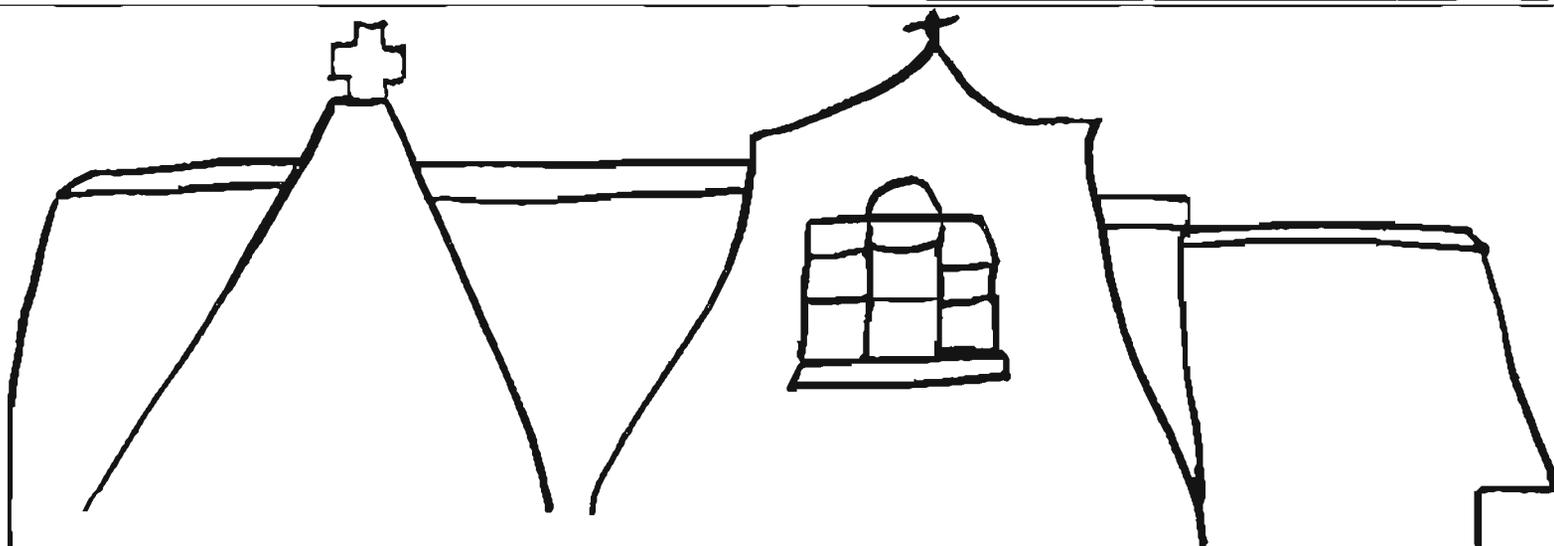


THE Round Table

Fall
1996

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



FROM KAREN HOUSE

WHY THIS ISSUE?

"The most significant thing about the Catholic Worker is poverty, some say. The most significant thing is community, others say. We are not alone anymore. But the final word is love. At times it has been, in the works of Father Zossima, a harsh and dreadful thing, and our faith in love has been tried through fire."

As I perused the articles assembled for this issue, focusing on Karen House itself, these words of Dorothy Day emerged ineluctably from my memory. Simple living, even living in poverty, yes. Community, yes. But above all, the realization that the most significant thing is that we care for one another, that we accept our responsibility for one another, that we are present to one another without judgement, without ceasing. Compassion for individuals is the heart of the Gospel, and it still enlivens the work of the Catholic Worker.

It is revealed in this issue in the stories of the community members, as they describe what drew them to this work and what sustains them. It is revealed in the lives of the guests, as related in their own words and as told in Teka's poignant reminiscences about several former guests of the house. It is revealed in Teresa Jorgen's reflection on the "golden age" of Karen House.

Indeed, it is from this Gospel love that the so-called principles or aims of the Catholic Worker arise: pacifism, solidarity with the poor (the majority of the world), and anarchism. Fittingly, Mary Ann McGivern gives the final stamp on the previous issue's discussion of that "ism" in her Round Table Talk. Here again the central principle is that people matter most, and any economy or system can only be measured by how it treats individuals.

It was not for a system, or a nation, or a creed that Jesus died on the cross, but out of compassion for humanity, for the friends he had gathered about him and had come to love in his life. By the miracle of God's grace that redeeming love is extended to us all, and continues to be embodied, or incarnate, in places like Karen House. ✚

- Mark Scheu

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DRAWN BY LOVE

by Christy Finsel

I first experienced the hospitality of Karen House one weekend in July of 1994 when I flew from Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, to St. Louis for a Saint Louis University orientation and final registration program. I stayed with Teka, Becky, and our mutual friend Sr. Terri Bednarz. (It turns out that Becky, who like myself is from Fort Smith, Arkansas, baby-sat me when I was a baby.) I felt that the Workers and guests were very welcoming and sincere. I was drawn to the sense of community and the real needs of the guests. At the end of the weekend, I was disillusioned with my experiences at SLU, but I was comforted by the exciting and radical ideas of the Catholic Worker movement.

When I returned in August for school, I started volunteering weekly at Karen House with Delores to help fulfill my SLU Ignation Service Award. I was further drawn into the community and I started coming to mass on Tuesday evenings with aid from Becky, Teresa, and Miguel who drove me back and forth. I was homesick and lonely that first year because I came to SLU not knowing anyone. Those that I met at Karen House were my saving grace and were supportive friends through dorm difficulties and the Oklahoma City bombing in April 1995.

I enjoyed working with the women and children. I especially enjoyed talking individually with the women and hearing their stories. I always felt that I was more balanced as a student after taking house because I escaped the seemingly sheltered and materialistic dorm life for a few hours each Saturday. I struggled with the injustice of the inner-city poor and at times felt overwhelmed by my questions of how I could help the guests.

In my sophomore year, I finally gained enough confidence in my abilities to take house by myself. I had not seen any other student housetakers and I felt that the guests would not listen to anyone who looked so young. Also, I doubted my abilities to know enough information to take house because I learned new things every time I came and I always had new questions. I finally succumbed to the gentle prodding of the Workers and took Thursday evening house shifts.

Once again, I felt balanced by the reality of the hard lives of others when I came to Karen House. Throughout the year, I found myself relating and talking with several guests about our individual traumas that had resulted in loss of security. During the year, I found myself at a point where most of my security had been stripped away and I was forced to ask for help. I was volunteering and going through the ritual motions of answering the phones and doors, cooking, cleaning, and talking, but I received much more than I could give to the house. I felt that some days I came in need searching for support, though for some different reasons, just as the guests came to the doors of Karen House.

On July 26, 1995, after going to the lawyer, who had handled my private adoption, to get nonidentifying information, I came in contact with a natural cousin on the phone and found out everything about my birth mother and her family in fifteen minutes. Two emotion-filled weeks later, I was reunited with my birth mother and half sister. My identity was shaken to the core and I was left devastated because of the unexpected reunion. As an adoptee, this was the biggest event that could happen in my life, and I had come full-circle, from birth to rebirth, in twenty years.

Christy Finsel, the only bona fide Generation X member of the community, is no slacker.

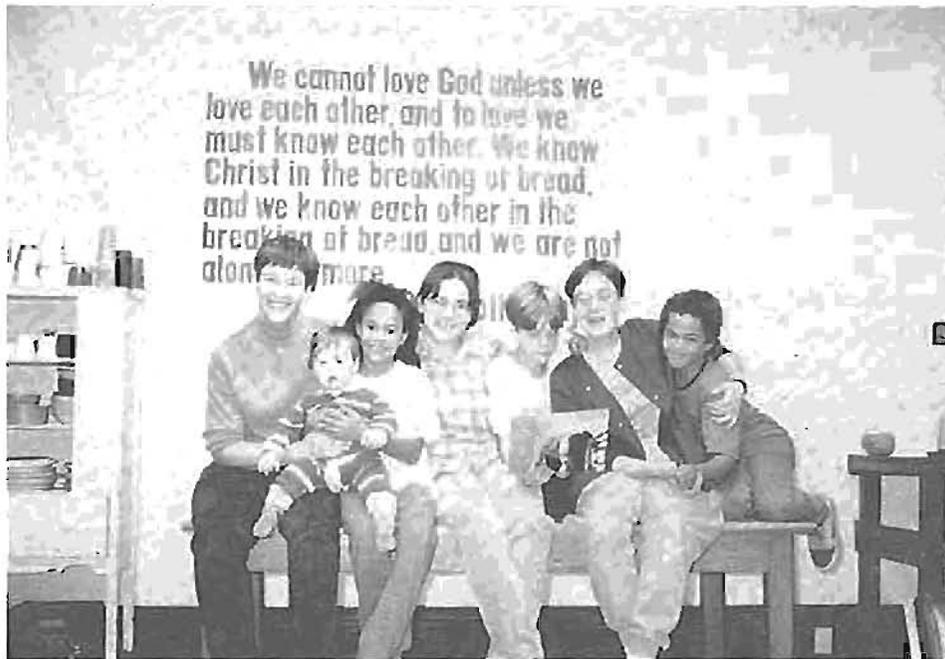
In January 1996, my father lost his job due to Boatmen's downsizing in Oklahoma. Suddenly, I felt financially insecure which was a feeling that I had never before experienced. In March, 1996, I was robbed at gunpoint on SLU's campus. I experienced panic attacks and loss of concentration. And in April, my uncle's house in Arkansas was demolished in a tornado. By the end of the spring semester, I was ready for respite.

