissa (the newest member of our community and a cherished friend) and I were trying to persuade him to grace us with a repeat performance.

After much pleading and begging, Anthony's voice once again filled the room, tears welled in my eyes and I could not envision living anywhere else.



Mindfulness Training Thich Nhat Hanh

Aware of the suffering caused by unmindful speech and the inability to listen to others, I vow to cultivate loving speech and deep listening in order to bring joy and happiness to others and relieve others of their suffering. Knowing that words can create happiness or suffering, I vow to learn to speak truthfully, with words that inspire self-confidence, joy, and hope. I am determined not to spread news that I do not know to be certain and not to criticize things of which I am not sure. I will refrain from uttering words that can cause division or discord, or that can cause the family or the community to break. I will make all efforts to reconcile and resolve all conflicts, however small.

Simplicity, Community, and Love

by Melissa Brickey



Melissa Brickey and Courtney Barrett

I recall, as a sophomore in high school, thinking that there was no way a person's life could be happy if she lived it thinking that it was a journey -- believing that there was a beginning, a middle, an end. The journey theme suggested that everything in life led up to one final event, and that that event was the reason for everything previous.

My initial thoughts as a high schooler have become a bit more refined (but not much). I rebel against the journey concept because it seems much too linear. Although I am hardly a Buddhist, I prefer to think about life more as a circular path than a linear journey. The great thing about the circular path is that we get to perfect ourselves every time we reach the same part of the path we have previously visited. Which is to say, Karen House has always been on my path. A year and a half ago, I was finally able to see it.

The joy of living in community is what lured me to the house initially. In October of 2000, I visited my ailing grandparents at their home. Lois, their nurse and a Catholic sister, sat with me at their kitchen table. Somehow our conversation turned to my own life and my frustration with it. I told her that I was looking for a life based in community and in love but that I was not interested in joining a religious order. Basically, I explained to her that I missed living with a family.

I grew up in a very Catholic house with eleven people. Living with a group of people was comfortable and natural and logical to me, much more so than living on my

own or with a roommate, as I had been doing for several years. Not long before my talk with Sr. Lois, I realized that I missed falling asleep upstairs in my bedroom while my brother and sisters raucously played Clue downstairs. I missed always having someone around to drag to Taco Bell. I missed seeing different faces coming in and out of the room where I was reading my not so exciting book. I missed the noise and fun chaos of being with a lot of people. And, most fundamentally, I missed being able to give love and to be loved at all times.

In a state of "Well, you asked and I need a little guidance here," I described my lost state to Sr. Lois. Her immediate response was to tell me about the Catholic Worker. Specifically, she talked about Teka (whom her mother had babysat as a child) and about the big brick house in North St. Louis.

Lois suggested that I call Teka and set up a visit. This, of course, worked well for me because I knew how to use the telephone, and I enjoy talking. My first trip to Karen House was on a Teka Childress Monday afternoon house shift. There are several things I remember distinctly from that day. I recall Teka offering me coffee and realizing the pot was empty. The orange juice that she thought was in the fridge was also gone. I sat in the office for about an hour, and at one point, without asking, one of the guests brought me a cup of ice water (in a mug with no handle).

Teka gave me a mini-tour that included a stop in the laundry room to fold her clothes. It was in front of the

Melissa Brickey cheerfully organizes tutoring for the children of Karen House.

dryer, while Teka was folding a pair of black jeans, that she asked me what I really wanted out of life. I told her that, at thirty years of age, I was finally able to define and to simplify it: I just wanted to be able to be a good person and to have the freedom to love people as well as I could. I explained to her that I had always been looking for that, and had tried to find it in other places -- as a Peace Corps volunteer, as a middle-school teacher, as an adult education teacher. But each of those endeavors had frustrated me because they never could be simply about love and kindness. Teka told me, at that point, that I should pick up some Dorothy Day readings, join the community, move in to Karen House, and begin living the life that I could finally see on my path. When I finally left that day, I knew that I would be back. I had not come to any firm realization as to how Karen House would fit into my life, but even then I knew that it could not and would not be a typical volunteer experience for me.

My next Karen House expedition involved meeting other community members, namely Courtney and Jenny. I was learning how to take house and they came into the office and sat (Courtney on the desk, Jenny on the sink) and talked. It felt so different from what my life was...and so right. I remember thinking that they were caring and loving people, and that is the reason they had stopped, and stayed, to talk with me. They had no other motives but to love. I left that day knowing that I wanted to have Courtney, Jenny and Teka in my life as long as I could.

After that visit, I talked to my sister Suzi about moving in and becoming a part of the community. I remem-

ber how excited she was for me because she realized that I had finally discovered a place that encompassed everything I valued: simplicity, community, and love. I had been talking to her for years about what I hoped I could find, but never really believing that it existed. Luckily she, being younger and wiser, reassured me that if I kept living my good and loving life, I would find what I wanted.

I don't remember when Jenny started asking me when I would be moving in. But it wasn't long after I met her. She persistently asked me every time she saw me. I realized, as she did I am sure, that it was pointless to wait -- Karen House was unquestionably a part of my path that I was fortunate to discover with the help of and love from the guests and the community.

A year and a half later, I still consider the house a step on my circular path. As I continue to circle it -- from the office to the food-storage room to the attic to the second floor linen closet -- I discover more and more things I never would have had I not become a part of the Worker community. Every day the kids and guests teach me to be a better, kinder person. Every day my community challenges me to live more simply. And, most important and most life giving, every day my community, the guests, and the children grace me with their love.

A few months ago, I came back to the house late in the evening. I found Nicholas, Dan, and Tony playing Risk in the community room. It wasn't Clue, and they were certainly not loud, but I remember falling asleep thinking that I had found my home again, and what a beautiful gift that was.

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From ROTC to 1840 Hogan

by Elizabeth Madden

As a kid, I said the Pledge of Allegiance with extra solemnity. I would stand there, with my shirt tucked into my plaid jumper, hand over my heart, looking passionately at the flag like it was my deliverance. I thought God and all the teachers who saw me, so patriotic, would be moved by the genuine love I had for my country. "What a good person that Elizabeth is," they would say to themselves, and they would secretly wish their children were more like me. In high school, I channeled that love into my chosen future career -- I wanted to be a military pilot. I had no desire to shoot people down, or anything

morbid like that. I wanted to be a part of what made this country great. I wanted children, whatever their race, religion, or ethnicity, to have a real, flushing toilet, and a refrigerator full of Capri-Suns. And I was willing to fight for that right.

I had a long romance with an image of myself flying into the Third World on a peacekeeping mission, with a shipment of food. "The poor" were far away, and I, a modern-day "Xena, Warrior Princess," would go to them. I had a perfect picture of myself stepping out of my airplane, after a perfect landing, in my perfect uniform, shak-

Elizabeth Madden is the new staff person for the Inter-Faith Committee on Latin America.

ing out my perfect hair from under my headsets, and nobly handing a starving child a bowl of mush.

This dream led to me to seek career guidance from my theology teacher, a deacon and former Marine Corps helicopter pilot in Vietnam in his youth. We went for long walks, and I would tell him my hopes, thinking he would understand the honor in my intentions. He listened, nodded, smiled, and said that if he had to do it over again, he would not go to war. Instead of accompanying me to the recruiter's office, he handed me an application to go on a service trip to the Dominican Republic.