I felt supported every time I came to Karen House. I often felt great empathy for the guests when they told me of their deep struggles to survive because I was in survival mode myself. I realized I could no longer hide behind a false sense of my world being always secure and safe. I wanted to live at Karen House, but I hesitated because of fear of the unknown.

By the middle of this summer, I reached the point where I had nothing holding me back from going to the next step and accepting the Worker's invitation to join the community. I overcame a lot of my fears that I could handle living at the house, through difficult situations, because I knew I could survive. I had struggled with the decision of where to live because of safety issues and my fear that living at Karen House would be too overwhelming.

Now as I write this article, after living at Karen House for five weeks, I wonder why I did not move in sooner. My experience has been one of a lot of peace and happiness due to working through some issues and the strong sense of community. I have felt frustrated with my inability to react appropriately to some guest behavior and I sometimes feel the chaos when I take house. I still fear being robbed again and I am careful with security issues. But I have special "God events" every day and my emotions are balanced when I go to sleep at night.

I was drawn by the love of those at Karen House. I think people have a lot to deal with in this world and that we have to be able to minister to each other out of our experiences. I know no one with a "perfect" life, but I do see first hand at Karen House how people are wounded healers-meaning the guests, Workers, and other community. I think healing is what the Catholic Worker movement is all about and I believe healing occurs daily at Karen House when children give hugs, volunteers hand out sandwiches at the door, Workers suggest treatment, women watch each other's children, and people share their stories of pain and coping strategies. I am thankful that I have found such a place of love.



Christy Finsel, fourth from left, in the dining room surrounded by Karen House friends.

FROM THE COMMUNITY

The following are interviews with the rest of the community excluding Christy. They were conducted by Ellen Rehg and Bill Miller.

Tim Pekarek

RT I know you were a member of the Cass House Community before coming to Karen House. How did you happen to come there?

TP My first connection to the Catholic Worker came in the early 80's. I grew up in a town called Joplin, Missouri; and in the early 80's, myself and others were doing some organizing for the Nuclear Weapons Freeze and disarmament issues in southwest Missouri. Some of the organizing was occurring on a statewide basis so occasionally there'd be meetings in Columbia or Jefferson City and I met some of the folks from the St. Louis Catholic Worker, maybe [Ellen Rehg] and Teka, and some other folks, at some of these meetings. I just remember having a discussion about the Catholic Worker, how the work was going in St. Louis.

Around that time, we were doing some community meetings about disarmament-related issues such as the relationship between poverty and the arms race. I can remember on one or two occasions talking in front of a group of people about the arms race and poverty and feeling a little bit like I was proselytizing because I didn't really have any direct connection at all to poverty, growing up in a middle-class background. So I felt kind of challenged internally and eventually decided to write a letter to the folks at the Worker in St. Louis and see if I could come up for a short period of time; not even intending on dropping in for a year even, maybe for a few months. I was thinking of doing something like my own urban plunge-type thing.

I ended up going to Cass House at that time. Since it was a much bigger house, there was much

more of a need for people.

It was at least a couple of years before I felt connected to the people in the community and started relying on it very much because the first couple of years I kept telling people, "Well, I'm probably leaving in a couple of months." That happens several times and people start thinking, "Well!" After a while you get to rely on community. I don't really know when that happened but at this point, it is the main reason why I'm still connected to the Catholic Worker and Karen House. I didn't show up in St. Louis because I was born in a small town and wanted to go to the big city. I kind of had a community of friends where I came from and wasn't running away from anything, really. I certainly didn't have anything as encompassing as much of my life as the community and work of the Catholic Worker, so that was some contrast.

RT Are you saying it's now the community you have established here that keeps you here?

TP I think so, yes. I am often very, not only discouraged but almost to the point of despair when I think of city living and all the problems that surround us ... The whole time I've been here it's only getting worse.

RT Do you still feel the call to share the poverty of the people here?

TP Well, I'm comfortable with that. I don't even think about it anymore. I mean, I never buy clothes; I buy shoes when I need to because you can't find a decent pair of shoes in the clothes room. That's something I don't really think about very much anymore. Part of the time I've lived in community I've had a job outside the house but I haven't had a job for about a year, year and a half. The community is pretty much able to meet my needs. It kind of becomes natural after a while.

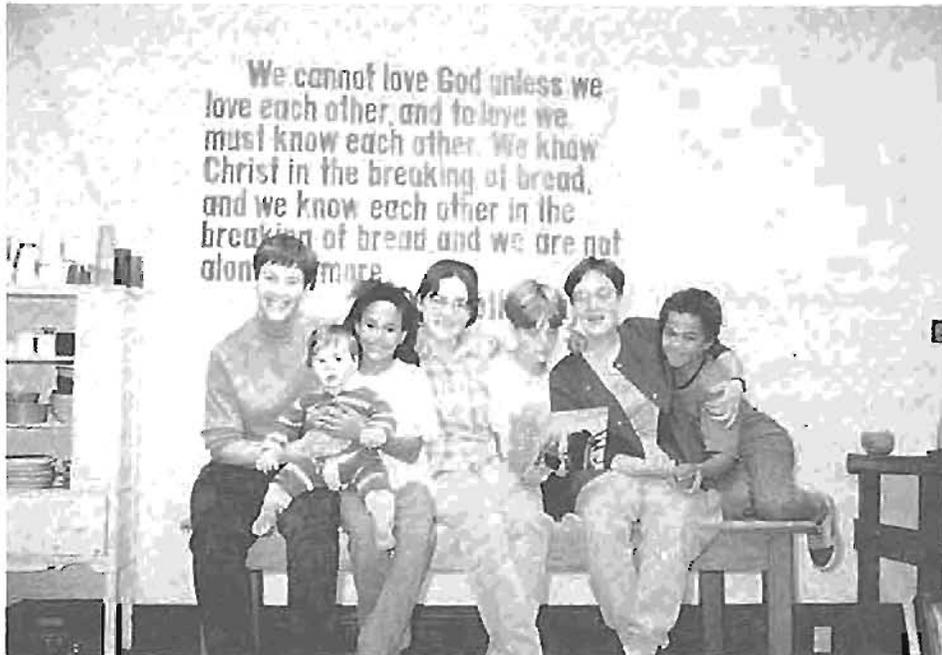
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Christy Finsel, fourth from left, in the dining room surrounded by Karen House friends.

Last week I went up to the Midwest Catholic Worker gathering in the Quad cities up in the countryside of southeastern Iowa. Having been around the Worker for about twelve years now I've gotten to know a lot of folks from Catholic Worker communities elsewhere—it's kind of nice [to see them]. It's like a reunion, in a way. A lot of folks I've met over the years from different places were there.



Tim Pekarek

RT Is this sense of discouragement you're talking about shared by Workers in other places?

TP Well, I didn't hear everybody talking about it but there's so many different communities. One thing that's kind of uncommon about our community and household is how many people actually live in this house. Most of the Catholic Workers I've met up in Iowa live in houses where there might be fewer than 10 people in the whole household, including community and guests. So there's a lot less stress. At one point we went around the room and introduced ourselves and talked a little bit about our community and a lot of people were really amazed that almost thirty people live in our house...I might have heard some people talking about it [being discouraged]. Obviously some things affect everybody, like Clinton and Congress abolishing welfare is going to affect everybody. There is just going to be an incredible increase in need I would imagine.

RT Does the increase in poverty make you feel like the Catholic Worker is not a success?

TP I don't think I ever had any really grandiose view of my place in our community or our city. What we're doing is a really small bit of work. It's not meaningless but it's not the most grand thing in creation either. It's somewhere in between there. Mostly I'm comfortable with that. There are times when I'm really challenged...