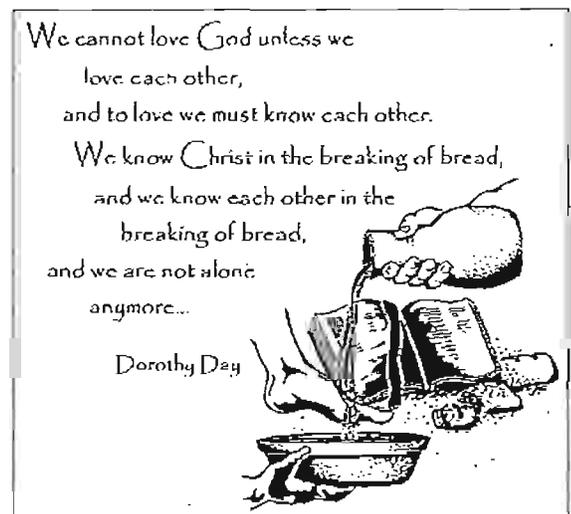
I went to the Dominican Republic, taught the starving children their numbers and letters, painted the church, had a life-altering experience, and called it a day. "The poor" were so giving, "the poor" were so rich in faith, and so forth and so on. I had such an amazing time that I returned the following year to do it all over again. On the final day of my second trip to the village of Guayabal, I was waiting for the bus to take me to the airport to go home, when I held my last little hungry baby. She was one-year-old, and her legs looked like sausage casings, after you've squished all the meat out. I sang to her, and tears went out my eyes, and down my nose, and she lifted her arm up and wiped them away. I knew that as a white, well-fed, US citizen, that I had something to do with her condition, although I did not know how or what, and I felt truly ashamed. I begged God to help me rid the world the world of hunger. At 17, I argued that I was the perfect candidate: I had lots of life-time and energy, and I was sure I could eradicate hunger and suffering and still have time to enjoy a long retirement. The military's unlimited funds would enable me to do this.

I joined Navy ROTC that fall at a Catholic university in Pennsylvania — full scholarship, full chance to study whatever I wanted, and then the chance to take a test to be trained as a Naval pilot. That semester, I learned to fire my first gun on my Catholic campus. I learned to polish brass until it was white, and to recite the chain of command, on command. I learned what it was to stand at attention for a three-hour inspection, and the necessity of referring to myself in the third-person ("This mid-shipman does not know, but will endeavor to find out- SIR"). I learned what it was to be pinned up against the wall by my shoulders as punishment for having made eye contact with a superior officer. I learned to drill, and to fear not following an order.

We ran miles through campus at five o'clock in the morning, singing in cadence "drop the A-bomb from the air, crispy critters everywhere" with a big "hurrah!" after it. I was called an embarrassment for smiling too much and not being able to "hold my bearing." I was late to physical training once, and the platoon sergeant gave me a wake-up call and proved that who I was, and where I was going could, in fact, be wholly explained in expletives. I was completely confused as to how such a dysfunctional, abusive system could lead to peace.

We were required to spend three hours every night in silent study hall in the library for NROTC. I used the time

alternately to shine my shoes for inspection, and to check out any book I could find that might have some answers. I knew no one who could guide me to appropriate books, so anytime I found a quote with the word "peace" in it, I looked up the name of the person who said it. I looked for quotations during the day in the "peace and justice" center, and felt like a spy and a traitor, as I checked out the backs of brochures and pamphlets, looking for clues and names, and too ashamed to tell the secretary what I was looking for. In this way, I found Gandhi, Albert Schweitzer, and even Albert Einstein. I read all about the "just war theory" and learned the word "nonviolence." By mid-way through the semester, I had read too much to think that war was the answer to any of my questions, and seen too much to honestly believe that anything that looked remotely like the system that I was currently in could lead to peace.



Jeff Finnegan

Through reading, I found the ideas I needed to equate hunger with violence, and military spending with global poverty. Learning this, I told the Colonel of NROTC why I needed to leave the program. He asked if I wanted to be a conscientious objector; and I was so ill versed in peace rhetoric that I had to ask him what that meant. I signed the document, packed my things, and my brother came to take me home to Florida. The shame of going home as a dropout felt like being dragged down a flight of stairs by my ankles, my head pounding on each step.

I held on to the hope of becoming a pilot, and after a semester of waitressing in Florida, I packed my things again and went to St. Louis to study aviation at the only Catholic school to offer such a program. My recent exile from the military led me to join a little group on campus called Pax Christi in their work for peace and justice. Pax Christi introduced me to peace activism, to protest, to the phrase "social justice," and to Dorothy Day. Mark Chmiel and Jenny Truax introduced me to Karen House. Karen House introduced me to a little boy named Derrick. And

Derrick introduced me to love-at-first-tutoring-session.

By the time I walked into Karen House, I had become radicalized; and I wanted my lifestyle to reflect an open protest to the militarization I had experienced. I had long let go of any notion of saving the world on my own, of nobility, of perfection, or success. My goals had diminished to wanting to practice simple loving kindness, to learn to be peace, and to play with some kids. The Karen House community enabled me to do these things. Coming to the conclusion that I wished to be a part of the community was humbling, because I felt I was wholly incompetent to offer anything in return for what I knew I

had found there. No one there needed a pilot. I had been living alone for many years and did not know how I would get on with a community. I had never composted anything and had been known to adore air-conditioning. I was an outsider, but I asked to be a part of the Karen House community anyway, after convincing myself that if I was going to be accepted anywhere in the world with all my defects, a Catholic Worker house of hospitality might be my best bet. I arrived in all my incompetent glory to 1840 Hogan, by car, with a gym bag of clothes and a pillow for my head. There was a room ready for me. †

Beginning Our Marriage

by Carolyn Griffeth

Just days after being married, my husband, son, and I came to St. Louis to visit the Catholic Worker as a part of our search for a community where we would relocate. Within our wedding vows we stated our mutual commitment to living lives that place the highest value on service and solidarity with the poor, living simply, building community, and working for peace and justice. These values had entered my heart through the gospel years ago, but had only become the real flesh of my life within the Catholic Worker Movement.

It was my desire to find a way to live out my faith, and a series of fortuitous misfortunes that first lead me to the Worker. I was raised sort of middle class on a horse farm in a small town. I acquired mostly materialistic values, to the extent that I held the idea that as a woman it was more important to be attractive than anything else. As a youth I had little contact with active Christianity, much less with families devoted to social justice, concern for the environment, or any such thing. Still, I remember having a sense that real Christians did exist and a hope I would someday find them.

Entering college at the University of Illinois was a mind-blowing experience for me, having grown very small-minded in the secluded world where I was raised. Within the first month of college something drastic happened to me: I went out partying and degrading myself in

the usual way, but on the following morn gave my life to Christ with utter humiliation and abandon. The result was astonishing, especially for me! My sister, who was once a great leader in debauchery, had suddenly become a Christian and turned her life all upside-down. I was awed by her transformation, but had not intended to become square in my first year of college. Now I had done the very same thing! For quite a while instead of going out, I often stayed in to read the Good News, which brought a joy to my heart I had never known. During this time I had wonderful spiritual experiences.

To be true to my story, I must admit that I lived a very back and forth life as a new Christian, never finding a Church or anything within which I felt comfortable. Instead I found most Christian groups full of youth that were more devoted to good clean fun than being a radical witness in the world, and this was something that I was still quite uncomfortable with. So my inward transformation remained hidden by the secular circles I hung out in and the many contradictory priorities I maintained.

One of these priorities was being successful, which created such a drive in me that I was accepted to a very prestigious medical school after graduating with high honors in molecular biology. Upon beginning medical school, my life took a number of turns for the worse. Most significantly, I developed a debilitating form of arthritis

Carolyn Griffeth recently began graduate studies at the Aquinas Institute of Theology.

that first made it difficult to run, but soon made it difficult to even walk, and painful to do many ordinary things. I spent Christmas break of my first year at the Mayo Clinic seeking answers and hope. I returned to school with a probable diagnosis of Lupus, feeling miserable and hopeless. I began to drink abusively again, which I had not done since the sad days of high school. My life seemed overwhelmingly meaningless and it was harder than ever to identify with my peers who recreated by going to the mall, bars, or nice restaurants.

Still, my misery did not alter my determination. Foolishly I stuck out the year, even as I became increasingly ill and disheartened. But I made a life-changing decision to take the next year off school in order to recapture my love of life by pursuing some of my dreams while I had the chance.

My destination was Simon Community in London. Simon is an egalitarian community of long-term homeless folks and idealists that strive to serve the most vulnerable folks living on the streets. I shared a home with many older men who had spent most of their lives on the streets and suffered great misfortunes. Here I had my first experience of "Community," which often meant such unpleasant things as helping someone who was de-toxing, scavenging dinner, and living without the luxuries I had once taken for granted. Yet the fellowship was as profound and real as any I had known, and I began to see my misfortunes with new perspective.