RT Do you have any particular hopes or desires for the House in the future?

TP Well, I'm not really sure. I've felt most of the time that I didn't want to live in the city forever and we have talked about some kind of rural experience, a farm or something like that. Jim and Katrina were the folks who mostly talked about that and they have since moved away...One reason why I've stayed around for several years is thinking maybe ultimately something like that will come up here. Maybe someone will drop a farm in our lap or something! But that's about as close to reality as I get with it.

Becky Hassler

RT How did you come to the Worker? I know that you volunteered at Cass House before you came to Karen House.

BH Right. I was going to enter the Sisters of Mercy back in 1984, and before I entered I was talking to the Vocation Director about what kind of ministry I would do my first year, and what I described to her was that I wanted to work with the poor. It was really important to me. She said back to me, "I know the perfect place for you. It's called Cass House; it's a Catholic Worker House." I had never heard of the Catholic Worker before. It sounded perfect, though. So I worked at Cass House for a year. I volunteered there a couple of days a week. And then because I was in the Sisters of Mercy I went different places and did different things for formation. When I was a novice, I was in college getting my nursing degree at St. Louis U. I was a junior and we were supposed to do some kind of a service project with children for our pediatric rotation. I had been back in St. Louis for a year and hadn't gotten connected with the Worker again and out of the blue I thought, "Oh, this is where I want to do my project." I went to talk to the people at the Catholic Worker about children. And it just got me back in touch again about how important that was for me. So I called and came and talked with Katrina.

RT At Karen House?

BH Yes, this was Karen House. Cass House was closed and this would have been probably about 1988 or '89. So I talked to Katrina and I asked her, "Do you still have Mass here on Tuesday night?" and she said, "Yes, anybody can come." So I started coming here to Mass and then started volunteering. And I did that for probably a year and a half, two years. I became good friends with Teka and sort of all those things together really kept me very involved. I guess I actually moved to Karen House in 1992. So I was volunteering for a couple of years before I moved in.

RT What was it about the Worker that drew you?

Mitch McGee

RT Could you tell us a little bit about what you did before you came to the Catholic Worker and what led you to join the community?

MM The last thing I did before this was being in a religious order for 6 years. During that time I met the Worker. In my 6 years there I changed a lot and maybe the group changed—and it was less of a match after 6 years. The Worker had real appeal and I felt it was attractive with the combination of community and ministry to people who are very poor.

RT When did you come to the Catholic Worker?

MM I first came to the Worker at Cass House over eleven years ago. I was involved at Cass House for its last two years or so—then I worked in the neighborhood a couple of years at the Land Trust. Then I left the area for four years and now I've been back three and a half years.

RT How is it to live and work at Karen House?

MM It can be exhausting and part of it is that I also work in social services at my job twenty plus hours a week, so it can be real exhausting and demanding to be off [from one job] but always feel like you are on duty...The last few months I've been staying with a friend one night a week so I don't feel like I am at work all the time and feel like I am in some sense "away." That seems to help and I'm also working real hard to refigure commitments and what is most important to me. It came down to I really like the work I do and I really like the house and, on the whole, they are both life-giving. Some other things I enjoyed on one level but they are not as life-giving back to me and so some of those commitments changed.

RT What do you like about your life and work at Karen House?

MM I like the people I get to meet--the guests--even some of the real difficult ones teach me something about myself or teach me about people. There are certain personality types that seem to really clash with me and I'm trying to figure out exactly what that is--it's always a learning process. And I like the volunteers. There's a lot of people with energy and enthusiasm.

Really, the people always have attracted me. The community is small as far as those of us who have the official title of "community" but there is a much larger extended community. There are a lot of people we see regularly and you hear what's going on with them or they listen to my story of the week...or my complaint of the week or something I thought was

really neat this week.

RT What have you found difficult about the life and work at Karen House?

MM Sometimes the noise, the dirt--and all that is part of being poor. I read one time about Fr. McNamee from Philadelphia who is connected with the Worker there. He [wrote] about ways of being with the poor and one is that you wait a lot. And I know that when I am on hold calling the welfare office or if I'm teaching someone to ride the bus--there's a lot of waiting that goes on. And part of being with the poor is the dirt and the noise. A woman from the D.C. Worker [wrote] this neat article about how often we get tied down in the mundane chores of the house--washing the dishes, cooking the meals, and trying to keep things clean and all those battles, but it's really part of living voluntary poverty because that's the type of work poor people do--domestic work. Most of poor people's lives are involved in the sheer maintenance of survival and so if you talk about wanting to



Mitch McGee with Violet and Aaron

live voluntary poverty, you really have to have a percentage of your time consumed by that or you're very removed from it. It was really helpful when I read that [because] there are days when I feel like I'm a maid and there's a certain level of frustration with that and then again it's part of reality too and the reality of living with 30 other people.

RT Do you still find any inspiration from Dorothy Day or Peter Maurin?

MM I always watch the book lists for the newest Worker publications and chase books down...And when nieces and nephews make their Confirmation I usually give them a book about Dorothy. Other than the gospels, things that Dorothy said have as much impact on me as far as what it means to be a Christian or to know that Dorothy really struggled to live the gospels and she combined the personal and the communal aspects of this--it's not just what I think and believe, it's what I do and how I do it.

RT Have you found liturgy to be an important part of your life here?

MM That's cyclical for me--sometimes it's more so than others. I know for Dorothy that [liturgy] was a huge part and there were times in my life liturgy wasn't important or prayer wasn't really alive, I would panic and now I feel a dry spell...I guess I'm getting older, I don't know, I can let go. For me often my work is my prayer--someone once told this to me and it makes sense.

In the book, *Service*, by Robert Coles, there is a chapter on Dorothy Day and she talks of the work being her most intimate prayer...chopping the carrots...she was at this point quite elderly, she was still having to do things, to be part of things, to make a contribution and that was part of her prayer, part of her gift to God. And so I always know, no matter what, Matthew Chapter 25 is alive for me and that often for me is a basic level that it come down to more than anything else.

RT What kind of work do you do outside the house and does it complement your work here?

MM I work for an agency that provides support services for people who are developmentally disabled. It's a small agency and very personal. I really like the philosophy of the agency...most people in my caseload in the agency have been homeless at one point so there's a real overlap and that's one of the reasons they get assigned to me. And probably on one level I have a calling to work with people who are developmentally disabled. Often, of the former guests, the ones who come to spend time with me, most are the ones who

*Really, the people always
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are developmentally disabled and several of the former guests who fit that category I still talk to regularly.

[At my job] we work with people who are homeless...I like the fact that I get to do that ongoingly: They were homeless, now they're not--the ongoing struggle of people who are poor, developmentally disabled, sometimes also mentally ill who may have a chemical dependency--all those issues [can arise] as you walk through that journey with them as you try to make the connections and find the support. And I think it's somebody I can say, "I made a difference with sometimes," more so than the guests [about whom] I never quite know...sometimes it's great when a former guest calls and says something is wonderful--those calls make my day. Often you don't know; people come and you live with them and get to know them and get attached to them and then all of a sudden they are gone and you never see them again. I like the ongoing relationship, the ongoing making a difference [that my job offers] and it's on an individual basis which is pretty personal.

Teka Childress

RT How long have you been at Karen House?

TC I've lived there about 15 to 16 years but I started volunteering shortly after it opened about 19 years ago.

RT What led you to join the community after volunteering a few years?

TC I got to know the women there and I liked them...And I guess I never wanted to live without them and always wanted to know that people like them had a place to stay.

I also got to know the community--wonderful people like Ann and Virginia--I was really drawn to them.

I think it was really clinched for me, long ago, when [after volunteering at Karen House] I had left for about a year to work in New York as a community organizer. One day I was out canvassing and I met this



Teka Childress and Becky Hassler

older gentleman who invited me into his house. I would say he was never going to be someone who could work in our organization, he would not really be able to help us fill the goals we had of putting pressure on the banks to lend money to the people in the neighborhood but he just wanted me to come in and talk with him. That day it became clear to me that I always wanted to abide with people like him and not just organize them. That wouldn't be enough for me--and it became clear that I really valued spending time with [people] like him. And I've always kept that part of wanting to work for social change as well, but in the context of living with people at Karen House.

RT How have you seen the community change over the years?

TC That's a hard question! The community is fluid and we've had so many people come and go, so when I think of community, I think of the community I'm living with at the time. It obviously changes any time any person comes or goes just like our house changes with every guest.

One obvious change is the difference in numbers--when I first came we were a larger community, at times we were up to thirteen or fourteen people working at the house. Now there are four people living in the house and five in our community. And some of those people have outside employment, so we're a much smaller group than we once were.