In the fall, I returned to medical school, no healthier, but with an awakened consciousness. Before, I had been driven in part by the need for personal accomplishment, now I was driven more by compassion, and to contribute to building a better world. Perhaps it wasn't in God's plan that I would work for these aims within the confines of medicine, but I would have to hit a brick wall before I would abandon this path for a new direction. Anyway, a brick wall I was given, in the form of increasing sickness ending in surgery right before my Board exams.

I remember vividly the last conversation I had with the school's Dean when I told her I intended to leave and not come back. She suggested several options in which I showed no interest, and then asked, "What will you do?" I replied, "I hope to find a Christian community where I can live a humble life, maybe one with a school where I can teach." These words proved prophetic. I left school and everything I had behind (except my student loan debt!) and set out in my old car on a trip to visit intentional communities that focused on earth stewardship, solidarity with the poor, and social justice. My spirit was revived as I met Christians that lived out the Gospel as I had never seen before. In the course of my travels, I learned about the Catholic Worker Movement, and because winter was at hand, I chose to go to Texas to visit the San Antonio Catholic Worker. There I discovered a life ethic, fleshed out within the Catholic Worker tradition that was challenging, but practical, and allowed me to begin living out my Christian faith as I never did before.

In about six months time, circumstance led me to

visit St. Francis House, the Catholic Worker in Uptown, Chicago. Although I thought I would stay just a day, I felt so at home there, that I had to stay. It was a true blessing for me to share my life and even my bedroom with our homeless guests, and give up what remaining luxuries I held on to. I soon got a job teaching half-time biology and social justice at Prologue, an Alternative High School for "last-chance students." I realized that the hope I shared with my medical school dean had been fulfilled in a way I could not have imagined.

After my first year at St. Francis House, I took a trip to visit my sister in Mongolia, which would change my life. My sister had moved to Mongolia to work with abandoned children and very poor families. During the summer I spent there I had a clear call from God, through prayer, to take one malnourished little boy as my own son. At the same time I was given a love for him unlike any I had ever known, and knew I would do anything to make his adoption possible. After returning, I raised money by teaching full-time while continuing to live at the Catholic Worker, and became completely focused on completing his adoption, aware that a successful adoption from Mongolia had rarely, if ever, been done before.

During that year many wonderful things came about to make the adoption possible, but my health took a huge turn for the worse. During the summer, when I was supposed to go back to Mongolia to complete his adoption, I began having such bad pain in my feet that I couldn't even walk a block (I was already unable to ride a bike because of knee problems). I became completely homebound, except for the generous amount of tandem bike rides community members, and Terry (who is now my husband) took me on. My foot pain was so disabling and prolonged that I had to cancel my flight to Mongolia, and experience a huge test of faith.

In the fall, my sister encouraged me to come if I could walk at all, saying that the adoption process in Mongolia, which is very unstable, was about to be changed all around again. Still tender footed, I went. I grew more in my faith during that time than any other in my life, and God showed me just how much He provides for us in our weakness during the months I worked on the adoption in Mongolia.

With overflowing joy, I boarded a plane from Beijing to go home with my new son, Gantolic. Twenty hours later, we were greeted at O'Hare by Terry and my family. That night Terry proposed to me. On Christmas day we announced our engagement to my family and his, who had never met me before. In this way, Terry became Gana's father from the start, and I never experienced the struggle of being a single mom. As we prepared for our marriage in June, we also prepared to move to an intentional community that would be good for raising a child while living in Catholic Worker style. It was this search that led us to the Dorothy Day Co-housing Community where we have now spent our first year of marriage renovating an old abandoned home, and struggling in community. So far, so beautiful!



From Abroad

by Becky Hassler



Sometimes you just know without a doubt what you need to do. That's the way I felt when I heard Kelly Campbell, a survivor of the September eleventh attacks, give her presentation on Afghanistan, this past March at the Catholic Action Network Conference. I saw her slides and I heard her words -- and my heart was moved. I knew, without a doubt, that I needed to go. I hooked up with the same organization with which she traveled, Global Exchange. They had a health and healing delegation planned for July. "Perfect," I thought. I was definitely going.