Sometimes in our community there have been some people more focused on the work of the house and some people more focused on justice work and now it's kind of a nice mix.

Also, I think there are obviously many more

homeless now than there were. Subsidized housing has been slashed particularly during the 1980's under Reagan and Bush, and the military budget has continued to go up and welfare doesn't pay what it once did--it's not worth what it used to be.

So that's a significant change--there are more people with lower incomes or incomes that buy less and there's a lot more people who can't afford to get housing because there is very little subsidized housing.

A whole other change in the last few years we've seen is the rise in drug use. ...So there's been an increase in drugs and that's been a terrible thing for many of our guests and with that increase in drugs and loss of income we've seen a great rise in violence and gang activity. And now when our guests have managed to get [an apartment], we're not sure it's going to be in a safe neighborhood for them and the kids. It's a struggle for me to know what to do about this.

RT Dorothy Day and Peter Maurin, the co-founders of the Catholic Worker, were either of them an influence on you? Do you still think about them or read what they said or read about them?

TC I was one of these people who came to the Worker by meeting the guests and getting to know the community and I read Dorothy Day afterwards but I have come to think that so much of what [she] says is true...

There is a real danger--especially living in this culture now--of seeing people who are poor as the creators of their own problems. It's so popular right now to blame people on welfare. I was leafletting the other day at a rally for Presidential candidate, Bob Dole, and I gave a leaflet to a woman--our leaflet was saying how we wanted to not feed the Pentagon but feed people and I said there are many people in need and people go hungry every day. This woman responded to me that these people are not hungry, they're just lazy--and that's such an evil, small-spirited attitude people have right now about the poor and it's such a temptation to blame them. In living at Karen House we see people whose lives are so marginalized and who do things that are not always good, and who are mentally ill or angry or in many ways have tremendous problems. You can begin to get furious with them about things, which is at times appropriate, and yet you have to keep the vision of how people came to be this way. ...[And while the emphasis on] personal responsibility is true yet often personal responsibility has something to do with power. You can't be responsible if you have no power in your life. I mean you can to some degree but you can only be responsible over that which you have power...You have to have a certain amount of control in your life.. over...choosing: what you can

do, how you do it, where you can live, what you can eat. If you have none of those things, how can you be personally responsible? I say all this because Dorothy and Peter never lost the vision. Of course, people had sinfulness but they never lost the vision that part of the problem is a system that is unjust and creates tremendous problems--and so they felt like they never had to fix people. Keeping that vision in mind, we just don't have to fix people at our house but we need to change the system.

RT Do you get weary in your work for people?

TC I don't feel weary right now--I have in the past but right now I don't feel weary. Sometimes for me that's a grace when I don't feel weary; a grace God gives me--a hope--and I feel that hope again.

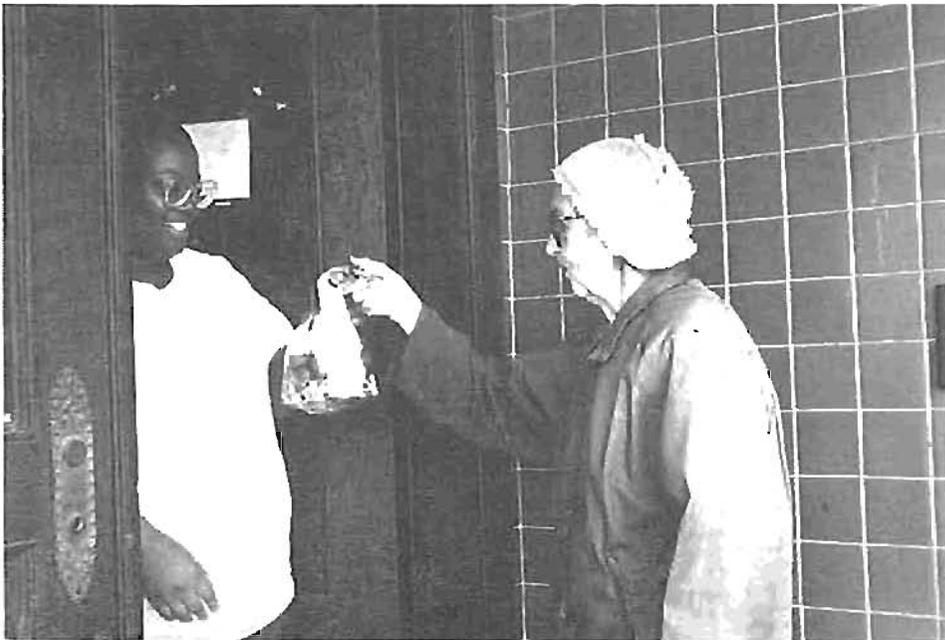
RT Do you have any thoughts about the future of the Catholic Worker? The focus? How people will respond in St. Louis?

TC Well, I pray about this actually. It's a lot of what we are doing [already]. I really do feel that the life we live is such a good life--I can't tell you how much I love our guests and I feel like our life at the house with them is often very good...[Karen House is] such a good place to be where people just care about one another--not just our community but everybody, there's such a good spirit that people have a home and have what they need and want to live well together...And in

some ways it could be enough. But I puzzle over this piece. I want to build a different world and I don't know how to do it but I feel like we've got to find a way--we've been given this time now [with all its hardships for people]--there's no other time we've been given but this time. So to continue what we're doing is what I want to do and also do something in addition. One thing I've thought about is along the line of co-housing where we would live long-term in an assembly of houses with people who are our guests and with people who are low-income. Where low-income people and people of middle-class backgrounds would live together and build community. That is really very appealing to me. In some ways it's sort of like what the Kopavi community is doing in their neighborhood but I'd like to do it sharing dinners and meals and a life with people--maybe even having a shelter, Karen House, there. I've thought of trying co-housing in our neighborhood, of having our guests move there and be part of our long-term community and maybe even have an economic component to it. This is one idea of building a long-term life with people.

I don't know about the Catholic Worker as a whole but we need to always continue with what we are doing; to keep [doing] both the works of mercy and [trying to] build a new society within the shell of the old. We need to keep these two things together.

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Mildred Holiday passing out food to a neighbor

Being a Catholic Worker:

100 Suggestions
by Bill Kellerman

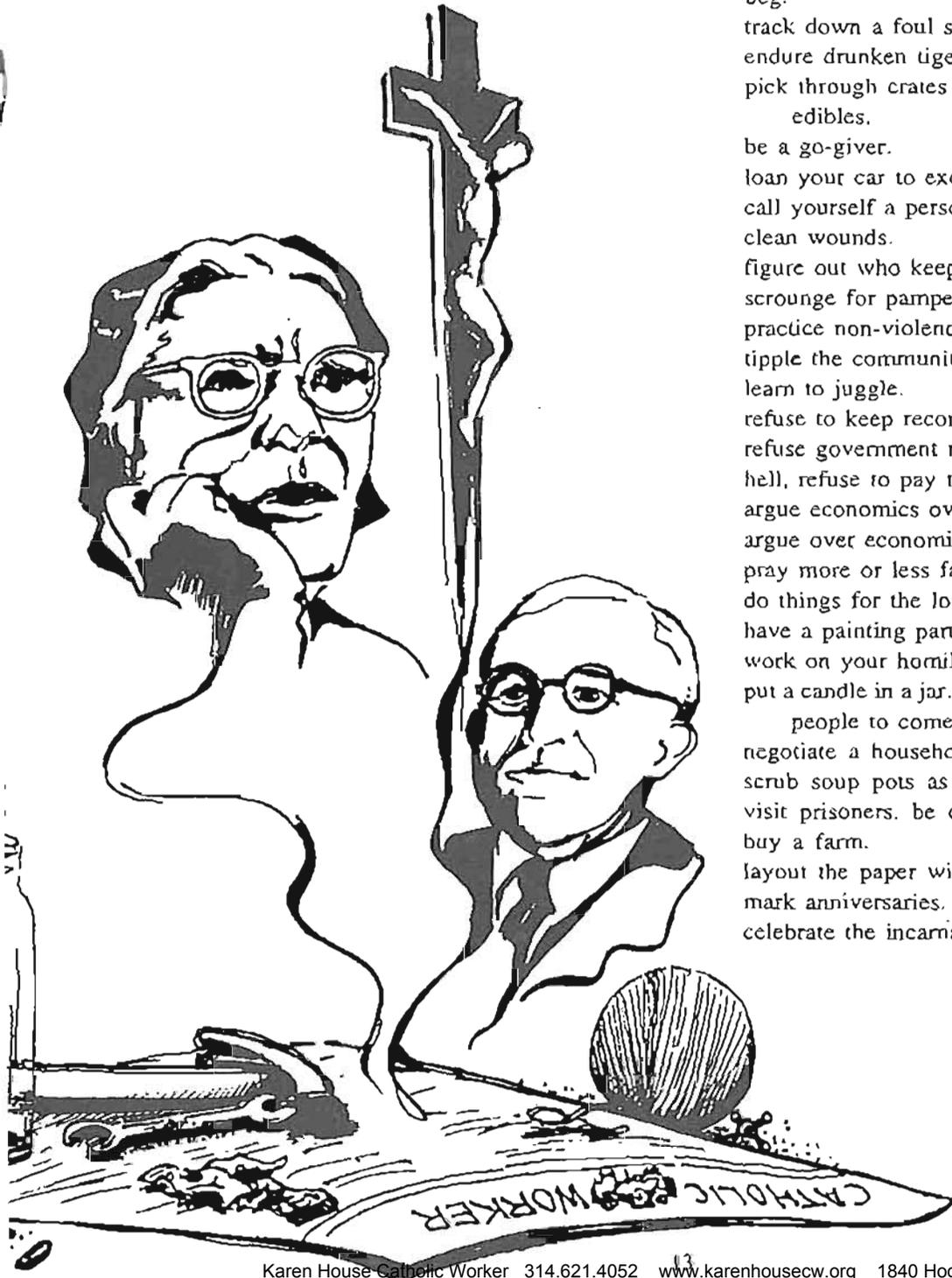
take the sermon on the mount very seriously.
don't take yourself too seriously.
convene the kingdom of god over soup.
compel them to come in.
ask how far the line goes back.
embrace holy mother poverty.
try and figure out where your allowance went last month.
consider vigilling in the hospital emergency room to be an intercession.
pray in places where it is forbidden.
draw a line. stand on it. get arrested.
do jail time as a monastic retreat or at least a vacation.
reside in the margins.
receive mail for guests who left years ago.
suffer thievery.
persevere in non-sequitur conversation.
bless those who curse you, including guests.
clarify your thoughts. be stunned by the phone bill.
always carry a spare bulb with the slide projector.
honor conscience. in yourself and others.
swing the mop like a flashy dance partner.
be skeptical of forms, bureaucracies, institutions and people who put you on hold.
refuse to be called a saint.
cry out for the unborn.
keep an advent journal and share it with your friends.
create a tradition, and nourish it.
plot the demise of small rodents.
try writing an easy essay.

find out it's harder than you think.
learn to say you're not on house today.
think about installing a shower.
agonize over your church.
rage against patriarchy.
never prepare a pre-sentencing statement.
take your chances on the holy spirit.
hold small children on your lap.
find love a harsh and dreadful thing.
find love.
bless the food in the making.
be civil when answering the phone at 3 am.
(you may swear if it rings again immediately.)
make the run to gleaners and try not to bring back too much ice cream.
devise new recipes for zucchini.
discern the times. take time. give time. do time. add thyme.
there's no such thing as too much garlic, but take it easy on the red pepper.



dress (tastefully) from the free box.
 build a new society in the shell of the old.
 be counted a laughingstock.
 try and figure out who is pilfering the toilet paper.
 find a new place to hide on your day off.
 read gandhi in jail.
 after awhile, throw away the i.o.u.'s.
 reach your limit and put a guest out.
 argue over where the limits are.

keep a stash of banners (liturgical and political) in the
 basement.
 don't let the principalities get you down.
 whip up a carrot cake for someone's wedding.
 walk the way of the cross through the streets of your
 city.
 study the faces of folk down and out.
 curse the filthy, rotten system.
 marvel at the survival skills of your guests.
 weep quietly in your room when necessary.
 stay in touch.
 sweat.
 beg.
 track down a foul smell. (look behind the couch.)
 endure drunken tiger fans.
 pick through crates and trash at eastern market for
 edibles.
 be a go-giver.
 loan your car to excess.
 call yourself a personalist.
 clean wounds.
 figure out who keeps turning up the heat.
 scrounge for pampers in a crisis.
 practice non-violence.
 tipple the community wine only on rare occasion.
 learn to juggle.
 refuse to keep records to get government money.
 refuse government money.
 hell, refuse to pay taxes.
 argue economics over coffee.
 argue over economics and coffee.
 pray more or less faithfully.
 do things for the love of christ.
 have a painting party and serve burritos.
 work on your homily before Sunday afternoon.
 put a candle in a jar. take it to a missile factory. wait for
 people to come and go.
 negotiate a household truce.
 scrub soup pots as an exercise in contemplation.
 visit prisoners. be one.
 buy a farm.
 layout the paper with a flair for graphics.
 mark anniversaries.
 celebrate the incarnation.



FROM THE GUESTS



Karen Wheeler and Linda Bobbitt

The following are interviews with some of the guests at Karen House. They were conducted by Mary Dutcher.

Jamille Henry

RT What's it like being a guest at Karen House?

JH All right. People need to get along more often because we're all in the same situation. But it's a good place. It's my first time in a shelter.

RT How different is Karen House from what you thought it would be like?

JH I thought I would come to a big room with a whole lot of people—who didn't care—but I had to because I lost my job as a cashier—I got laid off—and couldn't afford the rent at the apartment my mom had left to me. Just as soon as she left it to us, it seems I got laid off. . .

[But here at Karen House], we got our own room, don't just eat bologna sandwiches and stew like I thought from what I saw on t.v.

It's almost just like living in our own home but for a couple things: no male visitors in our room (okay with me) and curfew.

RT What's the worst thing about Karen House?

JH People go in your room and take things out of it. Someone been in my room and took \$8.00. The only bad thing is that we can't have locks on the door. My body wash came up missing earlier this month.

RT And the best?

JH You get to go to different places with the kids—like a swimming party.

RT Anything else you want to say?

JH If you're homeless, come to Karen House.

Karen Wheeler

RT What's it like being a guest at Karen House?

KW It has a homey atmosphere. The staff in general really care about the people here and, whether they're on house or not, they take time to speak to you individually and encourage you in your plans with the various social service agencies.

The rooms are very adequate and provide a sense of privacy that's reassuring because during the time you're here, it's your home.

RT How different is Karen House from what you thought it would be like?

KW Well, basically, I've been in six other shelters for the max time I was allowed to be there. I'd heard good things about Karen House almost as soon as I became homeless. It took fourteen months to get in; and even then—if it hadn't been for Teka making an exception and letting me sleep on the couch one night and then someone moved out, I'd still not be in. The two nights before I came to Karen House I'd slept on the lobby floor at the Area Two Police Station. On June 14, 1995, I was evicted from a home I'd rented for five years because two people I'd taken in had embezzled a lot of money—in the low five figures—charging up all my credit cards and running up my phone bill to \$2200.

On September 23, 1996, I celebrated my 24th anniversary of ordination as a United Church of Christ minister.

Karen House is more homey than I had expected—much less regimented than other places. Also, the accessibility—most of the time—of the community members is a different experience from what I'd come to expect from other shelters.

RT What's the worst thing about Karen House?

KW The fact that we have too many people with mental conditions that need to be in a more structured environment. The community is doing what it should be by bringing homeless people in, but there is a certain chemistry among the residents that requires a balance between the mentally stable and unstable.

I fit in the mentally stable group, but I have problems that I'm dealing with as I can through the social service agencies I'm in contact with. My major problems are physical (two herniated disks, frozen shoulders that affect both of my arms, including numbing my fingers, to begin with. . .), but I'm also dealing with depression from being homeless and totally disabled, as well as with grief from the death of my spouse of 23 1/2 years and my father within five months of each other. They're buried in our family plot in Arizona. . .

RT And the best thing?

JW The community—also many of the house takers [:)]—are sincerely interested in my well-being and that of the other residents. They do their best to give each of us personal time to discuss problems. Also, they're patient with the ups and downs of the lives of people in crisis.

RT Anything else you want to say?

KW It'd be nice if the community members had better quarters to live in, in my opinion, and not so many have outside jobs. It'd be nice to have them around more.

Laurel Adams

RT What's it like being a guest at Karen House?

LA It's okay. It's a lot better than another shelter I was at where I was in a gymnasium with 35 other adults, two kids to a bed. And the food is much better.

RT How different is Karen House from what you thought it would be like?

LA Before I was ever in a shelter, I thought it would be annoying—crowded, noisy, people in your business all the time. . . getting along with other people is not my strong point. It's better than I thought it would be. It's nice to be able to go to your room and close the door and get some peace.

I was on Section 8 and the landlord would not fix anything—backed-up sewer, broken toilet, and terribly leaking roof. Then I forgot to fill out a form and lost the Section 8. So I owed the landlord \$500 a month that I refused to pay until he fixed the things. When I got three months behind, he put us out: me,

my seven children and the cat. That was about eighteen months ago. It's hard to find housing when you have more than two or three children.