There were six of us that went on this delegation, from California to New York, and none of us knew each other previously. We were in Kabul for two weeks. Doing a needs-assessment, we visited hospitals, clinics, and orphanages. As you can imagine, the needs were overwhelming. After the first few days, it became difficult to hear each person tell us that so many foreigners come asking what is needed, but never send anything once they leave.

After twenty years of war, the people of Afghanistan have nothing. They are desperate for new equipment and the knowledge of how to use it. We visited a mental health hospital with no anti-depressants, and a maternal/child hospital where they had nothing to write on, using scraps of paper for charts. The ward for the severely malnourished children had no IV's or feeding tubes -- the starving babies were at their mother's breasts with their mom's squeezing their breast to try and get another drop of milk out.

We visited a children's hospital with only one source of oxygen; and half of the year the beds are filled with children with respiratory infections. A pediatrician told us of one night when four children were all in respiratory distress, and they had to choose which one child would receive the available oxygen.

We sat in a one-room home, and listened to a mother tell us through her tears that she was in her kitchen boiling water for tea at dawn when the bombs fell. She remembers waking up in the hospital and asking about her

children. She was assured they were fine, and received twenty-two stitches across her forehead to close the gap in her head. The mother went home only to learn that two of her five children had been buried in the rubble of her kitchen, caused by a U.S. bomb hitting her home. She spoke of feeling so depressed and anxious everyday. She went with all of the other victims to the U.S. Embassy and was turned away at the door. She was told the U.S. can't compensate for her loss -- "casualties are bound to happen in war." She tried going to the Afghani government, and was turned away again. She said that she was glad there is no more Taliban but that nothing would ever bring her children back and it's a loss she lives with every single day.

We spoke with a doctor who has a passion for her work that radiates from her. Dr. Zarmina is an OB-GYN and has been practicing the last four years under the Taliban, working in a rural clinic. She works as a midwife, giving routine care to women, family planning, delivering babies, and offering health education on nutrition and sanitation. Dr. Zarmina asked us to tell the people in the United States what we've seen. She is worried about the people of her country because she feels there is a stagnation of people's minds due to the Taliban. She wants the people of the United States to know they are all not al-Qaeda.

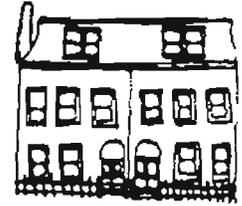
Amidst this great and desperate need, we also witnessed so much goodness; healthcare workers working in such poor conditions, flies and stench as common to their hospitals as fancy lobbies are to ours. They were there because they believed in their vocations as healers. They were hope for people without cause to have any.

I felt so humbled by the people of Afghanistan. I was also amazed and touched by the generosity of people who helped me pay the cost of the trip and gave me money for supplies. I will continue to send money and supplies to Afghanistan. If you would like to help, please let me know. Pray for them.



Becky Hassler is available to give talks on her trip to Afghanistan (beckyhassler@hotmail.com).

From Little House



by Mary Ann McGivern, SL

A few months ago I had one of the hottest theater tickets in St. Louis, to Act IV of *Hamlet* at Missouri Eastern Correctional Center at Pacific, a state penitentiary. Prison Performing Arts director Agnes Wilcox brings music, dance and theater productions into state prisons, local jails, and detention centers. She offers some classes, particularly for juveniles. But when male inmates at Pacific, a high-medium security prison, said, after one theater production with local actors, "We could do that, we'd like to do that," she took them up on it and, after some reflection, decided to produce *Hamlet*, one act every six months or so.

Why *Hamlet*? "Why not," she says. "*Hamlet* has name recognition. Whether or not they've read it, most people have heard of it. You've got some idea of what you're getting into before you audition. It's one of the greatest plays in the English language. And it has only two women's roles!

"It's a play that deals with many of life's problems — young love, step-fathers, decision-making, death of a parent or friend. It's a play that one can read a thousand times and still there are ideas to discover."