RT What's the worst thing about Karen House?

LA The constant, ridiculous bickering among the guests. Some of them aren't really adult and don't handle things well.

RT And the best thing?

LA The feeling of hominess, the fact that you can let down your hair and actually be a person.

RT Anything else you want to say?

LA I like the way they feed us real food—not bologna and hot dogs—and that I can cook once in awhile: getting to contribute of myself.

Joan Smith

RT What's it like being a guest at Karen House?

JS As far as shelters go, it's the closest thing you can find to being at home. I've been in two.

Before I was in a shelter, I never knew how good I had it. But it's good here, because the people who are responsible for running it also live here. So it's closer to a home. Everybody has responsibilities, and we're interdependent.

RT How different is Karen House from what you thought it would be like?

JS It's friendlier—it's the closest thing to being in a program that's one-on-one.

I was robbed and raped—I can say that now, I couldn't at first—on my way to work one night. I first came to Karen House for safety, but the financial problems following on the attack made me come back a second time for shelter.

RT What's the worst thing about Karen House?

JS Some of the residents act like they're passing through and don't care, like putting diapers full of bowel movement in the wrong place and not keeping the house as clean as we would our own home.

RT And the best thing?

JS It has to be a thing? Or can it be a person? For me, it's Tekka.

RT Anything else you want to say?

JS I'm glad that it's independent. We can participate in so many things, like Tuesday night Mass. So much good comes because the people who run it live here.



Laurel Adams with Jade, Violet, Aaron, Duncan, and Cameo

Lavonda Robinson

RT What's it like being a guest at Karen House?
 LR All right. I don't like it here because it's too strict because you have to go to bed at a certain time.

RT How different is Karen House from what you thought it would be like?
 LR The bedtime and the curfew I was not expecting. I haven't been at any other shelter. I had lived with my aunt all my life, but we had to leave because I wasn't on her lease. I've been here about a month.

RT What's the worst thing about Karen House?
 LR Both the curfew and the bedtime.

RT And the best thing?
 LR No best thing.

RT Anything else you want to say?
 LR There's nothing else I want to say.

Linda Renee Bobbitt

RT What's it like being a guest at Karen House?
 LB I like it. It's fun. The people here are nice.

RT How different is Karen House from what you thought it would be like?
 LB It's my first time being in a shelter. I thought it was going to be real strict—never get to leave—and boring. But it's not.

My brother threw me out after he and I got into an argument. I was living with him and his wife and family. I've been here a week and a half.

RT What's the worst thing about Karen House?
 LB There is no worst thing about living at Karen House. The only thing is, I wish we could get our time extended.

RT And the best thing?
 LB Chores—it's good to have chores because you're taking on responsibility while you're here and you'll have those when you have your own place. Helping out in the cooking is an especially good thing, I think—to participate in the cooking.

RT Anything else you want to say?
 LB I'm glad to be here. I feel welcome and I want to thank everybody for making me feel welcome. May God bless you all.

Mildred Holliday

RT What's it like being a guest at Karen House?
 MH I like it. I'll tell you this, it's one of the best shelters I've been in. Because here they really do care. People are nice. Here you only have to save your money, do your chore, observe the curfew: it's reasonable. They welcome you.

RT How different is Karen House from what you thought it would be like?
 MH I thought it would be like some of the other places I've been, but here it's friendly and they really care.

It's cleaner here, too, than some of the other places I've been. There are fewer people here. It's more peaceful here. I haven't had any problems with people here because they talk to me with respect. In other places people talked to me at times like I was a dog.

RT What's the worst thing about Karen House?
 MH Nothing, really.

RT And the best thing?
 MH I've got my own room—the privacy. And the food is available as needed. I can go in the ice box in the kitchen anytime Demonte gets hungry. That's great, because kids get hungry between meals.

RT Anything else you want to say?
 MH Not really. I'm glad to be here. ✦

LIVING THE PARADOX

by Teka Childress

I rarely write anything in my journal. One of the few entries to be found is the following two quotes, side by side:

...all loneliness, angers, hatreds, envies and itchings... if rolled into one single experience and put into the scale against the least moment of the joy that is felt by the least in Heaven would have no weight that could be registered at all.

-C.S. Lewis,
The Great Divorce

I want to see with my own eyes... the murdered one rise up and embrace their murderer. I want to be there when everyone suddenly finds out what it was all for... But then there are the children... That is the question I cannot resolve... if everyone must suffer... what have the children got to do with it? Why do they get thrown on the pile, to manure someone's future harmony with themselves?... when the mother and the torturer whose hounds tore her sons to pieces embrace each other, and all three cry out with tears: 'Just art thou, O Lord'; then of course the crown of knowledge will be explained... [and yet] I absolutely renounce all higher harmony... It is not worth one little tear of even that one tormented child... I want to remain with my unrequited suffering... they have put too high a price on harmony.

-Fyodor Dostoevsky,
The Brothers Karamazov
(Ivan Karamazov speaking to his brother Alyosha)

I entered these two quotes next to each other

because I believe they stand side by side, both true, neither taking away from the truth of the other. There is tremendous beauty and love in the world which embodies and promises the reign of God. We see it in large things and in small. It makes one believe Lewis' claim. And, yet, for all that, we can never block out or make less tragic a single experience of suffering. Thus with Ivan, we must never reconcile ourselves to it. I think of this tension, this seeming paradox in regard to the lives of our guests. Their lives, like our own are often beautiful, in fact stunningly so, and yet their lives are also often full of pain and struggle.

With this in mind let me tell you about some of our former guests. A woman (I'll call Kysha) came to our house eight or ten years ago to stay. I sensed right away that getting to know her would be a very complicated experience. One might think she has multiple personality disorder but she has been diagnosed as suffering from the personality disorder called "borderline personality". In any case, one rarely knows where one is while talking with her and even with whom one is talking. Yet, I would say that I came to really love her and to like her. Several years ago her real tragedy began (as if having a personality disorder and living with the memories of extensive sexual abuse were not enough of a tragedy.) At that time she became pregnant with twins and seemed to snap psychologically. I still wonder if it was because of the hormonal change. Anyway, she tried to kill her grandmother, thus alienating herself from her family and the folks she used to rely upon. Ever since then she has been in a perpetual state of homelessness. She has gone on to burn every bridge left to her so that recently she was even put out of State Hospital for attacking three of the

Teka Childress just turned 39, really.

perhaps not responding enough at critical times. Whatever has brought her to this state of affairs, though, she can now barely live among human beings. Our community's latest discussion about her centered around whether she could stay in our backyard if she had nowhere else safe to go. What a terrible pass we have come to and yet I do not know what to do and I imagine neither does Kysha.

On the other hand what great graces I have seen in Steve's life. Steve is one of the Suttons who came to us about nineteen years ago when we first opened. He was only about twelve or thirteen. When he was about fifteen he could no longer stay with his mother, he had run from numerous foster homes and the State had nowhere for him to go. He came and lived with us on the third floor. Steve is now thirty-one years old and has gone through numerous ups and downs but all in all his life is a wondrous thing. This last year Mitch McGee became Steve's case-manager as Steve entered the Council for Extended Care, the agency for which Mitch works. Mitch has been the best of guardian angels for Steve and has helped him have his own home for the first time in his life. In Steve's case we can really see the effects of love.

One of my dearest friends from my years at Karen House is a woman I'll call Darlene. She struggled for years with an addiction to crack. She has been clean for a year and a half now. This is a tremendous achievement, especially considering she lives in a neighborhood where drugs and dealers are in abundance. In a previous issue of The Round Table I described how after completing treatment she had moved into a new apartment only to discover it was a former crack house. People showed up in the middle of the night looking for drugs. But she has endured a lot and is doing well. She has a new apartment, although the owner charges way too much for what it's worth. She had a job but I encouraged her to quit and look for a new one because her employer was paying her around a \$1.00 an hour. He pays "off the books" to all his employees who are afraid of losing their welfare or more importantly their health insurance. Darlene is looking for a new job and has just learned of a promising one. But will it be one that she can live on and support her four children, three of whom are teenagers? I love these three teenagers, each one of them. Like all children, each is different from the others. The daughter is seventeen and looks just like her mother and I tell her mother that she has the same personality. She's as stubborn as the day is long and as sensitive. The oldest son who is sixteen is a hard worker and has a strong sense of right and wrong. I trust him a lot. The youngest of her teenagers is her son who is almost fifteen. He is handsome and is

charm personified. He will have friends wherever he goes. Yet because of their beauty and the potential I see in them I worry about these three. Just last week their mother called me at her wits' end. They had all three been suspended from high school. Keeping them in school has been a struggle for the last several years. They have each gone through periods of missing tremendous amounts. The boys have hung out with friends until all hours of night, coming home high at times. For a while they and their friends were all wearing red (the color of the Bloods gang). Her older son has already spent time in detention and has to see a deputy juvenile officer regularly. Yet the boys have helped me frequently to pick up donated furniture. In fact they have never refused to help me when I asked. I have encouraged them to stay in school and have offered to help the older one get in a job program (in which he longs to be) if he will stay in school. I am struck at the fragility of their lives and situations. I look at them and see great personalities, incarnations of God, yet they are set down on a precipice. Will they resist terrible forces that could bring them no end of harm? Can I convince them that it makes sense to stay in school? Will they be rewarded if they do stay in? Will there be jobs for them that pay a living wage? Will they be qualified for them? Will we as a community be there for them? Will I manage to be there for them?

A very dear woman has stayed with us for several years. She moved out today. She's like part of our family. She had gotten very ill and was anxious all the time. She paced the halls and went to the hospital in an ambulance about twice a week despite all our best efforts to prevent it. Yet, finally through a serendipitous event she got on the right medications and has been doing wonderfully. Today she moved into an apartment for senior citizens right around the corner from us. She has invited us for dinner and already plans to spend Christmas with us. We are very lucky that she feels at home with us. What a miracle that she is in our lives, that we are in hers, that she is well, that she has her own home that she can afford and that it's just around the corner.

There is no summary for these stories just as there is no easy reconciliation between my two quotes. They are simply stories of life in its beauty and pain, stories of people with their strengths and their weaknesses. I will hold onto the beauty and believe like Julian of Norwich that in the end "all manner of things shall be well." Yet, I will also remember (as if it were possible to forget) that Christ, even resurrected, bore the marks of his suffering and was recognized by Thomas because of them.



FROM ABROAD



by Michael Dulick

In September of 1983, Father James "Guadalupe" Carney, a Jesuit missionary, was thrown to his death from a military helicopter over the jungles of Honduras, Central America. This "disappearance" by our own expressed its hatred for people of faith whose center of gravity is Jesus Christ. In Guadalupe's fall, a scripture was fulfilled: "Unless the seed fall to the ground and die, it cannot give life" (Jn 12.24). In 1983, I was in Honduras for the fourth time. I had met

If we retrace Guadalupe's steps in Honduras, we will find his footprints still fresh in the paths of the church. You can see the legacy of Guadalupe, for example, in Pedro Ribera of Los Murillos. From Guadalupe, Pedro learned how to lead his little community in worship and in faith. Here's a man with a fourth-grade education who rises to preach on Sunday the justice he practices throughout his life. Pedro farms his beans, which sometimes he must replant after a flooding rain, for they are tender crops; and he is no less persevering in the vineyards of the Lord. There is a church in Los Murillos--and I don't just mean the pretty adobe chapel at the edge of the woods, but the whole living community--and there's a church in Pataste and in Mojiman and in San Juan, all built and built up by the leadership of Pedro Ribera. I get to celebrate Pedro's birthday--June 29, the feast of Peter (Pedro) and Paul, every summer with him and his family, and if there were one experience I could share with you, it would be sitting in the gathering darkness of a summer's evening as Pedro and his son Fernin sing songs together on their homemade guitars. I can imagine Guadalupe savoring that same sweet scene, before heading off to his next assignment.



Godofredo Ramirez and Crisúna Castro of Las Vegas, Yoro, Honduras

Guadalupe, and I was already jealous of his Honduran citizenship, because I wanted to be a Honduran, too. The highest compliment I could pay Guadalupe would be to say that he was an ordinary guy, a normal man transformed by faith: so he was perfectly at home in Honduras. Guadalupe's fall to death capped a life of self-emptying, as Paul commands for all those who would have "the mind of Christ": "he emptied himself, obediently accepting even death" (Phil 2.7-8).

We can follow Guadalupe to the little town of Las Vegas, near Victoria, across the Jacagua River. Here you meet Godofredo Ramirez. From Guadalupe -- and I can't remember any long conversation with Godo when he didn't mention Guadalupe -- Godo learned to ask questions. I had a teacher once, Fred Lawrence at Boston College, who gave final oral exams where your grade was determined not by the questions he asked you but by the questions you asked him.

Michael Dulick travels to Honduras each summer and hopes to settle there one day.

Godó would get an A+ with Fred Lawrence, I love Godó's questions; no theologian I know of has sought the meaning of our faith with more freedom than Godó. For Godó, the gospel is itself a question that he must answer with his life. And for me, Godó's most Guadalupe-like question was the one that may have saved my skin when Godó led a delegation to the police to question their authority to arrest me for "revolutionizing." He risked his life to save mine. Why? That's a good question! Guadalupe asked a lot of questions, and he and Godó found the answer to them all in Jesus Christ.

Cristina Castro also lives in Las Vegas, and your image of a machismo culture in Latin America would be confounded by a few days with Cristina. She has fulfilled the vision of a church that does not discriminate Jew and Greek, woman and man. Funerals, for example, used to corrupt the faith and impoverish a family that had to provide booze for the men and snacks for the ladies. Little by little Cristina has led the way in making these events an enrichment of faith where women and men preach by turns, in words that set your heart on fire, and when we distribute Communion, I am in tears. Cristina is the soul of hospitality, and surely Guadalupe enjoyed her tea and conversation, relaxing on the porch as neighbors hail greetings from the road.

Follow that road, as steep as a ladder, up to the mountain village of Guachipilin. As you arrive, you'll see the dense fields of growing corn that hug the

hills like thick, green blankets. These are the milpas of Julian Palma, the most maternal farmer I know. He nurtures those fields like a true parent. And he speaks of Guadalupe like a brother, a living brother. Sometimes Julian will even bend his head a little and point, as if acknowledging Guadalupe's presence, sitting right there on that wooden bench. Julian is shy; he does not like to preach, but you can hear his faith when he prays. And he always prays for faith, more faith: he really knows how little seeds grow. Guadalupe's life and death formed that same prayer.

Guadalupe fell to his death from a helicopter of hate. But it can become a flight of forgiveness. As Ezekiel said, "If the wicked turn from their evil ways and seek justice, they shall find life" (Ez 18.27). And, as Matthew reminds us in the parable of two sons sent to the vineyard, one full of promise who does nothing, the other full of resentment whose heart finally finds solidarity with all of us sinners and so finds his God (Mt 21.28-32), we get a second chance. The government of Honduras must take that chance for justice, and so must our own government, and so must we all.

Guadalupe fell from the Honduran sky, and as he fell, he floated, like a little cloud of rain, blossoming fields of flowers. So let us stand in that storm of grace. Guadalupe fell in the rainy season; now let it pour. The hate that killed him is washed with justice. As Isaiah spoke: "Drop down dew, you heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain down the Just One; let the earth be opened, and bud forth a savior" (Is 45.8).



FROM KAREN HOUSE

by Teresa Jorgen



I have heard people refer to the time when Ann Manganaro and Mev Puleo were associated with the Catholic Worker as "the golden age". I know they touched lives not only in St. Louis, but also in El Salvador. They touched me too, even though they were only acquaintances.

Ann and Mev may be gone, but the golden age embodied in their ministry lives on in the simple, quiet

generosity first taught me by my dad. Nineteen years ago, my father took my sister and me to visit the Catholic Worker. Mary Ann McGivern welcomed us at the front door, related the background history of Karen House, and gave us a tour. Dad was a simple, ordinary man. He never graduated from high school; he struggled with his temper, worried about feeding his eight children, loved his wife of forty one years, and questioned

Teresa Jorgen brings students from Parkway North to Karen House and always finds babies to hold.

his church. He took me to Karen House to help teach me about simple, ordinary charity and love, the cornerstone of his faith.

At Karen House, Mary Ann McGivern still awes me with a simple, steady faith that we can each help make economic conversion a means of peace and justice. She is as steady indeed as Tim, good old Tim. Thoughtful, funny, long-haired, short-haired, wonderful, dependable Tim.

And there's Phil; I mean Mitch (I tease him because I always got his name wrong when I first met him.) Every second, Mitch is thinking of someone other than himself. In every one of our conversations, a client interrupts on his beeper, or Mitch slides off into an anecdote about the individual parts of his crazy, busy days, the parts he loves so much. Only after much community prodding did Mitch take his first break in three years. This Summer Mitch had three days vacation without his beeper.