Agnes held a play reading and auditions. Seventeen men showed up. She made a very interesting casting decision — to divide the title role into five parts. She says, "It's a huge role. And I had a lot of actors I thought could manage it, could help one another, could develop this role together. Besides, the big challenge of *Hamlet* is his multi-faceted character. We broke up the facets, like cutting a diamond, so the actors and ultimately the audience, could see into the man." It was only after she'd made this decision that Agnes learned other producers (including the Folger Shakespeare Theatre in Washington, D.C.) sometimes make the same artistic choice. It is unusual for *Hamlet* to be multi-cast, but not unheard of.

So the men set to it. They marked up their books, carried them to work, listened to recordings, viewed several movies, coached one another, practiced lines. Agnes brought in lecturers and dramaturgs, hired professional actresses to play Gertrude and Ophelia, and started rehearsals -- one night a week. Gertrude took the job with some trepidation, but after the second week she said,

"It's no different than rehearsals any place else."

I saw the film version, shot outside, a separate production from the stage performances, which were two shows per act, done for other inmates, families, and few invitees. I didn't get a ticket till Act IV.

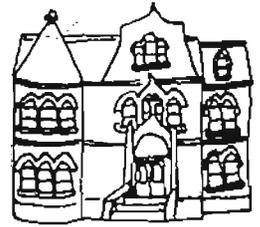
It was glorious. The *Hamlets* were down to four, two having stayed the course from the beginning; the other originals had been transferred to other Missouri prisons. They were a team, dressed alike in long black leather coats and interacting, feeling all the lines as one but with nuanced differences. Forewarned, I got it easily, but so did the relatives and inmates in the audience. Everybody laughed in the right places, gasped at word of Ophelia's death, and were held silent and immobile at Claudius's perfidy. Agnes says one reason Claudius is so fine is that he is a genuinely good man, deeply respected by everyone, and he can't shake that goodness, so his wicked Claudius is complex and richly defined.

The actors played off one another, Ophelia's madness causing fear and trembling, Horatio's righteousness straightening spines, and Laertes' grief carrying us beyond our own particular experience of death into tragedy. I cried then.

And afterwards, in conversation between cast and audience, one of the *Hamlets* linked the September 11 attacks to the murder of *Hamlet*'s father, the king. He said, "It's how one evil act sets so much more killing in motion. A lot of people have died in this play for no good reason; more are gonna die in the last act. And the same's true in Afghanistan. The tragedy is that we can see it's wrong but we can't stop it."



From Karen House



by Melissa Brickey

I am sitting in my room writing. Actually, depending on whom you talk to, I may be sitting in Jenny's room, or Annjie's room...or a number of other former or current Karen House community who have slept in the far corner attic room. Right next to me is Teka's room, or Liz's room, or the bike room. My old room, or Ann's room, or Fernando's room, is the closest attic room to the stairs. Closer even than Colleen's? Joe's? Tim's? Mark's? Mitch's? Or Scott's room, which is one of the larger attic rooms (but definitely the hottest)?

Hanging in my room is a picture of Dorothy Day that has surely seen dozens of different people sleeping on what is currently my bed. I wonder about the number of Worker hands that have touched the white sheet that I use for a door to "my" room. It fascinates me to think of the history of this little tiny corner attic room. It overwhelms me to think of the history of this house, and the outstanding people that have dedicated their lives or part of their lives to it.

The truly overwhelming thing is to consider the layers and layers of community that Karen House has created, and what this means in terms of sharing responsibility and resources. My current community is, of course, what is most present to me. I am constantly reminded, even in the most basic ways, of how responsibility and resources are shared. I am wearing a tank top that belongs to Courtney. I drove Nicholas' car this morning. Annjie made dinner for the two of us a few nights ago. Teka shut off the fan that I forgot about. Jenny took half of my house shift last night.

Shared responsibility and resources are necessary for community survival. But shared love is what makes community real and sustainable. And again, I am constantly reminded of how our love is shared. Tim puts flowers on the office desk, for no reason but to show love. Colleen asks me every day how my day was, for no reason but to show love. Courtney hugs me (and everyone else), for no reason but to show love. Becky, Colleen, Nicholas, Teka and Courtney came to a family member's wake, for no reason but to show love.