Her father (now deceased) and the passport office know her as Mary Kathleen Tekakwitha. We've known her as "Teka" for nearly nineteen years since she became involved with Karen House and gracing it with her easy-going manner. No matter how hectic the house is, Teka answers the door, the phone, or a guest's question with patience and a smile. She treats each individual with absolute respect, as if each were the only human on earth. I am envious of her ability to live the gospel. In her humility, she'd be embarrassed to hear me say that.

"Bless your heart" Rebekah could also be named "thoughtfulness". She is nurse, student, daughter, community member, community builder, sister and friend. While on sabbatical two years ago, I worried less about Mabel Dennison, a housebound 97 year-old,



Diane Beckerle, Teresa Jorzea and Mike Dulick



Amber Cornish and Shannon

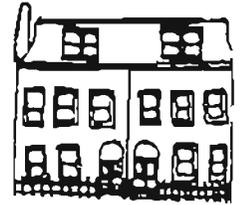
because "Beka" had volunteered to "look in on" her. I knew then Mabel's groceries would be purchased, she would be bathed, her bills paid, and most importantly, that her stories would be heard and appreciated. God blessed Rebekah's heart in a special way.

I first met Mary Dutcher through a mutual friend at Crown Candy. Mary was hosting two Nicaraguan friends. We shared food, thought and a visit to the Art Museum, which her friends loved. In addition to her involvement with human rights issues here and in Central America, Mary's life roles run from lawyer to godmother, from union organizer to organizer of a celebration of Father "Guadalupe" Carney's life. Despite these demanding roles, Mary never loses focus on her faith journey. She steadily questions the motives of authority, but never attacks. The questioning emerges in a thoughtful manner grounded in love. I didn't think two years ago, that she could bring her father from Iowa and care for him as he suffers from Alzheimers. As usual, Mary's sacrifices occur without fanfare, and she has amazingly found a way to care for yet another person amidst myriad life experiences. Her energy stems from a love of God, and her sense of peace heals.

These six people are just a few who have touched my life since first entering Karen House. It is a place full of selfless individuals, simple, ordinary love and faith expressed in action. The "Golden Age" these individuals reveal can happen now, in each of us. Some go to jail for refusing to pay taxes that support military oppression. Some plan a service for a teen in a coma, some prepare and serve meals for a guest, others take house shifts. Their spirit and testament teach us that simple, ordinary folks, are the continuing "golden age".



FROM LITTLE HOUSE



by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.

In early October I went to a conference on the conversion of closed military bases at the Presidio in San Francisco. The Presidio, which sits on a hill next to the Golden Gate Bridge, is itself a closed military base that's being converted into public grounds: meeting space, housing, and golf course.

The highlight of the day was the luncheon speeches by Oscar Arias and Mikhail Gorbachev. Arias talked about the amazing progress towards peace in Central America since 1986 when he became president of Costa Rica; and then he discussed the threat of foreign military sales, reminding us that 45% of those sales are made by the United States.

Gorbachev talked about the Green Cross, an international environmental group he has founded and that sponsored the conversion conference we were all attending. He said Russia was going to need some help to dismantle its missiles but that now we had an opportunity to change direction or else to squander the good will our nations gained toward one another in the '80's.

Then he asked what Russia should make of our plans to move NATO eastward? What should Russia make of Congress's increase of military spending by \$11 billion more than the Pentagon requested? What signal did the U.S. mean to send in continued funding of a variation on Star Wars?

I felt enormous admiration for these two men as I watched and listened to them. They both led their countries at times of great peril. Gorbachev said in passing that in 1987 he had feared that the politbureau would force him out of office. He must have decided to end the Cold War quickly and initiate democracy immediately for fear that the bureaucrats would shut down any gradual process. The cost to him personally was to be shut out of the circle of global power where

heads of industrialized states and international financiers determine the fate of the world. Instead, he and Arias speak to small citizens' groups and strive to foster in us the same commitment to the long haul that led them to risk everything for their nations.

Listening to Gorbachev and Arias, I felt shame as well as admiration. St. Louis is a premier arms exporter because McDonnell Douglas is bidding to do new research on Star Wars projects. St. Louis lobbies for increased military spending and our two senators and most of our Congressional delegation proudly claim credit for the arms contracts that come this way.

The Catholic Worker has resisted militarism from the beginning and many of us in this large and loosely-knit community are war tax resisters. Some St. Louisans have gone to jail and most of you have spent years opposing the military-industrial complex. Nonetheless, hearing Gorbachev and Arias, I felt ashamed of the behavior of our nation.

Shame is, I think, a sense of exposure that comes with the recognition of guilt. It is one thing for us to know in our hearts that we are complicit in the wicked acts of our country. We share sorrow over how the U.S. gains wealth and where we spend it. We repent and try to resist.

Yet it is another matter to hear foreign leaders whom I admire and respect recount those evil deeds. Their exposure of the guilt of my native land shames me as it dishonors us all. I think we can only be shamed when we love ourselves, our families, or in this case, when we love our country. This nation has a grand, egalitarian vision—and a violent practice. We're all inured to the possession of nuclear weapons and continued military spending at Cold War levels. A little experience of shame now and then is healthy for us.



Mary Ann McGivern, S.L. went to Washington, D.C., to see the display of the AIDS Quilt.

by Mary Ann McGivern, S.L.

Last spring, in the issue on anarchism, I think The Round Table got hung up on the benefits of government-issued foodstamps. The point, as I understand pacifist anarchy, isn't that government never has a good day. Government does do some good things. But in practice, what makes government problematic is that it legitimizes some evils, like killing, slavery, and theft.

Most governments claim the right to wage war, inflict the death penalty, and regulate abortion and infanticide. They also create the laws and regulations that allow some to accumulate wealth at the expense of others. Slavery is the most extreme form but the ordinary practice of capitalism is currently robbing the poor throughout the world of the very little that they have.

Here in the United States, at the heart of the capitalist beast, the courts treat corporations as persons, giving them the right to own property, to sue, and to speak freely. The State Department has warned other nations that limits on corporate advertising would be seen as infringements of free speech and would result in withdrawal of U.S. aid. States issue charters in perpetuity.

The only duty our government demands is that corporations make a profit. They have no essential obligation to customers, employees, or the communities where their plants are sited—much less an obligation to benefit the common good.

Government could and should remedy this situation. Government should stop treating companies like persons. Government should renew corporate charters regularly, dependent on proof that the firms have benefitted the common good. But our government is more responsive to corporate moguls than to us.

David Korten has written a book When Corpo-

rations Rule the World about global corporate practice. It is an excellent documentary account of the evils of transnational firms. These companies are now so huge that probably only the common effort of the governments of the industrialized nations could dismantle their power. Even if some of these giant companies fail, other firms will step in to buy up their assets—as they have already done in Russia and the newly independent states.

The only duty our government demands is that corporations make a profit.

Anarchism is a political philosophy. There's been very little effort to put it into practice. It is hard to see how it would work except on a small scale. Yet, our starting point is that government has failed miserably. It has filled the jails with the poorest members of society under the guise of protecting us while it allows for-profit enterprises to rape our environment and transfer our wealth from the many to the few. Where the Romans offered bread and circuses to the poor, we offer food stamps and television.

At the least, anarchism offers a radical critique and a radical action strategy. It gets us off the dime, thinking new thoughts and considering new possibilities. It's a big world out there and too often we limit ourselves to our own ideas. †

Mary Ann McGivern, S.L. is taking orders for Growing St. Louis, a 1997 calendar and appointment book for \$10.00 — proceeds benefit the St. Louis Economic Conversion Project.

photo by Merv Pulso



First Catholic bishop to be awarded the Noble Peace Prize: Bishop Belo of East Timor

Please come to the noon Mass at the Cathedral on December 10th to join in prayer for the intentions of Bishop Belo and the people of East Timor. December 10th is International Human Rights Day and the date the Nobel Prize is awarded.

Do your Christmas shopping on December 12th, feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, after 6:00 p.m. at Plowsharing Crafts on the Delmar Loop. You will know that your gifts were made under just conditions. Besides, 10% of the purchase price will be donated to The Interfaith Committee on Latin America.

House needs:

- ◆ **House takers**
- ◆ **Sandwiches**
- ◆ **Money**
- ◆ **Blankets**
- ◆ **Pampers**
- ◆ **Spoons**

The community celebrates liturgy on Tuesdays at 8:00 p.m. -- all are welcome.

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, Teka Childress, Mark Chmiel, Beth Druhe, Mary Dutcher, Jeff Finnegan, Mitch McGee, Bill Miller, Ellen Rehg, and Mark Scheu. Letters to the editor are encouraged; we'll print as many as space permits.

The Round Table

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