This is my layer of community, and for me the center

of community. But, again, I am astounded to think of the years and years of these same demonstrations of love coming from this house. I wonder how many hundreds of hugs Courtney has given? Or how many dozens of flowers Tim has picked? Or how many fans Teka has turned off? And before Courtney, there was someone else, someone I do not even know, who loved people with hugs. And before Colleen there was someone else showing love by genuinely asking, "How are you doing?"

The most beautiful thing about the layers of community is that not only have my community's kindnesses been given to me, they have also been shared with the guests of Karen House. The same love that each of my community members gives to me, they also generously give to the guests. The same is true of every community that has shared this house. That, to me, is the essential history of Karen House. It is interesting to think that I use the same sink to brush my teeth in that years of Workers have. It is overwhelming to think that I share the same work that years of Workers have shared and that that work keeps going.

I saw one of the kids that used to live at the house the other day. I was wearing a t-shirt that I had found in our clothing room. She told me that it used to be hers. She had donated it to the house when she moved out because she thought she had too many clothes. Then she told me she missed me and gave me a hug. It couldn't have been more perfect.



by Teka Childress

I read a disheartening article in today's *New York Times* (July 27, 2002). A report on India described a campaign of horrific violence embarked upon by some Hindus against Muslims in Mahatma Gandhi's adopted hometown of Ahmedabad. Approximately a thousand men, women, and children were killed in the most hideous and cruel ways imaginable. This campaign was in itself a reprisal for a horrible attack this past February on a train of Hindus by a Muslim mob. That train was stoned and set afire and people of all ages, including many children, were killed. In Gandhi's own time he witnessed the antagonisms between Hindu and Muslim, but how could Gandhi's legacy have had such little impact that these recent atrocities could happen?

I watched a program on TV recently that was similarly heartbreaking. Young men (Israelis and Palestinians) who had attended a peace camp together as teens about ten years ago were interviewed. In the years that immediately followed the camp some of them had become friends. And yet, in recent years their relationships had totally fallen apart. The program's interviews revealed that in some cases the young Israeli and Palestinian men viewed each other as enemies. As with the case in India, we witness again how far apart human beings can be, and how fragile are hope and peace.

Lastly, I have been discouraged upon seeing the lack of hope and brokenness among the youth in my neighborhood. I am more profoundly aware of this reality since I moved out of Karen House and into the co-housing community, out of the shelter and into our neighborhood. I have seen the daily lives of these young people more closely than ever before. They are experiencing their own portion of violence. And it is hard to know what to do about it. The breaches between those who are poor and those who are not, between those who are black and those who are white, and between those who are young and those who are not, seems almost irreparable. And yet, here

we are, trying to build a community that does just that, enters just that breach. But it is hard for a million reasons that are related to racism, anger, brokenness, and simple human frailty.

I gave a brief talk a couple of months ago at the College Church about the Dorothy Day Co-housing community on the Catholic Church's feast of the Body of Christ. I quoted Dorothy Day's lovely postscript to her autobiography, *The Long Loneliness*. "We know each other in the breaking of the bread and we know Christ in the breaking of bread and we are not alone anymore." I described our longing for communion -- our longing not to be alone anymore that led us to open up Karen House and that has since led us to start the Dorothy Day Co-housing community. In wondering if any attempts for communion (for unity and justice) make any sense, given all indications to the contrary, I was thrashing about for something to give me faith. I have discovered that we may find nothing to give us faith sometimes. It is simply faith that we need. Or faith and hope and love. We may not see that our love makes any difference, but we believe it. We believe it because we believe in love, more than anything else. And so with nowhere else to turn, we cling to it. And with this faith we find hope and both of these virtues then again engender greater love.

As Dorothy Day herself was fond of quoting from Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov*, "Love in reality is a harsh and dreadful thing compared with love in dreams." This is only so, because reality is harsh and dreadful. But at least love is there.



Teka Childress is now doing homeless outreach with Barnes-Jewish Hospital.



Karen House 25th Anniversary Celebration

Please join us!
Sunday 3 November 2002
2:00 pm Potluck
4:00 pm Mass

Karen House Needs You To:

- ✠ Share your money (funds are low)
- ✠ Take house shifts
- ✠ Cook dinners
- ✠ Tutor the kids
- ✠ Come to Tuesday Mass (8:00 pm)

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The Round Table

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